

Nature as a Giver of Health



SABBATH—MARCH 12

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Genesis 1:27–2:25; Genesis 3; Jeremiah 10:12, 13; Psalm 19:1–7; Matthew 6:25–34; Psalm 104.

MEMORY VERSE: “The heavens tell about the glory of God. The skies show that his [God’s] hands created them. Day after day they speak about it. Night after night they make it known” (Psalm 19:1, 2, Nlrv).

GOD CREATED ADAM AND EVE IN HIS OWN IMAGE (LIKENESS). What could be a more perfect gift? God then placed them in the Garden of Eden. What could be a more perfect place? Both heredity¹ and environment (surroundings) were perfectly balanced by God to produce (make; encourage) and protect perfect mental and physical health.

But sin ruined everything. By the second generation,² jealousy, hatred, and violence (abuse) had spoiled the world. The natural environment also showed the effects (results) of sin. When sin grew worse, the Flood forever changed the original scenery of the earth.

But much goodness and beauty remain in the natural world. Nature still gives enough things to satisfy our basic needs. Nature also can give us joy, happiness, and well-being to make up for the suffering caused by sin.

Sometimes nature still causes terrible things to happen, such as earthquakes, flooding, or storms. But nature can be a contributor (giver) to mental and physical health. It also can help us to come closer to the Creator. He is the Fountain of all goodness: “Every good and perfect gift is from God. It comes down from the Father. He created the heavenly lights” (James 1:17, Nlrv).

1. heredity—the natural process by which physical and mental features are passed from a parent to a child.
2. generation—a group of people born and living during the same time.

SUNDAY—MARCH 13**A PERFECT ENVIRONMENT
(Genesis 1:27–2:25)**

Today, we are living in a world stained and spoiled by sin. So, we cannot imagine what the world must have been like for our first parents in Eden. No sin, no suffering, no death, no sorrows, and none of the pain that we know so well. In a sense, we are so used to these imperfect (not perfect) things that we forget that none of them belong here. They are the things that God promises us will one day be gone forever.

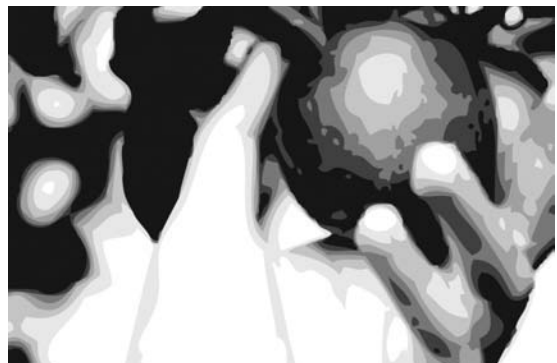
What picture is presented in Genesis 1:27–2:25 about what life and the environment were like in Eden? How different is it from what we know today?

The newly created couple (Adam and Eve) was placed in a garden that God Himself had planted (Genesis 2:8). The Bible story is short. But think about the wonderful things nature gives to us today, such as rich crops of fruit and vegetables. They must have come from the first garden. The senses of Adam and Eve were exposed to sights, sounds, tastes, feelings, and sweet smells that certainly brought much satisfaction and well-being. It truly was “heaven” on earth.

There is no doubt that this envi-

ronment was perfect for the newly created humans (Adam and Eve). Their physical, emotional,³ and mental needs were all met. Mental conditions, such as uncertainty, anxiety,⁴ and worry, were completely unknown. This is because there was nothing there to cause these problems.

“The Creator chose for our first parents the surroundings best fitted for their health and happiness. He did not put them in a palace or surround them with the man-made luxuries⁵ that so many today are working hard to get. . . . In the Garden that God prepared as a home for His children were many beautiful shrubs and flowers that greeted them everywhere. There were many kinds of trees with sweet-smelling and delicious fruit. On their branches the birds sang songs of praise. Under their shadow the animals of the earth played together without a fear.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, page 261.



God chose for our first parents the surroundings best suited for their health and happiness.

3. emotional—having to do with a strong feeling, such as love, anger, joy, hate, or fear.

4. anxiety—fear or nervousness about what might happen.

5. luxuries—great comfort, ease, or wealth.

Try to imagine what Eden must have been like. Think of the sights, the smells, the tastes, everything that pleases our senses. What should that tell us about how our physical bodies are good and were made for us to enjoy?

MONDAY—MARCH 14

SIN AND NATURE (Genesis 3)

Whatever wonder and beauty we find in nature today, it is still a double-edged sword. Beauty and marvel are there. But so are famines,⁶ earthquakes, storms, and outbreaks of disease. Something has gone terribly wrong.

