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The Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide is prepared by the Office of the Adult Bible Study Guide of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The preparation of the guides is under the general direction of a worldwide Sabbath School Manuscript Evaluation Committee, whose members serve as consulting editors. The published guide reflects the input of the committee and thus does not solely or necessarily represent the intent of the author(s).
Open the Bible to the first book, first chapter, first line. Notice it says nothing about Christ dying for our sins, nothing about the Second Coming, nothing about His bodily resurrection from the grave. It says nothing about the state of the dead, the Day of Atonement, or even the seventh-day Sabbath.

The first words of the Bible don’t talk about these teachings because they, and the truths associated with them, are meaningless apart from what the first words of the Bible do talk about—and that is, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (NIV).

Creation is the foundational truth of Scripture. All other biblical teachings—the Incarnation, the Cross, the Second Coming, and every other biblical teaching are founded upon the truth that our world was created by the Lord.

That’s why Creation appears not only in the opening pages of the Bible but in the first five books of Moses, in the prophets, in the Psalms, in the Gospels, in the Epistles, in Acts, and in Revelation. The theological context demands that it be taken literally.

For instance, Paul wrote that “death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come” (Rom. 5:14, NKJV). Paul not only links a literal Adam to a literal Jesus, but his context in Romans 5 ties that link to the plan of salvation, a crucial doctrine that we understand in the most literal sense: we are fallen beings who face eternal destruction or eternal life—literally!
And here’s Jesus Himself quoting from Genesis 1 and 2: “And He answered and said to them, ‘Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning “made them male and female,” and said, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh’” (Matt. 19:4–6, NKJV). If Jesus accepted and taught the Creation account as literal, how can those who claim to be His followers do otherwise?

Our name, Seventh-day Adventist, itself bears direct witness to a six-day creation. Though some voices may urge us to incorporate evolution into our theology, Seventh-day Adventism and Darwinism are inherently contradictory. Logically, one cannot hold both views at the same time.

Thus, this quarter’s lessons delve into the doctrine of Creation as depicted in Genesis 1 and 2 and explores its implications for a number of our beliefs, including morality, sin, marriage, stewardship, and more. Although working on the assumption that the story is literal, the quarter will show, again and again, how the central message of the Bible is built upon the historical truth of the Creation story.

Take, for instance, the gospel. According to Scripture, humans were created better than we are now. Jesus came to rescue us from the death brought by the sin of Adam and Eve. But in an evolutionary model, the Lord incarnates into an evolved ape, created through the vicious and painfully murderous cycle of natural selection, all in order to abolish death, “the last enemy” (1 Cor. 15:26). But how can death be the “enemy” if it was one of God’s chosen means for creating humans? The Lord must have expended plenty of dead Homo erectus, Homo heidelbergensis, and Homo neanderthalensis in order to finally get one in His own image (Homo sapiens). If evolution were true, then Jesus came to save humankind from the process that God used to create it in the first place.

We can see here that mixing biblical truths with nonbiblical views generates logical absurdities that should be of concern to the honest seeker of truth. As we go through this quarter, we’ll see even more reasons why to compromise on Creation is to undermine the basis of the gospel and the teachings that make us what we are.

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As we go through this quarter, we’ll see even more reasons ... why to compromise on Creation is to undermine the basis of the gospel and the teachings that make us what we are.
How to Use
This Teachers Edition

Get Motivated to Explore, Apply, and Create

We hope that this format of the teachers edition will encourage adult Sabbath School class members to do just that—explore, apply, and create. Each weekly teachers lesson takes your class through the following learning process, based on the Natural Learning Cycle:

1. Why is this lesson important to me? (Motivate);
2. What do I need to know from God’s Word? (Explore);
3. How can I practice what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Apply); and

And for teachers who haven’t had time to prepare during the week for class, there is a one-page outline of easy-to-digest material in “The Lesson in Brief” section.

Here’s a closer look at the four steps of the Natural Learning Cycle and suggestions for how you, the teacher, can approach each one:

Step 1—Motivate: Link the learners’ experiences to the central concept of the lesson to show why the lesson is relevant to their lives. Help them answer the question, Why is this week’s lesson important to me?

Step 2—Explore: Present learners with the biblical information they need to understand the central concept of the lesson. (Such information could include facts about the people; the setting; cultural, historical, and/or geographical details; the plot or what’s happening; and conflicts or tension of the texts you are studying.) Help learners answer the question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

Step 3—Apply: Provide learners with opportunities to practice the information given in Step 2. This is a crucial step; information alone is not enough to help a person grow in Christ. Assist the learners in answering the question, How can I apply to my life what I’ve learned?

Step 4—Create: Finally, encourage learners to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). Invite them to make a life response to the lesson. This step provides individuals and groups with opportunities for creative self-expression and exploration. All such activities should help learners answer the question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I’ve learned from this week’s lesson?

When teachers use material from each of these four steps, they will appeal to most every student in their class: those who enjoy talking about what’s happening in their lives, those who want more information about the texts being studied, those who want to know how it all fits in with real life, and those who want to get out and apply what they’ve learned.
Lesson 1

*December 29–January 4

(page 6 of Standard Edition)

Jesus, Creator of Heaven and Earth

Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study: Gen. 1:1; Heb. 11:3; Ps. 19:1–3; John 1:1–3, 14; Col. 1:15, 16; John 2:7–11.

Memory Text: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1, NKJV).

Only something greater than what it creates could have created it. Thus, only a Being greater than the universe could have created the universe. And that Being is the God who is revealed in the Bible, the God whom we worship and serve because, among other things, He is our Creator.

We also learn that this God—the One who created the universe, the One who has spun those billions of galaxies across the expanse of the cosmos—is the same One who came to earth, to live among us as a human being and, even more amazing, to bear in Himself the punishment for our sins.

Sometimes we hear of things that are “too good to be true.” What could be better, though, for us as sinful beings in a fallen, painful world than to know the wonderful truth of our Creator’s love—a love so great that He would come down in the person of Christ and link Himself to each of us with ties that never can be broken?

In response to such a wondrous truth, how are we to live our lives?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 5.
In the Beginning

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1).

There are many deep truths in that simple text, one of the most profound being that the universe itself had a beginning. While that idea might not seem so radical to us today, it goes against the long-held belief in an eternally existing creation. Not until the twentieth century, when the “Big Bang” model of origins took hold, did the notion that the universe had a beginning gain general acceptance. Until then many believed that it had always existed. Many people resisted the concept of the universe having been created because that implied some sort of Creator. (In fact, the name “Big Bang” was intended to mock the notion of a created universe.) But the evidence that the universe had a beginning has become so strong that nearly all scientists have accepted it, at least for now (scientific views, even those once deemed sacrosanct, are often changed or refuted).

Read Hebrews 11:3. What does this verse tell us about God and the creation of the universe?

As with Genesis 1:1, Hebrews 11:3 is full of mystery and things that are unexplainable by our present knowledge. Yet, the text does seem to tell us that the universe was not formed from preexisting matter. The universe was created by the power of God’s Word; that is, both matter and energy were brought into existence by God’s power.

Creation from nothing is known as creation ex nihilo. We often credit humans with the creation of various things, but humans are incapable of creating from nothing. We can change the form of preexisting matter, but we have no power to create ex nihilo. Only the supernatural power of God can do that. This is one of the most dramatic differences between God and humans, and it reminds us that our very existence depends on the Creator.

In fact, the verb created in Genesis 1:1 comes from a Hebrew root word that is used only in reference to the creative activity of God. Only God, not humans, can do that kind of creating (see also Rom. 4:17).

Why is a supernatural Creator, One who exists above and beyond the Creation, the only logical explanation for the Creation? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.
The Heavens Declare

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard” (Ps. 19:1–3, see also Rom. 1:19, 20). How have you experienced the truth of these texts? How has modern science helped us to even more appreciate the power and wisdom of God as Creator?

Not just any kind of universe would be capable of supporting life. In fact, it seems that the universe must be extremely well-designed in order for life to exist. First, the building blocks of all matter—atoms—must be stable enough in order for stable material objects to be created. The stability of atoms depends on the forces that hold the parts of the atoms together. Atoms contain charged particles that both attract and repel each other. The forces of attraction and repulsion must be carefully balanced. If the attractive forces are too strong, only large atoms can form, and there would be no hydrogen. Without hydrogen, there would be no water, and thus no life. If the repulsive forces are too strong, only small atoms can form, such as hydrogen, and then there would be no carbon or oxygen. Without oxygen, there can be no water and no life. Carbon is also essential for all forms of life as we know it.

Not only must the atoms be stable, but they must be able to interact with one another in order to form vast numbers of different chemical compounds. There must be a balance between the forces that hold the molecules together and the energy required to break up the molecule in order to permit the chemical reactions upon which life depends.

The precise fitness of our universe for life has gained the admiration of scientists and has led many of them to comment that the universe appears to be designed by an intelligent Being.

The world also must have been wisely designed in order for life to exist. The range of temperatures must be compatible with life; so, the distance from the sun, the speed of rotation, and the composition of the atmosphere must all be in appropriate balance. Many other details of the world must have been carefully designed. Truly, God’s wisdom is shown in what He created.
The Power of His Word

Read Jeremiah 51:15, 16 and Psalm 33:6, 9. In addition to wisdom, what other attribute of God is mentioned in the Creation? How was this attribute expressed in Creation? More important, what are the implications of this truth for us?

Though we cannot know exactly how God created, we are told that it was through His powerful Word. All the energy in all parts of the universe had its origin in the Word of God. All the energy in all our fuels came from God’s power. All the gravity throughout the universe, every star guided in its course, and every black hole result from God’s power.

Perhaps the greatest amount of energy is within the atom itself. We are justifiably impressed by the power of nuclear weapons, in which a small amount of matter is converted into a large amount of energy. Yet, scientists tell us that all matter contains large amounts of energy. If a small amount of matter can produce the vast energy of a nuclear weapon, consider the amount of energy stored in the material of the entire world! But that is as nothing when compared with the energy stored in the matter of the universe. Imagine the power that God utilized to bring the universe into existence.

Many scientists believe that anything God may do in the creation is restricted by the “laws of nature,” but this idea is contrary to the Bible. God is not restricted by natural law; instead, God has determined natural law. God’s power has not always followed the patterns that we call the “laws of nature.”

For example, one of the fundamental “laws of nature” is the “Law of Conservation of Matter and Energy.” This law states that the total amount of matter and energy in the universe remains constant. But how could the universe have appeared from nothing if this law were inviolable? God’s creative word is not bound by the “laws” of science. God is sovereign over all His creation and is free to carry out His will.

Dwell (the best that you can) on the size of the universe. Think about the incredible power needed in order to create it. And to think that the God who wields such power loves us, even died for us. How can you learn to draw comfort from this amazing truth?
Jesus, Creator of Heaven and Earth

Read John 1:1–3, 14; Colossians 1:15, 16; Hebrews 1:1, 2. How do the New Testament writers identify the Creator? What are the implications of the answer?

John refers to Jesus as the Word ("Logos") and equates Him with God. More specifically, Jesus is the One through whom all things were created. In John’s day, the term logos was commonly used to represent the creative principle. John’s early readers would be familiar with the concept of logos as a creative principle or even as a creator. John applied this familiar concept to Jesus, identifying Him as the true Creator. Jesus, the Logos, the Incarnate One who lived among us, was not only present in the beginning, He was the One by whom the universe was created. This means that we could read Genesis 1:1 as “In the beginning, Jesus created the heavens and the earth.”

Paul’s words in Colossians 1 resonate with those of John in the identification of the Creator as Jesus Christ. By Him, all things were created. Paul adds two other attributes of Jesus. First, He is the image of the invisible God. In our sinful state, we cannot see God the Father, but we can see Jesus. If we want to know what God is like, we can study the life of Jesus (John 14:9). Second, Paul calls Jesus the “firstborn” of creation (Col. 1:15). In this context, “firstborn” does not refer to origin but to status. The firstborn was the head of the family and the heir of the property. Jesus was the “firstborn” in the sense that, as Creator and through the Incarnation (His taking upon Himself our humanity), He is the rightful head of the human family. Jesus was not a created being; rather, from eternity He was one with the Father.

Hebrews 1:1, 2 repeats the same points as in the Colossians passage. Jesus is appointed heir of all things and is the One by whom the world was created. In addition, He is the exact representation of the Father’s nature, another way of stating that He is the image of God.

How would you respond if someone were to ask you, “What is your God like?” What justification could you give for your answer?
The Creator Among Us

Read John 2:7–11, 6:8–13, 9:1–34. What do these texts reveal about the creative power of God?

Each of these miracles gives us a glimpse of God’s power over the material world that He Himself created.

First, what kind of process would be required to change water directly into wine? None that we know of. Indeed, it took an act outside of the laws of nature, at least as we now know them, to do what Jesus did here.

In the miracle of the fish and loaves, Jesus started with five loaves and two small fish and ended with enough to feed a multitude and have twelve baskets of leftovers. All the food was made of atoms and molecules. At the end, there were many times more atoms and molecules of food than when Jesus started to feed the crowd. From where did the additional molecules come, if not by the supernatural intervention of God?

Furthermore, what physical changes happened to the blind man when he was healed? He was blind from birth; thus, his brain had never been stimulated to form images from the messages sent by the eye through the optic nerve. So, his brain had to be rewired in order to process the incoming information, form images, and interpret their meaning. Next, there was something wrong with the eye itself. Perhaps some photoreceptor molecules were produced incorrectly as a result of a mutation in his DNA. Or perhaps some mutation had occurred at birth in the genes that control the development of the parts of the eye—the retina, optic nerve, lens, and so on. Or perhaps some mechanical damage had occurred that prevented the eye from functioning properly.

Whatever the details of the man’s blindness, the words of Jesus caused molecules to form in appropriate places, forming functional receptors, neuronal connections, and brain cells so that light entering the eye would form an image, and the man would have the ability to recognize images that he had never before seen.

Miracles are wonderful when they happen, but what is the danger of making your faith dependent upon them? Upon what, then, must our faith depend?
**Further Study:** “The work of creation can never be explained by science. What science can explain the mystery of life? “The theory that God did not create matter when He brought the world into existence is without foundation. In the formation of our world, God was not indebted to pre-existing matter. On the contrary, all things, material or spiritual, stood up before the Lord Jehovah at His voice and were created for His own purpose. The heavens and all the host of them, the earth and all things therein, are not only the work of His hand; they came into existence by the breath of His mouth.” —Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, pp. 258, 259.

“Just how God accomplished the work of creation he has never revealed to men; human science cannot search out the secrets of the Most High. His creative power is as incomprehensible as his existence.” —Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 113.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. In class, discuss your answer to Sunday’s final question.

2. Science talks about what it calls “anthropic coincidences” (from the Greek word *anthropos* for “man”), the incredibly fine-tuned balance of forces in nature that make it possible for human life to exist. Notice, though, the built-in bias revealed in the word *coincidences*. If you don’t believe in God, you have to attribute these amazing balances to mere coincidence. Why is the belief that these balances were the product of a Creator God a more reasonable explanation than to simply call them “coincidences”?

3. Consider the love of the Creator as He formed Adam and Eve and provided them with a beautiful garden home, knowing that He Himself would suffer and die on Calvary at the hands of the race He was creating. What do we learn about God’s love from the decision that He made to go ahead with the Creation anyway?

4. How does the “Big Bang” theory compare with the Creation statement in Genesis 1:1? Might the “Big Bang” be a description of the way in which the universe came into existence at God’s Word? What issues or problems do you see in this idea? Why would it be dangerous to link our theology to any scientific theory, especially when science so often changes?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Genesis 1:1

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Understand the basis of God’s right to sovereignty over each individual.

**Feel:** Cultivate a sense of awe about God’s greatness, similar to the experience of Isaiah 6.

**Do:** Honor God’s right to sovereignty over personal emotions and choices in his or her life.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: What makes God, God?

A. God preexists all nondivine things. Which views of God are compatible with this concept, and which are not? Why?

B. Why does our view matter in regard to the way in which God created?

II. Feel: Awe for the Greatness of God

A. In what ways do God’s rights to sovereignty and exclusive worship impact your life experience?

B. Review Isaiah 6. How do these words cultivate within you a deeper sense of submissive awe for your Creator God?

III. Do: Honor God as Our Sovereign

A. In what ways does your Creation-shaped view of God impact your perceptions and choices?

B. How can you cede to God a controlling interest over your personal emotions?

**Summary:** Creatorship is important because it is a unique attribute of God, setting Him apart from all others and grounding His rights to sovereignty and priority in our lives. Our interpretation of how God created the universe will have a significant impact on our view of the nature of divine sovereignty, as well as on our view of human accountability and responsibility. The biblical doctrine of Creation should lead us to an Isaiah 6 experience of submissive awe and obedience to God.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: A proper relationship with God must be not only warm and loving but also must acknowledge His right to sovereignty in all areas of our lives. Creation is the biblical basis of God’s claim to sovereignty.

Just for Teachers: Our teaching goal this week is to show the importance that Creation has to our understanding of who God is and how we ought to relate to Him.

How often do we see people get deeply excited or awed in the presence of a “great” person? Michael Jordan and Babe Ruth are household names due to their “great” accomplishments, at least in certain cultures. Other examples of “greatness” could include Albert Einstein, Queen Elizabeth I of Britain, Aristotle, and Nelson Mandela. At the pop-culture level, people swoon over famous singers and actors. Accomplishments and media coverage create personas that elicit adoration and create emotional excitement, sometimes generating extreme reactions in the individual admirers or fans of these great people.

By contrast, we often take God’s greatness and accomplishments for granted, failing to appreciate and reverence His uniqueness and power. It’s as though we say, “Creation from nothing? . . . How is that relevant to my life? God’s continual sustenance of the world? . . . Sure, I believe it, but I already know all that. Isn’t there something new to discuss?”

For many, the Genesis Creation account seems to be an all-too-familiar, threadbare concept that they find comfortable but not necessarily compelling. Why should God’s successful creation of the cosmos matter to us?

Opening Activity for Discussion: How do people react to being in the presence of a “great” person. Why do you think they react in that way? By contrast, how should we feel in God’s presence? What makes God great, and how should that impact our emotions and psyches as we encounter Him?
STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Emphasize how Creation is both the biblical identifier of deity and the foundational basis of God’s right to sovereignty over us. Creation should instill a proper and submissive awe for God in the believer.

Bible Commentary

I. The Unmade Maker (Read Isaiah 40:18–26 with the class.)

Why is what we believe about Creation so important? One key reason is that, in biblical theology, Creatorship is an identifying mark of deity. Creation shows God to be God. This tenet is especially evident in Isaiah 40:18–26. Isaiah throws down a challenge to Israel: “To whom then will you liken God?” (NKJV). The implied answer seems to be “no one.” God is incomparable. Isaiah then contrasts God with “an idol,” something that has been crafted and shaped by a workman (vss. 19, 20, NIV). In short, the idol is something that has been made, but, in verses 21–23, God is depicted, in the language of the Genesis Creation, as the Maker of all things.

Verse 25 repeats the challenge and, once more, Isaiah appeals to Creation as the mark that distinguishes God from all others (vs. 26). The message is clear: idols cannot be God because they are made, but God is the unmade Maker. Hence, worshiping something made is idolatry. For Isaiah, then, being the unmade Maker distinguishes God from all others. Only Someone who creates all things where there was utterly nothing can be God.

Revelation 4:11 further develops Isaiah’s point. This verse grounds God’s right to glory, honor, and power in His creatorship. Thus, supernatural creation is both the biblical marker of deity and the basis of God’s rightful claim to governance over the universe.

But this begs a question: what kind of deity is compatible with the depiction of God in Genesis 1:1? In this verse, God preexists the beginning. Before there was a beginning, God existed. This means that whatever has a beginning cannot be considered to be a part of the divine being. Hence, Genesis 1:1 rules out a pantheistic view of God, for in full-blown pantheism, the material universe is equated with God. Yet, biblically, this material universe had a beginning, making it impossible to be part of a God who is unmade.

Genesis 1:1 also makes it difficult to advocate panentheism (note the extra syllable). Panentheism teaches that all material reality is in God, as part of His being, but that God is bigger than the “all” that is in Him.
Biblically, however, for this “all” to be part of God’s being, it should have no beginning. If things with a beginning can be part of the being of deity, then God would change and develop, as new elements of His being were created and added to His totality. But Genesis 1, as well as the rest of the Bible, depicts a God who is full, lacking nothing, and unchanging.

Genesis 1:1 thus points to God who is other and distinct from the material creation. This state of God being other and apart from the material universe, and His creation of that cosmos, gives God the right to sovereignty over all reality, as asserted in Revelation 4:11. As the Originator, He has the right to have purposes and designs for His creation and the right to hold free-will beings accountable for the violation of those purposes and designs by substituting their own in place of His.

**Consider This:** What are New Testament writers saying about Christ when they credit Him with being the Agent of Creation? (See John 1:3, 4; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16, 17; Heb. 1:2, 3, 10–12.)

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**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Explore what Creation means in daily life. Your task is to push the discussion past pleasing platitudes toward practical ideas about how to make Creation meaningful, especially in reference to the establishment of divine sovereignty in one’s life.

**Thought Questions:**

1. How does a life that recognizes and honors God’s sovereign claims differ from a life that does not?

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2. What does the Creation story in Genesis 1 reveal about God’s purposes for your life?
a. Is there a divine design for your relationships? If so, what is it?
b. What is the divine design for your diet?
c. How does the Creation story inform your view of the ways in which you should relate to the natural environment?
d. Does Creation have implications regarding how you relate to animals (especially regarding abuse issues)? If so, what are they?

_____________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________

3 How does Creation inform the way in which you worship God?

_____________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________

4 How can you best demonstrate the truth of Creation in relation to God’s rights to sovereignty, honor, power, and worship?

_____________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________

▶STEP 4—Create

Activity: Jesus talked about the cares of life choking out the Word of God in our lives. The meaning of Creation thus easily can become buried under the mountain of obligations that we manage. Have the class discuss how modern life can weaken the influence of Creation in our consciousness and the ways in which we can intentionally resist those influences.
Creation: Forming the World

Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study: Gen. 1:1–13, Isa. 45:18, 1 John 1:5, Rev. 22:5, 2 Cor. 4:6, 2 Pet. 3:5, Job 38:4–6.

Memory Text: “For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens, who is God, who formed the earth and made it, who has established it, who did not create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited: ‘I am the LORD, and there is no other’” (Isaiah 45:18, NKJV).

Scientists are increasingly impressed by the fitness of the world for living creatures. And no wonder, for design and purpose are affirmed throughout the Bible, beginning in Genesis 1. Starting with a planet that was unformed and unfilled, God spent the first three days forming the world for occupation and the last three filling it. This week’s lesson focuses on those first three days of the Creation week.

Some scholars have objected to the idea that God would “impose” a purpose on nature, arguing instead that He simply allowed the material world to “be itself” and to develop by natural processes supposedly inherent in itself. This is a common theme among those who promote various forms of “theistic evolution.” Yet, such ideas are not compatible with Scripture or with our understanding of Creation. The universe has no inherent will of its own. The creation is not an entity independent of God, but it is instead God’s chosen arena in which He can express His love to the creatures that He has made.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 12.*
Without Form and Void

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:1, 2, NKJV). What do these verses reveal about the earth before the Lord began creating life on it?

The Bible starts with the story of Creation, and the Creation story starts with a statement that God is Creator. It then describes the condition of the world when God began to prepare it for occupancy. When the story begins, the planet is already here but it is unformed, unfilled, dark, and wet. The succeeding verses describe how God first formed the world into an inhabitable place and then filled it with living creatures. The text does not tell us exactly when the rocks and water of the earth came into existence, only that the world had not always been suitable for life. The world became fit for living creatures only because God acted to make it so.

What does Isaiah 45:18 teach us about God’s intention at Creation?

When the earth was first brought into existence, it was unsuitable for life. The Bible says nothing about the time period between the original creation of the rocks and water and the creation of the environment and the creatures. Some scholars think it might have been immediate; others that it may have been after a long period of time.

The simple fact is, we don’t know, nor does it really matter. Whatever the case, the material of the earth was created by God; then, at the time of His choosing, He created a suitable environment for life. The crucial point is that the Lord, who was not dependent upon preexisting matter, used matter that He had at some point already created, something that in its “primeval” state was tohu vabohu (“without form and void”). Then, through the power of His Word, He created our inhabitable world.
Let There Be Light

“Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day (Gen. 1:3–5, NKJV). What do these verses teach us about the first day of Creation?

Numerous points can be inferred from this passage.

First, light appeared in response to God’s command. God’s word is effective in determining the state of the Creation.

Second, the light was “good.” We may wonder why the text says that God “saw” the light; is there any doubt that God sees everything? The point is that the light made by God was good, even in God’s eyes. We know that the light is good because God Himself evaluated it as such.

Another point is that God divided the light from the darkness. Both light and darkness are under God’s control, and neither one makes any difference to His activity and knowledge (see Ps. 139:12). God gave names to the dark and light portions of time, calling them “day” and “night.” God has the right to give names to periods of time because He is the Creator of time. As Sovereign over time, God is not limited by time. Rather, time depends on God.

Another point of this passage is that there was a period of darkness and a period of light that together comprised a day. Much has been written about the meaning of “day” in the Creation story. We will consider this question later, but we note in passing that the first day was composed of a period of darkness and a period of light, in the same way that we observe days now.

Also, light is one of the features that accompanies the presence of God. We do not need to suppose that light was invented on the first day of Creation, since God existed before the earth was created and His presence is often associated with light (1 John 1:5, Rev. 22:5). At Creation, light was introduced to the previously dark planet.

How, though, could there be day and night before the introduction of the sun into the Creation account? Moses surely knew the connection between the sun and daylight. Yet, despite that obvious knowledge, he wrote what he did about the light and darkness on the first day. God must have given him knowledge about Creation that, at present, we don’t understand, knowledge that cannot be discerned from looking at the natural world. Why, though, shouldn’t we be surprised that some things about Creation remain a mystery?
The Heaven Created

“Then God said, ‘Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.’ Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. So the evening and the morning were the second day” (Gen. 1:6–8, NKJV).

God created the firmament, appointed its function, and gave it a name, heaven. The function of the firmament (heaven) was to divide the water below from the water above it. Today, we would probably use the term “sky” and recognize the division of the sky into the atmosphere, which is a part of our environment and the space beyond our atmosphere where the sun, moon, and stars exist.

The atmosphere appears to be the portion of the “heaven” that was formed on the second day of Creation. The atmosphere provides a method for moving water uphill; water can evaporate and enter the atmosphere, where it can be transported to any place on the earth. Then it can be brought back to the surface, either through the mist, as described in Genesis 2:6, or as rain.

God named the firmament, signifying His sovereignty over it. The act of naming implies that God is Sovereign over space. Space does not limit God’s actions in any way, because He created and rules it. As with the lighting of the world on the first day, the creation of the firmament was completed before the end of the second day, another dark period of evening and a light period of morning.

Much discussion has centered on the meaning of the word firmament. The Hebrew word raqia is sometimes used to describe a sheet of metal that has been hammered into a thin sheet, hence the term “firmament.” Critics have argued that the ancient Hebrews actually believed there was a hard surface above the earth; thus, they argue, because no such thing exists, the biblical account is wrong. But this is faulty reasoning. The use of the word firmament, in that context, simply applies to the sky above—both the atmosphere and space itself. We only have to look at the immediate context to know what is being talked about. In Genesis the birds are described as flying on “the face of the firmament” (Gen. 1:20, NKJV), and in another place the firmament is where the sun and moon are seen (Gen. 1:14). Obviously, the birds don’t fly in the part of the raqia where the sun and moon are.

