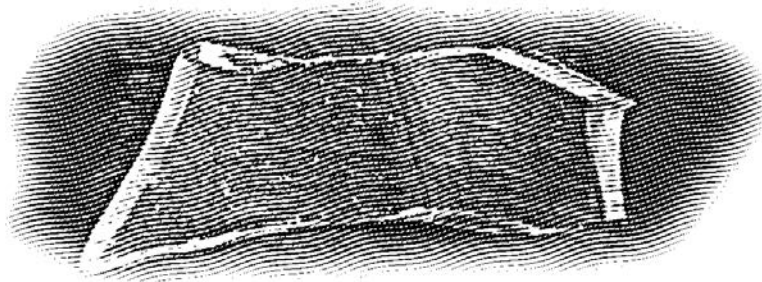


Through a Glass, Darkly (Dimly)



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 9

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20; Genesis 3:17; John 12:31; 1 Corinthians 1:18–21.

MEMORY VERSE: “The wisdom of this world is foolish in God’s eyes. It is written, ‘God catches wise people in their own tricks’ ” (1 Corinthians 3:19, NIV).

A SPECIALIST IN RELIGION, WILLIAM PALEY, WROTE A BOOK IN 1802 CALLED *NATURAL THEOLOGY*. In this book, he argued that one can study nature in order to develop an understanding of God’s character (who God is). He wrote a lot about how the features of animals (how animals look) showed the care and skill of the Creator. Paley may have made too much of some features. This is because he failed to recognize the results that both sin and the Fall have had on nature. But no one has ever been able to prove his argument wrong, even though many have tried!

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

Paley was obviously closer to truth than Darwin was. But this week’s lesson will examine what the Bible has to say about the question of what nature shows, and does not show, about God.

SUNDAY—FEBRUARY 10**THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S
(Psalm 24:1, 2)**

A scientist once challenged the need for God. The scientist argued that he could create people 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!"

Of course, this story is not true. But the point is clear: God is the only One who can create from nothing. God made all the things of the universe. These include our world, the things we own, and our bodies. He is the legal Owner of everything.

What is the basic message to us in Psalm 24:1, 2; Job 41:11; Psalm 50:10; Isaiah 43:1, 2; and 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20? More important, what does this message tell us about how we should look upon the world and upon God?

A favorite Christian hymn begins with the words "This is my Father's world." It truly is our Father's world. This is because He created it. There is no better claim to ownership than creatorship (being the Creator). God created. So, He owns the entire universe, the heavens and the earth, and all that is in them.

The world belongs to God. He also claims ownership of every living thing on the earth. No other person

has the power to create life. God is the only Creator. So, He is the final Owner of every living thing. We fully depend on God for our life. We cannot give God anything except our loyalty. Everything else on the earth is His already.

More so, we are God's by Creation and by Redemption.¹ Redemption is a wonderful gift from God. But human life has been greatly damaged through sin. And it will end in death. This robs life of all meaning and purpose. So, life as it now is for us is not all that great. Our only hope is the wonderful promise of Redemption. This is the only thing that can make things "right" again. So, we are Christ's by Creation and by Redemption.



The world belongs to God.

MONDAY—FEBRUARY 11**A FALLEN (SINFUL) WORLD
(Genesis 3:17)**

1. Redemption—God's work of saving us by paying the price on the cross for our sins.

One thing is certain. The world we now live in is different from the one that was created at the end of the Creation week. Certainly, there is powerful proof of beauty and design almost everywhere. But we are sin-damaged people living in, and trying to understand, a sin-damaged world. Even before the Flood, the world had been spoiled by sin. “In the days of Noah two curses were made upon the earth. They were the results of Adam’s sin and of the murder done by Cain.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Conflict and Courage*, page 32.

According to Genesis 3:17; Genesis 4:11, 12; and Genesis 5:29, how was the world “cursed”? And what were the results of those curses?

The curse on the ground because of Adam’s sin must have involved the plant kingdom. This is because its results were thorns and thistles (prickly plants). This suggests that all of the creation is spoiled by the curses coming from sin. The Ellen G. White quote above states clearly that the curse upon Cain was not limited to him but was upon the whole world.