Read over Genesis 3, the Fall. What changes came to both humans and nature as a result of sin?



Whatever beauty we find in nature today is a double-edged sword—beauty and marvel are there, and so are earthquakes and diseases.

Sin brought quick physical and spiritual changes to human life. Nature, too, suffered the results of sin. Sin caused terrible results to creation in

at least three ways:

- *The ground was cursed (Genesis 3:17).* After leaving the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve had problems working the soil. The ground began to grow undesirable thorns and thistles. It is likely that insects also got in the way of healthy growth. Things got worse after the Flood came.

- *Human beings experienced great changes.* Fatigue (feeling very tired) and pain became real. The relationship between the man and the woman changed. The chapter also seems to suggest that Eve would not have had pain in childbirth. The relationship of Adam to the earth had changed too. Work was going to be much more difficult than it would have been before. We do not know how Adam and Eve reacted to the knowledge of the fact that now, because of sin, they would grow old and die. But it must have completely changed how they looked at life.

- *Sin changed human and animal behavior.* Hate, jealousy, selfishness, and so on caused angry and violent behavior and feelings between humans and animals. Other ways of damaging the environment (perhaps much the same as what we are witnessing today) may have taken place. Animals started to kill one another for food and for power. As described in Genesis 3–6, sin and violence rose to the point that God was grieved for having made all living things (Genesis 6:5–7).

The true result of all these changes has not been shown to us. But we can

6. famines—shortages of food.

guess that great changes took place. God, in His limitless mercy, protected a great deal of the wonderful original creation for our good.

Look around at the wonders of nature where you are. What parts of the original creation seem to remain? What hope can you draw from those parts that point you to the promises of a better world?



After the Fall, the ground was cursed with thorns and thistles.

TUESDAY—MARCH 15

GOD'S GIFTS THROUGH NATURE (Jeremiah 10:12, 13)

The natural world presents powerful proof that God and His power are real. Sadly, humans (no doubt inspired by Satan) turned away from the living God and worshiped nature instead of its Creator (read Romans 1:19–25).

What picture is shown in Jeremiah 10:12, 13 of God's creative power in nature? What can we learn about the character⁷ of God through His created works?

We all know that nature sometimes turns against us. It spreads horror through earthquakes, volcanoes, floods, and so on. Why do these terrible events happen when and where they do? These are questions that we do not have the answers to for now. But we do know that the first few chapters in the book of Job show the great controversy (war) between God and Satan. We also know that Satan can use the forces of nature for evil purposes. Terrible events do happen, but the goodness of God still can be seen in the natural world.

Read Psalm 19:1–6 and then write its basic message in your own words.

Nature has always been seen by Seventh-day Adventists as God's second book (His first Book being the Bible). The study of the natural world, with the influence⁸ of the Holy Spirit, can deepen our faith and trust in God. It can also give us a better understanding of the love God has for His creatures. This can give us mental and spiritual comfort too. Sometimes, when all else fails, the beauty of nature points to God and gives us great comfort and hope.

⁷ character—the good qualities of a person that usually include moral or emotional strength, honesty, and fairness.

⁸ influence—the power to change or affect someone or something.

Suppose you are telling someone about God’s goodness as shown in nature. And the person brings up the question of tsunamis,⁹ earthquakes, famines, and other terrible events. How would you answer? What do terrible events tell us about the limits of what nature can teach us about God?



When all else fails, the beauty of nature points to God and gives us great comfort and hope.

WEDNESDAY—MARCH 16

COMMUNION (TALKING) WITH GOD THROUGH NATURE (Matthew 6:28)

A young man, who was an atheist¹⁰ his whole life, was converted¹¹ to Christianity in his early twenties. After his new-birth experience, he lived for many months in a country setting. He would often wander in the woods, studying the wonders of the God who created such beauty. Of course,

he had seen wonderful things in the natural world before, but now he was better able to understand the character of the Lord who had created it all. It was, he said, “as if my eyes were opened for the first time in my whole life!” It was during that time that this new Christian came to truly know the Lord.

What is Jesus telling us in Matthew 6:25–34 that we can learn from studying nature?

There is no question that we can learn many valuable (important) spiritual lessons from the study of the created world. But nature can help us spiritually in another way too. Luke 5:16 says that Jesus “went away to be by himself and pray” (NIRV). This is something that Ellen G. White said Jesus did often. Sometimes we, too, need to get away from everything and be alone with the Lord in a natural environment. The natural world often gives us beauty, comfort, and peace. These can speak to our hearts and minds in ways that nothing else does, even if there is no sudden unfolding of new truth or new understanding on a doctrine (Bible teaching) or a verse. There still could be an unspoken recognition (understanding) of the love and power of the One who created all this beauty. But no matter how we experience God, there is no question that time alone in nature, in closeness to God, can bring healing and peace to our bodies and souls.

