

Creation, a Biblical Theme



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 2, Matt. 19:4–6, Psalm 8, Job 38:1–21, 42:1–6, Isa. 45:18, Acts 17:22–31.*

Memory Text: “Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water’ ” (*Revelation 14:6, 7, NIV*).

Genesis 1:1–2:3 is the foundation for many Creation texts found in Scripture. Some references to Genesis 1 are clear, others are more indirect. The more indirect references often involve a repetition of certain words or ideas without directly quoting the text, such as 2 Corinthians 4:6: “For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (*NKJV*). A direct reference, in contrast, is Hebrews 4:4: “For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: ‘And God rested on the seventh day from all His works’ ” (*NKJV*), a quote from Genesis 2:2.

This week we will look at various references that point back to the Genesis account and show how other Bible writers understood it as a literal depiction of human origins.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 26.*

Creation in Genesis 2

“These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens” (*Gen. 2:4*).

Genesis 1:1–2:3 is the first account of God creating our world. It forms the foundation of all the other truths that we, as Christians, believe.

But the Creation account doesn’t end there. From Genesis 2:3 to the end of the chapter, we are given more details, specifically regarding the creation of Adam and Eve. Thus, we should interpret Genesis 2:4 (above) as the introduction to a more detailed history of the creation of Adam and Eve, an act that is briefly summarized in Genesis 1:26–29. Some modern scholars have argued that a conflict exists between Genesis 1 and 2, but this would have been a surprise to Moses and the other biblical writers. If the stories were seen as conflicting, Moses would never have written them, especially so close together. The conflict isn’t with the texts; it’s with those who read a conflict into them.

Read Matthew 19:4–6. How does Jesus affirm the historical truth of Genesis 1 and 2?

In response to the Pharisees’ question about divorce, Jesus quoted from both Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, showing that He considered both to be discussing the same historical event, the Creation of the world and humanity. How much more proof do we need that Genesis 1 and 2 are harmonious accounts of Creation, the doctrine and teaching that forms the foundation of our existence and purpose? We are not here by chance, we are not here by fluke; we are beings made in the image of God—and the Genesis Creation account, as revealed in chapters 1 and 2, is God’s special revelation to us of our origins.

Read Genesis 2. How does this help us to better understand what it means to be human, to be made in the image of God, and to be given free will?

Creation in the Psalms

Read Psalm 8. What links do you find with Genesis 1?

Read Psalm 104. Note how this psalm praises God for His goodness as seen in both Creation and providence. Identify the links with Genesis 1 in the following verses from Psalm 104:

Vs. 2 _____

Vss. 5–7 _____

Vss. 7–9 _____

Vs. 14 _____

Vs. 19 _____

Vs. 25 _____

Note how the psalm’s topical sequence seems to be crafted to follow the topical sequence of Genesis 1. Poetic imagery is vividly presented throughout the verses, and its message clearly includes the power, wisdom, and goodness of God and the dependence of all the Creation on the Creator. Nothing in the psalm hints that the Genesis account was not to be taken literally.

Note the following examples from the Psalms that correlate with Genesis 1.

Ps. 24:1, 2 _____

Ps. 33:6 _____

Ps. 74:16, 17 _____

Ps. 89:11 _____

The Psalms are full of praise for the Creator. Sometimes this is expressed in language reminiscent of Genesis 1, other times the language is more general; but in all cases, the description of Creation is consistent with Genesis 1 and reminds us of the foundational role of Genesis in our understanding of our origins as sons and daughters of God.

Creation in the Book of Job

Read Job 38:1–21. Note the creation topics in the following verses.

Vss. 4–7 _____

Vss. 8–11 _____

Vs. 12 _____

Vs. 16 _____

Vs. 19 _____

It's important to remember the context of the book of Job. Great tragedy struck, and Job was struggling to understand how this could happen to him, a faithful follower of God. From chapter 38 through chapter 41, the Lord continues to talk about His creative power, all in response to Job's pained questioning.

Read carefully Job's response to the Lord in Job 42:1–6. Why did Job respond as he did, and what can we learn from his response that could help us to trust God in our own personal tragedy?

Job's inability to explain features of the Creation led him to recognize the greatness of God and to trust Him, despite everything that had happened. We also find ourselves unable to answer many questions about the Creation, and Job's example should encourage us to trust God, no matter what. Many questions about everything in life will remain unanswered, at least for now. We will have an eternity to get explanations for what now seems incomprehensible.

The point is that through the marvels of Creation—which we today understand so much better now than Job ever could—we should learn to trust in God's incredible love and power.

We, today, living after the Cross, have a view of the Creator also as our crucified Redeemer, something that Job never had, at least not as clearly as we do. How much more, then, should we trust in the Lord's goodness toward us, knowing what He did for us?

Creation in the Prophets

“For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else” (Isa. 45:18).

Isaiah 45:18 emphasizes God’s intention to prepare a place for humans to live; thus, the fitness of the earth for life is not an accident.

Consider some of the features of Earth that make it a fit place for human life in contrast to the other planets in our solar system. First, water is present in abundance. There is some evidence of water activity on Mars, but there are no standing bodies of water on Mars or on any other planet aside from Earth. Another unique feature of Earth is the composition of the atmosphere, about 21 percent oxygen and 78 percent nitrogen. Other planets have atmospheres dominated either by carbon dioxide or by helium, but only Earth has an atmosphere suitable for life. The range of temperatures on Earth is suitable for terrestrial life, unlike any of the other planets in our solar system. This is due to a combination of factors, including our distance from the sun, the composition of our atmosphere, the mass of Earth, and the speed of its rotation—which determines the length of days and nights. All these features, and more, make Earth the only known planet suitable for sustaining life.

