

Jesus, Creator of Heaven and Earth



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 1:1; Heb. 11:3; Ps. 19:1–3; John 1:1–3, 14; Col. 1:15, 16; John 2:7–11.*

Memory Text: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (*Genesis 1:1, NKJV*).

Only something greater than what it creates could have created it. Thus, only a Being greater than the universe could have created the universe. And that Being is the God who is revealed in the Bible, the God whom we worship and serve because, among other things, He is our Creator.

We also learn that this God—the One who created the universe, the One who has spun those billions of galaxies across the expanse of the cosmos—is the same One who came to earth, to live among us as a human being and, even more amazing, to bear in Himself the punishment for our sins.

Sometimes we hear of things that are “too good to be true.” What could be better, though, for us as sinful beings in a fallen, painful world than to know the wonderful truth of our Creator’s love—a love so great that He would come down in the person of Christ and link Himself to each of us with ties that never can be broken?

In response to such a wondrous truth, how are we to live our lives?

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 5.*

In the Beginning

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1).

There are many deep truths in that simple text, one of the most profound being that the universe itself had a beginning. While that idea might not seem so radical to us today, it goes against the long-held belief in an eternally existing creation. Not until the twentieth century, when the “Big Bang” model of origins took hold, did the notion that the universe had a beginning gain general acceptance. Until then many believed that it had always existed. Many people resisted the concept of the universe having been created because that implied some sort of Creator. (In fact, the name “Big Bang” was intended to mock the notion of a created universe.) But the evidence that the universe had a beginning has become so strong that nearly all scientists have accepted it, at least for now (scientific views, even those once deemed sacrosanct, are often changed or refuted).

Read Hebrews 11:3. What does this verse tell us about God and the creation of the universe?

As with Genesis 1:1, Hebrews 11:3 is full of mystery and things that are unexplainable by our present knowledge. Yet, the text does seem to tell us that the universe was not formed from preexisting matter. The universe was created by the power of God’s Word; that is, both matter and energy were brought into existence by God’s power.

Creation from nothing is known as creation *ex nihilo*. We often credit humans with the creation of various things, but humans are incapable of creating from nothing. We can change the form of pre-existing matter, but we have no power to create *ex nihilo*. Only the supernatural power of God can do that. This is one of the most dramatic differences between God and humans, and it reminds us that our very existence depends on the Creator.

In fact, the verb *created* in Genesis 1:1 comes from a Hebrew root word that is used only in reference to the creative activity of God. Only God, not humans, can do that kind of creating (see also Rom. 4:17).

Why is a supernatural Creator, One who exists above and beyond the Creation, the only logical explanation for the Creation? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

The Heavens Declare

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard” (Ps. 19:1–3, see also Rom. 1:19, 20). How have you experienced the truth of these texts? How has modern science helped us to even more appreciate the power and wisdom of God as Creator?

Not just any kind of universe would be capable of supporting life. In fact, it seems that the universe must be extremely well-designed in order for life to exist. First, the building blocks of all matter—atoms—must be stable enough in order for stable material objects to be created. The stability of atoms depends on the forces that hold the parts of the atoms together. Atoms contain charged particles that both attract and repel each other. The forces of attraction and repulsion must be carefully balanced. If the attractive forces are too strong, only large atoms can form, and there would be no hydrogen. Without hydrogen, there would be no water, and thus no life. If the repulsive forces are too strong, only small atoms can form, such as hydrogen, and then there would be no carbon or oxygen. Without oxygen, there can be no water and no life. Carbon is also essential for all forms of life as we know it.

Not only must the atoms be stable, but they must be able to interact with one another in order to form vast numbers of different chemical compounds. There must be a balance between the forces that hold the molecules together and the energy required to break up the molecule in order to permit the chemical reactions upon which life depends.

The precise fitness of our universe for life has gained the admiration of scientists and has led many of them to comment that the universe appears to be designed by an intelligent Being.

The world also must have been wisely designed in order for life to exist. The range of temperatures must be compatible with life; so, the distance from the sun, the speed of rotation, and the composition of the atmosphere must all be in appropriate balance. Many other details of the world must have been carefully designed. Truly, God’s wisdom is shown in what He created.

The Power of His Word

Read Jeremiah 51:15, 16 and Psalm 33:6, 9. In addition to wisdom, what other attribute of God is mentioned in the Creation? How was this attribute expressed in Creation? More important, what are the implications of this truth for us?