Whatever the mysteries of the Creation narrative itself, one point comes through very clearly: nothing is left to chance. Why is that point important for us to know, especially at a time when many believe that chance played a big role in our creation?
Space for Living

**Read** Genesis 1:9–13. Try to envision the incredible creative power of God as He is doing that which is described in this text. How does this account give a logical answer to the old question, “Which came first, the chicken or the egg?”

Previous to this time, the earth was covered with water. In order to provide living space for the humans that God planned to create, He changed the surface of the earth to produce basins that received the water and formed seas, allowing continents to appear. This involved a third division of the physical features of the earth. (The first division was between light and darkness; the second division was between waters above from waters below; and the third division was between dry land and seas.)

Also, for the third time, God gave names to the things that He had divided. The dry land was called “earth,” and the gatherings of waters were called “seas,” once again illustrating God’s sovereignty over space. God examined the arrangement of land and seas and declared it “good.”

A second Creation event is recorded for the third day of Creation. The dry land provided space for God to place a food supply for the creatures soon to be created. God called forth plants from the dry land (earth). Grass, herbs, and fruit trees are mentioned specifically. These were to be the sources of food for terrestrial creatures. The text does not indicate how many different kinds of plants were created, but it does indicate that there was a diversity of plants from the beginning. In fact, from what we see today, we know that there must have been an incredible variety of these life forms. Also, Scripture is clear that there was no single ancestor here from which all plants evolved; instead, right from the start, there was a diversity of plant life. The concept, fundamental to evolutionary biology, of a single plant ancestor is contradictory to the biblical account.

Look at the incredible diversity of fruit and vegetables and other edibles. How do they present powerful evidence of God’s love for us? Why is it absurd to think that all these things were created, as evolution teaches, by random processes?
God’s All-Powerful Word

What do the following texts teach us about the power of God’s word?

2 Cor. 4:6 ____________________________

_____________________________________

Isa. 55:11 ____________________________

_____________________________________

2 Pet. 3:5 ____________________________

_____________________________________

The Bible teaches that God created out of nothing (ex nihilo) by the power of His Word and without conflict or resistance in any form. This view of creation is unique to the Hebrews among all the peoples of the ancient world. Most nonbiblical creation stories tell of conflict and violence in creation. For example, the ancient Babylonians had a creation story in which the monster Apsu and his consort Tiamat produce a generation of deities that they then attempt to destroy, but Tiamat is killed in the battle. Her body is divided into two parts, one that forms the heavens and the other that forms the earth.

Modern men have also created a popular story of creation through violence. According to this story, God willfully created a world in which resources would be in short supply, causing competition among individuals, with the result being that weaker individuals would be eliminated by the stronger. Over time, according to this modern story, organisms have become more and more complex, ultimately producing humans and all other living organisms from a common ancestor.

Yet, the “gods” of evolutionary theory (random mutation and natural selection) are not the same as the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible is the Defender of the weak and the generous Provider for all creatures. Death, suffering, and other evils were not caused by God; on the contrary, they came as a natural result of rebellion against His good rulership. The gods of evolutionary theory use competition and elimination of the weak by the strong in order to create. Even worse, they are responsible for death and suffering; indeed, death and suffering are their very means of creating.

Thus, Genesis 1 and 2 cannot, in any way, be harmonized with modern evolutionary theory, which at its core opposes the biblical account of Creation.
Further Study: Though Scripture doesn’t explicitly say it, we have good biblical reasons for believing that the universe existed long before life on earth began. First, in Job 38:4–6, God states that there were living beings who shouted for joy when God formed the world. This implies preexisting beings who lived in the universe before the earth was created. The reference to an on-looking universe in 1 Corinthians 4:9 may refer to the same group of beings. Second, the serpent was present in the Garden of Eden before Adam and Eve sinned. In Revelation 12:9, the serpent is identified as Satan, who was thrown out of heaven. Jesus said that He saw this happen (Luke 10:18). Ezekiel 28:14, 15 describe the covering cherub, who was perfect at first but eventually rebelled. This implies that there was a period of time before Satan’s rebellion and that presumably Satan lived in the universe also. These texts indicate that Adam and Eve were not the first beings created.

“As the earth came forth from the hand of its Maker, it was exceedingly beautiful. Its surface was diversified with mountains, hills, and plains, interspersed with noble rivers and lovely lakes; but the hills and mountains were not abrupt and rugged, abounding in terrific steeps and frightful chasms, as they now do; the sharp, ragged edges of earth’s rocky framework were buried beneath the fruitful soil, which everywhere produced a luxuriant growth of verdure. There were no loathsome swamps or barren deserts. Graceful shrubs and delicate flowers greeted the eye at every turn. The heights were crowned with trees more majestic than any that now exist. The air, untainted by foul miasma, was clear and healthful. The entire landscape outvied in beauty the decorated grounds of the proudest palace. The angelic host viewed the scene with delight, and rejoiced at the wonderful works of God.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 44.

Discussion Questions:

1 Identify as many features as you can that show that the world is designed.

2 What reasons can you give to show how the theory of evolution cannot be harmonized with the biblical doctrine of creation?

3 Without doubt, there are elements in the Genesis Creation account that we can’t explain. Why, though, is that not a reason to reject it as a literal account of the way in which God created our world?
The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** Isaiah 45:18

▶ **The Student Will:**

- **Know:** Acknowledge the importance of design in our understanding of Creation.
- **Feel:** Recognize that God acts purposefully, with specific intentions, even for each individual’s way of life.
- **Do:** Seek to know God’s designs for his or her life and to submit to them.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Important Role of Design in Our Understanding of Creation

- A What evidences of divine design and purpose can be found in the Creation story?
- B What are the ways in which God forms and fills in the Creation narrative?
- C If God creates through processes devoid of purpose and design, what kind of God would we have?

II. Feel: Appreciation for Divine Design

- A What difference should Creation with design make in your spiritual life?
- B How can you cultivate a deeper appreciation and reverence for God’s creative and regenerative power?

III. Do: Submit to God’s Creative Power

- A How does your life reflect God’s creative power?
- B What does God need to form and fill in your life, and how can you cooperate with His purpose to transform you?

▶ **Summary:** Our understanding of divine design in Creation is important because it dramatically affects our view of God and hence how we relate to Him.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: In Genesis 1, God is shown as Creator with specific purposes and designs for His creation. If we believe that God creates through random, purposeless processes, this view changes our understanding of God in dramatic ways.

Just for Teachers: Share or express in your own words the thoughts contained in the short essay below. Use it to instill in learners an understanding of the importance of divine design in their lives.

A number of scholars have observed that the six days of Creation fall into two sections: forming and filling. During the first three days, God forms, in rough features, our cosmos with light, water, and dry land. In the final three days, He fills with more details that which He formed. Hence, the light is filled with sun, moon, and stars; the waters and earth are filled with various life forms, culminating with the creation of man on day six.

Forming and filling provide evidence of a plan and design being implemented by God in the creative process. The sun and moon were designed to help to mark and define times and seasons. Plants and fruits were designed to be food for animals and humans, and thus predation seems to be excluded from the original design. Lastly, by creating two humans of differing genders and uniting them in marriage, God appears to have set forth a design for familial structure and relationships.

Design means that God created things with specific intentions and purposes. God has a right to prescribe how His creation operates and the ways in which it is used. Thus, design is closely related to God’s right to govern over that which He makes. Forming and filling, then, provide a simple template from which we can explore the importance of divine design for our spiritual lives.

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Your task is to explore why design and purpose in creation make a difference in the Christian’s life.
In Genesis 1 we find evidence that God created with specific purposes and goals in mind for His creation. In our key text, for example, the heavenly lights were made to govern time—days, months, and seasons are defined by celestial luminaries. Today, however, belief in the theory of evolution challenges the idea of a design in nature. Darwin’s observations from the Galápagos Islands played a key role in his development of his theory of origins, a theory that was fueled by natural selection and devoid of design and purpose. Capitalizing on the Galápagos connection, David Hull asks an important question: “What kind of God can one infer from the sort of phenomenon epitomized by the species on Darwin’s Galápagos Islands?” He eventually answers, “The God of the Galápagos is careless, wasteful, indifferent, almost diabolical. This is not the sort of God to whom anyone would be inclined to pray.”—David L. Hull, “The God of the Galápagos,” Nature 352 (August 8, 1991), p. 486. But what kind of God would create through evolutionary processes devoid of design?

Some theologians argue that God is not indifferent to natural evil, but, rather, God is limited in His very nature so that He is good but limited in power. Hence, while He desires to do something about the pain and suffering in the world, He is unable.

A second option offered asserts that while God is all-powerful, His greatest desire is the complete freedom of the cosmos to self-create and self-determine. This freedom is said to be more important to God than imposing some kind of order or design on the universe. Advocates of this view tend to express God as being in a power-sharing relationship with the universe, with the universe participating in its own creation.

A third option is Deism. In this view, God launches all the natural processes and then absents Himself like a disinterested, absentee landlord. While this God may have all power, He shows little or no personal interest in the affairs of humankind. In this construct, God is highly unlikely to personally interact or intervene with any particularity in the affairs of earth’s history.

For each of these three options, one must ask, “Why, then, should I pray to such a God?” If God is limited in power, at most, prayer would allow God to be a sympathetic but useless sounding board. In option two, if God has renounced plans and purposes to establish and preserve our freedom, why pray? He would not want to infringe upon our freedom by intervening. Why intervene if there is no purpose or design? Finally, in the Deist option, why pray to a disinterested God?
Biblical Creation is grounded in divine design, which makes it possible for God to care, intervene, and hold humanity accountable. Biblical theism thus gives us a God to whom people can be inclined to pray. Prayer presupposes a God who cares and who has plans and purposes that create a sense of that which ought to be. Thus, we pray because we believe God has designs and purposes, and we want His help in order to bring them to fruition. Hull appears to be correct. A God who eschews design and creates by random, undirected processes would indeed be one to whom we would not be inclined to pray.

**Consider This:** What attributes of God do you see in the Creation story that would make Him a God to whom you would be inclined to pray?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** What we believe about the way in which God created affects other beliefs. Use the question to probe how believing that God created through a designless process impacts other areas of biblical theology. Discuss the following question and its elements. Feel free to add other issues besides the ones listed.

**Thought Question:**
If there is no design in creation, how would the ensuing view of God inform our understanding of:

- Prayer ____________________________

- Scripture (Revelation and Inspiration) ____________________________

- The Nature of Truth ____________________________
**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Emphasize to class members that what we believe about design affects our view of worship.

**Activity for Discussion:** At opposite ends of the spectrum of faith lie a religious belief that conforms to a prescriptive divine revelation and a faith that is merely a communally constructed collection of spiritual ideas. How does design in creation affect our view of our faith? What difference would creation by design make in the way that we worship God?
SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Genesis 1; Ps. 8:3; Rom. 8:19–22; Lev. 11:14–22; Gen. 2:1–3; Mark 2:27, 28.

Memory Text: “By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work” (Genesis 2:2, NIV).

This week’s lesson reviews the Bible’s brief description of the last three Creation days and the Sabbath rest. This description is found in Genesis 1:1–2:3, but numerous references to it exist in other parts of Scripture. One of the most striking aspects of the Creation account is its division into days of Creation. Why did He choose to make the seven-day time cycle that we call a week?

Scripture does not tell us directly, but we can look for clues. Perhaps the most important clue is the Sabbath itself, which reserves a special time for communion between God and humanity. It may be that God established the week to provide a period of time suitable for ordinary work, yet with a regular period of time set aside as a reminder of our relationship to God (see Mark 2:28). This would help humans to remember that God is the True Provider and that we are totally dependent upon Him.

Whatever the reason, it is apparent that the Genesis Creation account reveals a Creation done with exceeding care and purpose. Nothing is left to chance.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 19.*
Sun, Moon, and Stars

Read Genesis 1:14–19. What actions are mentioned on the fourth day of Creation? How are we to make sense of this, especially given our present understanding of the physical world?

The fourth day has probably been discussed more than any of the other six Creation days. If the sun was created on the fourth day, what caused the daily cycles for the first three Creation days? On the other hand, if the sun already existed, what happened on the fourth day?

Uncertainty over the events of the fourth day of Creation does not arise from a logical contradiction but from a plurality of possibilities. One possibility is that the sun was created on the fourth day, and the light for the first three days came from God’s presence or from another source such as a supernova. Revelation 21:23 is consistent with this idea, as the sun is not needed in the heavenly city because God is there. A second possibility is that the sun, moon, and stars were appointed their functions at that time. Psalm 8:3 seems consistent with this view. Hebrew scholar C. John Collins writes that the Hebrew wording of Genesis 1:14 may allow for either of these two possibilities. (See C. John Collins, Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary [Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing Co., 2006], p. 57.)

A third possibility is that the sun was already in existence but was obscured by clouds or volcanic dust and was not visible or fully functional until the fourth day. One can compare this possibility with the planet Venus, where a similar situation occurs today.

The text does not seem clearly to endorse or rule out any of these interpretations, although this does not deter strong opinions on the topic. It is probably a good rule not to give a question more significance than the Bible gives it, and we ought to acknowledge that our understanding is limited. This acknowledgment, especially in the area of creation, shouldn’t be that hard to accept. After all, think about how many scientific mysteries exist at present; that is, they are right here for experimental science to investigate and yet still remain mysteries. How much more mysterious is something hidden so far in the past?
Creation of Air and Water Animals

Read Genesis 1:20–23. What evidence, if any, exists in the texts that would imply randomness?

The waters and the atmosphere were populated on the fifth day of Creation. Many have seen a relationship between the second and fifth Creation days. The waters were separated by the atmosphere on the second day, and both were filled with living creatures on the fifth day. The Creation events seem to have occurred in a sequence that reflects an intentional pattern, showing the care and orderliness of God’s activity. In other words, nothing in the Creation account provides any room for randomness.

Notice that both water creatures and air creatures are mentioned in the plural, indicating that a diversity of organisms was created on the fifth day. Each creature was blessed with the capacity to be fruitful and multiply. Diversity was present from the beginning. There was no single ancestor from which all other species descended, but each species seems to have been endowed with the possibility of producing varieties of individuals. For example, more than four hundred named breeds have been developed from the common pigeon, and at least twenty-seven breeds of goldfish are known. God apparently gave each of His creatures the potential to produce a great variety of various offspring, further adding to the diversity of the Creation.

In verse 21, God saw that the creatures He had made were good. This implies they were well-designed, attractive to the eye, free from defects, and harmoniously participating in the purpose of the Creation.

Few living creatures excite our imagination and admiration more than birds do. Birds are truly amazing creatures and are wonderfully designed. Their feathers are lightweight but strong, stiff yet flexible. The parts of a flight feather are held together by complex sets of tiny barbs that provide strong but lightweight bracing. A bird’s lung is so designed that it can obtain oxygen as it inhales and also as it exhales. This provides the high level of oxygen required for powered flight. This result is accomplished by the presence of air sacs in some of the bones. These sacs function to sustain the flow of oxygen and, at the same time, to lighten the body of the bird, making flight easier to maintain and control. Birds are amazingly constructed.

With all this in mind, read Matthew 10:29–31. What comfort can you find in these words?
Creation of the Land Animals

In Genesis 1:24–31, terrestrial animals and humans were created on the sixth day. As with the correlation between the second and fifth days, a correlation is also seen between the division of the land and sea on the third day and the filling of the land on the sixth day. One is reminded again of the orderly and purposeful sequence of Creation events, as is consistent with a God of order (compare 1 Cor. 14:33).

As with the creatures created on the fifth day, the wording of the text indicates that a plurality of types was created on the sixth day of Creation. A diversity of beasts, cattle, and creeping things were created, as well.

There is no single ancestor of all land animals; God, instead, created many distinct and separate lineages.

Note the expression “according to their kind,” or similar phrases in Genesis 1:11, 21, 24, 25. Some have attempted to use this phrase to support the idea of fixed “kinds,” an idea taken from Greek philosophy. The ancient Greeks thought that each individual was an imperfect expression of an unchanging ideal, known as a type. Yet, the fixity of species is not consistent with the biblical teaching that all of nature suffers from the curse of sin (Rom. 8:19–22). We know that species have changed, as expressed in the curses of Genesis 3 (Ellen G. White wrote about the “threefold curse” on the earth—the curse after the Fall, after Cain’s sin, and after the Flood) and as seen in the parasites and predators that cause so much suffering and violence. The meaning of the phrase “according to their kind” is best understood by examining the context in which it is used.

Read Genesis 6:20, 7:14, and Leviticus 11:14–22. How is the expression “after its kind,” or an equivalent phrase, applied? How do these examples help us to understand the phrase in Genesis 1?

The phrase “after his kind,” or an equivalent, should not be interpreted as some rule of reproduction. Rather, it refers to the fact that there were diverse kinds of creatures involved in the respective stories. Some Bible translations use the phrase “of various kinds,” which seems more true to the context. Instead of referring to fixity of species, the phrase refers to the diversity of creatures created on the sixth day. From the time of the Creation, there have been many kinds of plants and animals.
The Creation Completed

After the Creation was completed in six days (we will study the creation of humanity later), we find the first mention in the Bible of the seventh day.

Read Genesis 2:1–3. Notice especially verse 1, which emphasizes the completion of all that God had done. Why is this so important in our understanding of the significance of the seventh day?

The Hebrew word for rest in this text is shabath, which is closely related to the word for Sabbath. It indicates a cessation of labor upon completion of a project. God was not weary and in need of rest; He was finished with His work of creating and so He stopped. God’s special blessing rests on the seventh day. It is not only “blessed” but also “sanctified,” which carries the idea of being set apart and specially devoted to God. Thus, God gave special significance to the Sabbath in the context of the relationship between God and humans.

Read Mark 2:27, 28. What did Jesus say was the purpose of the Sabbath?

Notice that the Sabbath was not made because God had a need but because man had a need for which God made provision. At the end of that first week, God rested from His acts of creation and devoted His time to relationship with His creatures. Humans needed the communion with their Maker in order to understand their place in the universe. Imagine the joy and wonder that Adam and Eve experienced as they conversed with God and beheld the world that He had made. The wisdom of this provision for rest became even more evident after sin. We need the Sabbath rest in order to prevent us from losing sight of God and getting caught up in materialism and overwork.

God commands us to give one-seventh of our lives to the remembrance of the act of Creation. What should that tell us about the importance of the teaching? How can you learn to have a deeper and richer experience with the Lord through resting on the Sabbath as He Himself did?
The Literal Day

Read Genesis 1:5, 8, 31. What are the components of a creation day? Does anything in the verses imply that these are not literal 24-hour days as we experience them today?

The nature of the days of Creation has been the subject of much discussion. Some have questioned whether the days were ordinary days or whether they might represent much longer periods of time. The text’s description of the Creation days provides the answer to that question. The days are composed of an evening (dark period) and a morning (light period) and are consecutively numbered. That is, the days are expressed in a way that very clearly shows that they are days just as we now experience them, an evening and a morning, a period of darkness and a period of light. It is difficult to see how the statement could be more clear or explicit in describing the days of a week. The repeated expression, “and there was evening and there was morning,” emphasizes the literal aspect of each day.

Read Leviticus 23:3. What indication do we have that all seven days of Creation week were the same kind of days as those that we experience?

The ancient Hebrews were in no doubt as to the nature of the Sabbath day. It was a day of ordinary length but carried a special blessing from God. Note the explicit comparison of God’s workweek of six days with our workweek of six days and the corresponding comparison of the day of rest for God and for us (see also Exod. 20:9, 11). Even many scholars who reject the idea of these being literal days often admit that the writers of the Bible understood that literal days were meant.

So crucial to our relationship with God is our trust of God and of His Word. If we can’t trust the Word of God on something as foundational and as explicitly stated as the Genesis Creation in six literal days, what can we trust Him on?
Further Study: As stated previously, the days of the Creation week are numbered and identified as being composed of a dark period, the evening, and a light period, the morning. There is no reasonable way in which to interpret these days other than as being like the days we experience today. Some have appealed to such texts as Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8 when arguing that each Creation day actually represents 1,000 years. This conclusion is not suggested by the text and does nothing to resolve the issue created by those who think that these days represent billions of years.

Also, if the days in Genesis represented long epochs, one would expect to find a succession in the fossil record that matches the succession of the living organisms created in the successive six Creation “days.” Thus, the first fossils should be plants, which were created on the third “day.” Next should be the first water animals and the air animals. Finally, we should find the first land animals. The fossil record does not match this sequence. Water creatures come before plants, and land creatures come before air creatures. The first fossil fruit trees and other flowering plants appear after all these other groups. The only point of similarity is that humans appear last in both accounts.

“Of each successive day of creation, the Sacred Record declares that it consisted of the evening and the morning, like all other days that have followed.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 112.

“But the infidel supposition, that the events of the first week required seven vast, indefinite periods for their accomplishment, strikes directly at the foundation of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment. It makes indefinite and obscure that which God has made very plain. It is the worst kind of infidelity; for with many who profess to believe the record of creation, it is infidelity in disguise.”—Ellen G. White, Spiritual Gifts, vol. 3, p. 91.

Discussion Questions:

1. Even from a nonliteralist interpretation of Genesis, two points are obvious: nothing was random in the act of Creation, and there was no common ancestry for the species. Now, along comes Darwinian evolution, which, in its various versions, teaches two things: randomness and common ancestry for all species. How, then, does one interpret Genesis through a theory that, at its most basic level, contradicts Genesis at its most basic level?

2. Why is it important to understand that science, for all the good that it does, is still merely a human endeavor?

3. All science has available to study is a fallen world, one that is very different in many ways from the original Creation. Why is it important to keep that truth ever before us?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** *Genesis 1*

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** Analyze the textual evidence that shows that *Genesis 1* was written as a historical narrative.
- **Feel:** Appreciate the importance of the different ways that one can approach the biblical text.
- **Do:** Seek to approach the biblical text on its own terms without importing nonbiblical ideas into the interpretive process.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Historical Authenticity of *Genesis 1*

A. Some people question whether the literary genre in *Genesis 1* is historic narrative or something more symbolic, such as poetry. What evidence in *Genesis 1* helps to answer this question?

B. How does the Hebrew word for “day” help to answer this question?

C. How does the *waw* consecutive construction in Hebrew (meaning “but” or “and”) help to answer this question?

II. Feel: Reverence in Approaching the Word

A. Why is the way in which we approach the biblical text so important?

B. How can we cultivate a feeling of reverence and awe for God in our approach to the biblical text?

III. Do: Interpreting Scripture With Scripture

A. How can you better approach the biblical text without corrupting the message with outside ideas?

B. How can you approach and interpret the Bible on its own terms?

**Summary:** How we approach the Creation story sets a tone for how we approach the rest of the Bible. Methods of reinterpretation, designed to make *Genesis* more palatable to the modern mind, sometimes show similarities to the way in which some Christians reinterpret the biblical text to make the Sabbath more palatable to a Sunday-oriented society. Biblical interpretation, however, should not be driven or influenced by human desire but should center instead around letting Scripture interpret Scripture.
**Learning Cycle**

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** How do we treat the biblical text? Should Scripture interpret Scripture, or should we import ideas from modern society in order to make the message more palatable?

**Just for Teachers:** Your task is to help class members to understand how important the correct interpretation of Scripture is to their faith and spiritual growth.

The way in which we approach a text can have a big impact on the meaning of the message received. How does one’s treatment of the Genesis 1 text affect its message for us today?

If we treated texts, e-mails, and letters from our spouses or business associates with the same indifference or disregard with which some treat the text of Genesis 1, how would our marriages and careers fare? Jesus raised a similar question when He asked, “‘What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?’” (Luke 11:11, 12, ESV). If we believe that God inspired the messages of the biblical authors, how much creative license can we take in the task of interpreting Genesis 1? Should the days of Genesis 1 be reinterpreted in the way that the father in Jesus’ illustration “reinterpreted” a fish into a snake? Or should we look for internal evidence of the writer’s intent regarding how to understand Genesis 1?

**Opening Activity for Discussion:** Have you ever thought that you had communicated something very clearly only to discover that the recipient of your message did some very creative interpreting in order to bypass your intended goal? How did this creative interpretation of your message make you feel?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** Genesis 1 provides a useful and convenient test case for exploring the question of how we approach and interpret the biblical text.
Bible Commentary

I. Flexible Facts Versus Fixed Truth: The Challenge of Evolution to a Belief in Young-Earth Creation (Read Genesis 1 with the class.)

Young-earth creationists treat Genesis 1 as a straightforward historical account that depicts how God made the world in six literal, consecutive, contiguous days. Current scientific theory presents difficulties for this view. As a result, some Christians try to solve this dissonance.

One alternative denies the inspiration of Scripture, relegating stories, such as Genesis 1, to the status of relics from humankind’s prescientific past. While admitting that the author of Genesis intended to teach a literal, seven-day Creation week, the believers in this alternative assert that the author was scientifically wrong. Others attempt to affirm both the inspiration of Scripture and the authority of current scientific theory. A frequent tactic is to assert that Genesis 1 is some kind of literary genre other than historical narrative, thus allowing us to understand the Creation days as being nonliteral and in harmony with long chronologies. Such assertions have some challenges, however, when looking at the text itself.

First, when the Hebrew word for day (yom) appears in the Old Testament with an ordinal number (first, second, et cetera), the combination always depicts a literal day. Additionally, the presence of evening-morning vocabulary in Genesis 1 makes it hard to escape the obvious: the author clearly intended us to read the account as a basic chronological history with real days like the days that we experience now.

Second, there is a Hebrew construction called the “waw consecutive,” which is a hallmark of Hebrew historical narrative. (Waw is a conjunction that is generally the equivalent of “and” or “but” in English. The consecutive waw is used in a story that is reporting sequences of consecutive events in historical narratives.)

All the classic stories in Genesis, including the Flood and the sacrifice of Isaac, are liberally sprinkled with waw consecutives. By contrast, waw consecutives are rarely used in poetic genres, such as the Psalms and wisdom literature. With Genesis 1 employing over forty waw consecutives, we have strong evidence that the author felt that he was writing a historical narrative. But why might this be important?

Reinterpretations of Genesis 1 attempt to make the Creation story more palatable to the modern mind at the expense of the obvious reading of the text, raising questions about biblical authority. As such, there is some similarity to attempts to reinterpret the plain meaning of the Sabbath, especially the seventh-day aspect, in order to make one of God’s commandments...
more palatable to a Sunday-oriented society. The “literal-but-wrong” advocates mimic the method of medieval Catholicism, which admitted that the Bible taught the seventh-day Sabbath but claimed that there was a higher authority than Scripture, allowing the change of interpretation. And other Christians, trying both to affirm biblical authority and to circumvent the seventh-day dimension of the Sabbath, introduce various textual reinterpretations not unlike the current attempts to reinterpret Genesis 1. Those trying to affirm the authority of the text while attempting to provide a more palatable reinterpretation may have more difficulty acknowledging the plain sense of the text than those who outright deny biblical inspiration and authority.

Consider This: Scientific knowledge is always subject to revision and, therefore, is never fixed and absolute. By contrast, we believe that God, and hence His Word, is eternally true and unchanging. Consider the irony in this question: why do some Christians reverse the concepts, treating flexible scientific knowledge as fixed, absolute truth while treating Scripture as relative and revisable? While this sort of treatment seems to be an attack on the authority of Scripture, what does the answer to this question reveal about what is really under attack?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Much of this week’s lesson hinges on the concept of principles of interpretation. How are we to approach the text? Do we let Scripture supply the interpretational norms and rules, or should we import other ideas, especially from our own culture and era, to help us to better understand the text? How one answers these questions has great implications for the meaning of biblical authority in the life of the student.

