

Sabbath: A Gift From Eden



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 certainly 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?

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?

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 was 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?

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 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, not used as an excuse for prolonging suffering.

What other activity did Jesus do on the Sabbath, despite the controversy that it engendered? *See Matt. 12:9–13, Luke 13:10–17, John 5:1–17.*

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 The issue, instead, was how the seventh day should be kept, not whether it was to be abolished or superseded by something else.

Jesus' example shows not only that the Sabbath remains something that should be observed but 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 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?

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?

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 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 creates 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 had done 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.

Embracing the World's Cities: Part 2

As we look at the mission field, we must look through the compassionate eyes of Jesus. We're not looking at a target group or mere statistics; we're looking at real people. They may have given up on church and religion, but they're open to those who follow Christ and show the love and sympathy of their Master.

And if we're going to minister to needs, we need to know what those needs are. We need to study our communities. What are people reading, what are they watching, what are they listening to? How do they spend their spare time? What's causing them pain? What's bringing them joy?

A few years ago, Wayne Krause, the pastor of a church near Sydney, Australia, discovered that some students were arriving at the local public school each day without breakfast. He presented the challenge to his church, and soon the church members were providing food to these hungry children. Later, when the school decided to hire a chaplain, they turned to the Seventh-day Adventist church. Today, Rochelle Madden serves as the school's chaplain.

"I see my role as chaplain to be a window to Jesus," says Rochelle. "I want the students, parents, and teachers to see a Christian as someone who really cares about them and about what's going on in their lives."

Seventh-day Adventists should make cities better places. Are people hungry? Let's feed them. Are immigrants struggling to adapt? Let's help them. Does a city park need a cleanup? Let's roll up our sleeves.

In the book of Jeremiah, God instructed the Jewish exiles how to live when they got to Babylon: "But seek the welfare [*shalom*] of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for its welfare [*shalom*] and you will find your welfare [*shalom*]" (*Jer. 29:7, ESV*).

The Hebrew word *shalom* conveys thoughts of peace, well-being, and prosperity. God is urging the exiles to work and pray for the good of the city. We must do the same today.

Jesus modeled a wholistic ministry that balanced the spiritual and the physical: "Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness" (*Matt. 9:36, NIV*). We should use Christ's ministry as our example and care for physical as well as spiritual needs.

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