

“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 believe as Christians. 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?

Key Text: *Genesis 1:1*

Teachers Aims:

1. To discuss the creative and sustaining powers of God.
2. To reveal the foundation of a literal 24-hour time period, instituted at Creation.
3. To show the wisdom of God in creating man and woman as the crowning act of Creation.

Lesson Outline:

I. In the Beginning (*Gen. 1:2*)

- A. Through faith we understand that the Word of God framed the worlds, “so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible” (*Heb. 11:3, NKJV*).
- B. Life can exist and continue only through the sustaining power of God.

II. The Natural Order of Things (*Gen. 1:5*)

- A. The 24-hour time period that divides each day was established at Creation.
- B. The language of Genesis indicates that Creation spanned a literal time frame of seven days.
- C. The Lord follows a systematic sequence when creating the earth, culminating in the creation of man and woman.

III. Adam and Eve—the Crowning Act of Creation (*Gen. 1:27*)

- A. Man and woman were created in the image of God to have dominion over the earth and everything in it.
- B. Everything that Adam and Eve needed to sustain life was already in place before they were created.
- C. The manner in which God created man and woman shows that He left nothing to chance.

Summary: God is the Creator and Sustainer of all things. He followed a logical progression when creating the earth and established the literal, 24-hour day/seven-day week that we know today.

COMMENTARY

Our Creator is a God of order. The structure of Creation week, as outlined in Genesis, reveals this. God carefully planned every detail of the Creation of our world, from its foundation to its culminating day of rest. Moses wrote this account at a time when ancient people believed far differently. Just how differently can be seen through a comparison of the Creation account with ancient cosmologies that taught that natural, often chaotic, forces originated the world. By contrast, the orderliness of the Creation account has inspired hope from

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 (*vss. 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 beginning of time that a loving God intended for us to exist by design, not by accident.

I. Creator of All That Is

The simple biblical declaration that in the beginning God created is so familiar to us that we do not sense how startling it would have been to most of those who first heard it in the ancient world. The ancients had many Creation accounts, but they did not believe that what we term as the universe, or cosmos, came into existence in the same sense as the Bible says it does.

Instead, ancient cosmologies taught that the very fabric or structure of the universe contained within itself the capability to produce gods, matter, life, and everything else. In some ways the ancient concepts remind us of modern evolutionary theories that suggest that life came into being because of the inevitable outworking of natural, physical laws. (Interestingly, some Egyptologists have traced the concept of evolution all the way back to ancient Egypt.)

The Mesopotamians believed that after the first god spontaneously sprang into being, he and the deities he created fought each other to establish order and supremacy. One account relegates humanity to a mere by-product of that struggle among the gods. Instead of being created to have dominion over the earth as in the Bible (*Gen. 1:26*), human beings were made by the higher gods to perform the work that the lesser gods refused to do.

The ancient Egyptians regarded the origin of the earth and its life as the inevitable result of natural forces, or laws, in the cosmos itself. Once the first god emerged from the primeval chaos (described as the watery turmoil experienced during the annual flooding of the Nile), he created the other deities and everything else through one of a variety of processes. One God named Ptah, worshiped particularly in the ancient Egyptian city of Memphis, spoke everything into existence. He spoke, and the waters above separated from the waters below. Additional commands made dry land appear and created living things, including human beings.

At first glance the story of Ptah might remind us of the biblical account. But Ptah was quite different from the God of Genesis. First, he was not eternal and came into being himself through the operation of blind forces in the universe. The cosmos just happened to have in it the ability to originate gods. Second, Ptah did not create anything through any power in himself. When he spoke, he was merely activating something that was already latent in the cosmos. For example, if he said the word “tree,” the word had programmed within itself—like a cosmic DNA or digital code—the capacity to produce a tree when uttered. Third, neither Ptah nor anything he brought into existence was eternal. Everything, including the gods themselves, would someday collapse back into the original chaos from which they had come.

The Bible, however, portrays God as standing outside of, and

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.

above, all creation. He alone is everlasting (*Ps. 90:1, 2; 93:2*). He is not a natural force at work, a product of creation itself. The Lord creates through power that He personally possesses. He does not have to trigger some latent cosmic law that, once set in motion, automatically makes something spring into existence.