Thought Questions:

Our lesson looks at connections to Genesis 1 in Job, Psalms, the Hebrew prophets, and the teachings of Jesus.

1 In Genesis 1, what evidence do you see in the text that direct us to the author’s intent for how to understand the story?
How does your interpretational approach to Genesis 1 affect your interpretational approach to other areas of biblical teaching, especially when these areas conflict with modern lifestyle and ideas?

Why is it important to take Genesis 1 on its own terms instead of blending outside ideas into its framework?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: This is a final opportunity to emphasize to your class the importance of letting Scripture interpret Scripture.

Activity: Compare and contrast the ways in which people try to circumvent the historicity of Creation with the ways that some try to circumvent elements of the Sabbath truth or the nature of man. What similarities do you see in the ways in which the biblical text is handled? Do you see any differences? What does this teach you about the importance of how we approach the text of Scripture?
Lesson 4  *January 19–25
(page 30 of Standard Edition)

Creation, a Biblical Theme

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water’ ” (Revelation 14:6, 7, NIV).

Genesis 1:1–2:3 is the foundation for many Creation texts found in Scripture. Some references to Genesis 1 are clear, others are more indirect. The more indirect references often involve a repetition of certain words or ideas without directly quoting the text, such as 2 Corinthians 4:6: “For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (NKJV). A direct reference, in contrast, is Hebrews 4:4: “For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: ‘And God rested on the seventh day from all His works’ ” (NKJV), a quote from Genesis 2:2.

This week we will look at various references that point back to the Genesis account and show how other Bible writers understood it as a literal depiction of human origins.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 26.
Creation in Genesis 2

“These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens” (Gen. 2:4).

Genesis 1:1–2:3 is the first account of God creating our world. It forms the foundation of all the other truths that we, as Christians, believe.

But the Creation account doesn’t end there. From Genesis 2:3 to the end of the chapter, we are given more details, specifically regarding the creation of Adam and Eve. Thus, we should interpret Genesis 2:4 (above) as the introduction to a more detailed history of the creation of Adam and Eve, an act that is briefly summarized in Genesis 1:26–29. Some modern scholars have argued that a conflict exists between Genesis 1 and 2, but this would have been a surprise to Moses and the other biblical writers. If the stories were seen as conflicting, Moses would never have written them, especially so close together. The conflict isn’t with the texts; it’s with those who read a conflict into them.

Read Matthew 19:4–6. How does Jesus affirm the historical truth of Genesis 1 and 2?

In response to the Pharisees’ question about divorce, Jesus quoted from both Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, showing that He considered both to be discussing the same historical event, the Creation of the world and humanity. How much more proof do we need that Genesis 1 and 2 are harmonious accounts of Creation, the doctrine and teaching that forms the foundation of our existence and purpose? We are not here by chance, we are not here by fluke; we are beings made in the image of God—and the Genesis Creation account, as revealed in chapters 1 and 2, is God’s special revelation to us of our origins.

Read Genesis 2. How does this help us to better understand what it means to be human, to be made in the image of God, and to be given free will?
Creation in the Psalms

Read Psalm 8. What links do you find with Genesis 1?

________________________________________________________

Read Psalm 104. Note how this psalm praises God for His goodness as seen in both Creation and providence. Identify the links with Genesis 1 in the following verses from Psalm 104:

Vs. 2_____________________________________________________

Vss. 5–7____________________________________________________

Vss. 7–9____________________________________________________

Vs. 14_____________________________________________________

Vs. 19_____________________________________________________

Vs. 25_____________________________________________________

Note how the psalm’s topical sequence seems to be crafted to follow the topical sequence of Genesis 1. Poetic imagery is vividly presented throughout the verses, and its message clearly includes the power, wisdom, and goodness of God and the dependence of all the Creation on the Creator. Nothing in the psalm hints that the Genesis account was not to be taken literally.

Note the following examples from the Psalms that correlate with Genesis 1.

Ps. 24:1, 2_____________________________________________________

Ps. 33:6_____________________________________________________

Ps. 74:16, 17_____________________________________________________

Ps. 89:11_____________________________________________________

The Psalms are full of praise for the Creator. Sometimes this is expressed in language reminiscent of Genesis 1, other times the language is more general; but in all cases, the description of Creation is consistent with Genesis 1 and reminds us of the foundational role of Genesis in our understanding of our origins as sons and daughters of God.
Creation in the Book of Job

Read Job 38:1–21. Note the creation topics in the following verses.

Vss. 4–7________________________________________________
Vss. 8–11_______________________________________________
Vs. 12__________________________________________________
Vs. 16__________________________________________________
Vs. 19__________________________________________________

It’s important to remember the context of the book of Job. Great tragedy struck, and Job was struggling to understand how this could happen to him, a faithful follower of God. From chapter 38 through chapter 41, the Lord continues to talk about His creative power, all in response to Job’s pained questioning.

Read carefully Job’s response to the Lord in Job 42:1–6. Why did Job respond as he did, and what can we learn from his response that could help us to trust God in our own personal tragedy?

________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

Job’s inability to explain features of the Creation led him to recognize the greatness of God and to trust Him, despite everything that had happened. We also find ourselves unable to answer many questions about the Creation, and Job’s example should encourage us to trust God, no matter what. Many questions about everything in life will remain unanswered, at least for now. We will have an eternity to get explanations for what now seems incomprehensible.

The point is that through the marvels of Creation—which we today understand so much better now than Job ever could—we should learn to trust in God’s incredible love and power.

We, today, living after the Cross, have a view of the Creator also as our crucified Redeemer, something that Job never had, at least not as clearly as we do. How much more, then, should we trust in the Lord’s goodness toward us, knowing what He did for us?
Creation in the Prophets

“For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the Lord; and there is none else” (Isa. 45:18).

Isaiah 45:18 emphasizes God’s intention to prepare a place for humans to live; thus, the fitness of the earth for life is not an accident. Consider some of the features of Earth that make it a fit place for human life in contrast to the other planets in our solar system. First, water is present in abundance. There is some evidence of water activity on Mars, but there are no standing bodies of water on Mars or on any other planet aside from Earth. Another unique feature of Earth is the composition of the atmosphere, about 21 percent oxygen and 78 percent nitrogen. Other planets have atmospheres dominated either by carbon dioxide or by helium, but only Earth has an atmosphere suitable for life. The range of temperatures on Earth is suitable for terrestrial life, unlike any of the other planets in our solar system. This is due to a combination of factors, including our distance from the sun, the composition of our atmosphere, the mass of Earth, and the speed of its rotation—which determines the length of days and nights. All these features, and more, make Earth the only known planet suitable for sustaining life.

How do the following texts relate to the events described in Genesis 1?

Isa. 44:24_______________________________________________

Isa. 45:12_______________________________________________

Jer. 51:15, 16____________________________________________

Amos 4:13_______________________________________________

Jonah 1:9________________________________________________

Zech. 12:1_______________________________________________

Think through the implications of our origins and why getting them right is so important to our understanding of who we are, why we are here, and what we can hope for in a world that, in and of itself, offers no hope at all.
Creation in the New Testament

Read Acts 17:22–31. What were the circumstances of this sermon? After Paul had introduced his topic, what was the first topic he brought to these learned men? Vss. 24, 25. What does Paul say is the relationship between the Creator God and humans? Vss. 26–28.

The audience here no doubt included the two groups of philosophers known as Stoics and Epicureans. The Stoics affirmed the reality of design in nature, while the Epicureans denied it. Neither had a knowledge of the true God, but their arguments about design were similar to many of the arguments still discussed in our day.

The important point here is that, in his witness to these pagan thinkers and intellectuals, Paul reverts directly to the argument of the Lord as the Creator of all things and all humanity. Paul had little in common with these people; so, he went right to what they did have in common—the fact that they existed—and from that undeniable reality he sought to build his argument. Hence, we see Creation as, again, a crucial theme in Scripture.

Look at the following texts: Matthew 19:4–6, Mark 2:27, Luke 3:38, John 1:1–3, 2 Corinthians 4:6, Hebrews 4:4, James 3:9, 2 Peter 3:5, Jude 11, 14. What’s fascinating is that each one of these New Testament authors either directly or indirectly makes reference to the Genesis Creation account, more evidence proving just how universally accepted the Genesis account of origins was to all the Bible writers.

Read Revelation 4:11 and 10:5, 6. What do the heavenly beings say about God’s creatorship?

Creation was not an accident but occurred by the will of God. The second passage contains a clear allusion to Exodus 20:11. Once again, as in John 1:1–3, John shows his familiarity with, and confidence in, the Creation story. How foolish for us to do anything less.
Further Study: The Bible is a book about God and His relationship to us humans and our world. The events of Creation week are unique and supernatural. They are outside the realm of scientific inquiry for at least two reasons. First, they are singularities. Singularities are events that occur only once. Science has a difficult time dealing with singularities because they cannot be repeated and tested under differing circumstances. Second, the Creation events were supernaturally caused. They were not the natural result of the way that God sustains the Creation; they were special, direct acts of God. Science deals only with secondary causes and does not—at least as now practiced—accept any explanation that depends on God’s direct action. Because the Creation events are unique and supernatural, they lie outside of the reach of science.

One’s view of origins has important implications for one’s view of human nature and self-identity. Understanding our origins is so important that God had it placed as the first subject in the Bible, and the message of the Bible is based on the historicity of the Creation account. To claim that we can learn the true history of our world through science is to claim that it can be explained without appealing to any direct action by God, an error that has led to more error.

“Men will endeavor to explain from natural causes the work of creation, which God has never revealed. But human science cannot search out the secrets of the God of Heaven, and explain the stupendous works of creation, which were a miracle of almighty power, any sooner than it can show how God came into existence.”—Ellen G. White, The Spirit of Prophecy, vol. 1, p. 89.

Discussion Questions:

1. Creation is a dominant theme throughout the entire Bible. Is there any evidence that Bible writers had different views of Creation or that any of them had doubts about the veracity of any part of Genesis? Why is your answer important?

2. What reasons do you think someone might give to justify the rejection of the idea that nature is designed?

3. Jesus endorsed the authority of Moses (Luke 16:29–31), including the story of Creation (Mark 2:27, 28; Matt. 19:4–6). Given this background and the example of Jesus, what should be our attitude toward the story of Creation?
The Lesson in Brief

➤ **Key Text:** Genesis 1–4

➤ **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Discover how Genesis 1–4 introduces most of the key definitions and concepts used throughout Scripture.

**Feel:** Appreciate the importance of Genesis 1–4 in the shaping of the rest of biblical theology.

**Do:** Live out a belief in Creation in order to demonstrate how it impacts the role of biblical authority in his or her life.

➤ **Learning Outline:**

I. **Know: Genesis 1–4—The Foundation of Scripture**

   - Genesis 1–4 introduces most of the key definitions and concepts used throughout Scripture. What are these definitions?
   - How do the biblical authors make use of the Genesis account, and for what purposes?

II. **Feel: Appreciate the Concepts of Creation**

   - Recognizing allusions to Creation in other parts of Scripture help us to see the importance of the doctrine of creation. Why is such recognition and appreciation simply not enough? What else is needed, and why?
   - How can we better appreciate the way in which Creation is used to develop spiritual concepts throughout Scripture?

III. **Do: Understand the Impact of Creation on the Authority of God’s Word**

   - How does one’s belief in Creation impact his or her belief in, and implementation of, biblical authority?
   - How can a person demonstrate through his or her actions and lifestyle a belief in Creation?

➤ **Summary:** Our understanding of the Creation story is vitally important because it impacts the way in which we understand both the nature of Scripture and the inspired messages given by the biblical authors.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Creation plays a key role throughout Scripture in the development of theological themes.

Just for Teachers: Why do biblical authors make such regular use of the Creation account? Convey to your class that a proper understanding of the Creation story prepares one to better understand the theological argument of later biblical authors and thus more accurately perceive their message.

There is a well-circulated story about a Russian czar finding a soldier standing guard over what appeared to be a vacant spot in the palace garden. (One version of this story can be found at http://www.actsweb.org/articles/article.php?i=1285&d=2&c=5.) When asked what he was guarding, the sentry answered to the effect that he had no idea but that regulations required a sentry to be there. The czar had the records checked and discovered that, many years earlier, Catherine the Great had planted a new rose bush there and had posted a sentry to protect it for an evening. Somehow, the order continued to be implemented even beyond the death of both Catherine and the rose bush. Thus, the current sentry had no idea what he was guarding or why.

Many believers in Creation are like that sentry. They know that Creation is important, but they cannot tell you why. Belief in the Genesis 1 Creation has become a tradition with little-known significance for many. It is important, then, not only to see that the rest of Scripture makes use of the data from Genesis 1 but also to understand why the biblical authors were using that data. In what way did they understand Genesis 1, and how would reinterpreting Genesis 1 affect the message of the biblical authors who were making use of the Creation story?

Opening Activity for Discussion: What are some things in our religious beliefs, societal customs, or family structures that we cherish and guard but may not adequately appreciate and understand? Why is it important to better understand these things?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Creation is part of a larger body of biblical data
that defines concepts used throughout the Scriptures. How we understand Creation will thus impact our understanding of the entire biblical message.

Bible Commentary

I. The First Four Chapters of Genesis: A Foundation for Our Faith (Read Genesis 1–4 with the class.)

When systematic theologians write a systematic theology, they usually start with a section (or volume) called “Prolegomena.” The prolegomena expounds upon the philosophical, theological, and historical presuppositions of the author and defines the parameters of the whole system of theology being presented. As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe in a unified, underlying, and inspiring cause of Scripture: God. We, thus, expect the Bible to have a unified theological message. While the Bible is not a formal system of thought, it has a basic consistency of message and meaning. Thus, it may be proposed that Genesis 1–4 forms a theological prolegomena to the rest of Scripture, defining the basic theological concepts used throughout the Bible.

For starters, Genesis 1–4 defines who God is, who man is, the ideal for their relationship, and the nature of reality. Other concepts introduced here include humanity’s assigned role in the larger natural system, what went wrong between God and man, divine judgment, salvation, and more. All these concepts are first introduced in Genesis 1–4 and then are repeated and developed throughout Scripture.

For example, in Genesis 4 we have the first explicit use of the term sin. God tells Cain that “sin is crouching at the door,” waiting to gain mastery over Cain (Gen. 4:7). Sin is here depicted as an enslaving power that gains mastery over a person. It is much more than merely making a wrong choice. Paul especially develops the sin-as-enslaving-power motif in Romans 3, 5, and 6, depicting sin as a power under which we are born because of Adam’s sin. However, many misunderstand the nature of sin in Scripture because they fail to start to ground their understanding in the prolegomena.

It should be no surprise, therefore, that Genesis 1–4 is often asserted to be mythical in nature, denying the historical veracity of the events depicted there. This denial, however, leads to a problem, because biblical writers—especially New Testament authors, and Jesus Himself—treat these stories as historical narratives. Key theological expositions, which were inspired by God, presuppose that the information in Genesis 1–4 is historical fact, not
mythical fiction. Hence, when some assert that Genesis 1–4 is mythical in character, they immediately undermine key portions of biblical theology by subverting the presuppositions upon which it is built.

The way that we interpret Genesis 1–4, then, has great impact on how we understand the rest of Scripture. If the events depicted are “clever fables” invented by the religious community and are not an inspired historical record, then the rest of Scripture comes into question. If later authors based their theological insights, in part, on previous Scriptures that are not historically accurate, how can their theological concepts be reliable? The Bible roots faith in the actual historical acts of God in earth history. Mere mythical claims are insufficient to ground true faith. To be in harmony with Scripture, we must accept the presuppositions of the prolegomena (Genesis 1–4) in order not to corrupt or distort the rest of the biblical message built off those definitions and presuppositions.

Consider This: What is the significance of inspired authors, and of Christ, treating the data in Genesis 1–4 as actual history? How would accepting Genesis 1–4 as mythical fiction impact the veracity of the teachings that were set forth by the biblical authors, and by Christ Himself, as a true basis for spiritual insight?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: This section will require some diligent work on your part as a teacher to familiarize yourself with the mega-themes of Job and with the contexts of the Psalms, prophets, and Jesus. It is not enough to note, for example, that Jesus mentions Creation and affirms its historicity. How is Jesus using the historicity of Genesis 1–3 to make a larger spiritual point? (Follow this template used with Jesus for each of the passages in the lesson.)

Thought Questions:

Bearing in mind that our lesson looks at connections to Genesis 1 in Job, Psalms, the Hebrew prophets, and the teachings of Jesus, answer the following questions:

1. What is the larger message in Job, the various Psalms, et cetera, in our lesson, and how does each biblical author use Creation to help to shape his larger argument?
If Genesis 1 can be taken literally only in the sense that it shows that God is the first cause of all things, but we then say that science shows that God actually created through evolutionary processes, how would this impact the messages of Job, the Psalms, Jesus, et cetera? Why would it radically change the message of each? And how?

**STEP 4—Create**

*Just for Teachers:* The following activity for discussion is designed to encourage class members to consider the implications of the following question: If Jesus and other biblical authors under inspiration held Genesis 1 to be historically true, how should our view of Creation impact our belief in biblical authority?

*Activity:* Discuss how active and strong biblical authority is in the lives of the class members. What role should Scripture have in their lives? How does what you believe about Creation impact the role of biblical authority in your life?
Lesson 5 *January 26–February 1

Creation and Morality

Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study: Gen. 2:16, 17; Gen. 1:26–28; James 3:9; Acts 17:26; Prov. 14:31; Matt. 5:44–48; Rev. 20:11–13.

Memory Text: “And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die’” (Genesis 2:16, 17, NIV).

People love to talk about “human rights.” From the Magna Carta (1215) to the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789) to various United Nations declarations, the idea is promoted that human beings possess certain “inalienable rights,” rights that no one can rightfully take away from us. They are ours by virtue of being human (at least that’s how the theory goes).

The questions remain: What are these rights? How are we to determine what they are? Can these rights change, and if so, how so? Why should we, as humans, have these rights anyway?

In some countries, for instance, women were not given the “right” to vote until the twentieth century (some nations still deny it). How, though, can a government grant to people something that is their “inalienable right” to begin with?

These are hard questions, and their answers are inseparably linked to the question of human origins, the study for this week’s lesson.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 2.
Our Dependence on the Creator

Genesis 2:7 depicts God as creating Adam individually and represents him to be an intelligent, moral being rather than as an animal. The text does not say, but one can imagine God using His hands to form the dust into the intended shape and size. One might think that the great Sovereign of the universe would not stoop to get His hands dirty in the making of man, but the Bible reveals the Creator as One closely involved with the Creation. Scripture records many occasions when God willingly interacted with the material creation. Examples include Exodus 32:15, 16; Luke 4:40; and John 9:6. Indeed, the incarnation of Christ Himself into humanity, into human flesh, where He day by day interacted with the created world in much the way we do, refutes the notion that God would not stoop to “get His hands dirty” among humanity.

Read Genesis 2:16, 17. What command did God give to Adam? What is implied in this command?

We may ask, What right did God have to make rules for Adam and Eve? Compare this situation to that of a child in a family. The child’s parents provide the child with a home and all of life’s necessities. They love the child and have the child’s best interests in mind. Their greater experience and wisdom can spare the child much misery if that child will accept their guidance. Some children find this guidance difficult, but it is universally recognized that as long as the child is dependent on parents for necessities, the child is obligated to accept the parents’ rules. In like manner, because we are always dependent on our heavenly Father for life and its necessities, it is always appropriate for us to accept God’s guidance. Because He is a God of love, we can trust Him to always provide what we need for our own good.

Read Psalm 95:6, 7 and Psalm 100. How does the psalmist express our dependence on God? What obligations does that dependence automatically place on you, especially in regard to the way in which you treat others?
In the Image of God

Read Genesis 1:26–28. What special attribute was given to humans that was not given to the animals?

What exactly is “the image of God”? This question has generated a great deal of discussion, and opinions vary. But the verses provide some clues regarding the nature of the idea. First, note that to be made in the image of God implies that we resemble God in certain ways. One important aspect of the image of God is that God gave to humans dominion over the other creatures. As God is sovereign over all, He has appointed to humans a share of sovereignty by giving them dominion over the fish, the birds, and the land animals.

Notice, too, that God purposed to make man in “our” image—that is, an image involving the plurality of the Godhead. Then He made humans male and female. The image of God is not fully expressed in an individual but in relationship. As the Godhead is manifest in three Persons in relationship, the image of God in humans is expressed in relationship of male and female. The ability to form relationships is part of the image of God. Relationships, of course, imply responsibility and accountability, which means morality. Hence, right here we are given a strong hint as to how morality finds its basis in the Creation story.

Read Genesis 9:6 and James 3:9. In what way is the idea of humans being made in the “image of God” clearly linked to the concept of morality?

Humans have wrestled for millennia with the question of morality. Even before one gets into what is the right kind of morality, the whole idea of morality itself raises a host of deep issues. Why should humans, as opposed to beetles, fleas, or even chimps, have a moral conscience, a concept that distinguishes between right and wrong? How can beings made essentially of amoral matter (quarks, gluons, electrons, and so forth) be aware of moral concepts? The answer can be found in the early chapters of the Bible, which reveal humans to be moral creatures made “in the image of God.”
Made of One Blood

In Genesis 2:23, Adam is given the task of naming his wife, whom he called Havah. This word is related to the Hebrew verb hayah, which means “to live” (Jews sometimes use the related expression lehayim, “to life!”). The Hebrew word for “Eve” (Havah) can be translated as “life-giver.” Eve’s name represents the fact that she is the ancestor of all humans. We are all one family in the most literal sense.


We are united in that we all descended from one woman, Eve, and from one man, Adam. And God is the Father of us all. This fact is the basis of human equality. Think how different human relations would be if all people recognized this important truth. If we ever needed proof of how far fallen we are, of how badly sin has damaged us, we have it in the sad fact that humans often treat one another worse than some people treat animals.

Read Proverbs 14:31 and 22:2. How do these texts help us to understand the link between morality and the fact that we are created by God?

Many factors have divided the human race: political, national, ethnic, and, of course, economic. The economic factor is, arguably, one of the most consequential (though never to the degree that Karl Marx envisioned: the workers of the world never did unite; instead, they warred against each other based on their nationality). Today, as always, the poor and the rich often regard one another with suspicion and disdain. How often these sentiments have led to violence, even war. The causes of poverty and the solution to it still continue to baffle us (see Matt. 26:11), but one thing is sure from the Word of God: rich or poor, we all deserve the dignity that is ours by virtue of our origins.

Years ago, after Darwinism became fashionable, some justified the exploitation of the poor by the rich on the grounds of “social Darwinism,” the idea that in the natural world the strong overcome and exploit the weak, so why should not the same principle apply in economics? How is this another example of why a correct grasp of origins is crucial to the understanding of morality?
Wednesday January 30

The Character of Our Creator

God created us in His image, which means, among other things, that He intended for us to resemble Him in character. That is, we are to be like Him as much as is humanly possible (notice, to be like God is not the same thing as to aspire to be God, a crucial difference). In order for us to be like God, in the sense that we reflect His character, we must have a proper understanding of what that character is.

Read Matthew 5:44–48. What do these verses reveal not only about God’s character but also about how we should reflect His character in our own lives?

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Read Luke 10:29–37. Again, what does this reveal about the character of God and how it should be reflected in humanity? See also Phil. 2:1–8.

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The story Jesus told involved two men from different people groups, groups that were antagonistic toward each other. But Jesus showed that they were neighbors. Each was within the other’s sphere of responsibility, and God was pleased when their differences were set aside and one treated the other with kindness and compassion.

What a contrast is seen between the principles of God’s kingdom and the principles of Satan’s rulership. God calls the strong to care for the weak, while Satan’s principles call for elimination of the weak by the strong. God created a world of peaceful relationships, but Satan has distorted it so thoroughly that many regard survival of the fittest as the normal standard of conduct. If the vicious process of natural selection (in which the strong overpower the weak) were the means by which we came into existence, why should we do differently? If we accept this view, are we not following God and the dictates of nature as He ordained it when we advance our own interests at the expense of the less “naturally selected”?

What are other ways in which you can see how an understanding of our origins can affect our moral concepts?
Morality and Accountability

In an earlier lesson, we looked at Paul’s sermon to the men in Athens (Acts 17:16–31). Follow the line of reasoning he used, noting not just where he started but where he ended. What’s so important about the conclusion he came to, particularly regarding the question of origins and morality?

Paul’s sermon to the men of Athens began with Creation and ended with judgment. According to Paul, the God who made the world and everything in it has fixed a day on which He will judge the world. To be endowed with morality implies accountability, and each of us will be held responsible for our actions and our words (see Eccles. 12:14 and Matt. 12:36, 37).

Read Revelation 20:11–13 and Matthew 25:31–40. What is clearly taught in these texts that is directly tied to morality?

Everyone who ever lived will meet together in God’s presence to face the judgment. The difference between the two groups in Jesus’ parable is how each person treated those who were in need. The Creator is interested in how His creatures treat each other, especially those who are needy. There is no place in heaven for the principle of natural selection; it is contrary to the character of the God of peace.

If the Bible teaches anything, it teaches that the justice so lacking in this world will one day be meted out by God Himself. More so, the whole idea of judgment implies a moral order: why would God judge, much less punish, if there were no moral standards to which people could be held?

Think through the reality and certainty of judgment. Why, then, is the gospel and the promise of salvation in Christ so crucial in order for us to have assurance in that judgment?
Further Study: According to Scripture, Adam was the first man and was specially created from the dust by God. Our understanding of the origin of morality is founded in the origin of Adam. Biblical concepts of morality are, then, inseparable from biblical concepts of origins.

Recognizing Adam as the first human also refutes the possibility that any fossils were ancestral to Adam or other humans. From where, then, did these fossils come? Several other possibilities exist.

First, the humanlike fossils might be forms of humans with normal intelligence but with growth patterns unlike any present-day human. A second possibility is that the fossils may have been degenerate due to their own lifestyle or environmental stress or other factors. A third possibility is that they may be the results of Satan’s direct attempts to corrupt Creation in ways we do not understand. Another possibility is that they were not humans but were similar in morphology. Different people may prefer different explanations but, because we do not have direct evidence to settle the matter, it is best to avoid being dogmatic in our speculations. Fossils do not come with labels attached that say, “Made in China 500 million years ago” or the like. Our understanding of earth history, which varies greatly among scientists, provides a frame of reference within which we interpret fossils, but we do not have proof of our interpretations. They are, in the end, only that: interpretations, nothing more.

Discussion Questions:

1. Think through the implications of what it would mean if there was no Creator who imposed a moral order on humanity. Where would moral concepts come from? Many people who don’t believe in God nevertheless do hold to some strict moral standards. On what basis, other than God, might a person be able to develop a moral code? What are some possible scenarios that they could come up with? What, though, would be the ultimate weakness in them all?

2. How does our view of Creation inform our opinions regarding current issues such as euthanasia, cloning, abortion, etc.?

3. A local citizen who volunteered his time to give tours at the Nazi concentration camp of Dachau began the tour by talking about Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution, implying that Darwin’s theory led to Dachau and the like. What’s the obvious logic of that line of reasoning? In what ways might it be flawed?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Genesis 9:4–6

The Student Will:

Know: Discover how important Creation is to Christian morality and ethics.
Feel: Experience the difference between morality based in Creation and morality based in evolution.
Do: Learn to live a life of self-emptying service, especially in connection with those over whom he or she exercises power.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: The Importance of Creation to Morality
   A What difference does our belief about origins make for morality and ethics?
   B Discuss the role of relativism in ethics. To what extent does a belief in Creation inform and shape this discussion?
   C Explain the doctrine of human dignity and its role in the Christian life.