Though we cannot know exactly how God created, we are told that it was through His powerful Word. All the energy in all parts of the universe had its origin in the Word of God. All the energy in all our fuels came from God's power. All the gravity throughout the universe, every star guided in its course, and every black hole result from God's power.

Perhaps the greatest amount of energy is within the atom itself. We are justifiably impressed by the power of nuclear weapons, in which a small amount of matter is converted into a large amount of energy. Yet, scientists tell us that all matter contains large amounts of energy. If a small amount of matter can produce the vast energy of a nuclear weapon, consider the amount of energy stored in the material of the entire world! But that is as nothing when compared with the energy stored in the matter of the universe. Imagine the power that God utilized to bring the universe into existence.

Many scientists believe that anything God may do in the creation is restricted by the "laws of nature," but this idea is contrary to the Bible. God is not restricted by natural law; instead, God has determined natural law. God's power has not always followed the patterns that we call the "laws of nature."

For example, one of the fundamental "laws of nature" is the "Law of Conservation of Matter and Energy." This law states that the total amount of matter and energy in the universe remains constant. But how could the universe have appeared from nothing if this law were inviolable? God's creative word is not bound by the "laws" of science. God is sovereign over all His creation and is free to carry out His will.

Dwell (the best that you can) on the size of the universe. Think about the incredible power needed in order to create it. And to think that the God who wields such power loves us, even died for us. How can you learn to draw comfort from this amazing truth?

Jesus, Creator of Heaven and Earth

Read John 1:1–3, 14; Colossians 1:15, 16; Hebrews 1:1, 2. How do the New Testament writers identify the Creator? What are the implications of the answer?

John refers to Jesus as the Word (“Logos”) and equates Him with God. More specifically, Jesus is the One through whom all things were created. In John’s day, the term *logos* was commonly used to represent the creative principle. John’s early readers would be familiar with the concept of *logos* as a creative principle or even as a creator. John applied this familiar concept to Jesus, identifying Him as the true Creator. Jesus, the Logos, the Incarnate One who lived among us, was not only present in the beginning, He was the One by whom the universe was created. This means that we could read Genesis 1:1 as “In the beginning, Jesus created the heavens and the earth.”

Paul’s words in Colossians 1 resonate with those of John in the identification of the Creator as Jesus Christ. By Him, all things were created. Paul adds two other attributes of Jesus. First, He is the image of the invisible God. In our sinful state, we cannot see God the Father, but we can see Jesus. If we want to know what God is like, we can study the life of Jesus (*John 14:9*). Second, Paul calls Jesus the “firstborn” of creation (*Col. 1:15*). In this context, “firstborn” does not refer to origin but to status. The firstborn was the head of the family and the heir of the property. Jesus was the “firstborn” in the sense that, as Creator and through the Incarnation (His taking upon Himself our humanity), He is the rightful head of the human family. Jesus was not a created being; rather, from eternity He was one with the Father.

Hebrews 1:1, 2 repeats the same points as in the Colossians passage. Jesus is appointed heir of all things and is the One by whom the world was created. In addition, He is the exact representation of the Father’s nature, another way of stating that He is the image of God.

How would you respond if someone were to ask you, “What is your God like?” What justification could you give for your answer?

The Creator Among Us

Read John 2:7–11, 6:8–13, 9:1–34. What do these texts reveal about the creative power of God?

Each of these miracles gives us a glimpse of God’s power over the material world that He Himself created.

First, what kind of process would be required to change water directly into wine? None that we know of. Indeed, it took an act outside of the laws of nature, at least as we now know them, to do what Jesus did here.

In the miracle of the fish and loaves, Jesus started with five loaves and two small fish and ended with enough to feed a multitude and have twelve baskets of leftovers. All the food was made of atoms and molecules. At the end, there were many times more atoms and molecules of food than when Jesus started to feed the crowd. From where did the additional molecules come, if not by the supernatural intervention of God?

Furthermore, what physical changes happened to the blind man when he was healed? He was blind from birth; thus, his brain had never been stimulated to form images from the messages sent by the eye through the optic nerve. So, his brain had to be rewired in order to process the incoming information, form images, and interpret their meaning. Next, there was something wrong with the eye itself. Perhaps some photoreceptor molecules were produced incorrectly as a result of a mutation in his DNA. Or perhaps some mutation had occurred at birth in the genes that control the development of the parts of the eye—the retina, optic nerve, lens, and so on. Or perhaps some mechanical damage had occurred that prevented the eye from functioning properly.