The ancient pagans visualized their gods as manifestations of natural phenomena. Baal, for example, was the god of storms and of

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Genesis 1:25; 2:2; Exodus 20:8-11; Job 38:4-7; Psalm 8:5-8; Ecclesiastes 3:18, 19; Romans 8:28-30*

- 1 It is said that if we are to accept the account of human/biological origins that contemporary science puts forth, we must reject important parts of the biblical account. In what ways do the two accounts contradict each other? Could we say, as some do, that God guided the evolutionary process? Why, or why not?
- 2 Genesis clearly indicates that chance played no part in God's creation of life, the universe, and everything. Why is this such an important point? What implications does it have for our lives today? Do you see elements of chance in the present world, or does everything happen in accordance with God's will?
- 3 There are two possible interpretations of the Creation account in Genesis: that it tells of the creation of the whole universe, or that it tells of the creation of the earth alone. Seventh-day Adventists generally believe that Genesis refers to the Creation of the earth. Which do you believe, and why? Is it important?
- 4 As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe that the days referred to in the Creation account are literal, 24-hour days. Why is this particularly important to Seventh-day Adventists? What are the consequences to Seventh-day Adventists of believing otherwise—for instance, that the days are actually indeterminate ages? How would you answer someone who points out that the 24-hour day presupposes, or requires, the existence of the sun and moon, both of which do not appear until the fourth day?
- 5 Even without believing in evolution, one can identify similarities and family resemblances between humans and animals. Why is that so? In what ways are we similar to the other life forms that share the earth, and in what crucial ways are we different? Why do you think God created living creatures in the order in which He did?

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?

fertility (the semidesert land of Canaan desperately needed rain to sustain vegetation and other living things). Ra was one of many Egyptian gods who assumed various forms of the sun (which provided light and heat for life). But Scripture constantly declares that the true God is not part of any natural phenomena. He made nature and its forces in the first place.

II. A God of Order

Just as the natural world points to a Creator, the organization of the biblical account of our origins points to a deliberate, intentional Creation. Genesis 1 is carefully structured, perhaps to make it easier to remember at a time when few people could read and most people committed important information to memory. The six days of active Creation divide into two parallel halves. During the first three days God establishes the settings for what He will create later, and during the second three days He fills them with their inhabitants.

Witnessing

How many parents, when holding a new baby in their arms, after counting toes and fingers, examining tiny feet and hands, and gently touching the perfectly shaped head, say, “Isn’t chance wonderful! Look how (s)he has morphed into something resembling human form. We avoided fins, scales, and multiple limbs this time. Look at what 10 million years of evolution can produce!”

How foolish it is to think that this healthy and unblemished child is a product of chance. What an impossible stretch of the imagination to believe that only time is responsible for this replica of human parents. Accepting the Creation story by the exercise of faith is easier than leaving everything to the unknown and unpredictable.

Our heavenly Father has instructed us to protect His creations. Shielding planet Earth as much as possible from destructive practices is something we can, and should, do with help from our neighbors, friends, co-workers, and other concerned citizens. By working with others, we not only improve our own physical, mental, and emotional well-being, but we also have the perfect opportunity to share our spiritual beliefs in an atmosphere of mutual understanding and friendship. Working toward a common environmental goal creates a natural bond that allows for deeper discussion of spiritual matters, when appropriate. Recycling, renewing, replanting, and reusing shows our commitment to God’s instructions, our respect for the earth, and our love for our fellow human beings. Make it a priority to get involved. Our spirituality, as well as life on earth, positively will be impacted by such efforts.

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?

Creation week begins with chaos (*Gen. 1:2*) and ends with the tranquility of Sabbath rest (*Gen. 2:2, 3*). Or to put it another way, Creation week moves from a time of chaos to holy time. As God creates, He fills both time and space with His holy presence. In many ways one could say that the Sabbath not only completes Creation week but is its goal. From watery waste on the first day to Sabbath rest in an Edenic paradise on the seventh day, the structure of Creation week reflects the careful working of an orderly God.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: What have you made recently? What components or ingredients did you use? Where did they come from? A store? your garden? Quote the memory text, Psalm 33:6, 9, as a group. What does it mean, “For he spake, and it was done” (*vs. 9*)? How does this compare with your creative endeavor?

Thought Questions:

1 When an automobile factory builds a car, it carefully has to decide on the order, or sequence, in which the parts will be assembled. Read Genesis 1, focusing on God’s choice of creative events. Especially note that God made the habitat for His creatures first; He formed then filled. What does this tell you about His wisdom and His concern for each living thing?

2 As you look back on your creative efforts, how long did it take to make the object you were constructing? How did the time spent make a difference in the quality of the finished project? More time invested, in human endeavors, usually reflects a higher quality product. Now consider the time frame for Creation: “The evening and the morning were the first day” (*Gen. 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31*). Why does this short time frame say wonderful things about God? What does this say about His ability to meet the needs in your life or in that of a friend’s?

Application Question:

Read Genesis 1 again, as a group. Define “it was good” (*vss. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25*) in contrast to “it was very good” (*vs. 31*). Note when and how often these phrases were used in the Creation account. What does this tell you about God’s feelings toward humanity? Compare this to the theory of evolution’s concept of humankind’s origins and relationship to other living things. Covenant as a Sabbath School class to spend time next week discussing, with at least two friends, colleagues, or neighbors, the immeasurable value of each individual. Next Sabbath, plan to begin your introductory class time reporting on your experiences.

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.