II. Feel: Cultivating a Personal Experience of How Creation Shapes One’s Sense of Morality
   A What do the differing implications of Creation and evolution mean to me personally?
   B How does my belief in Creation shape my self-worth and my view of the worth of others?
   C How, in turn, should this view inspire me to treat those with whom I come into contact?

III. Do: Living a Life of Self-Emptying Service
   A How do I apply moral principles derived from Creation to my life?
   B What are some of the ways that my belief in Creation can help me to become more selfless and service-oriented toward others, especially toward those over whom I have power?

Summary: What we believe about origins has significant moral implications. Creation morality encourages belief in fixed standards of right and wrong and calls us to use our dominion to serve and protect that over which we have power. Evolution, by contrast, sets a tone of flaunting one’s power by exploiting and preying on the weak in order to advance one’s self-interest.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: What one believes about origins has significant moral implications.

Just for Teachers: Emphasize that a belief in Creation, as depicted in Genesis 1, lays foundations for a significantly different kind of morality than the morals implied by evolution.

Ever since Charles Darwin published his treatise on evolution, there has been agitation over whether evolution has moral implications. Generally, little scholarly work was done to probe this question, but there has been grassroots agitation claiming that Darwinism is toxic to traditional Judeo-Christian morality and ethics. Since 1950, a small but increasing number of trained thinkers have probed the question of how the theory of evolution has impacted traditional ethics.

Julian Huxley argued that morality is itself a product of evolution; thus, “any standards of rightness and wrongness must in some way be related to the movement of that process [evolution] through time.”—T. H. Huxley and Julian Huxley, Touchstone for Ethics: 1893–1943 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1947), p. 131. This argument shows that the evolutionary worldview favors relativism in morals. This observation, however, is just the beginning of the impact of evolution on morality. In the next step of the Learning Cycle, we shall contrast differing moral implications between Genesis 1 and Darwin’s theory.

Opening Activity for Discussion: If one takes the ethical principles of Genesis 1 or evolution seriously, how might the creationist behave differently from the evolutionist?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Creation supplies foundational elements for Christian morality, especially the concept of the sanctity and dignity of the human person. Creation introduces an ethics of personal power that calls us to serve instead of exploit those less powerful than ourselves, whether human or animal.
When God commands humankind to refrain from eating the fruit of one tree, we see man highlighted as having a characteristic that is missing in animals. Ellen G. White observes, “The first great moral lesson given Adam was that of self-denial. The reins of self-government were placed in his hands. Judgment, reason, and conscience, were to bear sway.”—The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, February 24, 1874. Thus, humans were distinguished from the animals, as they were given the unique ability to recognize freewill options and evaluate them on the basis of a higher standard than their own desires and wants. The Creation account provides the foundation for the establishment of God’s right to place authoritative demands on us.

Christianity has a long tradition of equating the image of God with the power of reason. One challenge to this comes from evolutionist James Rachels, who argues that reason must have evolved incrementally and thus is not unique to humankind. We merely have more and hence are only quantitatively different from animals. However, it seems clear that a better option than reason alone can be offered. Another evolutionist, Robert Wright, recognizes that humans are unique in nature, for only humans possess a moral sense. Wright is onto something. Our moral sense is indeed unique and yet mirrors God’s moral sense. Hence, having a moral sense would seem to constitute a core idea of being made in God’s image, especially when this idea is linked to dominion.

Two issues arise from the idea of our being made in the image of God. The first is the sanctity of human life. Genesis 9:4–6 protects human life from slaughter by animal or human agency because man was made in God’s image. So, something about being made in God’s image provides a basis for considering murder to be morally wrong. Thus, Judeo-Christian ethics has tended to project a higher level of moral protection onto humans than onto nonhumans. Hence, if the house is burning, and we can save either the dog or the baby, we choose the baby as being entitled to more protection as a human created in God’s image. Rachels argues that evolution undermines the human-dignity doctrine, in part, by undermining the idea that man is created in the image of God. If materialist evolution is the creative agent, then God was not actively designing and shaping; thus, you cannot have humans being made in God’s image.

A further moral contrast can be built between Genesis 1 and evolution.
In evolution, self-interest is the governing norm. The strong do not accommodate the weak but prey on them and exploit them. But in the pre-Fall Creation, there was no predation and exploitation. Rather, Adam and Eve were “to serve and protect” nature, using their power to nurture, not to exploit. (“To serve and protect” is a very literal translation of the Hebrew text in Genesis 2:15.)

Human dominion was to mimic divine dominion, in style at least. Already in Genesis 1, we can see the moral principle of self-emptying denial for the good of others, as described in Philippians 2:5–7. To be in God’s image, then, is not merely to have dominion and the power to morally evaluate choices but to live a life dedicated to non-exploiting, self-sacrificial service to the world around us. To exploit any of God’s children physically, sexually, or emotionally is more Darwinian in nature and violates the image of God, marred though it be, in the perpetrator.

**Consider This:** If we say that God created through the evolutionary process, how might this view alter the foundations of our view of human dignity and worth?

►**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** What we believe about origins impacts the way in which we make decisions. Creation calls us to self-emptying service, while evolution calls us to be one of the fittest who survive. The following questions are designed to probe those differences.

**Thought Questions:**

If a person consistently lives out the principles of either Genesis 1 or evolution, how might the creationist behave differently from the evolutionist:

- In family life? __________________________________________

- In professional life? ______________________________________

- In the community? ________________________________________
STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** This activity takes the previous questions and personalizes them. Encourage each student to think about the meaning of these issues for his or her actual way of life. Use the following activity to encourage introspection, even if the answers are not shared with the class.

**Activity for Discussion:** How can I be more creation-oriented, living a self-emptying life of service and blessing to others:

- In my home? ________________________________
  _________________________________________
- In professional life? ______________________________
  _________________________________________
- In the community? ______________________________
  _________________________________________

**Teachers Notes:**

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Lesson 6

*February 2–8

(page 46 of Standard Edition)

Creation and the Fall

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Gen. 3:1–15; Matt. 4:3–10; Col. 2:20–23; John 3:17; Rev. 14:6, 7.

Memory Text: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15, NIV).

A comic used to play a female character called Geraldine. In one monologue she was a minister’s wife who had come home with an expensive new dress. Her husband (played by the same comedian) got angry. Geraldine then shrieked in response: “The devil made me buy this dress! I didn’t want to buy the dress. The devil kept bothering me.”

That was supposed to be funny. But our world, and the evil in it, shows that Satan is no laughing matter.

For some people, the idea of the devil is an ancient superstition not to be taken seriously. Scripture, however, is unequivocal: though Satan is a defeated foe (Rev. 12:12, 1 John 3:8), he is here on the earth, and he is determined to wreak as much havoc and destruction as possible against God’s creation.

This week we’ll look at Satan’s original attack and what we can learn from it so that, while we are still under his assault, we can claim the victory that’s ours in Christ.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 9.*
The Serpent Was More Cunning

Read Genesis 3:1. How is Satan, in the form of a serpent, described? How is the truth of that depiction revealed even in that one verse?

The cunning of the serpent is seen in the way that he introduces his temptation. He does not make a direct attack but attempts to engage the woman in conversation. Note that the serpent’s words include at least two problematic aspects. First, he asks if God really made a particular statement. At the same time, he phrases his question to raise doubt about the generosity of God. In effect, he asks, “Did God really withhold anything from you? Did He not give you permission to eat from every tree in the garden?” By intentionally misquoting God’s instructions, the serpent entices the woman to correct his statement and successfully draws her into conversation. The serpent’s strategy is certainly “cunning.”

Of course, none of that should be surprising. Jesus called the devil a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). In Revelation 12:9 the devil deceives the whole world, which means that none of us, even as Seventh-day Adventist Christians, are safe. Satan has, obviously, lost none of his cunning or deceptiveness. He still uses the strategy that was successful with Eve. He raises questions about God’s Word and God’s intentions, hoping to raise doubts and draw us into “conversation.” We must be vigilant (1 Pet. 5:8) in order to resist his devices.

Compare Matthew 4:3–10 with Genesis 3:1. What similar ploy did Satan try on Jesus, and why did it fail? What lessons can we learn from how Jesus responded to the devil’s attacks in the wilderness? In what ways does Satan try the same thing with us now?
The Woman and the Serpent

Read Genesis 3:2, 3. How did the woman respond to the serpent? What mistakes did she make?

Though Eve clearly knew the command of God, which shows her culpability, she does make a statement that goes beyond what God had said, at least as recorded in the Bible. God had clearly instructed Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree; nothing was said about not touching it. Because we don’t know what prompted her to say that, it’s best not to speculate about its origins. There is no question, though: by thinking that she shouldn’t touch the fruit, she would have been less inclined to eat it, because she couldn’t eat what she couldn’t touch.

How often do we face the same thing today: someone comes with teachings that are in harmony with Scripture on most points but not all? It’s the few points that aren’t that can ruin everything else. Even mixed with truth, error is still error.


The problem with sin is not a lack of rules but a reprobate heart. Even in secular society, we often hear calls for more laws against crime when there are already sufficient laws in existence. We do not need new laws so much as we need new hearts.

In what ways might we be in danger of following the things warned about here? Standards based on biblical principles are crucial. The question is, How can we be sure that the standards and rules we apply aren’t going to lead us astray? Bring your answer to class.
Deceived by the Evidence

Read Genesis 3:4–6. What are the principles that led to Adam and Eve’s downfall? What can we learn from their experience that can help us to deal with whatever temptations we face, as well?

Satan was successful in drawing Eve into conversation and in raising doubts about what God had said and why. Now he tells Eve that God is not telling the truth and provides an explanation for God’s motive behind His forbidding them to eat of the fruit. According to Satan, God is withholding something good in order to keep Adam and Eve from reaching their full potential. In doing so, Satan builds on his previous question about whether God has withheld some of the trees from them.

Eve uses three lines of evidence that lead her to the conclusion that she would benefit from eating the fruit. First, she sees that the tree is good for food. Perhaps she has observed the serpent eating the fruit. He may have commented on how good it tasted. It’s interesting that though Adam and Eve were told not to eat of it, she notices that it is “good for food.” Talk about a conflict between the senses and a clear “Thus saith the Lord!”

A second line of evidence that convinces Eve to eat the fruit is that it is pleasant to the eye. No doubt all the fruit in the garden is beautiful, but, for some reason, Eve is especially attracted to the fruit that Satan is offering her.

The supposed power of the fruit to make one wise is a third reason that Eve wants to eat of the fruit. The serpent assured her that eating the fruit will expand her knowledge and make her like God. Of course, the sad irony here is that, according to the Bible, she already is like God (Gen. 1:27).

We are told that Eve was deceived, but Adam was not (1 Tim. 2:14). If Adam was not deceived, why did he eat? Adam consciously disobeyed God, choosing to follow Eve rather than God. How often is this same kind of behavior seen today? How easily we can be tempted by what others say and do, regardless of how contrary their words and actions are to the Word of God. Adam listened to Eve instead of to God, and the rest is the nightmare known as human history (see Rom. 5:12–21).
Grace and Judgment in Eden: Part 1

In Genesis 3, after the Fall, the Lord’s opening words are all questions: “Where are you? . . . Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from? . . . What is this you have done?” (Gen. 3:9–13, NIV).

In contrast, God’s first declarative statement in chapter 3—His first statement of fact—follows these questions. What does God say to the serpent, and what is the meaning of His words? See Gen. 3:14, 15.

Think through the implications of what is happening here. God’s first declarative statement to the fallen world is, in fact, a condemnation of Satan, not humanity. Indeed, even in that condemnation of Satan, God gives humanity the hope and promise of the gospel (vs. 15). As He declares Satan’s doom, He proclaims humanity’s hope. Despite their sin, the Lord immediately reveals to Adam and Eve the promise of redemption.

Notice, too, that only after this promise, only after hope of grace and salvation is given in verse 15 (known also as the “First Gospel Promise”), does the Lord pronounce judgment on Adam and Eve: “To the woman He said, ‘I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children. . . .’ Then to Adam He said, ‘Because you have heeded the voice of your wife . . .’” (Gen. 3:16, 17, NKJV).

Don’t miss this point: the promise of salvation comes first, followed by judgment. Only against the backdrop of the gospel, then, does judgment come; otherwise, judgment would mean nothing but condemnation, but Scripture is clear: “God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:17).

Why is it so important always to dwell on the fact that God’s purpose is to save us, not to condemn us? How does sin in our life cause us to lose sight of that crucial truth? That is, how does sin cause us to turn away from God?
Grace and Judgment in Eden: Part 2

In Genesis 1 and 2, God utters imperative statements such as: “Let there be lights in the firmament of heaven. . . . Let the earth bring forth living creatures. . . . It’s not good for man to be alone.” All these declarations deal with Creation and with establishing humanity in that Creation. As we saw yesterday, the next declarative statement recorded in the Bible occurs in Genesis 3:14, 15, in which the Lord offers humanity the gospel.

Thus, in Scripture, God’s initial statements deal with Creation and then with redemption—and this redemption occurs in the context of judgment itself. It would have to. After all, what’s the purpose of the gospel, what’s the good news, if there were no judgment, no condemnation from which to be spared? The very concept of the gospel carries within itself the concept of condemnation, a condemnation that we don’t have to face. That’s the good news!

Though we have violated God’s law and though God will judge those violations, in Christ Jesus we are spared the condemnation that this judgment would, inevitably, bring.

Creation, gospel, and judgment appear not only in the early pages of the Bible but in the latter, as well. Read Revelation 14:6, 7. In what ways are these verses linked to the first three chapters of Genesis? That is, what parallel ideas are found in all these verses?

In Revelation 14:6, 7 we see a declaration of God as the Creator, a key theme in the opening pages of Genesis. In Revelation 14, however, the “everlasting gospel” comes first and then is followed by the announcement of judgment, as in Genesis 3. Judgment is there, but not before the gospel. Thus, the foundation of our present-truth message has to be grace, the good news that, though we deserve condemnation, we can stand pardoned, purified, and justified through Jesus. Without the gospel, our destiny would be the same as the serpent’s and his seed, not the destiny of the woman and her seed. And, fascinatingly enough, this great news appears even in Eden, in God’s first words to a fallen world.
Further Study: “God gave our first parents the food He designed that the race should eat. It was contrary to His plan to have the life of any creature taken. There was to be no death in Eden.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels for the Church*, p. 228.

“Satan represents God’s law of love as a law of selfishness. He declares that it is impossible for us to obey its precepts. The fall of our first parents, with all the woe that has resulted, he charges upon the Creator, leading men to look upon God as the author of sin, and suffering, and death. Jesus was to unveil this deception.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 24.

“But man was not abandoned to the results of the evil he had chosen. In the sentence pronounced upon Satan was given an intimation of redemption. . . . This sentence, spoken in the hearing of our first parents, was to them a promise. Before they heard of the thorn and the thistle, of the toil and sorrow that must be their portion, or of the dust to which they must return, they listened to words that could not fail of giving them hope. All that had been lost by yielding to Satan could be regained through Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 27.

Discussion Questions:

1. In class, go over your answer to Monday’s final question. What kind of rules do we make that could turn us into the very people Jesus condemned? At the same time, how can we make commitments that might help us better to follow the principles of truth as revealed in the Bible?

2. Eve trusted her senses instead of a very clear command from God. Why do we find it so easy to do the same thing?

3. Dwell on the obvious contrast between the Creation story and the various evolutionary ideas that depict natural evil as being part of God’s original creative process. Why is it impossible to harmonize such conflicting views of our origins without ultimately destroying the plain meaning of the Bible? Why is a correct understanding of Creation important in order to gain a correct understanding of the Fall?

4. Some cultures find the idea of a literal devil nothing but foolishness; others, in contrast, can be obsessed with the power of evil and evil spirits. What about your culture? What’s the tendency, and how can you learn to strike the right balance when dealing with the reality of the supernatural battles in which we find ourselves?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Genesis 3:1–6, 15

The Student Will:

Know: Explore Satan’s original attack against humanity and analyze the dynamics of the temptations faced by both Eve in Eden and Christ in the wilderness.

Feel: Value the importance of trusting God’s Word, even when observations and experience come into apparent conflict with that Word.

Do: Commit to trusting God’s Word more than his or her own opinions and perceptions.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: The Dynamics of Satan’s Original Attack
   A What can we learn through Eve’s story about the dynamics of Satan’s temptations?
   B Likewise, what do the temptations that Christ underwent reveal to us about the devices of Satan and the power that God gives us to overcome them?

II. Feel: Trusting God’s Word Over Our Senses
   A How does Eve’s story help you to better value God’s Word?
   B The forbidden fruit would have been easy to resist had it been bitter or rotten. But sin would not be tempting if it did not appear to be sweet. How can we cultivate within us a desire to resist this “sweetness,” no matter how tempting sin may be?

III. Do: Committing Our Ways to God
   A How can you trust God’s Word more fully and completely?
   B In what ways can you allow God to live out His life and His Word more fully and completely through your life?

Summary: The original attack by Satan on our planet reveals some important dynamics in the temptation process. Satan caused Eve to experience a dissonance between her perceptions of the forbidden tree and God’s command to refrain from eating of its fruit. Eve’s management of that conflict can show us how we can manage or mismanage temptation today.
Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Understanding the issues and dynamics underlying all temptations better equips us for successful spiritual life. These dynamics are highlighted in the Fall story of Genesis 3.

**Just for Teachers:** Emphasize to your students that our understanding of sin, salvation, and the dynamics of temptation are all affected by the way in which we view the historicity of the Genesis text.

The story of Eve and the serpent is a classic, even in secular literary circles. How we are impacted by the story will be determined, to a great degree, by our view of its historicity. If Genesis 1–3 is not based on historic fact, then that would mean that the author of Genesis was constructing his own religious beliefs out of some combination of his imagination and ancient culture. Such a construct would suggest, then, that our beliefs are based not in factual revelations from God but in human creativity. By contrast, when Genesis 1–3 is taken as historically accurate, God now acts in history, revealing plans and purposes for humankind and holding humans accountable for how they respond to His communications.

Genesis 1–3 thus plays a key role in determining how authoritative God’s Word is to you as a believer. The Fall story highlights a tension that arose between creaturely experience and divine revelation. This dynamic of perception versus divine Word plays a key role in the Fall story of Genesis 3.

**Opening Activity for Discussion:** Describe a situation you have been in where your senses fooled you—a time when what you saw, felt, or perceived turned out to be wrong. What does this tell you about the reliability of human perceptions?

►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** The temptation dynamics in the fall of Eve provide rich insights for our spiritual life. Those dynamics are also demonstrated in the temptations faced by Christ, and they are explored in the following commentary.
Bible Commentary

I. Not by Bread Alone . . . (Read Genesis 3:1–6 with the class.)

In Genesis 2:16, 17, God tells humankind that if they eat from the forbidden tree, they will “certainly die” (NIV). The cunning serpent asks a deceptively simple question—did God place all trees off-limits?—in order to entice Eve to imagine the real question: “why did God forbid us to eat from this single tree?” The purpose of the question was to plant within Eve seeds of discontent against God. Because the tree was a component of a created order that God had declared good, why would it now be declared off-limits?

Eve answers the serpent, repeating the stated prohibition and penalty, but adds another reason for not touching the tree, that she would die. The snake retorts that she would not die, implying that God was lying to her in order to keep her from achieving co-deity standing with God. The serpent promises that she could indeed achieve this status through disobedience. Because the whole argument depends on Eve’s belief that God was deceiving her, what might have made Eve accept the argument as true?

In Genesis 3:6, Eve analyzes the forbidden tree. She observes that the tree is “good for food, . . . a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise” (ESV). The tree looks wholesome not deadly. She experiences a dissonance between her observations and God’s revelation. Furthermore, while not explicitly addressed in the biblical text, the craftiest creature appears to acquire his linguistic ability by eating the forbidden fruit, making it easy for Eve to conclude that God’s word had been falsified. The snake’s implied message is: “If eating this fruit enabled me to talk, what will eating it do for you as the image of God? You will become co-deity with God. Look at what it did for me!” For Eve, this “evidence” would be a compellingly powerful contradiction of God’s truthfulness. Thus, Eve is forced to choose between her observations and analysis and God’s word. She chooses her abilities, thus rebelling against God’s word and sovereignty.

Satan tries to entrap Jesus using the same tactics. In the Matthew 3 baptism scene, God speaks audibly from heaven, affirming Jesus’ identity as Son of God. In Matthew 4, Jesus then enters into the wilderness and does not eat for 40 days. One has to presume that after 40 days without eating, and without creature comforts, that Jesus did not look or feel as though He were the Son of God. According to Ellen G. White, when Satan appeared, he did so as an angel of light, as Paul warns us that he will do (2 Cor. 11:14). Arguably, Satan looked like the Son of God, and Jesus looked more like a
fallen angel. The primary focus of Satan’s attack was to challenge what God told Christ six weeks earlier. It is as though Satan effectively implied, “You can’t trust what You heard six weeks ago at the baptism. Do something material and miraculous to prove to Yourself that You are the Son of God.” In His human limits, everything Jesus was observing and experiencing suggested that the baptismal announcement was wrong. As Eve did, Christ had to choose between His perceptions and analysis and God’s Word. Now we can see the significance of His answer, “ ‘Man shall not live by bread alone [by what he sees and analyzes], but by every word that comes from the mouth of God’ ” (Matt. 4:4, ESV, italics supplied).

Consider This: Because Christ was tempted in all points as we are (Heb. 4:15), how do the temptations of Eve and Christ help you to better understand the spiritual issues involved in your own temptations?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: With the following questions, guide the class past theoretical philosophizing in order to confront the limits of their perceptions and analysis.

Thought Questions:

1. How does Satan try to falsify God’s Word to you in order to get you to choose your own observations and analysis over God’s Word? Which will you choose, and why?

2. Are human observation and analysis reliable enough to outrank God’s Word in trustworthiness? Why, or why not?
Why does it matter what I choose—my observations or God’s Word? What does Genesis 3 tell us about accountability?

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How do accountability and grace interrelate in Genesis 3? What is the purpose of grace in Genesis 3?

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STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: We want to end on an uplifting note. Close on a positive track, emphasizing the need and joy of trusting God’s Word.

Activity for Discussion: What can I do that will help me to trust God’s Word implicitly and fully, even when it seems to contradict my senses?
SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Job 41:11; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20; Gen. 3:17; John 12:31; 1 Cor. 1:18–21.

Memory Text: “The wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight. As it is written: ‘He catches the wise in their craftiness’” (1 Corinthians 3:19, NIV).

Theologian William Paley wrote a book in 1802 entitled Natural Theology in which he argued that one can use observations of nature in order to develop an understanding of God’s character. He wrote extensively on the ways in which the features of animals exhibited the care and skill of the Creator. Paley may have made too much of some features, however, because he failed to recognize the effects that both sin and the Fall have had on nature, but his general argument has never been refuted—despite numerous and vociferous claims to the contrary!

Charles Darwin, in contrast, argued that a God who designed every feature of nature would not be good. As evidence, he referred to a parasite that feeds within the living bodies of caterpillars and the cruel way in which a cat will play with a mouse. For him, these examples were evidence against the existence of a loving Creator God.

Though Paley was obviously closer to truth than was Darwin, this week’s lesson will examine what the Bible has to say regarding the question of what it is that nature reveals, and does not reveal, about God.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 16.
The Earth Is the Lord’s

A scientist once challenged the need for God; he argued that he could create humanity just as well as any God could. God said, “OK, go ahead and do it.” The scientist began to gather some dirt, but God said, “Wait a minute. Make your own dirt!”

Though this story is only a fable, the point is clear: God is the only One who can create from nothing. God made all the material of the universe, including our world, our possessions, and our bodies. He is the legitimate owner of every thing.

What’s the basic message to us in these texts? More important, what does this message tell us about the way in which we should relate to the world, one another, and to God? Ps. 24:1, 2; Job 41:11; Ps. 50:10; Isa. 43:1, 2; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20.

A favorite Christian hymn begins with the words, “This is my Father’s world.” It truly is our Father’s world because He created it. There is no more legitimate claim to ownership than creatorship. God created and therefore owns the entire universe, the heavens and the earth, and all that is in them.

Not only does the world belong to God, He claims ownership of every creature on earth, as well. No other being (at least that we know of) has the power to create life. God is the only Creator and, as such, the ultimate owner of every creature. We are all completely dependent on God for our existence. We cannot give God anything except our allegiance; everything else on earth is His already.

More so, we are God’s not only by creation but, even more important, by redemption. Though a wonderful gift from God, human life has been greatly damaged through sin, and it will end in death, a prospect that denudes life of all meaning and purpose. Life, as it now exists for us, isn’t all that great. Our only hope is the wonderful promise of redemption, the only thing that can make things “right” again. Thus, we are Christ’s by creation and by redemption.
A Fallen World

One thing is certain: the world in which we now live is vastly different from the one that came forth from the Lord at the end of the Creation week. Certainly, powerful evidence of beauty and design exist almost everywhere; however, we are sin-damaged beings living in and trying to understand a sin-damaged world. Even before the Flood, the world had been negatively impacted by sin. “In the days of Noah a double curse was resting upon the earth in consequence of Adam’s transgression and of the murder committed by Cain.”—Ellen G. White, Conflict and Courage, p. 32.

How was the world “cursed,” and what were the results of those curses? Gen. 3:17; 4:11, 12; 5:29.

The curse on the ground for Adam’s sake must have involved the plant kingdom, because its results would include the production of thorns and thistles. The implication is that all of the creation is affected by the curses resulting from sin. The Ellen G. White quote above states very clearly that the curse upon Cain was not limited merely to him but rested on the whole world.

Unfortunately, the curses due to sin didn’t end here—because the world faced another curse, which greatly damaged it. That, of course, was the worldwide Flood. “And the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake; for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done” (Gen. 8:21).

The Flood disrupted the system of watering that God had established at Creation, stripping the soil from parts of the earth and depositing it in other parts. Even now, rain continues to leach the soil, robbing it of its fertility and further reducing the crop yield. God graciously promised not to curse the earth again, but the soil we have inherited is a far cry from the rich, productive soil that God originally created.

Read Romans 8:19–22. Though these are difficult verses, how do they relate to what we have studied today? More important, what inherent hope can we derive from them?
The Ruler of This World

“The Lord said unto Satan, ‘Whence comest thou?’ Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, ‘From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it’” (Job 1:7).

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8).

As we have seen, the world belongs to God, both by creation and by redemption. But we mustn’t forget, either, the reality of Satan, the reality of the great controversy, and the reality of Satan’s attempt to wrest control over all that he possibly can. Even though, the Cross made his defeat certain, he’s not going down quietly or gently. His wrath and destructive power (though limited to a degree by God in ways that we certainly don’t understand now) must never be underestimated. We mustn’t forget, either, that however often issues may come to us in shades of gray, the ultimate battle boils down to only two forces: Christ and Satan. There is no middle ground. And, as we know, so much of this world falls under the banner of the wrong side.

Is it any wonder then that the world is so damaged?

Read John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11, Ephesians 2:2, 6:12. What important truth about the reality and power of the evil one is found in these texts?

In the book of Job, some of the veil that hides the reality of the great controversy is pulled back, and we can see that Satan does have the ability to cause great destruction in the natural world. Whatever the phrase “the prince of this world” entails, it’s clear that in this role Satan still exerts a powerful and destructive influence on the earth. This truth gives us all the more reason to realize that the natural world has been greatly damaged, and we need to be very careful about the lessons that we draw from it regarding God. After all, look at how badly Darwin misinterpreted the state of the world.

