

“In the Beginning . . .”



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 1.*

Memory Text: “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. . . . For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast” (*Psalms 33:6, 9*).

On the topic of human origins, a famous scientist wrote: “We’re here because one odd group of fishes had a peculiar fin anatomy that could transform into legs for terrestrial creatures.”

The Bible, of course—particularly the first two chapters of Genesis—gives a completely different account of our origins: We’re here only because a loving, benevolent Creator-God purposely created life on earth in a process that took six literal contiguous 24-hour days.

It is pretty obvious that modern evolutionary theory stands in blatant opposition to the biblical account of Creation. If one is correct, the other has to be wrong. Even more so, the Bible offers no wiggle room for theistic evolution or any theories that seek to integrate a long evolutionary process with the work of God in creating life on earth, especially human life. As we’ll study this week, in the creation of the world, particularly humans, it doesn’t appear that God left anything to chance.

Let’s take a look at what the Bible says about origins and see for ourselves that the reason we are here has nothing to do with some fish fin that could, by chance, turn into a leg, and everything to do with the God who spoke the world into existence.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 14.*

“In the Beginning, God . . .”

One could argue that, in many ways, the most important text in the Bible is Genesis 1:1. Out of it and all that it contains flows everything else that we as Christians believe. None of our basic teachings make sense apart from the idea expressed in that verse—an idea that becomes even more pertinent in our day and age, when so many people have been swept away by false science, which explains Creation as the result of natural forces that, by chance, evolved into life on this earth. The Bible, with its first verse, denies that idea completely.

Read the following texts. What’s the common message in all of them?

Exod. 20:11; Job 38:4; John 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:2; Rev. 14:6, 7.

Even more than the process of Creation itself, nature’s Creator remains the primary focus in the rest of Genesis 1. The word *God* punctuates the 31 verses of this chapter 32 times, a fact that emphasizes God’s role in Creation. The first chapter of Genesis seems to go out of its way to remove any notion of chance in Creation. Also, unlike other ancient polytheisms, which often linked Creation with the battles of ancient deities, Genesis depicts only one God as the sovereign Creator.

The verb translated “created” in verse 1 (*bara*) appears in the Bible only when it depicts an activity of God. The other common word used when human beings or even God makes or does things is *asah*. Only God, then, can do the kind of creating that was required to make the heavens and the earth. As humans, we can work within that Creation and do (*asah*) things with it, but only God could create (*bara*) it itself.

It’s a fundamental law that nothing created can be greater than its creator. (Try to think of an example.) Hence, when you view the entire creation, not just the earth (the main focus of Genesis 1), and realize that the God who created the universe is *greater* than the universe, what does that tell you about the power of God? What does it tell you about the sacrifice of this God, who became a human being who died in your stead the death that you deserved?

The Creation

When Genesis 1:1 says that God created heaven and earth, some believe that “heaven” here includes the entire universe. A study of the use of the word *heaven* in the rest of the chapter shows that’s not what’s meant.

See how the word *heaven* is used in the rest of the chapter (*see especially vs. 20*). **What, from the context, is the meaning of *heaven* in Genesis 1?**

What does verse 2 tell us about the condition of the earth at the beginning of Creation?

The phrase “without form, and void” depicts an environment without shape, form, and light, and void of plant and animal life; in short, a nonlife-supporting globe. God created by means of a commanding word (*vs. 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24; compare Ps. 33:6-9*) or by using the matter that He already had brought into existence some time before the creation of life on earth. Though the reading of these texts in Genesis doesn’t require a creation out of nothing, God wasn’t dependent upon preexisting matter in order to create the earth. Whatever matter He used to make the earth, He had already at some point in the past created out of nothing because, according to the Bible, God created everything.

Read John 1:3. **What point is that verse making, and how does it help us understand these opening verses of Genesis?**

In two short verses we are given the essence of our origins: A Creator-God made us from a formless and void earth. Much else remains a mystery that we’ll never understand now. It is, though, a miracle that we’re here at all. Meditate on our existence, on the miracle of Creation, and on all that we owe to God. Write out your thoughts and bring them to class on Sabbath.