Whatever the details of the man’s blindness, the words of Jesus caused molecules to form in appropriate places, forming functional receptors, neuronal connections, and brain cells so that light entering the eye would form an image, and the man would have the ability to recognize images that he had never before seen.

Miracles are wonderful when they happen, but what is the danger of making your faith dependent upon them? Upon what, then, must our faith depend?

Further Study: “The work of creation can never be explained by science. What science can explain the mystery of life?”

“The theory that God did not create matter when He brought the world into existence is without foundation. In the formation of our world, God was not indebted to pre-existing matter. On the contrary, all things, material or spiritual, stood up before the Lord Jehovah at His voice and were created for His own purpose. The heavens and all the host of them, the earth and all things therein, are not only the work of His hand; they came into existence by the breath of His mouth.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, pp. 258, 259.

“Just how God accomplished the work of creation he has never revealed to men; human science cannot search out the secrets of the Most High. His creative power is as incomprehensible as his existence.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 113.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ In class, discuss your answer to Sunday’s final question.
- ❷ Science talks about what it calls “anthropic coincidences” (from the Greek word *anthropos* for “man”), the incredibly fine-tuned balance of forces in nature that make it possible for human life to exist. Notice, though, the built-in bias revealed in the word *coincidences*. If you don’t believe in God, you have to attribute these amazing balances to mere coincidence. Why is the belief that these balances were the product of a Creator God a more reasonable explanation than to simply call them “coincidences”?
- ❸ Consider the love of the Creator as He formed Adam and Eve and provided them with a beautiful garden home, knowing that He Himself would suffer and die on Calvary at the hands of the race He was creating. What do we learn about God’s love from the decision that He made to go ahead with the Creation anyway?
- ❹ How does the “Big Bang” theory compare with the Creation statement in Genesis 1:1? Might the “Big Bang” be a description of the way in which the universe came into existence at God’s Word? What issues or problems do you see in this idea? Why would it be dangerous to link our theology to any scientific theory, especially when science so often changes?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Genesis 1:1*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Understand the basis of God's right to sovereignty over each individual.

Feel: Cultivate a sense of awe about God's greatness, similar to the experience of Isaiah 6.

Do: Honor God's right to sovereignty over personal emotions and choices in his or her life.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: What makes God, God?

A God preexists all nondivine things. Which views of God are compatible with this concept, and which are not? Why?

B Why does our view matter in regard to the way in which God created?

II. Feel: Awe for the Greatness of God

A In what ways do God's rights to sovereignty and exclusive worship impact your life experience?

B Review Isaiah 6. How do these words cultivate within you a deeper sense of submissive awe for your Creator God?

III. Do: Honor God as Our Sovereign

A In what ways does your Creation-shaped view of God impact your perceptions and choices?

B How can you cede to God a controlling interest over your personal emotions?

► **Summary:** Creatorship is important because it is a unique attribute of God, setting Him apart from all others and grounding His rights to sovereignty and priority in our lives. Our interpretation of how God created the universe will have a significant impact on our view of the nature of divine sovereignty, as well as on our view of human accountability and responsibility. The biblical doctrine of Creation should lead us to an Isaiah 6 experience of submissive awe and obedience to God.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1**—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: A proper relationship with God must be not only warm and loving but also must acknowledge His right to sovereignty in all areas of our lives. Creation is the biblical basis of God’s claim to sovereignty.

Just for Teachers: Our teaching goal this week is to show the importance that Creation has to our understanding of who God is and how we ought to relate to Him.

How often do we see people get deeply excited or awed in the presence of a “great” person? Michael Jordan and Babe Ruth are household names due to their “great” accomplishments, at least in certain cultures. Other examples of “greatness” could include Albert Einstein, Queen Elizabeth I of Britain, Aristotle, and Nelson Mandela. At the pop-culture level, people swoon over famous singers and actors. Accomplishments and media coverage create personas that elicit adoration and create emotional excitement, sometimes generating extreme reactions in the individual admirers or fans of these great people.

By contrast, we often take God’s greatness and accomplishments for granted, failing to appreciate and reverence His uniqueness and power. It’s as though we say, “Creation from nothing? . . . How is that relevant to my life? God’s continual sustenance of the world? . . . Sure, I believe it, but I already know all that. Isn’t there something new to discuss?”