In what ways can you see, clearly, the destructive influence of Satan in your own life? Why is the Cross and the promises found in it your hope?
The “Wisdom” of the World

As humans, we have gained an incredible amount of knowledge and information, especially in the last two hundred years. Knowledge and information, however, are not necessarily the same thing as wisdom. We have also gained a much greater understanding of the natural world than our forefathers ever had. A greater understanding, however, isn’t the same thing as wisdom either.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18–21, 3:18–21. How do we see the powerful truths of these words manifested in our time and context today, almost two thousand years after they were written?

There is so much in human thought that challenges God’s Word. Whether the issue is the resurrection of Jesus, the creation itself, or any miracle, human “wisdom” (even when buttressed with the “facts” of science) must be deemed “foolishness” when it contradicts the Word of the Lord.

Also, as stated earlier, so much science today, especially in the context of human origins, begins from a purely naturalistic perspective. Even though many of history’s greatest scientific geniuses—Newton, Kepler, Galileo—were believers in God and saw their work as helping to explain the work of God in creation (Kepler once wrote, “O God, I think Thy thoughts after Thee”), such sentiments today are often mocked by segments of the scientific community.

Some even seek to explain away the miraculous stories in the Bible by arguing that they were really naturally occurring phenomena that the ancients, ignorant of nature’s laws, misinterpreted as divine action. There are, for instance, all sorts of naturalist theories that seek to explain the parting of the Red Sea as something other than a miracle of God. A few years ago, one scientist speculated that Moses was on drugs, and so he just hallucinated the idea that God gave him the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone!

However silly some of this might sound, once you reject the idea of God and the supernatural, you need to come up with some other explanation for these things; hence, the “foolishness” that Paul so clearly and prophetically wrote about.
Through the Eye of Faith

Psalm 8 is one of the best loved of the psalms. To David, as a believer in God, the Creation spoke of the Lord’s majesty and love. What specific lessons did David see in the creation, as recorded in Psalm 8? Also, considering what we know about the creation today—the moon and the stars and so forth—in contrast to what was known back then, why should David’s words seem even all the more remarkable?

Only in the last one hundred years have we really come to begin to grasp the vastness of the cosmos and, hence, our physical smallness in comparison. One can’t even imagine someone like David, apart from divine revelation, having any idea of just how big the “heavens” were. If he was in awe back then, how much more so should we be, knowing that, despite the size of the universe, God loves us with a love that we can’t even begin to fathom?

Read Psalm 19:1–4. What did David see in the heavens?

Many have looked up at the stars at night and recognized the greatness of God and the smallness of humanity and have praised God for His care. Others have focused on the problem of evil in nature and blamed God for the problems that are, in fact, the result of their own choices or of the devil’s activities.

To the believer, the creation truly speaks of God’s care, even amid the evil introduced by Satan. Yet, even as powerful of a testimony and witness that the created world is, the revelation is incomplete, especially due to the results of the Fall and the curses that it has brought.

Read John 14:9 and then think about Jesus on the cross. Why must the Cross always be the main revelation to us of the nature and character of God?
Further Study: “I have been warned [1890] that henceforth we shall have a constant contest. Science, so called, and religion will be placed in opposition to each other, because finite men do not comprehend the power and greatness of God. These words of Holy Writ were presented to me, ‘Of your own selves shall men arise, speaking per-verse things, to draw away disciples after them.’”—Ellen G. White, Medical Ministry, p. 98.

Discussion Questions:

1. Think about the “threefold curse” (Ellen G. White, Spiritual Gifts, vol. 3, p. 88) on this earth (the curse resulting from Adam’s fall, from Cain’s sin, and from the Flood). The cumulative effect of these curses, compounded over thousands of years, means that our present world is much different from the way that it was when God first created it. Why, then, must we be careful regarding the conclusions that we draw from the present world about what it was like in the beginning?

2. Think about the work that science does, especially in the area of origins. There are no written labels to explain what we see. Science is entirely a human undertaking, and the human mind is limited in its scope and is prone to resist divine authority. Furthermore, Satan’s influence is strongly felt in nature, so that much of what we see is incompatible with God’s self-revelation in the Bible. Why is it so important that we place greater confidence in Scripture than we do in science, especially when considering unique events such as the Creation of our world?

3. We do not understand all aspects of the tension between Scripture and science, but God is far wiser than we are, and we must acknowledge that there is more to the creation than science can ever discover. Why should we, in fact, not be surprised to find some tension between the supernatural events recorded in the Bible and the materialistic approach of science?

4. Look at the Ellen G. White quote above. In what ways are we seeing this being fulfilled in our own church? How can we deal with these dangerous challenges to our mission and message in a way that—while never compromising our position on Creation and the Word of God—still keeps the church a “safe place” for those who are struggling with these difficult questions?

5. Read Romans 11:33–36 and Job 40:1, 2, 7, 8. How reliable is human wisdom when attempting to understand the ways of God? What should be our attitude toward the difficulties that we encounter when trying to find harmony between science and Scripture?
The Lesson in Brief

★ Key Text: Genesis 3:16–19

★ The Student Will:

Know: Distinguish between general revelation, through nature, and special revelation.
Feel: Appreciate how nature’s messages, though mixed, can still help us to better understand who God is and who we are in relation to Him.
Do: Allow the limits of the curse to teach us our creaturely limits and the ways in which we are dependent on God.

★ Learning Outline:

I. Know: General Versus Special Revelation

A What can we learn about God through the curse of Eden?
B What is the difference between special revelation and general revelation?

II. Feel: Appreciating Our Creaturely Limits

A How do the Edenic judgments confront us with our creaturely limits?
B How do these judgments, despite their limitations—or perhaps because of them—actually provide us comfort and security in a fractured world?

III. Do: Living Within Our Limits

A How can you learn to relate to God from personally confronting the limits of Eden’s curses?
B In what areas of life can you learn to depend more fully upon God than you are now?

★ Summary: God reveals Himself through special revelation but also through nature in more limited and general ways. General revelation through nature sends mixed messages about God. Job gives us some perspective on why natural evil occurs; yet, evil is still permitted by God. The reason for this occurrence is that humankind’s Fall was, in part, due to the desire to transcend creaturely limits and become co-deity with God. God’s corrective measures resulted in curses that increase human limitations. These limitations help us to more easily acknowledge that we can never be co-deity and to recognize our need to depend on a God higher and more powerful than ourselves.
**Learning Cycle**

**STEP 1**—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Nature gives mixed messages about God due to the Fall, satanic activity, and our sinfulness. Nevertheless, nature still reveals a gracious and loving God, even as we live under the Edenic curse.

**Just for Teachers:** Remind your class that while nature can show us things about who God is, the mixed messages in nature place severe limits on how much we can accurately know about God through nature.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, natural theologies were a popular pursuit of many Christian intellectuals. This fixation with natural theology led to great debate over how much we could know about God through the study of nature. Most Protestants were pessimistic about the ability of natural theology to reveal God, due to their belief that both nature and human reason were blighted by sin. Out of debates over natural theology, a distinction was made between two types of divine revelation: general and special. General revelation refers to aspects about God that can be inferred through the study of nature. General revelation is seen as limited in what it can reveal to us. Paul gave only two of the invisible attributes of God that the Gentiles could infer from nature: His eternal power and divinity (Rom. 1:19, 20). Undoubtedly, we can infer more, but there is no question that general revelation can be lacking in clarity due to the mixed messages in nature.

By contrast, special revelation is the type of revelation in which God communicates specific, clear information to humans through prophets, dreams, visions, and direct speech. It seems likely that many of those natural theologies produced actually read special revelation into nature, creating a greater clarity than is present in nature. But even the presence of calamities, disease, and uncertainty in this world can be a witness to the love and grace of God.

**Opening Activity for Discussion:** Share an experience in which something seemingly negative turned out to be a blessing in your life. What does this outcome suggest about the way in which we perceive calamities and troubles in our lives?
STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: While Genesis 3 contains the first clear gospel promise, the curse on man and the earth still plays a redemptive role in human experience and thus testifies to the grace and love of God.

Bible Commentary

I. Thorns, Thistles, and Death: The Curse That Speaks of Love (Read Genesis 3:16–19 with the class.)

“The heavens declare the glory of God” (Psalm 19:1), said the psalmist, but who gets the message? Animist worshipers often have a far more fearful view of God because they find nature to be capricious and uncertain. Will the future bring flooding or drought? Will my child get sick and die, or will she grow to adulthood? Calamity and blessing both seem to be a wink away.

The devoted Darwinist seems little better off. What kind of God would purposely create through random, suffering-saturated processes? David Hull, as noted previously, feels that “the God of the Galápagos”—of random, evolutionary processes—“is careless, wasteful, indifferent, almost diabolical.” —David L. Hull, “The God of the Galápagos,” Nature 352 (August 8, 1991), p. 486. Other theologians assert that evolution shows God is good but limited in power. He cannot eradicate the suffering and evil, but He empathetically suffers with us. Either way, we do not seem to have “the sort of God to whom anyone would be inclined to pray.”—Page 486.

On the other hand, believers in Creation see a basic order and rational structure in nature that testifies to a mastermind Creator. Both Psalms 8 and 19 laud this perspective. Belief in Creation played a key role in developing the scientific method because those scientists believed that God would create in orderly, rationally understandable ways, making predictive experimental results possible. Therefore, in spite of the influences of sin—disasters, diseases, and the like—scientists still discerned a fundamental order and logic in nature. Nature thus presents two faces: one of haphazard evils and one of divine order and design.

The conflicting messages found in nature lead to deep questions about God, especially in regard to theodicy. How can nature testify to a good God when babies die, et cetera? Seventh-day Adventists have leaned toward the theme of the great controversy to help explain the mixed message of nature. Based on Job’s story, we blame natural disasters on the general results of sin or on direct, satanic activity. But this thinking does not adequately explain the judgments of Genesis 3. Because God pronounced a curse, including death, on humans and the earth, it seems that we must account for more than
mere satanic influences in order to explain natural evil. Why would God impose thorns, thistles, and death?

It may be argued that the fundamental problem with Adam and Eve was a failure to acknowledge and accept that they were creatures with finite limitations living under divine sovereignty. The couple tried to transcend their creaturely limits and be as God, without limits. Thus, God’s disciplinary action had to fit the transgression; so, God imposed a curse, increasing the level of limitations on humankind in order to reiterate and reinforce the idea that we are limited creatures in need of the Creator’s sovereignty. While God does not bring about all natural evil, He allows humanity to follow its ruler of choice, Satan, but not without protective limitations. Hence, we have mixed messages of curse and blessing in this world; yet, when taken as a disciplinary tool, even the curse speaks of a loving God, seeking to help us to reenter a proper relational orientation with Him. Thus, even the mixed messages from the curse reflect grace, as much as the first redemptive promise does in Genesis 3:15.

**Consider This:** Paul tells of having a “thorn in the flesh” (*2 Cor. 12:7*), which God would not remove. Rather, God told Paul that His power would be made perfect through Paul’s weakness—the thorn in his flesh. Paul thus used the thorn as a tool to train himself to see “thorns” as disciplinary tools of blessing that teach dependence on God. What are some thorns that you can turn into spiritual tools, teaching you how to better depend on God?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Our lesson this week briefly touched on the judgment scene of Genesis 3:8–21. This is the first biblical example of God conducting an “investigative” judgment. Note the order: first, God conducts an investigation; then He passes judgment.

**Thought Questions:**

1. Why did God conduct an investigation? Why did He not just come in, pronounce guilt, and get the process over with?
What was the purpose of holding humans accountable in Genesis 3? Was it disciplinary? Redemptive? Punitive? What in the story provides evidence to support your answer?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: We live in a world that encourages us to push, even defy, our limits. Yet, part of a proper relationship with God requires that we acknowledge His design limits for us that were given through creation.

Activity for Discussion: In what ways are you prone to disregard God’s limits for your life, and how can you better acknowledge your need for His sovereign reign in your life?
Jesus, Provider and Sustainer

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:16, 17; Job 42; Matt. 5:45; 6:25–34; 10:28.*

Memory Text: “And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus” *(Philippians 4:19, NIV).*

God sustains the creation in such regular ways that the universe is sometimes compared to a machine that God has left to run on its own.

Rather than a machine, however, a better metaphor is that the creation is like a musical instrument that God uses to produce the desired “melody.” That is, He is constantly involved in sustaining what He has created.

Nothing in the universe exists independently of the Lord. He created everything that was created. “Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” *(John 1:3, NIV).* Not only that, He is the One who sustains it all. Even more astonishing, the One who created and sustains it all was the One who was crucified for us.

“The apostle Paul, writing by the Holy Spirit, declares of Christ that ‘all things have been created through Him, and unto Him; and He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.’ Colossians 1:16, 17, R.V., margin. The hand that sustains the worlds in space, the hand that holds in their orderly arrangement and tireless activity all things throughout the universe of God, is the hand that was nailed to the cross for us.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 132.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 23.*
The Sustainer

Read Hebrews 1:3 and Colossians 1:16, 17. What is the role of Jesus in the ongoing existence of the universe?

The implication here is that Jesus continues to sustain the existence of the universe by His power. The universe is not independent; its existence depends on the continuous exercise of divine will. This is a refutation of deism, the philosophy that teaches that God created the world to govern itself and then left it to evolve without any further action on His part. The Bible rules out such theories.

Also, God is not within the creation, constantly creating it, as in the false theories of pantheism (God and the universe are the same thing) or panentheism (God inhabits the universe as though it were His own body). God is not dependent on the universe in any way. He is separate from the universe. He existed and continues to exist independently of it. The universe depends on God; God does not depend on the universe.

Read 1 Corinthians 8:6 and Acts 17:28. How does Paul describe our relationship to Jesus?

We are dependent on God’s sustaining power, moment by moment, day by day. It is because of His love that we continue to exist and are able to act and also form relationships. This is true in a special way for those who have committed themselves to God and who are, as Paul would describe it, “in Christ” (2 Cor. 5:17, Eph. 2:10; note the references to creation in these texts). It is also true that even those who reject salvation are, nevertheless, dependent on God’s sustaining power for their existence. Daniel made this point very poignantly to King Belshazzar when he said, “The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified” (Dan. 5:23).

With all this in mind, how do we understand the reality of free will and free choice? Why are these elements of our existence so important to all that we believe?
The Generous Provider

Genesis 1:29, 30 shows that when God first created living creatures, He provided food for them. Herbs, fruits, and seeds were the food chosen for both humans and animals. Nothing is said of predation or competition for resources. The generous Provider made plenty of food for everyone to partake in without any need for violence.

What a contrast to the common models for existence proposed by evolutionary theory, which teaches that human life, indeed all life, exists only through a violent process of predation and survival of the fittest. The early chapters of Genesis know nothing about that. On the contrary, they reveal a world that was, literally, a paradise from the beginning. That’s why, when the Lord had finished creating it, the Bible records these words: “And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day” (Gen. 1:31).

**Read** Genesis 2:8, 9. What does this passage indicate about God’s special interest in providing for Adam and Eve?

We already noted that God had provided food for all His creatures, including humans. Now we see God going a step further. Not only does He provide food in abundance throughout the earth, but He has prepared a special Garden for Adam and Eve, with trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food (see Gen. 2:9). The Garden, with its beauty and its variety of food, was a provision of God’s extravagant love and grace. It was a gift of grace because Adam and Eve had done nothing to earn it, but it was freely offered and abundantly furnished.

As stated in an earlier lesson, we are far removed from the original Creation. Ours is a greatly damaged world. Nothing on the earth, it seems, has been spared either. Yet, even amid the damage, powerful evidence of God’s love exists.

“Nature is a power, but the God of nature is unlimited in power. His works interpret his character. Those who judge him from his handiworks, and not from the suppositions of great men, will see his presence in everything.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, March 13, 1884. Look at nature; in what ways do we see “his presence in everything”? 
Natural Evil

Of course, one of the great questions that all believers in a loving God have had to deal with is the question of evil; not just human evil but what is called “natural evil.” This natural evil occurs when bad things happen in nature (floods, hurricanes, drought, earthquakes, etc.) that cause enormous pain and suffering, not just for humans but for animals, as well.

How are we to understand these things? After all, if God is in control of the creation, why would such things happen?

One of the earliest books of the Bible is the book of Job, where these questions (and others) became painfully real for Job (see week four).

Read Job 42. What does this chapter answer for us? What questions remain unanswered?

Anyone who has ever read the book of Job came away with, perhaps, more questions than answers. The book does reveal important truths about the great controversy (see also Rev. 12:12), which help to form a background crucial for us to even begin to understand the existence of evil. The great controversy scenario, however, doesn’t explain every instance of evil. In fact, to explain evil would in a sense be to justify it, and we can never do that. The great controversy can reveal the grand issues behind evil; the motif tells us little, if anything, about each instance of evil.

Job did not understand, and neither do we when we face such catastrophic losses. Although God spoke to Job, He did not provide the answer to Job’s questions, nor did He explain the cause of what had happened. He simply reminded Job that there were things beyond his knowledge and that he would have to trust God, which Job did. Our experience is often similar; we may not receive an answer to our questions. But the story of Job does give us important insight into the nature of evil, and it shows us that God is not unaware of the struggles that we face.

Go back to Sabbath’s introduction and read the Ellen G. White quote. How does that help us to come to grips better with the question of evil, knowing that God Himself suffered greatly from it, as well?
Governing a Damaged Creation

Read Matthew 5:45 and Psalm 65:9, 10. How does God act in creation in order to maintain the creatures that He created? What does this tell us about God’s interest in the created world?

We are familiar with sunshine and rain, and scientists have provided explanations for the processes involved in each. Yet, there is more to the story than science can tell. Behind the scenes, God is actively providing for the necessities of His creatures. We may not understand His ways, but we know He is in control. Just as a skilled musician may play an instrument to produce music so beautiful that one’s attention is focused on the music rather than on the musician, so God orders the creation so that we often see the order and are impressed with the majesty of the creation. At the same time we may not recognize that God is behind the scenes, ordering events according to His will and intending that all things will eventually work together for the good of those who love Him (Rom. 8:28).

What similar phenomenon is noted in the following texts? Gen. 8:1, Exod. 10:13, Num. 11:31.

Wind is a common event, and we generally understand what causes it. But in these texts, the winds occur in special circumstances. We might call them “providential winds.” They occur at specific times and places and accomplish specific purposes. Though they may appear “natural,” there is an unseen Cause working out the purposes of His own will, using features of the world that He created to accomplish His own purposes.

In 2 Kings 20:9–11, we see one of the most unusual miracles of the entire Bible. The relationship of sun and earth and day length seems like one of the most stable and predictable features of human experience. Imagine the reaction of today’s scientific community if a similar event should occur in our day. Yet, we must ask, “Is any thing too hard for the Lord?” (Gen. 18:14). What this miracle and others should tell us is that there is much about the creation, and God’s actions in His creation, that is way beyond our understanding. That’s why it’s so crucial that we come to a personal knowledge of God and know for ourselves the reality of His love. That way, we learn to trust Him despite all that we don’t understand.
Provider for a Damaged Creation

“Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?” (Matt. 6:26).

Even after Adam and Eve had sinned and could no longer enter the Garden, God provided for their immediate physical needs (Gen. 3:21). Sin brought a new need, the need for clothing. Adam and Eve tried to provide clothing for themselves, but fig leaves were quite unsatisfactory. Something better was needed, which God provided in the form of skins. (We will consider more of the meaning of the skins in another lesson.) The point is that God provided for their needs, even though they had fallen into sin. This is another example of God’s grace providing for us despite our unworthiness.

Read Matthew 6:25–34. What crucial message is Jesus giving us with these words? How are we to understand them in the face of the trials and tragedies that are such a part of so many lives?

These are very comforting words, and we need to cling to them with all our hearts, souls, and minds, especially in times of great suffering, loss, and need. Jesus died for us, not for the lilies or the birds. We can be sure of His love for us, regardless of the circumstances. And yet, as we all know, circumstances can at times be quite appalling. We see famine, drought, floods, epidemics, and death all around, and Christians are not immune to these tragedies either.

God does not promise His people a life of luxury without pain, but He does promise to provide for our needs and to strengthen us so that we may cope with our challenges. We just can’t forget the reality of the great controversy and that we are in a fallen world.

Read Matthew 10:28. How could this verse, read in conjunction with the verses for today, help us to deal better with the harsh realities that we often face?
Further Study: “Yet men of science think that they can comprehend the wisdom of God, that which He has done or can do. The idea largely prevails that He is restricted by His own laws. Men either deny or ignore His existence, or think to explain everything, even the operation of His Spirit upon the human heart; and they no longer reverence His name or fear His power. They do not believe in the supernatural, not understanding God’s laws or His infinite power to work His will through them. As commonly used, the term ‘laws of nature’ comprises what men have been able to discover with regard to the laws that govern the physical world; but how limited is their knowledge, and how vast the field in which the Creator can work in harmony with His own laws and yet wholly beyond the comprehension of finite beings!”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 114.

(See also Ellen G. White, “Laws of Nature,” pp. 259–261 in Testimonies for the Church, vol. 8.)

Discussion Questions:

1. Read carefully the Ellen G. White statement above. What is she saying? In what ways do we see many scientists today doing exactly what she says?

2. Modern science today is much better than it used to be at explaining, through natural means, why certain things happen or why they don’t. The problem isn’t with “natural means” or “natural laws” but with the idea that these means and laws are all that exist—that there is nothing, and certainly no supernatural forces, ultimately behind them. What’s wrong with this assumption? Why does it make no logical sense (ask yourself, From where did these laws originate?), and why is that idea so contrary to the most basic teaching of the Bible?

3. How does the image of creation as a musical instrument provide a more accurate picture of God’s relationship to the creation than does the image of creation as a machine?

4. What other examples can you find in Scripture where God caused special events in what we would consider to be merely “forces of nature”? See, for example, 1 Kings 19:11, 12.
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Hebrews 1:2, 3; Colossians 1:16, 17

The Student Will:

Know: Understand why God’s sustenance of the world is important to one’s spiritual life.
Feel: Appreciate the importance of God’s sustaining power for spiritual life.
Do: Seek to depend more fully on God’s sustaining power in his or her life.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: God’s Sustenance of the World
   A What kind of God continues to sustain what He created?
   B How does God’s ongoing sustenance of His creation reveal His purpose and will?

II. Feel: Appreciating God’s Sustaining Power
   A What difference will the fact that God sustains His creation make in your relationship with Him?
   B Contrast God’s divine design with the evolutionary model where there is no design but only random forces at work. How does the difference provided by the contrast deepen your appreciation for the many blessings and promises of God that are so often taken for granted?
   C Conversely, how does the difference between evolution and Creation help to deepen your compassion and patience for those whose worldview is shaped by a belief in the evolutionary model?

III. Do: Depending on God’s Sustaining Power
   A How can you appropriately put God’s Word to the test and experience His creative power?
   B In what ways can you allow God’s creative and sustaining power to renew all areas of your life?

Summary: The biblical view of God’s ongoing sustenance of His creation highlights that God has a purpose and design that He seeks to maintain. This seems incompatible with an evolutionary model in which there is no design but only random, undirected processes at work. God’s sustaining power is the same as His creative power, and we find this creative sustaining power at work in both justification and sanctification.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The Bible teaches that God continually sustains the world and universe He created. The sustaining work of God is not compatible with all views of God but requires particular perspectives of who God is.

Just for Teachers: Emphasize with your class that God’s sustaining power in nature is the same power that sustains us in spiritual life.

A sustaining God is an active God, One who is interested in His creation. Stories abound of people exercising great faith and accomplishing great things with God. The missionary George Mueller was famous for trusting God to fulfill the needs of his missionary work. The Bible contains similar stories—from the deliverance of Israel, to David’s numerous escapes from his enemies, to Paul’s missionary journeys—in which a cadre of people have taken the risk to radically depend on God’s sustaining, creative power to accomplish God-glorifying feats. Sadly, we tend to be so fearful of presumption or emotionalism that we fear contact with the supernatural.

Nowhere is this fear more tragically enacted than in the story of King Ahaz during the siege of the Syrian army against Judah. Isaiah was sent to Ahaz with a promise: “ ’Take heed, and be quiet; do not fear or be faint-hearted for these two stubs of smoking firebrands.’ . . . Thus says the Lord God: “It shall not stand, nor shall it come to pass” ’ ” (Isa. 7:4–7, NKJV). Ahaz appeared to doubt the promise, and so, “the Lord spoke again to Ahaz, saying, ‘Ask a sign for yourself from the Lord your God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above.’ But Ahaz said, ‘I will not ask, nor will I test the Lord’ ” (vss. 10–12, NKJV). God wants us to trust His promises because He is still at work, sustaining the cosmos and all that is in it.

Opening Activity: Most of us hate being dependent on others. Why do we find this so distasteful, and how can this attitude affect our ability to trust in God?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: The fact that God is an active Sustainer is only compatible with certain views of God. Sustaining power is the same as creative power. Thus, the New Testament ascribes both creative and sustaining power to Christ.
Bible Commentary

I. Our Sustainer God (Read Hebrews 1:2, 3 and Colossians 1:16, 17 with the class.)

Several important points from past lessons are reinforced by the concept of God’s continued activity of sustaining the world. First, an active sustaining by God would seem contrary to the undirected processes of natural selection and evolution, which are devoid of design and purpose. Christians who try to unite Creation with evolution thus seek to blend contradictory views of how God acts in, and relates to, the world.

Second, some theologians who are currently trying to blend evolution into Christian theology favor a panentheistic view of God. Panentheism claims that all of the material universe is in God, as part of His being. The cosmos is akin to being God’s body. This view creates an interesting problem that would seem to be shared by pantheism (all is God), as well. In both views, there is a significant lack of distinction between creature and Creator, for all share in God’s divine being. If the random processes of evolution are part of the divine being, then either God is unstable, changing, and possibly capricious—causing earthquakes, tornadoes, and calamities—or God becomes lessened in power, assuming the role of co-victim with the Creation. These evolutionary theologians tend to favor the latter, arguing that God hides Himself in nature so that the world can be truly free to participate in its own creation. Instead of sustaining the world according to a preplanned design, God humbly submits Himself to the same suffering and pain that we face, as a co-victim of natural evil. We are supposed to take comfort, not that God might intervene but that our pain and suffering are eternally recorded in God’s being and thus will never be forgotten. Some go so far as to assert that God is evolving with the universe that is part of Him.

The doctrine of divine provenance stands in stark contrast to these views. To be a provider, one cannot be a co-victim with the needy. A sinking ship would not be of any real help to the passengers from the Titanic. The victims of the Titanic needed a sound vessel other than the Titanic to save them. The helper must be equipped sufficiently to be of practical help to the needy and thus cannot be a co-victim with them. Thus, a God who sustains and provides must be distinct from and “other” to that which He sustains. He must also have plans and purposes that He wishes to support with His sustenance and be superior in power and resources. Such a God entered our suffering through the Incarnation, not as a helpless co-victim but in an act of self-sacrifice that provides a solution to a cosmic rebellion for all willing to surrender their revolt. Thus, God does not suffer for the sake of suffering but to achieve specific purposes. God suffers in order to achieve the necessary conditions to...
save and deliver, not merely to empathize.

Finally, the doctrine of divine sustenance presents the idea of our utter dependence on someone bigger and better than ourselves. Having trusting dependence on God is a vital element of righteousness by faith. This is because we depend on God through faith, not only to forgive our sins but also for the power to walk in the paths of righteousness. Righteousness by faith depends on God’s creative Word, the promise, in spite of what one perceives and feels; it enables the believer to make choices based on dependent faith that God will fulfill His promise and sustain him or her in a successful walk of moral growth and development. Just as the world depends on its Creator not only for origins but also for ongoing sustenance, so the believer lives in a state of dependence on God not only for justification but also for implementation of a Christian lifestyle.