The Creation Days

Probably no aspect of the Creation story comes under more attack than the time frame it depicts for the creation of life on earth, culminating in Adam and Eve. Almost throughout the Christian world, where the Bible is supposedly held in high esteem, few accept the Genesis time frame as it reads, with its clear and unambiguous depiction of six literal 24-hour days of Creation. Apparently, evolution—a teaching that at its core denies everything that the Bible stands for and teaches—has made deep inroads even in the Christian community. Jesus once said, in reference to His second coming, “When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (*Luke 18:8*). Unless there’s a radical change, He certainly won’t find much faith regarding the Bible’s account of Creation, that’s for sure.

Read through Genesis 1, focusing on the time element in which Creation is depicted. What evidence can you find directly within the chapter itself that shows that literal time was meant? Also, what other texts can you find in the Bible that show it was meant to be literal, not figurative, time? (*See, for example, Exod. 20:8-11.*)

Read carefully Genesis 1:4, 5. A simple reading of these two verses makes it clear that it is talking about a single day, as we understand a day—half light and half darkness, “day” and “night.” These two elements, the text says, made up “the first day.” These verses, then, are talking about the creation of the 24-hour period we use to mark off each single day. And this account ends with a formula that reads in Hebrew, “And there was evening and there was morning, day one.” That same formula—first used here to mark off explicitly a single day, the creation of this 24-hour time period—is then repeated throughout the rest of the chapter to depict the other days of Creation themselves. “And there was evening and there was morning, day two,” . . . “day three,” and so forth. Hence, within the first few verses the Lord showed us unambiguously that when the Bible says, in Exodus 20, for instance, that “in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth” (*vs. 11, NIV*), He meant six days, nothing less and certainly nothing more.

The Chicken or the Egg?

The Genesis Creation account is not simple, which shouldn't be surprising. After all, the earth and life on earth aren't simple. We have been given (even with chapter 2 included) about fifty-six verses to explain Creation: Most manuals on how to fix a bicycle are longer. No doubt a lot has been left out. How fortunate that we'll have an eternity to learn more. We'll need it.

Nevertheless, there's still plenty of information there for us to ponder now.

Read through Genesis 1 again; this time focus on the sequence of events. What pattern emerges? How does this pattern make sense in regard to our understanding of the nature of life on earth?

Genesis starts out saying that earth was “without form, and void” (*Gen. 1:2*). God then proceeded to give our earth form and remove the “void.” If you follow the sequence, at first there's darkness and then light; this leads to demarcation of day and night. Next, there's some kind of atmosphere, a “firmament” called “heaven.” Water, it seems, is already there at the time of earth's creation, which, of course, is needed for life (at least as life exists here). God then brings forth dry land, and then upon the dry land there came vegetation, grass, herbs, trees (all of which needed land first in order to exist) “whose seed is in itself” (*vss. 11, 12*). This is followed by the presence of the sun and the moon and the visible stars (why these are depicted here, in this manner, in this part of the sequence, is one of those questions we'll probably have to wait to get answered in heaven). Finally, with all these other things in place, God was able to bring forth creatures, land and sea creatures who were flying and swarming and moving throughout this part of God's creation, living things who were to “be fruitful, and multiply” (*vs. 21*) upon the face of the earth. Thus, it seems that, within our limited understanding, the Lord followed a very logical sequence and pattern that resulted in the creation of life here.

Keeping the Genesis account in mind, answer this question: Which came first, the chicken or the egg? Justify your answer, and why is that answer (or at least the principles behind that answer) important to our own understanding of just who we are and why we are here?