Sadly, the curses due to sin did not end here. This is because the world faced a third curse, which greatly damaged it. That was the worldwide Flood. “Their smell [Noah’s sacrifice] was pleasant to the Lord. He said to himself, ‘I will never put a curse on the ground again because of man. I will not do it even though his heart is

always directed toward what is evil. His thoughts are evil from the time he is young. I will never destroy all living things again, as I have just done’ ” (Genesis 8:21, NIV).

The Flood broke up the system of watering that God had established at Creation. It robbed the soil from parts of the earth and dropped it in other parts. Even now, rain continues to soak through and remove the fertile soil from the ground. It also causes the soil to have fewer crops. God kindly promised not to curse the earth again. But the soil we have received is very different from the rich, fertile soil God originally created.

Read Romans 8:19–22. These are difficult verses to understand. But how are they connected with what we have studied today? More important, what hope can we get from them?



All creation is spoiled by the curse of sin.

TUESDAY—FEBRUARY 12**THE RULER OF THIS WORLD
(Job 1:7 and 1 Peter 5:8)**

The world belongs to God, both by Creation and by Redemption. But we must not forget, either, that Satan is real. He is responsible for the great controversy (war between Christ and Satan). He is real in that he tries to take control over all that he possibly can. After the Cross, Satan's defeat was made certain. But he is not going down quietly or gently. His anger and destructive power are still very strong. We must not forget that there are many things we do not understand. But the great battle comes down to only two forces: Christ and Satan. There is no middle ground. And, as we know, so much of this world falls under Satan's control. Is it any surprise that the world is so damaged?

Read John 12:31; John 14:30; John 16:11; Ephesians 2:2; and Ephesians 6:12. What important truth about Satan's real power is found in these verses?

In the book of Job, some of the veil that hides the great controversy (war) is pulled back. And we can see that Satan does have the ability to destroy much of the natural world. Whatever else the name "the prince of this world" means, we must remember that Satan still has a powerful and destructive influence on the earth. So, this truth gives us more reason to understand that the natural world has

been greatly damaged. And we need to be very careful about the lessons that we learn from it about God. After all, look at how badly Darwin misinterpreted (understood wrongly) the condition (state) of the world.

What damage has Satan done to your own life? Why are the Cross and the promises found in it your only hope?



Nature can give us wrong ideas about God because it is so damaged by sin.

WEDNESDAY—FEBRUARY 13**THE "WISDOM" OF THE WORLD
(1 Corinthians 1:18–22)**

As humans, we have gained a great amount of knowledge and information. This is especially true in the last two hundred years. But knowledge and information are not necessarily the same thing as "wisdom." We have also gained a much greater understanding of the natural world

than our ancestors ever did. But a “greater understanding” is not the same thing as wisdom either.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18–21 and 1 Corinthians 3:18–21. How are the powerful truths of these words shown in our time today? Remember that they were written almost two thousand years ago.

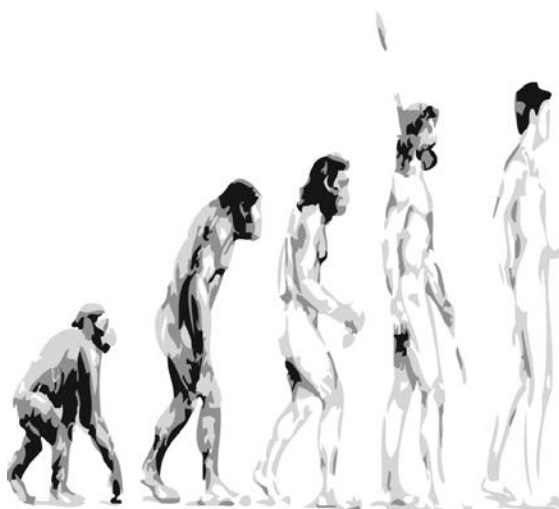
There is so much in human thought that challenges (denies) God’s Word. Is it the resurrection (return to life from the dead) of Jesus? Is it the Creation itself? Or is it any miracle? No matter what, human wisdom (even when covered up with the facts of science) is foolishness when it goes against the Word of the Lord.