**Consider This:** The New Testament writers assign both Creation and sustenance to Christ (for example, *Acts* 17:28; *Col. 1*:16, 17; *Heb. 1*:3). What does this tell us about whom they understood Christ to be?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Knowing that God is continually sustaining the world should remind us of our utter dependence on God and His promises.

**Thought Questions:**

1. When do you find it easy to depend on God’s promises, and why? When do you find it hard to depend on God’s promises, and why do you feel that is so?

2. What might help you to be more willing to depend on God’s Word and promises?

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3 What role might biblical stories of God’s sustaining others play in helping you to develop your trust in God?

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4 What role might the testimonies of people you know and trust play in helping you to become more willing to exercise faith in God’s promises?

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Marriage: A Gift From Eden

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Gen. 2:18–25, Mark 10:7–9, Eph. 5:22–25, Matt. 5:27–30.

Memory Text: “And the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him’ ” (Genesis 2:18).

Think of the blessings of a happy marriage and a loving home. How fortunate are those who have such an experience!

Unfortunately, for too many people marriage has been an experience of mostly pain and anger rather than of joy and peace. This is not how it was intended or how it should be. The sad state of so many marriages is a powerful expression of the degradation that sin has brought to the human race.

“God celebrated the first marriage. Thus the institution has for its originator the Creator of the universe. ‘Marriage is honorable’ (Hebrews 13:4); it was one of the first gifts of God to man, and it is one of the two institutions that, after the Fall, Adam brought with him beyond the gates of Paradise. When the divine principles are recognized and obeyed in this relation, marriage is a blessing; it guards the purity and happiness of the race, it provides for man’s social needs, it elevates the physical, the intellectual, and the moral nature.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 46.

What a wonderful ideal. This week’s lesson looks at some of the principles behind it.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 2.
Lo Tov

Out of a primeval abyss God created our world through the supernatural power of His Word. All through the Creation account, everything was “good” until the work was completed, at which point everything the Lord had created was pronounced “very good” (Gen. 1:31).

In the midst of all this, however, one thing was lo tov, “not good.” Read Genesis 2:18. What was “not good,” and why? What are some of the implications of this text?

God had declared all aspects of the Creation “good” up to the time that He created Adam. At that point, Adam was the only human. Although he was made in the image of God, in his aloneness he could not reflect the full image of God, who exists in relationship with other parts of the Godhead. The Godhead, of course, is composed of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Thus, Adam needed someone like himself with whom he could form a relationship of mutual love and cooperation, reflecting the loving relationship exemplified within the Godhead.

Read Genesis 2:19–21. After what act does God cause Adam to sleep and then, from his flesh, create a wife? How might the previous act be related to God’s creation of a wife for Adam?

Perhaps the key here is found in the last phrase of verse 20. As he named the animals, Adam must have noticed that they came in pairs (male and female), unlike himself, who was a singular creation. We can be sure that the Lord all along intended for Adam to have a wife. Perhaps the Lord intended to create a longing in Adam, the sense that something was missing in his own existence, which would make him that much more appreciative of the gift that the Lord was going to give him in a wife.

Consider the contrast between the “good” of the rest of the Creation and the declaration of “not good” in regard to Adam’s solitude. What does this indicate about the value of relationships? What can you do to help to strengthen whatever valuable relationships that you are in now?
A Companion for Adam

Genesis 2:20, in which Adam names the animals, helps to reveal the great gap between humans and other earthly creatures. There was no animal that was comparable to Adam. Not even among the apes was there any creature like Adam, because Adam was not like an ape. This is an important point for us to remember because so many in our society promote the idea that humans are nothing more than advanced apes. We are not apes, and an ape was no more suitable as a companion for Adam than it would be for one of us.

Read Genesis 2:21, 22. What significance is found in the method by which God created a companion for Adam?

As God had personally crafted Adam’s body from the dust of the ground, so He personally crafted Eve’s body, using one of Adam’s ribs. God did not need Adam’s rib to create Eve; He could have created her as He had created Adam or even spoken her into existence. But God had a reason for forming Eve out of one of Adam’s ribs. If the two had been created completely separately, it could indicate that by nature they were completely independent individuals. But the sharing of flesh in both persons indicates that the two were to be united and were intended to be “one flesh.”

After being created, Eve was brought to Adam to be his helper (vs. 18). She was made from Adam (vs. 22) and given to Adam (vs. 22). The process by which God created Eve showed clearly that God could provide any companion that Adam needed. This point became important later when Adam faced the temptation of whether to join Eve in the eating of the fruit or to trust God to take care of the situation. Adam had ample reason to believe that God could take care of him, and this made his sin the more grievous.

Read Genesis 2:23. What was Adam’s response to Eve?

Adam was so excited when he saw Eve that he sang out in poetry. This is the first poem in the Bible and reflects Adam’s regard for his wife and the closeness of their relationship. She was to be his equal, another aspect of Creation that was damaged by the Fall.
Ideal Marriage

Author William Faulkner once called marriage a “failure” and wrote that “the only way to get any peace out of it is . . . to keep the first one [wife] and stay as far away from her as much as you can, with the hope of some day outliving her.” What a sad commentary on the state of many marriages.

Read Mark 10:7–9. What texts did Jesus quote in this passage? What characteristics of a good marriage can be found here in the words of Jesus?

The benefits of leaving one’s parents in order to create a home with one’s spouse are so well known that they hardly need to be mentioned. Problems with in-laws are one of the leading causes of marital discord. One of the first steps to take when establishing a happy home is to respect the independence of the marriage partners by the establishment of a home separate from their parents when at all possible. In cases when it is not possible, the privacy and intimacy of marriage should still be respected.

Unity is another feature of a good marriage. Unity does not mean that the two partners should give up the use of their separate brains but that they should be united in their purpose to do the very best for each other and for their union.

Jesus also emphasized the lasting nature of marriage. Marriage is not a casual relationship to be entered into or dismissed at will. It is a lifetime commitment. Those who are not prepared to commit themselves for life should postpone such a step until they are ready.

Read Ephesians 5:22–25. In what ways do these verses reveal the principles of a good marriage?

It is the husband’s privilege to give himself to his wife in loving service, as Christ gave Himself for the church. In turn, the wife is to respect her husband and to cooperate in their work toward their mutual goals. Here is the solution to the discord that sin has brought into the marriage relationship. Self-sacrificing love will be met by loving respect and mutual happiness. Our homes can be a foretaste of heaven.
Protecting What’s Precious

One of the greatest examples of God’s love for humanity can be found in human sexuality. It is truly a wonderful gift from God. Yet, as with all the gifts that we have been given, it doesn’t come unconditionally. That is, it’s not something we can just do with as we please. God has set some rules. Indeed, He is very clear: sexual activity is to be between a husband and wife, male and female, and only in the context of marriage. Anything outside of that is sin.

Read Matthew 5:27–30. Look at how seriously Jesus takes the issues with which He is dealing here. What is, ultimately, at stake?

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However much we like to focus (and rightly so) on all the grace and forgiveness that Jesus bestows upon sinners, we can’t forget the high standards of morality that He lived and preached. It’s hard to imagine how Jesus could have expressed more strongly the warning against sexual immorality as revealed in these few verses. Plucking out your eye? Cutting off your hand? If this is what it takes to be pure, then it’s worth it; otherwise, you are in danger of losing your eternal life.

“If all who profess to obey the law of God were free from iniquity, my soul would be delivered; but they are not. Even some who profess to keep all the commandments of God are guilty of the sin of adultery. What can I say to arouse their benumbed sensibilities? Moral principle, strictly carried out, becomes the only safeguard of the soul.”—Ellen G. White, Counsels on Health, pp. 621, 622.

However strong Jesus’ warning is here, we must not forget the story about the woman caught in the act of adultery (John 8: 1–11). How do we strike the right balance between the upholding of the standards that Jesus talked about in the above verses, while at the same time showing grace and compassion to those who fall, as revealed in this story?
Marriage as a Metaphor for the Church

It is well-known among students of the Bible that, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, marriage is used as a symbol of the relationship between God and His covenant people. That’s why, for example, on numerous occasions the Bible uses the image of an unfaithful woman to symbolize the apostasy and backsliding that were prevalent in ancient Israel. For instance, back in Exodus the Lord said to His people that they should not enter into any kind of close relationship with the pagans around them because the pagans were a very perverse people who could lead Israel astray.

Read Exodus 34:15, 16. What image does the Lord use in this specific warning? How can this be understood in the context of God’s people being “married” to Him? See Jer. 3:14.

At the same time, the image of the church as the bride of Christ points toward unity among believers and with Christ, especially when understood in the context of the biblical ideal for marriage: one man and one woman in a loving, self-sacrificing relationship.

Read Ephesians 5:28–32 and Revelation 19:5–9. What are these texts teaching?

In these texts, the relationship within the ideal marriage is compared with the relationship of God and His people. God invites His people to join with Him in an intimate relationship. This is an amazing picture of God’s interest in His people and His desire to bring us into His fellowship.

What choices can you make that will draw you closer to the Lord and closer to the ideal represented in the biblical concept of marriage? Why is it a matter of the choices that you, and you alone, can make?
Further Study: In many ways a proper understanding of morality, especially sexual morality, is clearly tied to a proper understanding of our origins. For example: evolutionary philosophy does not provide an objective basis for any link between sexual activity and morality. Animals have many different types of “mating systems.” Some species are polygamous; many are promiscuous. A few species are mostly monogamous, but genetic studies have revealed that many species that appear to be monogamous are not actually so. In many species, a female may give birth to a group of offspring that are not all fathered by the same individual. Without the objective standard of morality given by the Creator, we would have no basis for the evaluation of sexual behavior as morally good or bad. The current push to approve homosexual partnerships illustrates this point. It is only in the light of Creation that marriage is properly understood.

“In both the Old and the New Testament, the marriage relation is employed to represent the tender and sacred union that exists between Christ and His people. To the mind of Jesus the gladness of the wedding festivities pointed forward to the rejoicing of that day when He shall bring home His bride to the Father’s house, and the redeemed with the Redeemer shall sit down to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 151.

Discussion Questions:

1. Darwinism denies anything like the biblical Creation. What rules for sexual behavior, if any, does Darwinism provide, and how do they contrast with the biblical ideal?

2. What are some biblical examples of good marriages and happy homes? Name some biblical examples of unhappy marriages and homes. What can we learn from both?

3. Review the description of the virtuous wife in Proverbs 31:10–31. What should be the character of the husband of such a wife?

4. In what ways can your local church be a place that can help to affirm and strengthen the ideals of marriage? What practical things can your church do in order to accomplish that goal?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Genesis 2:18, 21–24

The Student Will:

Know: Recognize and understand God’s Creation design for marriage.
Feel: Reverently consider what God’s Creation design means for marriage.
Do: Seek to use his or her personal power in marriage (and in life) as Christ modeled in Philippians 2.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Leave, Cleave, and Be One Flesh

A What are God’s designs for marriage before it is entered into?
B What are God’s designs for marriage itself once it is entered into?

II. Feel: Reverence for God’s Design for Marriage

A The final act of Creation design made some changes to marriage to accommodate humanity’s fallen condition. How does the post-Fall design help to instill reverence for marriage?
B In Ephesians 5, Paul outlines principles for mutual submission in marriage. How are a husband and wife to submit to each other as equals without either spouse feeling inferior or giving into the temptation to dominate?

III. Do: Humility Before the Lord

A How can you use your personal power in marriage in the way that Christ modeled in Philippians 2?
B In what ways can the principles in that same model be applied to other aspects of your life?

Summary: Prior to the Fall, Adam and Eve were equal partners. Moses makes an inspired moral application from Eden to how we should enter marriage today. There is a critical order to be followed: Leave, Cleave, and Be One Flesh. Paul explains the post-Fall ideal for marriage in Ephesians 5 with the concept of mutual submission.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Marriage was made in Eden with certain design parameters, which were designed to protect our happiness.

**Just for Teachers:** Use the following points to help class members understand that God has a design for them once they enter into marriage, as set forth in Creation.

“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). Here Moses discloses a moral norm for entering marriage, based on God’s creation order.

First, Moses says that the man leaves his parents before being joined to his wife. This condition means that, prior to marrying, a man should establish independence, demonstrating that he can successfully manage his life alone. If he cannot manage himself, how can he manage a marriage?

Second, he cleaves to his wife. The Hebrew word is used in reference to the skin cleaving to the body, thus denoting a strong, permanent bond. But when is this permanent bond fully established? At the wedding. Engagement is not a permanent relationship, for it always ends either in breaking up or in marriage.

Finally, once permanence is established, the element of “one flesh” can be added to the relationship. Saying “No” to desire prior to the establishment of permanence is hard, but the strength of discipline required to wait is the same strength of discipline needed to make the marriage work for a lifetime. Failure to establish this discipline prior to marriage weakens the ability to maintain a permanent union after the wedding. God’s design is that marriage be one enactment of the image of God, illustrating the permanent Oneness of the Trinity after whom we are imaged.

**Opening Activity for Discussion:** As a child, did you ever ruin your Christmas by not waiting to open presents? How does not waiting when we should diminish the joy of the experience that we waited for? Can you think of other examples where something is ruined by a failure to wait?
STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Convey to your students the idea that God created marriage to be a mutually unselfish, self-emptying, loving relationship. Husband and wife were not made to lord over each other.

Bible Commentary

I. Marriage: An Enactment of the Image of God (Read Genesis 2:18, 21–24 with the class.)

In making Eve, God is said to have made a “helper comparable to” Adam (NKJV). What kind of “helper” was Eve meant to be? The Hebrew vocabulary means a helper who is a counterpart to someone, on the same level. This shows that Eve was meant to be an equal to Adam in the Creation order. (Ellen G. White takes this view, as well; see The Adventist Home, p. 25 and Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 46.)

But with sin, a change appears. Eve is told, “Your desire shall be for your husband” (Gen. 3:16, NKJV). The text only states that she was to be subordinate to her husband. Eve was not subjugated to men in general, for the text addresses only the family economy. It does not address gender relations at large. Ellen G. White notes, however, that “had the principles enjoined in the law of God been cherished by the fallen race, this sentence, though growing out of the results of sin, would have proved a blessing to them; but man’s abuse of the supremacy thus given him has too often rendered the lot of woman very bitter, and made her life a burden.”—The Adventist Home, p. 115. What, then, does this verse in Genesis about subordination mean?

In Ephesians 5, Paul takes the Creation order and expounds upon the post-Fall ideal for marriage. He first calls us to practice mutual submission (vs. 21)—“submit[ting] to one another out of reverence for Christ” (ESV)—but husband and wife will submit in differing ways. Verse 22 continues Paul’s thought, literally reading, “Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord” (NKJV). Paul directly addresses the wife, as he does in Colossians 3:18, in which he further admonishes that the wife must determine when submission is appropriate. By addressing the wife directly, Paul is calling for the voluntary submission of the wife as an equal and not to the involuntary subservience of an inferior. Paul never calls husbands to supervise their wives’ submission. This being the case, how is the husband to submit to his wife?

Paul explains this in Ephesians 5:25–29. The husband is not called to rule his wife but to love her as Christ loves the church. Christ loves
the church with self-emptying, self-sacrificial love. Instead of using His divinity to lord His authority over the church, He “made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant” (Phil. 2:7, ESV). For Paul, Philippians 2 is a code of ethics for Christian behavior. In marriage, then, just as Christ emptied Himself of His divine rights and privileges to self-sacrificially serve us, so the husband is called to do the same with his wife. Her needs and well-being should be more important to him than his own privileges and conveniences.

This is the kind of husband to whom a wife can safely submit! God’s ideal is that both parties submit to each other but in differing ways. When properly practiced, this post-Fall ordinance makes marriage a blessing to both.

Consider This: God never intended husbands and wives to exercise selfish or tyrannical power over each other, even after the Fall. In what way does your use of your personal power reflect Christ’s example in Philippians 2?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: God’s design for marriage should not demean or degrade your marriage partner.

Thought Questions:

1. In Ephesians 5, what does mutual submission mean today for husbands (men focus here) and wives (women focus here)?

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2. Why does Paul not instruct husbands to supervise their wives in the area of mutual submission?

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3. Paul applies the principles of Philippians 2:5–7 as a general code of ethics for Christians to follow (see 1 Corinthians 9, for example, where Paul has
rights but refuses to exercise them in order to accomplish nobler goals). Ephesians 5 applies these ethics especially to husbands, though the wife is not excluded.

4 How can you be more sacrificial and self-emptying in your use of your personal power with your spouse, children, and community?

► STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Obedience to God’s norms in a sinful world does not guarantee that all marriages so founded will automatically succeed. The blight of sin and the function of free will prevent a guaranteed result, but obedience does increase your odds of success.

**Activity for Discussion:** In class, talk about what marriage must have been like before sin entered. What principles must have ruled the relationship? In what ways could a married couple reflect those principles?
Lesson 10 *March 2–8

(page 80 of Standard Edition)

Stewardship and the Environment

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Psalm 8; Gen. 2:15; Rev. 4:11; Exod. 20:8–11; 1 Cor. 16:19, 20.

Memory Text: “Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth’ ” (Genesis 1:28, NKJV).

The world in which we live is a gift of love from the Creator God, from ‘Him who made heaven and the earth, the sea and the springs of water’ (Rev. 14:7, NKJV). Within this creation He placed humans, set intentionally in relationship with Himself, other persons, and the surrounding world. Therefore, as Seventh-day Adventists, we hold its preservation and nurture to be intimately related to our service to Him. . . .

“Since human poverty and environmental degradation are interrelated, we pledge ourselves to improve the quality of life for all people. Our goal is a sustainable development of resources while meeting human needs. . . .

“In this commitment we confirm our stewardship of God’s creation and believe that total restoration will be complete only when God makes all things new.”—Excerpted from “Caring for Creation—A Statement on the Environment by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.”

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 9.
Dominion Given at Creation

According to Genesis 1:26, Adam’s dominion extended to all other created entities—in the sea, on land, and in the air. Dominion includes the idea of ruling or having power over these creatures. Nothing is said about dominion over the forces of nature themselves, only over the creatures. And, according to the text, this rule was universal: Adam was to be, essentially, the ruler of the earth.

Read again Psalm 8. What is David’s response to the honor that God gave to humans? What does it mean that we have been given “honor and glory,” especially in the context of humans having been given dominion over the earth?

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According to Genesis 2:19, one of Adam’s earliest tasks was to name the animals. Names had great meaning in biblical times. One’s name represented one’s person and often one’s status. The authority to give names to the birds and beasts was confirmation of Adam’s status as ruler over the animals.

Read Genesis 2:15. In what ways do you see the principle of stewardship revealed here?

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Adam was assigned the task of caring for the Garden, to manage it and tend to its needs. The Hebrew root, smr, translated here as “keep” it, often means “to watch over” or “to protect.” The Garden was a gift to Adam, an expression of God’s love, and Adam was now given responsibility over it, another example of the dominion that Adam received at the time of Creation.

How should our understanding of God as the Creator, or even, more specifically, our understanding of the Creation story itself, impact the ways in which we treat the environment? Why should our understanding of these things protect us from either gross indifference toward the environment or, in contrast, a fanatical devotion to it?
Caring for Other Creatures

“For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills” (Ps. 50:10). What in this text touches on the topic of our stewardship of the earth?

Read Revelation 4:11. How does this text contrast radically with the common atheistic notions of a creation without a creator, a creation that comes into being purely by chance alone?

Creation of the animals was not an accident or an afterthought. God intentionally created them. It was His will that they should exist, and it is this principle that should guide our treatment of them (see also Exod. 23:5, 12; Prov. 12:10; Luke 14:5).

Indeed, cruelty toward animals and indifference toward their suffering are widely recognized as being symptomatic of personality disorders. Many organizations have been established to promote good treatment of animals, and rightly so.

However, at the same time, some people have gone so far as to claim that humans are not intrinsically more important than animals, and so humans should not be given preferential treatment. In many ways, this is a train of thought that flows logically from an evolutionary model of human origins. After all, if we and the animals are separated only by time and chance, why should we be any more special than they are? One philosopher has even argued that a chicken, or even a fish, has more “personhood” than does a fetus in the womb or even a newborn infant. However ridiculous these ideas might sound, they can be derived with a fair amount of logic from an atheistic evolutionary model of human origins.

Of course, such ideas are not supported in Scripture. Humans have special status in God’s plan, in contrast to the animals. (See Gen. 3:21, Exod. 29:38, Lev. 11:3.)

Put yourself in the mind of an atheist evolutionist and work through the reasons for why you think that animals should be treated no differently from humans. What should this tell you about how important our presuppositions are in determining the outcome of our thought?
The Sabbath and the Environment

As we have seen, the concept of stewardship, in the context of the way in which we take care of the planet, is tied directly to the creation. Our views on Creation will influence our views on the way in which we should relate to the creation.

For some, the creation is to be exploited, used, even pillaged to whatever degree necessary in order to fulfill our own desires and wants. Others, in contrast, all but worship the creation itself (see Rom. 1:25). Then there is the biblical view, which should give us a balanced perspective on the way in which we relate to the world that the Lord created for us.

Read Exodus 20:8–11. What do we find in this commandment that relates to stewardship?

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“God set aside the seventh-day Sabbath as a memorial and perpetual reminder of His creative act and establishment of the world. In resting on that day, Seventh-day Adventists reinforce the special sense of relationship with the Creator and His creation. Sabbath observance underscores the importance of our integration with the total environment.”—Excerpted from “Caring for Creation—A Statement on the Environment.”

By pointing us to the fact that God created us and the world that we inhabit, the Sabbath is a constant reminder that we are not wholly autonomous creatures, able to do whatever we wish to others and to the world itself. Sabbath should teach us that we are, indeed, stewards and that stewardship entails responsibilities. And, as we can see in the commandment itself, responsibility extends to how we treat those who are “under” us.

Think about how you treat other people, particularly those who are under your dominion. Are you treating them with respect, fairness, and grace? Or are you taking advantage of the power that you have over them? If the latter, remember, one day you will have to answer for your actions.
Stewards of Our Health

As we have seen throughout this quarter, God’s original creation was “good,” even “very good.” Everything and everyone came forth from the hand of the Creator in a state of perfection. There was no sickness, no disease, no death. Contrary to the evolutionary model—in which disease, sickness, and death are part of the very means of creation—these things came only after the Fall, after the entrance of sin. Thus, it is only against the background of the Creation story that we can understand better the biblical teaching about health and healing.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20. What is our responsibility to God regarding the care of our bodies?

Our bodies are the vehicles for our brains, and it is through our brain that the Holy Spirit communicates with us. If we wish to have communion with God, we must take care of our bodies and brains. If we abuse our bodies, we destroy ourselves, both physically and spiritually. According to these texts, the whole question of health itself and how we take care of our bodies, the “temple of God,” is a moral issue, one filled with eternal consequences.

Care of our health is a vital part of our relationship to God. Obviously, some aspects of our health are beyond our power. We all have defective genes, we all are exposed to unknown chemicals or other damaging agents, and we are all at risk of physical injury that may damage our health. God knows all this. But to the extent that lies within our power, we are to do our best to maintain our bodies, made in the image of God.

“Let none who profess godliness regard with indifference the health of the body, and flatter themselves that intemperance is no sin, and will not affect their spirituality. A close sympathy exists between the physical and the moral nature. The standard of virtue is elevated or degraded by the physical habits. . . . Any habit which does not promote healthful action in the human system degrades the higher and nobler faculties.”—Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, Jan. 25, 1881.
Stewardship Principles

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17, NIV). How does this text help to set the foundation for a biblically based concept of stewardship?

We often tend to think of stewardship in terms of money. As we’ve seen this week, however, stewardship involves much more than just that. Yet, whether dealing with money or with environmental concerns or our own health, there are certain principles involved in good stewardship, principles that have their ultimate foundation in the Creation, as depicted in Genesis. In the end, because God is our Creator, and because everything we have is a gift from Him, we are obligated before Him to be good stewards of whatever has been entrusted to us.

Read Matthew 25:14–30 to see how this parable illustrates the rewards of good stewardship. What is the message of this parable regarding the principles of stewardship in general?

“To His servants Christ commits ‘His goods’—something to be put to use for Him. He gives ‘to every man his work.’ Each has his place in the eternal plan of heaven. Each is to work in co-operation with Christ for the salvation of souls. Not more surely is the place prepared for us in the heavenly mansions than is the special place designated on earth where we are to work for God.”—Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, pp. 326, 327.

What are you doing with the talents with which you have been entrusted (remember—everything good comes from “the Father of the heavenly lights”)? What choices can you make that will enable you to use these gifts in better service for the Lord’s work?
**Friday March 8**

**(page 86 of Standard Edition)**

**Further Study:** “Christ’s followers have been redeemed for service. Our Lord teaches that the true object of life is ministry. Christ Himself was a worker, and to all His followers He gives the law of service—service to God and to their fellow men. Here Christ has presented to the world a higher conception of life than they had ever known. By living to minister for others, man is brought into connection with Christ. The law of service becomes the connecting link which binds us to God and to our fellow men.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 326.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Some secularists have proposed that the value of life should not be measured by whether the life is human but by its potential to live a pleasant life. They might value a young, healthy chimpanzee more than they do an old, diseased human.
   For instance, read the following quote from Australian Peter Singer, who argues that, in certain cases, humans shouldn’t have any more rights than some animals do: “Far from having concern for all life, or a scale of concern impartially based on the nature of the life in question, those who protest against abortion but dine regularly on the bodies of chickens, pigs and calves show only a biased concern for the lives of members of our species. For on any fair comparison of morally relevant characteristics, like rationality, self-consciousness, awareness, autonomy, pleasure, pain, and so on, the calf, the pig, and the much-derided chicken come out well ahead of the fetus at any stage of pregnancy—while if we make the comparison with a fetus of less than three months old, a fish would show more signs of consciousness.”—Peter Singer, *Writings on an Ethical Life* (New York: The Ecco Press, 2000), p. 156.

   Singer, of course, is an evolutionist; thus, he believes that there’s really no overt qualitative difference between us and the animals. We just have evolved into something different from what they did, that’s all.

   What is radically wrong with this picture? How should we as Christians respond to this kind of thinking?

2. If you can find it, bring to class the entire text of “Caring for Creation—A Statement on the Environment” (this statement can be found at adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main-stat5.html). Otherwise, use the sections quoted in this week’s Sabbath study. Focus on how the statement ties in the Genesis Creation to the environment. Dwell more on how a proper view of Creation can protect us from taking an extreme position.
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Genesis 1:27, 2:15

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Discover how humanity’s stewardship of the world was designed to operate in Eden.

**Feel:** Feel the importance of caring for God’s creation in the context of his or her belief in the soon return of Christ.

**Do:** Accept responsibility to be a good steward of nature and of the environment.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know: How to Be Custodians of the Earth**

A Does Christianity cause poor stewardship of the environment? Why, or why not?

B How was humanity’s dominion limited at Creation?

II. **Feel: Caring for the Environment**

A Why is caring for the environment important, even though we believe Christ is coming soon?

B How does the Creation account inspire you to better serve and protect the environment?

III. **Do: Being Better Stewards**

A In what ways can you use your personal power to be a better steward of this world?

B What other areas of stewardship, aside from protecting the earth, does God call Christians to practice, and how can we implement the practice of faithful stewardship in these areas?