The Creation of Humanity

Compare the creation of the animals to the creation of Adam. What are the similarities? *See Gen. 1:24; 2:7, 19.*

What are the differences? *Gen. 1:26, 27; 2:7.*

In contrast to the creation of the animals and Adam, how was Eve created? *Gen. 2:21-24.*

As stated yesterday, there's so much about Creation not revealed in the Scriptures. But enough is revealed to show the special place of humanity (notice in Genesis 1:27 that the generic term *man* included both male and female; it takes two different sexes to define what is meant by human) in the Creation story. Only after God had everything else perfectly in place did He create Adam (whose name in Hebrew is very closely related to the word for "ground"), and only after him did He create Eve. Despite some similarities between these humans and the beasts, the Bible makes a clear distinction between them. Also, as with the creation of everything else, Genesis knows nothing about chance in the formation of humanity. On the contrary, the systematic pattern of Creation, expressed in repeated formulas ("and God saw," "and God said," "let there be") in a repeated time frame ("and there was evening and morning . . ."), culminating in the intimate act of creating both the man (*Gen. 2:7*) and the woman (*vss. 21-24*), show that God left nothing to chance.

Read Genesis 1:26, 27. What does this idea of humanity being made in God's image mean? What are the differences between human beings and other earthly creatures—differences that might help us better understand the unique place we have? Also, think about Jesus, the humanity of Jesus, and the death of Jesus only for human beings as opposed to the animals, which also have suffered from the consequences of sin. How does the Cross help us understand our special place in the creation of the earth? How should this understanding impact how we view others, and ourselves?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 44, 45; *Education*, pp. 15–18; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, comments on Genesis 1.

“When Adam came from the Creator’s hand, he bore, in his physical, mental, and spiritual nature, a likeness to his Maker. . . . It was His [God’s] purpose that the longer man lived the more fully he should reveal [His] image—the more fully reflect the glory of the Creator.”
—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 15.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Most of us were taught that atoms, made up of tiny particles such as protons, neutrons, and electrons, are the smallest building blocks of the universe. A new theory states that these particles are actually made of tiny vibrating strings (a string is to the size of a proton as a proton is to the size of the solar system!). Though it’s still only a theory, think about the idea of these vibrating strings (different vibrations bring about different particles) in light of the teaching that God “spoke” the world into existence.
- 2 Discuss Genesis 1:28 and the teaching that God has given humanity “dominion” over the earth. What does that mean? What responsibilities does that entail? How can we as a church and as individuals better fulfill that responsibility?
- 3 The Bible teaches a supernatural origin of our world. How does that idea help us better understand the reality of a supernatural end of this world?
- 4 Plan a trip with your class to go out in nature and explore the wonders of creation. If possible, bring along some people who don’t yet know Jesus and the wonderful plan of salvation. See what you all can learn, believers and unbelievers, about God through His created works.

Wasted Years

by ILIANA GARCÍA

A mother's conversion leads her adult daughter back to Christ.

I attended a Protestant church with my father when I was growing up, but when I was a teen, I stopped going. I was glad that I knew about God, but I did not like the strict rules our church imposed.

Soon after I married, my mother became an Adventist Christian. She shared her new beliefs with me, and I saw the huge changes in her life. She invited me to visit her church, and I did. And when she gave me literature, she would say, "Read the Bible, and you will see that this is true." It worked. I believed.

But with my job and my family, it was easy to know the right way but not so easy to follow it. I attended church with Mother once a month and took the children. But as they grew up, they went their own way, just as I had with my father.

For years I attended church without committing myself to God. I wanted to follow God in baptism, but many things had to change in my life before I could be baptized. For one, I needed to stop smoking. I tried everything to quit—except surrendering my habit to God. Cigarettes were my comfort, and I feared the pain of withdrawal, even when my doctor said they were killing me.

Then I realized that cigarettes were a chain that held me prisoner. Only God could remove that chain, and I had to ask Him to do it. I prayed honestly and asked God to break the chain of addiction that held me prisoner.

That day I went home, laid my pack of cigarettes on the table, and walked away. I did not tell my family until I had been smoke-free for a week. But they noticed and secretly rejoiced.

I started attending church regularly and prepared for baptism. It was a joyful day for my family and me. My only regret is that I had wasted so many years—years when I could have been training my children to love God and His church as I now do.

Your mission offerings provide the support programs that helped lead me and thousands of others to Jesus. Thank you!

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