So much science today begins from cause in nature. But we must remember that many of history’s greatest scientific geniuses—Newton, Kepler, Galileo—were believers in God and thought their work helped to explain the work of God in creation. (Kepler once wrote: “O God, I think Thy thoughts after Thee. . . .”) But their thoughts are often laughed at by modern scientists.

Some even try to explain away the miraculous stories in the Bible by arguing that they were really “accidents” of nature. Many scientists think that leaders during Bible times were ignorant of nature’s laws and misinterpreted them as God’s actions. For example, many scientists try to explain that the parting of the Red Sea was a cause of nature. A few years ago, one scientist decided that

Moses was on drugs. He thought that Moses dreamed up the idea that God gave him the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone!

How foolish some of this might sound to you! But once you refuse to accept the idea of God, you need to come up with some other “good” explanation for these things. These false explanations are really the “foolishness” that Paul so clearly wrote about.



No matter how true they seem, the facts of science are foolishness when they go against God’s Word.

THURSDAY—FEBRUARY 14

THROUGH THE EYE OF FAITH (Psalm 8)

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 rulership and love. What lessons did David see in the Creation, as written in Psalm 8? Suppose we

compare² what we know about the Creation today—the moon and the stars and so forth—with what was known back then. Why should this comparison make David’s words seem all the more wonderful?

Only in the last hundred years have we really begun to understand how great the universe is and how small we are. One cannot even imagine how someone like David, without God’s help, could have any idea of just how big the “heavens” were. If David admired the universe back then, how much more so should we? This is because we know more about the size of the universe. We should see that God loves us with a love that we cannot even begin to understand!

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

Many have looked up at the stars at night and recognized (understood) how great God is and how small we are. And they have praised God for His care. Others have paid attention to the problem of evil in nature and blamed God for the problems that they have. But, in fact, these problems are the result of human choices or of the devil’s work.

To the believer, the Creation truly speaks of God’s care, even among the evils introduced (brought in) by Satan. Yes, the created world has given us a powerful witness. But we cannot see the full glory (beauty and

power) of God’s work of Creation. This is because of the results of the Fall and of the curses that have fallen to the world.

Read John 14:9 and then think about Jesus on the cross. Why must the Cross always be the best example to us of God’s nature and character (who God is)?

FRIDAY—FEBRUARY 15

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “I have been warned [1890] that we shall have a continuing struggle. Science and religion will be opposed to each other. This is because limited men do not understand the power and greatness of God. These words of the Holy Bible were given to me, ‘Even men from your own people will rise up and twist the truth. They want to get the believers to follow them’ [Acts 20:30, NIV].”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry*, page 98.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① Think about the “threefold curse” (Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, volume 3, page 88) on this earth (the curse from Adam’s fall, from Cain’s sin, and from the Flood). The end results of these curses, after thousands of years, mean that our present world is much different from the way that it was when God first created it. Why, then, must we be careful about comparing what we learn from

2. compare—show how two or more things are the same or different.

the present world with what it was like in the beginning?

② Think about the work that science does, especially in the area of beginnings. There are no written labels that explain what we see. Science is entirely a human project. And the human mind is limited and likes to rebel against God's authority. Furthermore, Satan's influence is strongly felt in nature. So much of what we see does not agree with the Bible. Why is it so important that we place greater trust in the Bible than we do in science?

③ We do not understand all parts of the tension (fight) between the Bible and science. But God is far wiser than we are. And we must accept that there is more to Creation than science can ever discover. Why should we not be surprised to find some struggle between God's events

recorded in the Bible and science?

④ Look at the Ellen G. White statement in Friday's Additional Study. In what ways are we seeing this statement being fulfilled (occurring) in our own church? How can we deal with these dangerous challenges to (denials of) our mission and message? Why must we never give up our position on (belief about) Creation and the Word of God? At the same time, how do we still keep 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 good is human wisdom when trying to understand the ways of God? What should be our attitude (standing) toward the difficulties that we face when we are trying to find peace and unity (oneness) between science and the Bible?