For many, the Genesis Creation account seems to be an all-too-familiar, threadbare concept that they find comfortable but not necessarily compelling. Why should God’s successful creation of the cosmos matter to us?

Opening Activity for Discussion: How do people react to being in the presence of a “great” person. Why do you think they react in that way? By contrast, how should we feel in God’s presence? What makes God great, and how should that impact our emotions and psyches as we encounter Him?

► STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Emphasize how Creation is both the biblical identifier of deity and the foundational basis of God’s right to sovereignty over us. Creation should instill a proper and submissive awe for God in the believer.

Bible Commentary

I. The Unmade Maker *(Read Isaiah 40:18–26 with the class.)*

Why is what we believe about Creation so important? One key reason is that, in biblical theology, Creatorship is an identifying mark of deity. Creation shows God to be God. This tenet is especially evident in Isaiah 40:18–26. Isaiah throws down a challenge to Israel: “To whom then will you liken God?” (*NKJV*). The implied answer seems to be “no one.” God is incomparable. Isaiah then contrasts God with “an idol,” something that has been crafted and shaped by a workman (*vss. 19, 20, NIV*). In short, the idol is something that has been made, but, in verses 21–23, God is depicted, in the language of the Genesis Creation, as the Maker of all things.

Verse 25 repeats the challenge and, once more, Isaiah appeals to Creation as the mark that distinguishes God from all others (*vs. 26*). The message is clear: idols cannot be God because they are made, but God is the unmade Maker. Hence, worshiping something made is idolatry. For Isaiah, then, being the unmade Maker distinguishes God from all others. Only Someone who creates all things where there was utterly nothing can be God.

Revelation 4:11 further develops Isaiah’s point. This verse grounds God’s right to glory, honor, and power in His creatorship. Thus, supernatural creation is both the biblical marker of deity and the basis of God’s rightful claim to governance over the universe.

But this begs a question: what kind of deity is compatible with the depiction of God in Genesis 1:1? In this verse, God preexists the beginning. Before there was a beginning, God existed. This means that whatever has a beginning cannot be considered to be a part of the divine being. Hence, Genesis 1:1 rules out a pantheistic view of God, for in full-blown pantheism, the material universe is equated with God. Yet, biblically, this material universe had a beginning, making it impossible to be part of a God who is unmade.

Genesis 1:1 also makes it difficult to advocate pantheism (note the extra syllable). Pantheism teaches that all material reality is in God, as part of His being, but that God is bigger than the “all” that is in Him.

Biblically, however, for this “all” to be part of God’s being, it should have no beginning. If things with a beginning can be part of the being of deity, then God would change and develop, as new elements of His being were created and added to His totality. But Genesis 1, as well as the rest of the Bible, depicts a God who is full, lacking nothing, and unchanging.

Genesis 1:1 thus points to God who is other and distinct from the material creation. This state of God being other and apart from the material universe, and His creation of that cosmos, gives God the right to sovereignty over all reality, as asserted in Revelation 4:11. As the Originator, He has the right to have purposes and designs for His creation and the right to hold free-will beings accountable for the violation of those purposes and designs by substituting their own in place of His.

Consider This: What are New Testament writers saying about Christ when they credit Him with being the Agent of Creation? (*See John 1:3, 4; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16, 17; Heb. 1:2, 3, 10–12.*)

► **STEP 3**—Apply

Just for Teachers: Explore what Creation means in daily life. Your task is to push the discussion past pleasing platitudes toward practical ideas about how to make Creation meaningful, especially in reference to the establishment of divine sovereignty in one’s life.

Thought Questions:

1 How does a life that recognizes and honors God’s sovereign claims differ from a life that does not?

2 What does the Creation story in Genesis 1 reveal about God’s purposes for your life?

- a. Is there a divine design for your relationships? If so, what is it?
- b. What is the divine design for your diet?
- c. How does the Creation story inform your view of the ways in which you should relate to the natural environment?
- d. Does Creation have implications regarding how you relate to animals (especially regarding abuse issues)? If so, what are they?

3 How does Creation inform the way in which you worship God?

4 How can you best demonstrate the truth of Creation in relation to God's rights to sovereignty, honor, power, and worship?

► **STEP 4**—Create

Activity: Jesus talked about the cares of life choking out the Word of God in our lives. The meaning of Creation thus easily can become buried under the mountain of obligations that we manage. Have the class discuss how modern life can weaken the influence of Creation in our consciousness and the ways in which we can intentionally resist those influences.