**Summary:** The dominion given to Adam and Eve at Creation was not an unrestricted dominion given to them to do with as they pleased. Human dominion was limited, for example, by the forbidden fruit. Also, humankind was placed in Eden to serve and protect the Garden, not to exploit and destroy it. Some, however, have tried to blame our ecological problems on Christianity, claiming that it has an inherently exploitative theology, based on Genesis 1. The limitations to human power given in Genesis 1 and other data refute this position. Finally, we must consider the question, why care for the environment if we believe that Jesus is coming soon?
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Creation reveals that God made humankind to nurture and to care for His world, not to exploit and pillage it. This should impact the ways in which we treat the powerless beings in our lives.

**Just for Teachers:** Instill in the class the idea that Genesis 1 and 2 do not support any kind of oppressive leadership over fellow human beings or over nature.

In the Bible, righteousness is a covenantal-relational concept. It is about who you are and not just what you do. In short, righteousness is being in the proper relational orientation to the members of the covenant community, which, in this week’s lesson, is the Creation community. Balaam demonstrated his unrighteousness by abusing his donkey (Num. 22:27). By contrast, Proverbs 12:10 declares that the righteous man respects the life of his beast. Old Testament law protected even the draft animals of your enemy. If your enemy’s ox or ass was struggling to get up under its load, you were to help relieve its suffering, even though it was your enemy’s beast (Exod. 23:5).

What relevance do those principles have for us today?

To understand the point of this question better, it is useful to look at the ethical dilemma of Joseph during his engagement to Mary, in which he finds her to be pregnant and he is not the father. Matthew informs us that “Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly” (1:19, ESV). Joseph, who believes he has been unspeakably wronged by his fiancée, seeks to avoid shaming Mary precisely because this is the way in which righteous men act.

Yes, Joseph was going to hold her fully accountable, but he sought to do so in the least shaming way possible in order to protect her dignity. Joseph was in right relationship, even with his apparent enemy. What an example of Creation ethics!

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** God did not give Adam and Eve unbridled dominion over the earth. Their dominion was to be exercised
within divinely prescribed conditions and limits. Exploitation of God’s creation is not part of the Creation dominion package.

Bible Commentary

I. To Serve and Protect: A Divine Mandate (Read Genesis 1:27 and 2:15 with the class.)

In 1973, Lynn White Jr. published a scathing article, “The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis,” in *Western Man and Environmental Ethics: Attitudes Toward Nature and Technology* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1973), pp. 18–30. White contended that Christian theology, based heavily on the concept of Creation dominion, provided a theological basis for the promotion of an exploitative view of man’s relationship to nature, hence our current eco-crisis. White’s article did accomplish some good by touching off a chain of reactions within Christianity, including among Evangelicals, causing those Christians to seek to refute White and proponents of an exploitational view, while arguing for a stewardship model of environmental care based in Creation. It is true that some exploitationist theology appears in Christian history, especially during the Industrial Revolution. However, most of the pro-exploitation expositors made poor use of biblical data when framing their arguments. It is likely, however, that the majority of Jews and Christians have not held such views.

This week’s lesson highlights evidence from Genesis as to why White, and exploitationist theologians, were ultimately wrong. Besides the problem of finding ecologic crises in thoroughly non-Christian areas, Genesis 1 and 2 contains no message of exploitation.

First, after Adam and Eve are given joint dominion—the text says, “let them have dominion” (NKJV)—but that dominion is immediately limited. One tree was not under their dominion, and its fruit was off-limits. Additionally, in Genesis 2 humanity is put into the garden to “serve and protect it.” (This is a literal translation of the roots *abad*—to labor or serve, and from which the term for servant is derived—and *shamar*, “to guard, watch over; or, of the Sabbath, to keep and observe.”) Humanity was not given any authority to do as it pleased, nor allowed to exploit and pillage God’s creation. Humanity
was a vassal ruler, subject to the policies of the sovereign God. While humankind is given a higher level of moral protection than animals or nature (see Genesis 9:5, 6, for example), this privilege does not logically entail that nature and animals are devoid of divine protection. The Sabbath commandment typifies this point. Those addressed by the commandment are agents of power. These power agents have the ability to deny the Sabbath rest to their children, servants, ox, ass, and the alien in their gates. The common denominator of this potentially oppressed latter group is precisely their powerlessness to resist being unjustly forced to forfeit the Sabbath rest. With the Sabbath, God shows that He has granted basic rights of non-exploitation to the weak and powerless. It makes sense that the memorial of Creation shares in the same nurturing, caring spirit of Genesis 1, 2. This can be seen in the Sabbath poem of Isaiah 58, in which part of keeping the Sabbath was to cease one’s oppression of the poor and powerless, not just to keep one day for religious observance. Isaiah does not ask for political activism against other oppressors. Rather, he calls oppressors themselves to keep the Sabbath by ceasing their exploitative ways over the weak and powerless.

**Consider This:** Why care for the earth and environment if Jesus is coming soon? What biblical principles urge us to avoid shirking our stewardship of the earth in the name of the Second Coming?

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**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** *Creation calls us to a life of non-exploitation over those whom we have the power to exploit.*

**Thought Questions:**

1. Whom do you have the power to exploit? How would both Creation principles and the Sabbath inform how you exercise your power?

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To what degree can we use technology to gain greater control of nature? What principles should control our conclusions?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Stewardship is a Creation ordinance that means God owns us.

Thought Questions:

1. Because I do not own myself, what are my obligations and duties to my owner?

2. How does Creation stewardship define and clarify the kind of claims that God has on me?

3. What difference would the belief that I own myself make in my approach to others and to God’s claims on me?
SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Gen. 2:1–3; Heb. 4:3, 4; Deut. 5:12–15; Ezek. 20:12; Mark 2:27, 28; 2 Pet. 3:3–7.

Memory Text: “For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day” (Matthew 12:8).

At the end of the sixth day, the Creation had been completed (Gen. 2:1, 2). The world had been formed into a habitable place, and it had been filled with living creatures. Adam and Eve had been created in God’s own image and had been given a beautiful, well-provisioned Garden in which to live. They had formed the first marriage and established the first home. God was satisfied with what He had made. Something else, however, was added to this paradise: the seventh-day Sabbath (see Gen. 2:1–3).

Genesis 2 disproves the common notion that the seventh day is the “Jewish Sabbath.” Why? Because God “blessed the seventh day and sanctified it” back in Eden, before the Fall and before any Jews existed.

In addition, the Sabbath is a memorial to the creation of all humanity (not just the Jews); all humanity should enjoy the blessings of the Sabbath day.

This week we will explore the biblical teaching on this, another gift from Eden.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 16.
Creation and the Seventh-day Sabbath

In Exodus 20:8–11, the fourth commandment refers directly to the Creation week. This is important because it points back to Eden itself, to a world without sin, a perfect world coming fresh from the Creator. “The Sabbath is not introduced as a new institution but as having been founded at creation. It is to be remembered and observed as the memorial of the Creator’s work.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 307.

Read Genesis 2:1–3. How is the seventh-day Sabbath tied directly to the Creation itself? How do these verses help to reinforce the idea that God did, indeed, create our world in six days, as opposed to the long ages postulated by theistic evolution?

In those three verses, it’s worth noting that reference is made to the seventh day five times: in three of these five it is specifically called “the seventh day,” and twice the day is referred to with the pronoun “it.” In these verses, we are left with no ambiguity about either the day or what it is specifically referring to, and that is the six days of Creation that preceded the seventh.

Read Hebrews 4:3, 4. In his discussion of rest, the author of Hebrews is pointing to what event?

This is a clear New Testament reference to the Genesis Creation account, and it provides additional evidence for the historical truth of Creation in six days, followed by a day of rest.

Many today resist the idea that Creation took place in six days. They demand scientific evidence that the record is true. But science itself comes with many contingencies, uncertainties, and presuppositions. Plus, how could a literal six-day Creation be proved, anyway?

God “has not removed the possibility of doubt; faith must rest upon evidence, not demonstration; those who wish to doubt have opportunity; but those who desire to know the truth find ample ground for faith.”—Ellen G. White, Education, p. 169. What are the reasons you have for faith? Why do they trump all the reasons to doubt?
MONDAY March 11

The Rich Meaning of Sabbath Rest

Read Deuteronomy 5:12–15. How does the emphasis of the Sabbath commandment here differ from Exodus 20:8–11?

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Here Moses reminds the Israelites that they should keep the Sabbath, and he states that they should do this because God delivered them from Egypt. The texts say nothing about the six days of Creation or about the Sabbath being God’s rest. Instead, the emphasis here is on salvation, on deliverance, on redemption—in this case the redemption from Egypt, a symbol of the true Redemption we have in Jesus (see 1 Cor. 10:1–3).

In other words, there is no conflict between the texts, no justification for trying to use one passage to deny the truth of the other. Moses is showing the people that they belong to the Lord, first by Creation and then by redemption.

Read Ezekiel 20:12 and Exodus 31:13. What is another reason for observing the Sabbath?

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The passages that mention sanctification remind us that only God can make us holy. Only the Creator can create a new heart within us.

Consider, then, three reasons given for Sabbath observance and how they are related. We observe the Sabbath on the seventh day in recognition of the fact that God created in six days and rested on the seventh. We also observe the Sabbath on the seventh day because God is the one who redeemed us, saved us in Christ. And also He is the One who sanctifies us, which comes only from the creative power of God, as well (see Ps. 51:10, 2 Cor. 5:17).

Theories, therefore, that deny the six-day Creation tend to diminish God’s grace, and they magnify the value of our own efforts to be good enough in order to be saved. The Creation story reminds us of our total dependence on grace and the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ in our place.

Dwell on the fact that we are as dependent upon God for Redemption as we are for existence (after all, how much say did you have in your own birth?). How can the Sabbath help us to better understand our absolute need of God’s grace for everything in our lives? How should this knowledge influence the way in which we live?
Jesus and the Sabbath

**Read** Mark 2:27, 28. What crucial truth about the Sabbath does Jesus reveal here? How can we take this principle and apply it to our own Sabbath experience?

Jesus and His disciples had just walked through a field of grain, and the disciples, hungry, had picked some of the grain and eaten it. The act of picking grain while one was passing through a field was not a problem, as the rules of the society permitted this. Food is a necessity, and it was perfectly acceptable for the disciples to relieve their hunger by eating what they found as they walked along. The problem was that religious leaders regarded their own made-up rules for Sabbath observance as being more important than human need. This was a continuing point of controversy between Christ and the Pharisees. Jesus’ response indicated that their priorities were wrong. The Sabbath should be a day for human blessing. It should not be used as an excuse for prolonging suffering.


Nowhere in all the Sabbath controversies recorded in the Gospels does the question of the validity of the Sabbath ever arise. The issue, instead, is how the seventh day should be kept, not whether it is to be abolished or superseded by something else.

Jesus’ example shows not only that the Sabbath remains something that should be observed, but it shows also how the Sabbath should be kept. And one thing we can clearly see from His example is that work done on the Sabbath to help to relieve human suffering does not violate the Sabbath. On the contrary, if anything, His example shows that doing good for others is exactly how the Sabbath should be kept.

**In what ways could your Sabbath keeping better reflect the principles seen in Jesus’ example to us?**
Sabbath and the Last Days

Read 2 Peter 3:3–7. Compare the description of the last-day scoffers with our contemporary society. What do the scoffers deny, and why?

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The scoffers claim that nature has continued on without interruption, a claim known among scientists as “uniformitarianism.” This is equivalent to denying that miracles occur. This claim is then used to deny that the Lord is going to come as He promised.

Notice, though, how Peter links their denial of the second coming of Christ with their denial of the Creation account (plus the Flood, as well). Denial of one leads to denial of the others!

Read Revelation 14:6, 7. Amid the doubts and caviling of the scoffers, what message will be proclaimed with heavenly power?

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The scoffers are wrong. Judgment is coming, and we are called to worship the One who “created the heavens and the earth, the seas” and everything else. This is Creation language. The text alludes to Exodus 20:11 and points out the significance of Creation and Sabbath in the end times. As the Sabbath symbolizes the biblical story of Creation and Redemption, so rejection of the Creation story leads to rejection of the seventh-day Sabbath and to the establishment of a man-made substitute. The result, indicated in Revelation 14:8–10, is spiritual fornication and separation from God.

God is calling people to worship Him as the Creator, and nowhere in the Bible do we find anything that points so fully to Him as the Creator as does the seventh-day Sabbath. It is no wonder, then, that we see the Sabbath, the original sign of God as Creator, as being pivotal in the last days.

Think it through: how does a rejection of a literal six-day Creation weaken the importance of the seventh-day Sabbath? And if our understanding of the seventh-day Sabbath is weakened, why adhere to it when persecution comes?
A Psalm for the Sabbath

Read Psalm 92. What does this tell us, at least in part, about what the experience of Sabbath keeping should be like? Why, when thinking about the Lord, should we express the kind of joy expressed in this psalm?

The psalmist obviously knew the Lord, knew what the Lord was like, knew what the Lord had done, and knew what the Lord was going to do one day. And it is for these reasons that he expresses the joy that he does.

Look, too, at the rich themes expressed in this, a “psalm for the Sabbath day.”

First and foremost, there is praise and thankfulness to God for His loving-kindness and faithfulness. Plus, any “psalm for the Sabbath” would, of course, include acknowledgment of God as Creator, which we see here, as well.

Also, look at the theme of judgment here. In the Bible, God’s judgment is not just against the wicked, but it is also in favor of the righteous (see Dan. 7:20–28). These two aspects of judgment are revealed here in the psalm, as well. Even if we don’t see these promises fulfilled now, we have the promise that this judgment ultimately will come at the end of time, when God will create all things new (Rev. 21:5).

If we get nothing else out of this psalm, we should see that the Sabbath, however sacred, is a time to delight in the Lord, to rejoice in Him and in all that He has done for us and has promised to do. The whole tone of the psalm is that of praise, joy, and happiness, not because of anything that the psalmist did but only because of all that the Lord had done and promised to do.

What a gift to be given: one-seventh of our lives set apart every week to rest and to be able—free from the busyness and stress of mundane existence—to rejoice in the works of the Lord for us.

How can you learn to rejoice in the Sabbath as does the psalmist here in this psalm? If you are not having that experience, why not?
Further Study: “God created man in His own image. Here is no mystery. There is no ground for the supposition that man was evolved by slow degrees of development from the lower forms of animal or vegetable life. Such teaching lowers the great work of the Creator to the level of man’s narrow, earthly conceptions. Men are so intent upon excluding God from the sovereignty of the universe that they degrade man and defraud him of the dignity of his origin. He who set the starry worlds on high and tinted with delicate skill the flowers of the field, who filled the earth and the heavens with the wonders of His power, when He came to crown His glorious work, to place one in the midst to stand as ruler of the fair earth, did not fail to create a being worthy of the hand that gave him life. The genealogy of our race, as given by inspiration, traces back its origin, not to a line of developing germs, mollusks, and quadrupeds, but to the great Creator.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 45.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why is the relationship between Sabbath and Creation so significant in these last days? How is this truth expressed in Revelation 14:6, 7? Look again at the question at the end of Wednesday’s lesson as you discuss the above question.

2. At about the same time that Charles Darwin started promoting his theory of evolution, God raised up a church that upheld the seventh-day Sabbath as a distinctive belief. More so, God raised up that church to proclaim the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14, which calls upon us specifically to worship the One who created the heavens and the earth. What could be more tragic, or a deeper fall from faith, than for those professing to be members of that church to argue in favor of evolution?

3. In recent years, science has revealed a complexity in life that boggles the mind. Charles Darwin had no clue whatsoever about just how complicated even the so-called “simple” cell really is. We know now that even the most “simple” cell is more complicated and more intricate than Darwin probably ever imagined. Look at the irony here: many scientists believe that life arose by chance alone. Yet, the more complexity that science finds in life, the less likely it becomes that chance could have done it. That is, the more that science reveals about the complexity of life, the less likely science’s grand theory about the origin of life, atheistic evolution, becomes. Discuss.
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Genesis 2:1–3

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Understand that the Sabbath was given to humanity prior to the Fall as a means of recalibrating humanity’s relationship with God on a weekly basis.

**Feel:** Appreciate the importance of recognizing and protecting the rights of others to have the Sabbath experience.

**Do:** Gratefully keep the Sabbath in a way that recalibrates his or her relationship with God and avoids depriving others of this experience.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: God and the Sabbath

A Why did Adam and Eve need the Sabbath in an unfallen world?
B How does the keeping of the Sabbath reveal God’s purpose for our lives?

II. Feel: The Gift of the Sabbath

A The fourth commandment identifies a list of creatures whom we have the power to deprive of a Sabbath rest. Why is it important to feel a need to protect their Sabbath rest, as well?
B We were made for intimate fellowship with God. How can Sabbath keeping strengthen your desire to deepen your communion with your Creator?

III. Do: Keeping the Seventh Day Holy

A How does the Sabbath recalibrate our relationship with God?
B How can we use our influence to protect the access of others to the Sabbath rest?

**Summary:** The Sabbath was given before the Fall as a tool to help humanity to remember who they are—finite creatures under the sovereignty of an infinite God. The Sabbath, thus, was given as a tool to recalibrate one’s relationship with God. As such, the Sabbath shows that God made us to be more than mere producers of products and services. We were made to have intimate fellowship with God. Additionally, in a sinful world, we have the power to deprive others of that recalibrating experience; we can do that by making them continue to produce products and services for us on the Sabbath. The fourth commandment calls us to self-restraint and asks to use our power to protect others’ access to the Sabbath rest.
**Learning Cycle**

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Creation and the Sabbath are intimately connected. Denial of Creation tends to lead to a denial of other Bible truths, such as the Sabbath, the Flood, the Second Coming, and the new heavens and earth.

**Just for Teachers:** Help your class to realize that the teaching of Creation is intimately tied to the rest of biblical theology. Change your view of Creation, and you will be forced to change other views in order to maintain logical consistency.

Our lesson mentions the fact that Peter connects a denial of Creation to a denial of the Flood and other biblical teachings. Peter may have been an early witness to such phenomena, but the same pattern is also alive and well today. Process theologians, evolutionary theologians, and others deny the six-day Creation of Genesis 1 as factual history. A number of these theologians also deny the Second Coming, the new heavens and earth, and more. For them, modern science has relegated Scripture to mere fables. But once faith in the authority of Scripture wanes, religion becomes a humanly constructed collection of religious ideas and nothing more.

Creation, then, functions as a litmus test of one’s view of Scripture and its authority. If one decides that the Bible is wrong about origins, one is more likely to question other miraculous stories, such as the Flood, the resurrection of Jesus, or concepts such as the Sabbath. The core issue is not Creation per se but the impact on biblical authority that comes with denying Genesis 1.

**Opening Activity for Discussion:** How does a person with a humanly constructed faith approach Scripture differently from one who holds Scripture to be the authoritative Word of God? How can you discern if your faith is humanly constructed or grounded in Scripture?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** The Sabbath is more than merely a day of rest. God made us to be more than just producers of goods and services for Him. The Sabbath is a day for renewing our relationship with God.
Bible Commentary

I. The Deeper Dimensions of Sabbath Keeping (Review Genesis 2:1–3 with the class.)

On one Seventh-day Adventist university campus, it is not uncommon to regularly see cars with bumper stickers reading, “The seventh day is the Sabbath, and God never changed it.” This statement begs the question: Is it possible that Seventh-day Adventists can focus so much on which is the day of the Sabbath that they miss out on the deeper dimensions of Sabbath keeping? Furthermore, it is not infrequent to hear the Sabbath explained as being an enhancer of human productivity. By resting one day, we can produce more during the following six. But is the Sabbath merely a rest day, permitting us to destroy ourselves with overwork during the other six days? If this were the case, why would the Sabbath be needed in a pre-Fall Eden where fatigue was, presumably, not a meaningful factor? Why did sinless humanity need the Sabbath?

Several reasons can be cited.

First, Adam and Eve had jobs to do in the garden; yet, God commanded them not to do those jobs on Sabbath. This prohibition suggests that God made humanity for more than the production of goods and services. Intimate fellowship with God was a higher priority than purely efficient production. God’s love for us is based not on what we produce for Him. Instead, His love extends an invitation to a special personal friendship with Him. Additionally, it seems that even Adam and Eve could get so absorbed in the tasks related to serving and protecting the garden that they could lose track of whom they were under—God.

So, even prior to the Fall, the Sabbath provided a time to recalibrate one’s relational orientation to God, reminding one that he or she is a finite creature under the claims of a sovereign but gracious God. Whether pre-Fall or post-Fall, this recalibration is a vital function of the Sabbath.

Second, Adam and Eve had to accept the Sabbath on God’s terms and timing, thus acknowledging His right to make claims in this area. For Adam and Eve, Sabbath was their first full day of existence. They had no way of knowing how much time had transpired prior to their coming to consciousness. Common sense might have suggested to them that the mature ecosystem upon which they gazed could never have appeared mere days earlier. The only way they could have known what really happened is that God must have revealed the nature of the prior Creation days to them. By faith, they had to accept that the Sabbath was indeed the seventh day of earth’s history and then submit to a weekly cycle ordained by God. Thus, Sabbath keeping is an act of faith, surrendering
to God’s timetable and acknowledging His right to structure our time and our worship. Sabbath thus helps to reinforce and reverse Eve’s problem of forgetting who she was and trying to become co-creator. It shows us that God made us for more than utilitarian benefits for Himself. The Sabbath was created in order to foster intimate fellowship between God and humanity.

**Consider This:** Beyond the difference of day, how does our keeping of Sabbath differ from the ways that others observe Sunday? How do those differences benefit spiritual life?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Those we hire and employ have a right to the Sabbath rest, and God has a right to their Sabbath observance. But we have the power to deprive people of their right to the Sabbath rest and to deprive God of His rights, as well.

**Thought Questions:**

1. Do you view people as utilitarian tools made to produce products and services for yourself, or do you see them as having been created for something more? How will this perspective affect the ways in which you treat others?

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2. Whom do you have the power to exploit and lord over? How would both Creation principles and the Sabbath inform how you exercise your power?

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3. How is Isaiah 58:1–12 related to verses 13 and 14 of the same chapter?  

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STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The two versions of the fourth commandment show that Sabbath celebrates both creative and redemptive power.

Questions:

1. How are creative and redemptive power related?

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2. If God had created through evolutionary processes, how would that have affected our understanding of the connection between creative and redemptive power? How might our understanding of new birth and spiritual renewal change?

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3. How do the principles of Christian growth and character development differ from the processes of evolution? Why is Christian growth not merely a form of evolution?

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Creation and the Gospel

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Gen. 3:21; Ps. 104:29, 30; John 1:4; Rom. 5:6–11; Gal. 3:13; Matt. 27:46.

Memory Text: “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22, NIV).

In the biblical account, Adam and Eve were created in God’s image without any moral defect. But they did have free will, a prerequisite for them to be able to love. When Adam and Eve rebelled against God, they fell under Satan’s power (see Heb. 2:14), an act that brought the whole world under the enemy’s power, as well. Jesus, though, came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8) and free us from his power. He did this by dying in our place and offering us life. On the cross, Jesus became sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21) and experienced the separation from His Father that sin causes. By His death, Jesus restored the relationship between God and humanity that had been broken by the sin of Adam and Eve.

All these points are logically linked to the Creation story. Creation comes into the picture again as the power of the Creator God is exercised to create a new heart in His children (2 Cor. 5:17), renewing the image of God within us and restoring our relationship with Him.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 23.
Grace in the Garden

As we all know so well, the first humans, perfect beings created in the “image of God,” fell into sin, which brought death. They had been warned, and they understood what they had been told. Eve even repeated to the serpent what God had said. Yet, they sinned anyway. At times we, like Eve, are led into sin by deceit; while at other times, like Adam, we sin intentionally. Either way, we are sinners, guilty of transgressing God’s law.

Read Genesis 3:9–15. What was God’s response to the sin of Adam and Eve?

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God held a trial, an “investigative judgment” even. The purpose of the trial was not so that God could learn the facts. He already knew them. The purpose was, instead, to give the couple an opportunity to accept responsibility for their actions, the first step toward repentance and restoration. God asked them what had happened, and they confessed, although reluctantly. Though they were guilty and though their sin brought immediate consequences—the first gospel promise was given (see lesson 6) to them in Eden.

Read Genesis 3:21. What further act of grace was revealed?

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Death came in a most unexpected way. Instead of the immediate death of Adam and Eve, one or more animals died. Imagine Adam’s feelings as the animal died, perhaps in his place as a sacrifice. It was the first time that Adam had seen death, and it must have brought him enormous mental pain. Then the animal was skinned, and a tunic was fashioned from the skin. The skin was placed over Adam’s body to cover his nakedness. Every time he looked at it or felt it, he was surely reminded of what he had done and what he had lost. More important, it was a reminder of God’s grace.

No doubt we all should be very appreciative (to say the least) of God’s grace to us. What better way to reveal that appreciation than to show grace to others. To whom could you show some grace right now, however undeserving he or she may be?
Sin and Death

In Genesis 3:19, Adam was told that at death he would return to the dust from which he was made. The same thing happens to us. Notice—we do not return to being apes, because we were not made from apes. We were made from dust, and it’s to dust, at death, that we return.

Read Genesis 2:7; Psalm 104:29, 30; John 1:4; Acts 17:24, 25. What is the ultimate significance of these texts for us? How should this truth influence the way in which we live?

Life is a marvelous phenomenon. We are all familiar with life, but there is still something mysterious about it. We can take apart a living organism, but in the end we find nothing there except various kinds of atoms and molecules. We can collect the molecules in a container and heat it or pass an electric spark through it or try any number of other experiments, but we do not get life again. There is no entity called “life” that exists within a living body or a living cell. Life is a property of the entire living system, not an entity that can be separated from the cells.

On the other hand, we know much about how to produce death. We have devised many ways of killing living things. Some of these methods reveal in astonishing detail the violence and cruelty of our sinful hearts. Death we can produce, but the creation of life is beyond our grasp. God alone has the ability to create living organisms. Scientists have tried to create life, thinking that if they could do so they would have an excuse for why they do not believe in God. So far, all such efforts have failed.

Read Isaiah 59:2. How does sin affect our relationship to the Life-Giver?

If life comes only from God, then separation from God cuts us off from the Source of life. The inevitable result of separation from God is death. Even if one lives 969 years, as did Methuselah, the story still ends with “and he died.” Sin, by its very nature, causes separation from life, and the result is death.
While We Were Yet Sinners . . .

All throughout the Bible we find that God’s response to human sinfulness is redemptive in nature and motivated by genuine, unselfish love. He would have been fully justified in giving Adam and Eve up to Satan’s destructive power; after all, they had made their choice. But God knew that Adam and Eve did not understand the full meaning of what they had done, and He determined to give them an opportunity to become better informed and to be able to choose again.

Read Romans 5:6–11. How do these verses help us to understand what God’s grace is all about?

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When we are wronged, we like to have an apology before we accept the offender back into a good relationship with us. Of course, an apology is appropriate in such circumstances. Complete healing of a damaged relationship includes an expression of sorrow and acceptance of responsibility for the misdeed. But God did not wait for us to ask for forgiveness; He took the initiative. While we were yet sinners, He gave Himself to die on our behalf. This is a wonderful demonstration of divine love.

How does our behavior compare with God’s behavior? How often are we offended and angry and seek revenge rather than restoration? We should be eternally thankful that God does not treat us in that way.

God’s treatment of sinners shows the true meaning of love. It is not a mere feeling but a principled behavior in which every effort is made to reconcile the offender to the offended and restore the relationship. God’s treatment of Adam and Eve is an illustration of how He relates to our sin.