9. tsunamis—very high, large waves in the ocean that are usually caused by earthquakes under the sea and that can cause great destruction when they reach land.

10. atheist—a person who believes that God does not exist.

11. converted—to change one’s beliefs.

“All who are under the training of God need quiet time with their own hearts, with nature, and with God. They need to see that there can be a good life that does not follow the world, its customs, or its practices. And they need to have a personal experience in getting a knowledge of the will of God. Each one of us must hear God speaking to the heart. When we are quiet and wait before Him, the silence of the soul ‘hears’ more clearly the voice of God.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, page 58.

When was the last time you prayed and talked with the Lord while in nature? If possible, try to do just that. You might be surprised at what a positive spiritual experience it will be for you.

THURSDAY—MARCH 17

PSALM 104

In the 1800s, deism was a popular belief. Deism taught that God created the world but then left it alone. This would mean that God exists (lives) but does not want to get involved.

But that belief is not what the Bible teaches. God did not just set the world like a wind-up watch and let it go. According to the Bible, God is involved in everything that happens here. After all, what good would the Cross be if God were not personally and directly involved in human affairs?

What does Psalm 104 tell us

about the work of God in creation and in the natural world?

The words of Psalm 104 suggest that the writer of the psalm is very excited about the work of God in creating and supporting the world. You almost can hear the writer shouting these words out in praise and admiration. The writer sees that God is real in the everyday operation (work) of the natural world.

The God in this psalm is not the god of the deists (people who believe in deism). He is a God who is involved in everything that happens here. The writer of this psalm may have personal troubles, but he finds comfort and hope in the power of the Lord. Sure, thinking about the birds in their nests or the lions hunting for their food is not going to solve the struggles this person faces. But he or she can see in nature things that speak to him or her of God’s goodness and power. And that gives this person hope.

Nature also can be used for healing of the body, mind, and spirit. In many cases, fresh air, sunlight, water, and a healthy diet can do wonders for us both physically and mentally. Natural cures remain a powerful means of health and healing.

Some doctors often will tell people to get away from work and stress and find rest and relaxation in a natural setting somewhere. Research shows just how good nature can be for us physically and mentally. After all, God put our first parents (Adam and Eve) in a garden, not in a city square. Something in us clicks (works) better with a field of lilies than it does with a paved parking lot.

Nature is one of God’s great gifts. We should do all we can to make the most of it. What are ways you can profit better from what God has given us in nature?

FRIDAY—MARCH 18

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “The home of our first parents [Adam and Eve] was to be an example for other homes as their children should go forth to build homes upon the earth. That garden home, made beautiful by the hand of God Himself, was not a lovely palace. Men in their pride delight in expensive buildings and glory in the works of their own hands. But God put Adam in a garden. This was Adam’s home. The blue heavens were its ‘roof.’ The earth, with its beautiful flowers and carpet of living green [grass], was its floor. And the leafy branches of the good trees were its cover. Its walls were hung with the most beautiful decorations, which were the handiwork of the great Master Artist. In the surroundings of Adam and Eve was a great lesson for all of us. True happiness is found, not in the foolish use of pride and money, but in closeness with God through His created works. If men would give less attention to what is false and man-made, they would come far nearer to answering the purpose of God in their creation.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*,¹² pages 49, 50.

“The close and faithful study of the mystery of life and nature, as well as

the caring for these beautiful things of God’s creation, makes the mind and character noble.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, page 143.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① How can we make sure that we do not cross the line from being a lover of nature to a worshiper of nature? How might it be difficult to tell the difference? However wonderful nature is, we always must remember that nature itself cannot save us. Only the God who created nature can. Why is it important to always keep this truth in mind?
- ② What should we as Seventh-day Adventists have to say about the question of the environment? How should we answer a fellow church member who says, “Well, we know the Lord is coming soon. And this whole world will be destroyed and then made over. So, is the environment really that important?”
- ③ In what ways can all the wonderful inventions and advances of science and nature help increase our love of and appreciation for the power of God? Think of all the things we know about the natural world today that the people of long ago never dreamed of. In what ways are we better able to marvel (wonder) at the creative power of the Lord?

12. Patriarchs and Prophets—patriarchs were leaders of God’s people in early Bible times, men such as Abraham and Isaac, or other leaders of Israel, such as Moses; prophets are men or women who are spokespersons for God.