“The scenes of Calvary call for the deepest emotion. Upon this subject you will be excusable if you manifest enthusiasm. That Christ, so excellent, so innocent, should suffer such a painful death, bearing the weight of the sins of the world, our thoughts and imaginations can never fully comprehend. The length, the breadth, the height, the depth, of such amazing love we cannot fathom.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 2, p. 213. Maybe we can’t fathom this love, but why is it so important that we try?
The Sin-bearing Substitute

“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’)” (Gal. 3:13, NKJV). Dwell on the amazing implications of this text, keeping in mind the deity of Christ as you do. What does this tell us about what God was willing to do in order to save us? More so, what does this tell us about how tragic it is for anyone not to accept the provision that Christ made in our behalf?

In taking the guilt of our sins upon Himself and dying in separation from God, Jesus fulfilled the promise originally made in the Garden of Eden that the Seed of the woman would bruise the serpent’s head. His sacrifice made possible the reconciliation of God and the human family and will eventually result in the final elimination of evil from the universe (Heb. 2:14, Rev. 20:14).

Keeping Galatians 3:13 in mind, read Matthew 27:46. What do Jesus’ words reveal about what He went through on the cross?

On the cross, Christ accepted the curse of sin in our behalf. This was a change in His standing with the Father. The sacrificial lamb, when brought to the altar, became a substitute for the death of the sinner. Likewise, when Christ went to the cross, His status before the Father changed. Shut out from the Father’s presence, He felt the curse that our sin had caused. In other words, Jesus, who had been One with the Father from eternity, experienced a separation from the Father, in what Ellen G. White called “the sundering of the divine powers” (Ellen G. White, Manuscript 93, 1899). However hard it is to fully comprehend exactly what was happening, we can know enough to realize that an amazing price was paid in order to redeem us.
A New Creation

The great news of the gospel centers around the death of Jesus as our substitute. He took our sins upon Himself, bearing in Himself the penalty that would, otherwise, justly be ours. As we have seen, too, the whole idea of Christ as our Substitute, dying for the sins of the world, is inextricably linked to the Creation story. Death is an alien intruder in God’s creation, and Christ came to destroy it. If evolutionary theory were the chosen way that God used to create humans, it would mean, then, that death, far from being an aberration and an enemy, would instead be part of God’s original plan for humanity. Indeed, death would play an important role in the way in which God created us. It’s no wonder then that Christians must reject theistic evolution as a viable way of understanding the Creation story.

The Genesis Creation account, however crucial in helping us to understand Christ’s death in our behalf, also helps us to understand another aspect of the plan of salvation, that of God’s work of creation in us, as we partake of His holiness now.

Read Psalm 51:10; Ezekiel 36:26, 27; Colossians 3:10; and 2 Corinthians 5:17. What promises are given to us here that are linked with the concept of God as Creator, as revealed in Genesis 1 and 2?

A new heart is a creation that only God can make. We cannot make it ourselves but must depend on the same Creator who formed the world and created our first parents. David recognized his need and asked God to solve the problem by an act of creation.

Indeed, the person who is “in Christ” is a new creation. The old way of thinking must be taken away and replaced with a newly created mind. Our new mind is created for good works, in accordance with God’s will. This kind of creation is a supernatural process, accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit. The original Creation gives us confidence that God’s creative power is able to change our lives and to bring us back into relationship with Him.

How have you experienced what it means to be a new creation in Christ? What does this mean in a daily, practical sense? What is it that changes in the life of someone who has had this experience?
**Further Study:** “‘The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever.’ [Deuteronomy 29:29.] Just how God accomplished the work of creation he has never revealed to men; human science cannot search out the secrets of the Most High. His creative power is as incomprehensible as his existence.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 113.

“In that thick darkness God’s presence was hidden. He makes darkness His pavilion, and conceals His glory from human eyes. God and His holy angels were beside the cross. The Father was with His Son. Yet His presence was not revealed. Had His glory flashed forth from the cloud, every human beholder would have been destroyed. And in that dreadful hour Christ was not to be comforted with the Father’s presence. He trod the wine press alone, and of the people there was none with Him.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 753, 754.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. How is the gospel related to the story of Creation? What specific aspects of Genesis 1–3 are foundational to the gospel? How is the story of Jesus based on the historical veracity of Genesis? How would one tell the story of Jesus if there were no Adam and Eve?

2. The Bible maintains that the Creation was accomplished by supernatural processes that are not accessible to science but that can be learned only by special revelation. Tension between the Bible and science is, therefore, not a surprise. Why is it a mistake, then, to expect science to be able to explain all of God’s creative works?

3. As indicated in Revelation 14:6, 7, what links exist between the gospel, Creation, and judgment?

4. Critics of Christianity will often argue that Jesus knew beforehand that, though He would die, He would be resurrected to life. Thus, they ask, what was the big deal about His death when He knew it would be only temporary? How does Matthew 27:4, supplemented by *The Desire of Ages* statement in Friday’s Further Study, help to answer that objection?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Genesis 3:7–21

The Student Will:

Know: Understand the plan of salvation as outlined in Genesis and perceive how evolution undermines that plan.
Feel: Give gratitude to God for finding a way to forgive others that does not subvert justice.
Do: Seek to practice God’s balance of accountability and grace in his or her dealings with those who commit offenses against him or her.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Creation and the Plan of Salvation
   A How does what you believe about Creation or evolution impact the doctrine of salvation?
   B How would evolution affect our need for salvation?
   C How does God’s handling of Adam and Eve’s sin in the Garden reveal His character?
   D Why did God institute a blood sacrifice for sin? Is God bloodthirsty? Why, or why not?

II. Feel: Gratitude for the Gift of Grace
   A What does the relationship between justice and forgiveness mean to you as one who is called to forgive those who wound or offend you?
   B How does knowing what God has done to save you deepen your sense of gratitude to Him for the gift of salvation?
   C In what ways can you express your gratitude to God for His saving grace?

III. Do: Practicing a Balanced Approach
   A How can you balance accountability with grace (as God does) when you deal with those who sin against you?

Summary: Through blood atonement, God voluntarily absorbs the cost of justice for the sinner so that the sinner can renounce rebellion and transform into a loyal, heavenly citizen.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Creation is critically important to the plan of salvation. Evolution undermines the foundations of the plan of salvation in several ways.

**Just for Teachers:** As noted before, Creation is intimately tied to the rest of biblical theology. Help your class to keep this connection in mind as we focus on the plan of salvation in Eden.

Creation is crucial to our doctrine of salvation. Because God created with designs and purposes, there are ideals that can be violated. Free moral agents are capable of choosing to reject God’s ideals and revolt against His sovereign will. Hence, there is a basic concept of sin embedded in the created order. Sin has to do with the rebellious choice to reject God’s designs.

By contrast, it would seem that if God “created” the world through the unguided, purposeless processes of evolution, there would be no objective ideals that the exercise of free will could violate. And if there were no divinely given ideals to be violated, how could there be any concept of sin? Good and evil could be framed only in terms relative to the individual. Good and evil would have to be determined primarily by perceived self-interest. As such, in an evolutionary scenario there can be no true sense of sin. If we cannot have a meaningful concept of sin, then we have no need of a Savior. There would be no need for a self-emptying, self-sacrificial God, for there would have been no loss of ideals requiring a saving restoration. Creation, then, is vitally important to our understanding of salvation.

**Discuss:** Ask class members to share, in their own words, why an understanding of Creation is so essential to the doctrine of salvation.

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** The judgment story in Genesis 3 reveals both a God who holds humanity accountable and a God who desires to graciously save.
Bible Commentary

I. Our Gracious Redeemer (Read Genesis 3:7–21 with the class.)

In Genesis 3, we find the Fall of humanity and the first promise of the gospel. Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and noticed that they had become naked. They sewed fig leaves into aprons to cover themselves. Then they heard the sound of God walking in the Garden. The word for “sound” can mean a voice, as in calling out and talking, or it can mean sounds in general. One way or another, God was making some kind of noise with His approach toward Adam and Eve. Why did God not just suddenly appear to, or by, the couple?

The fact that God conducts an “investigative” judgment in the ensuing verses informs us that He had indeed come to hold Adam and Eve accountable for eating the forbidden fruit. The noisy approach of God, however, indicates that God was approaching with more than goals of accountability and punishment. If punishment was all that God cared about, all He had to do was suddenly appear before the couple and they would have collapsed and died of fright. But God was conducting a judgment in order to help humanity to see their need of a Savior. God prefers transforming sinners instead of merely killing them.

So, God came gently, asking questions, reviewing the evidence that showed He had not lied to Adam and Eve. He did this prior to imposing judgments, attempting to rekindle their trust in Himself and His Word. And it worked! Furthermore, God made robes of skins to replace their fig-leaf aprons. But how did God get animal skins?

Animal skins come from dead animals. Why, then, do we suddenly have dead animals in the story? The story seems to imply that the first sacrifices for sin had been offered. The fact that Abel knew to offer a sacrifice would bolster this conclusion. Thus, that very day a substitute died, paying the penalty for Adam and Eve, so that they might regain intimate fellowship with God and live a new life of transformed obedience.

Does this mean that God is bloodthirsty, demanding cruel rituals in order to appease His anger? The gentle and gracious approach of God rebuts such thinking. Furthermore, Genesis 3:15 promises that God would defeat the deceiver and redeem humanity. Thus, the sacrifice points to a greater truth. Forgiveness is not achieved at the expense of justice. Rather, forgiveness becomes possible because God chooses to absorb the cost of justice in Himself. The penalty must be paid, or God’s law would become meaningless. The skins, then, point not
to a bloodthirsty God but to a gracious God who voluntarily chooses to absorb the cost of justice in order to make it possible for us to renounce our rebellion and realign ourselves with His sovereign will without having to be executed. In short, God’s gentle approach, His promise to crush the serpent’s head, and His provision of a sacrifice all point to His desire to restore us to right relationship with Him. The purpose of the judgment in Genesis 3 was redemptive, opening the heart of Adam and Eve to the plan of salvation.

Consider This: Forgiveness involves the victim’s volunteering to absorb the cost of justice in order to offer the perpetrator a means of entering a new, healthy relationship. What does it mean for you to forgive someone who has wronged you?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: In the Creation and in the Fall, God is revealed as gracious, desiring the best good of His creatures. As beings made in God’s image, each of us is called to reflect His character to others.

Thought Questions:
1. How does God’s approach to sinners in Genesis 3:7–15 inform us about how we are to approach sinners when following Matthew 18:15–20?

2. Compare and contrast God’s purposes for confronting Adam and Eve with the purpose of the procedure given in Matthew 18:15–20?

3. When you need to confront someone about a problem, how can your attitudes and approach best model God’s character in Genesis 3:8–15?
What would have happened to God’s ability to rule if He had merely dropped the charges instead of actually conducting a judgment trial? How does amnesty differ from forgiveness? (Hint: it has to do with if and how justice is satisfied.)

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The Genesis 3 gospel shows a wonderful balance of God being just (holding humanity accountable for wrong) and gracious (paying the penalty for Adam’s and Eve’s transgression against Him).

Application Questions:

1. How can you balance justice and grace, as God does, in your dealings with others?

2. How can you avoid creating an aura of cheap grace that leaves the sinner thinking that he or she can sin with impunity?

3. How can you avoid being so strictly just that you seem devoid of grace?
Lesson 13  *March 23–29

(page 104 of Standard Edition)

Creation, Again

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study:  Rev. 21:1–5, Gen 3:19, 1 Cor. 15:52–58, Gen. 6:11–13, Isa. 11:6–9, John 14:1–3.

Memory Text: “But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13, NIV).

In 2 Peter 3:10–13, Peter describes the fate of heaven and earth. Both, along with all that they contain, will be destroyed. But that’s not the end of the story, not by a long shot, because a new heaven and a new earth will be created in their stead.

Look at the contrast between the two existences. Sin has dominion in the old one; righteousness dwells in the new. Death rules in the old one; life in the new. The contrast couldn’t be more striking or absolute.

As we can see in these promises, too, God’s role as Creator didn’t end with the first Creation of the earth. It doesn’t end with the work that He does in us, to make us new creatures in Christ, either. No, it continues. The same Lord who, through the supernatural power of His Word created the world once, will create it again, and with His supernatural power too.

Indeed, without this last act of creation, all the previous ones would come to nothing. The new heavens and the new earth are the culmination of God’s promises to us.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 30.
A New Beginning

One thing that science and the Bible do have in common is the belief that this earth, as we know it now, is not going to last forever. For science (at least some versions of it), the same cold and mindless forces of chance that brought the earth and life on it into existence are the same cold and mindless forces of chance that are going to, eventually, destroy it. The Bible, too, teaches that this earth isn’t going to last forever but will, indeed, be destroyed. In the scenario that science offers, however, that destruction is the end of everything forever; in contrast, in the biblical scenario, it’s the start of something brand new and wonderful and that lasts forever, as well.

Read Revelation 21:1–5. What picture of the future is presented here? What wonderful promises await us? Why is this something that only God can do for us?

No question, one of the best promises of our new existence is that death and suffering will be gone forever. It is clear that God does not regard these experiences as positive. They were not in the Creation that God pronounced “very good” (Gen. 1:31). They are alien intruders; they were never meant to be part of the original Creation, and they won’t be part of the new one either. Jesus came to destroy these things, and we will never have to experience them again.

The new creation brings a new beginning. This wretched experiment with sin will be over. The results are in, and they are clear: sin brings death and suffering, and God’s law is the law of life.

As God created the heavens and the earth in the beginning, He will create a new heaven and a new earth, and with them we are all offered a new beginning. Only God, only the Creator, could do this for us. And it all comes to us through the work of Jesus in our behalf. Without the plan of salvation, we’d have no hope for anything beyond that which this life now offers, a pretty dismal thought.

Why are these promises of a new existence so crucial to us? What would our faith be without them?
From Dust to Life

Read Genesis 2:7 and 3:19. From what was Adam made, and what was the result of his sin?

God created Adam from the dust, and he became a living being. As long as he maintained his relationship with God, his life would continue. When Adam sinned, he became separated from the Source of life. As a result, he died and returned to dust.

Read Isaiah 26:19 and Daniel 12:2. What will happen to those who sleep in the dust?

The promise of the resurrection provides hope for the Christian. Job expressed this hope, saying, “And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God” (Job 19:26, NKJV). For the faithful, death is only temporary. The God who formed Adam from the dust and breathed life into him has not forgotten how to create humans from dust. The resurrection will be an act of creation just as much as was the original creation of Adam.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:52–58. What is taught here that is so inextricably linked to the Genesis Creation account?

The resurrection of the righteous at the second coming of Jesus is going to happen instantaneously. As with the first creation of humankind, it will be a supernatural event in which God does everything. All this is in blatant contradiction to theistic evolution. After all, if God isn’t going to use millions of years of evolution to re-create us, but does so in an instant, then He certainly could have created us without evolution in the first round. Thus, as with everything else in the Bible, the hope of the resurrection is more biblical evidence that refutes theistic evolution.

What should it tell us about the limits of science that, regarding something as crucial and fundamental as the resurrection, science offers us little light?
**Tuesday March 26**

*(page 107 of Standard Edition)*

**Restoration of Human Dominion**

*Compare* Genesis 1:28 with John 12:31. What was the status of Adam and Eve in the newly created world? Who seized power and became the ruler of this world?

Adam was given the responsibility to be ruler of the world. When he sinned, Adam’s dominion was compromised. Satan now exercised his power in the creation, causing the corruption and violence that we see everywhere.

After the Cross, however, Jesus won back the earth from Satan’s dominion *(see Matt. 28:18, Rev. 12:10, John 12:31)*. And even though Satan is still allowed to operate on the earth and do damage, we can rejoice in the knowledge that Satan’s days are numbered: Christ’s victory on the cross guarantees that.

*Read* 2 Timothy 2:11, 12 and Revelation 5:10. What truths can we glean from these texts? *See also 1 Cor. 6:2, 3.*

Those who are saved will be given authority as kings and priests. The idea of kingship implies some kind of authority; the idea of priests carries with it the implication of acting in communication between God and other creatures, perhaps even with those from other created worlds, those who have never known the experience of sin and the woe that it brings.

“All the treasures of the universe will be open to the study of God’s redeemed. Unfettered by mortality, they wing their tireless flight to worlds afar—worlds that thrilled with sorrow at the spectacle of human woe and rang with songs of gladness at the tidings of a ransomed soul. With unutterable delight the children of earth enter into the joy and the wisdom of unfallen beings.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 677. What do you think it means to “enter into the joy and the wisdom of unfallen beings”? What could we learn from unfallen beings? And they from us?
More Restoration

In the world that we know, predation is a common way of life among the animals. The term “food chain” is a familiar reminder of the importance of predation in our ecology, and we have difficulty imagining a world without it. But in the beginning, all land creatures ate green plants (Gen. 1:30). No animals fed on other animals. Genesis 1:30 does not mention the food of the sea creatures, but the same principles would likely apply so that God could review the entire Creation and declare it “very good.”

Read Genesis 6:11–13, 9:2–4. By the time of the Flood, what changes had occurred in nature? What further deterioration occurred in the relationship between humankind and beast after the Flood?

What had started as a peaceful kingdom had become filled with corruption, violence, and evil. These are the results of sin. The world that once was “very good” had become so bad that it called for its own destruction.

After the Flood, the animals became afraid of humans. This included the creatures of land, air, and sea. This is obviously in contrast to the previous situation. It appears that the dominion of humans over the animals was reduced at this time.

Read Isaiah 65:25, 11:6–9. How are the relationships among the creatures in our present world different from those promised by God in the future?

Through the beauty of this poetic language, Isaiah shows us that there will be no violence in the new world. Corruption and violence, those characteristics of the pre-Flood world that called for their destruction, will both be absent from the new one. It will be a world of harmony and cooperation, a peaceable kingdom. We are so used to violence, predation, and death that it’s hard for us to imagine anything else.

As we can see, the gospel is so much about restoration. Though, of course, God alone can do the final restoration, what choices can we make that can help to bring about some needed restoration now?
The Restoration of Relationship With God

“Before the entrance of sin, Adam enjoyed open communion with his Maker.”—Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, p. 7. After the Fall, however, that close relationship was radically altered in many ways.

Read Genesis 3:24, Exodus 33:20, and Deuteronomy 5:24–26. What did sin do to the close relationship that existed between humanity and God?

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Sin had broken the relationship between God and humanity. God sent the couple away from His presence for their own protection. Humans could no longer see God’s face and live.

The Lord, though, of His own initiative, brought in the plan of salvation, through which the broken relationship could be healed, even at a terrible cost to Himself.

Read John 14:1–3 and Revelation 22:3–5. What promise did Jesus extend to His disciples just before He went to the cross, and what will be the result?

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God and humanity are to be reunited, at peace, and meeting face to face. The earth will be without any curse, and all that has been lost will be restored. The redeemed will be given a new environment, a new life, a new dominion, a new peace with the rest of the creation, and a new relationship with God. The original purpose behind the creation of humans will now be fulfilled. God, the human race, and the creation will be in harmony, and that harmony will last forever.

Even now, before the re-creation of heaven and earth, how can we learn to enjoy a close communion with God? What choices do we make that affect our relationship with God, either in positive or negative ways?
Further Study: “And the years of eternity, as they roll, will bring richer and still more glorious revelations of God and of Christ. As knowledge is progressive, so will love, reverence, and happiness increase. The more men learn of God, the greater will be their admiration of His character. As Jesus opens before them the riches of redemption and the amazing achievements in the great controversy with Satan, the hearts of the ransomed thrill with more fervent devotion, and with more rapturous joy they sweep the harps of gold; and ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of voices unite to swell the mighty chorus of praise. . . .

“The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.”—Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, p. 678.

Discussion Questions:

1 Gather as many texts as you can (especially from the book of Revelation) that talk about what the restored earth will be like. Discuss in class what these texts are saying. What aspects of the restored earth do you find the most appealing? What aspects are hardest to understand?

2 How is the doctrine of Creation as revealed in Genesis 1 and 2 related to the doctrine of the re-creation of the heavens and the earth? How are we supposed to understand this re-creation if theistic evolution were true?

3 Read Romans 8:18 and 2 Corinthians 4:16, 17. What is Paul saying here, and how can we draw comfort from these words for ourselves?

4 Dwell more on this whole concept of the gospel as “restoration.” What does the word imply? What is restored? How is it restored? And what role do we have, if any, in the whole process?

5 What does the promise of a new heaven and a new earth reveal to us about the character of God?
The Lesson in Brief

➤ **Key Text:** Revelation 20:1–5

➤ **The Student Will:**

  **Know:** Discover why the new earth is important to biblical theology and his or her experience.

  **Feel:** Appreciate the key role that Creation plays in closing the great controversy.

  **Do:** Choose to trust God that the new heaven and new earth are desirable, even though he or she cannot really understand what they will be like.

➤ **Learning Outline:**

  I. **Know: Creation and the Great Controversy**

  A. What role does Creation play in the closing of the great controversy?

  B. In light of the millennium, what is the theological and spiritual significance of a new creation?

  II. **Feel: Anticipating Paradise**

  A. How can I foster desire for the new creation when I cannot understand what it really will be like?

  B. What joys do you especially look forward to experiencing in the new heaven and the new earth?

  III. **Do: Heaven on Earth**

  A. What things will we be able to do in the earth made new that are impossible to do here now?

  B. It has been said that if we want to live in heaven, Heaven must first live in us. How can we let Heaven live in us now?

➤ **Summary:** For the redeemed, the new creation takes what they have had to accept by faith—that God indeed is best qualified to rule—and makes it sight. The best part of the new creation is not the reduction of our limitations but the unrestricted communion with God.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The new heaven and new earth are the culmination of a grand, redemptive process launched in Eden.

Just for Teachers: This week, try to push beyond run-of-the-mill imaginings of what heaven will be like and why we should desire to be there. Lead the class to deeper conceptions of heaven, such as the meaning of having unfettered, unbroken communion with God.

Many of us can still remember being in Kindergarten Sabbath School and dreaming of things to do in heaven, such as climbing a giraffe’s neck, hugging a lion’s mane, and so forth. As adults, our desires have matured and become more sophisticated. Perhaps we wanted to dive with whales, get the answer to quantum mechanics, and more. Certainly, there is much to look forward to about heaven; and, yet, it must be acknowledged that we cannot fully conceive why we should desire it. Heaven is well beyond our frame of reference. Thus, John was forced to tell us about the new heaven and new earth by telling us what it doesn’t have. There is no death, no sorrow, no crying, no pain.

Aside from imagining vague visions of what heaven may be like, we can find meaning in the promise of a new heaven and new earth. John affirms that, in the new cosmos, we will have unbroken communion with God. No more barriers between us! In light of the great controversy, however, there is a grand spiritual purpose for God first to destroy, then re-create, this earth. The next step of the learning cycle will explore that very point.

Opening Activity for Discussion: What is it like to anticipate a surprise when you know that you do not fully understand what it is? What role does fear of not liking the unknown elements play in your anticipation? How confident are you that the ones giving the surprise will have done a good job preparing it? How does this analogy help you to anticipate and prepare for the surprise of a new heaven and a new earth?
STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: The new heaven and new earth are more than a warm, pleasant promise. They will affirm that God deserves to be God, especially to the saved.

Bible Commentary

I. The End of All Evil *(Read Revelation 21:1–5 with the class.)*

In Revelation 21:1–5 John saw a new heaven and new earth. Why is this significant?

The new heaven and earth come in the context of finishing the 1,000 years of Revelation 20. John notes that during the 1,000 years, Satan, “the ancient serpent” *(NIV)*, is cast into the bottomless pit *(vss. 1–3)*. Two elements in the text connect back to Genesis 1 and 3. The ancient serpent is a clear reference to the snake in Genesis 3, while the bottomless pit ties us to Genesis 1. But how?

In Greek, the word for bottomless pit is *abussos*, from which we get our English word, *abyss*. When Jewish scholars translated the Hebrew text into Greek, what we now call the Septuagint (LXX), they used *abussos* to translate the “deep” of Genesis 1:2. With New Testament writers frequently quoting from the LXX, it is reasonably certain that *abussos* alludes to Genesis 1:2. In so doing, John is depicting the millennial earth as being in a state of formless void similar to the state of the earth in Genesis 1:2. This matches the depictions of the destruction of the cosmos in Revelation 6:14 at the Second Coming. Revelation 6 shows Genesis 1 in reverse!

The millennium serves, in part, as a time-out for Satan to ponder the fruit of his actions *(see Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 630)*. The great controversy is a conflict over leadership. Satan has sought to sell the idea that he is more qualified to govern the universe than God. But there is a problem. God’s right to rule is grounded in His creation of the cosmos *(Rev. 4:11)*. Satan, however, is a created being, and by virtue of being created, God has a right to rule over him. However, Satan is confronted with his creaturely limits but refuses to surrender and acknowledge them.

For those ransomed from the earth, the new heaven and new earth will be God’s visual verification of His qualification and right to rule the universe. In service to this divine claim, many of these believers had to trust by faith that God was worthy of sole allegiance, even to the point of martyrdom. What they had taken as a matter of faith will now be made visual.
God deserves to be God, and with the presence of sin eliminated, unbroken communion can resume between this deserving God and the humanity He created.

**Consider This:** What is the significance of John’s vision of a new heaven and a new earth? What eternal realities do they direct the mind to consider?

- *How does Revelation 6 show Genesis 1 in reverse?*
- *What will Satan be confronted with during the millennium, and why is this limitation significant in the context of the great-controversy theme?*
- *Unbroken communion with God—it is hard for our finite, sin-damaged minds to imagine such a concept. But as much as we are able to grasp it, what will such communion entail?*

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** The new heaven and new earth direct us to the realities of eternal destiny. These realities should impact our priorities and decisions.

**Thought Questions:**

1. How does the promise of a real new earth impact your current priorities and choices?

2. How should this promise affect your priorities and decisions?
STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Read or tell the following parable in your own words, reinforcing the idea that we are called to desire something that we cannot fully understand.

A Parable: Akiak of the Inupiat people had lived his whole life well above the Arctic Circle. All he knew was tundra, ice, and snow. Akiak had no electricity, no phones, no Internet, and no contact with the outside world. One day, Mike from Jamaica visited Akiak in his village. “Akiak,” Mike said, “I have good news for you! I can take you to Jamaica where life is so much better!”

“Tell me about Jamaica,” Akiak said. “Why is life so much better there?”

“Well,” Mike said, “we have palm trees, and it is always warm so you can enjoy our beaches.”

Akiak pondered Mike’s statement for a moment then asked, “What are palm trees? And what is a beach?”

Mike replied, “Palm is a special type of tree with big leaves that shade you from the hot sun.”

Akiak interrupted, “Why would I want shade from the sun?” Mike was stumped. How could he get his friend to understand the delights of Jamaica?

Upon some reflection, Mike said, “Jamaica is not like the Arctic. Jamaica is so warm that there is no snow, no blizzards, and no ice. You do not need to wear heavy clothing. There are no polar bears to attack you, and there are no killer whales or seals in the ocean.” In short, Mike started to explain what Jamaica was like by describing how it was not like the Arctic.

“If you have no seals and whales, what do you eat?” Akiak asked.

“We eat coconuts and tropical fruits,” Mike replied.

“What are coconuts and fruits?” Akiak asked. Mike was desperate. How could he convince Akiak of Jamaica’s allure when he had no frame of reference for making a comparison to it?

Mike thought about heaven. It is said to have no sorrow, no pain, no death, no crying. We are told how it is not like life on our earth. But what is it really like? Imagine God’s challenge of trying to convince us to desire something that we cannot understand. How does this parable help us to understand our own limitations in imagining all that God has in store for us?