How do the following texts relate to the events described in Genesis 1?

Isa. 44:24 _____

Isa. 45:12 _____

Jer. 51:15, 16 _____

Amos 4:13 _____

Jonah 1:9 _____

Zech. 12:1 _____

Think through the implications of our origins and why getting them right is so important to our understanding of who we are, why we are here, and what we can hope for in a world that, in and of itself, offers no hope at all.

Creation in the New Testament

Read Acts 17:22–31. What were the circumstances of this sermon? After Paul had introduced his topic, what was the first topic he brought to these learned men? *Vss. 24, 25.* What does Paul say is the relationship between the Creator God and humans? *Vss. 26–28.*

The audience here no doubt included the two groups of philosophers known as Stoics and Epicureans. The Stoics affirmed the reality of design in nature, while the Epicureans denied it. Neither had a knowledge of the true God, but their arguments about design were similar to many of the arguments still discussed in our day.

The important point here is that, in his witness to these pagan thinkers and intellectuals, Paul reverts directly to the argument of the Lord as the Creator of all things and all humanity. Paul had little in common with these people; so, he went right to what they did have in common—the fact that they existed—and from that undeniable reality he sought to build his argument. Hence, we see Creation as, again, a crucial theme in Scripture.

Look at the following texts: Matthew 19:4–6, Mark 2:27, Luke 3:38, John 1:1–3, 2 Corinthians 4:6, Hebrews 4:4, James 3:9, 2 Peter 3:5, Jude 11, 14. What’s fascinating is that each one of these New Testament authors either directly or indirectly makes reference to the Genesis Creation account, more evidence proving just how universally accepted the Genesis account of origins was to all the Bible writers.

Read Revelation 4:11 and 10:5, 6. What do the heavenly beings say about God’s creatorship?

Creation was not an accident but occurred by the will of God. The second passage contains a clear allusion to Exodus 20:11. Once again, as in John 1:1–3, John shows his familiarity with, and confidence in, the Creation story. How foolish for us to do anything less.

Further Study: The Bible is a book about God and His relationship to us humans and our world. The events of Creation week are unique and supernatural. They are outside the realm of scientific inquiry for at least two reasons. First, they are singularities. Singularities are events that occur only once. Science has a difficult time dealing with singularities because they cannot be repeated and tested under differing circumstances. Second, the Creation events were supernaturally caused. They were not the natural result of the way that God sustains the Creation; they were special, direct acts of God. Science deals only with secondary causes and does not—at least as now practiced—accept any explanation that depends on God’s direct action. Because the Creation events are unique and supernatural, they lie outside of the reach of science.

One’s view of origins has important implications for one’s view of human nature and self-identity. Understanding our origins is so important that God had it placed as the first subject in the Bible, and the message of the Bible is based on the historicity of the Creation account. To claim that we can learn the true history of our world through science is to claim that it can be explained without appealing to any direct action by God, an error that has led to more error.

“Men will endeavor to explain from natural causes the work of creation, which God has never revealed. But human science cannot search out the secrets of the God of Heaven, and explain the stupendous works of creation, which were a miracle of almighty power, any sooner than it can show how God came into existence.”—Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 89.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Creation is a dominant theme throughout the entire Bible. Is there any evidence that Bible writers had different views of Creation or that any of them had doubts about the veracity of any part of Genesis? Why is your answer important?
- ❷ What reasons do you think someone might give to justify the rejection of the idea that nature is designed?
- ❸ Jesus endorsed the authority of Moses (*Luke 16:29–31*), including the story of Creation (*Mark 2:27, 28; Matt. 19:4–6*). Given this background and the example of Jesus, what should be our attitude toward the story of Creation?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Genesis 1–4*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Discover how Genesis 1–4 introduces most of the key definitions and concepts used throughout Scripture.

Feel: Appreciate the importance of Genesis 1–4 in the shaping of the rest of biblical theology.

Do: Live out a belief in Creation in order to demonstrate how it impacts the role of biblical authority in his or her life.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Genesis 1–4—The Foundation of Scripture

A Genesis 1–4 introduces most of the key definitions and concepts used throughout Scripture. What are these definitions?

B How do the biblical authors make use of the Genesis account, and for what purposes?

II. Feel: Appreciate the Concepts of Creation

A Recognizing allusions to Creation in other parts of Scripture help us to see the importance of the doctrine of creation. Why is such recognition and appreciation simply not enough? What else is needed, and why?

B How can we better appreciate the way in which Creation is used to develop spiritual concepts throughout Scripture?

III. Do: Understand the Impact of Creation on the Authority of God’s Word

A How does one’s belief in Creation impact his or her belief in, and implementation of, biblical authority?

B How can a person demonstrate through his or her actions and lifestyle a belief in Creation?

► **Summary:** Our understanding of the Creation story is vitally important because it impacts the way in which we understand both the nature of Scripture and the inspired messages given by the biblical authors.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Creation plays a key role throughout Scripture in the development of theological themes.

Just for Teachers: Why do biblical authors make such regular use of the Creation account? Convey to your class that a proper understanding of the Creation story prepares one to better understand the theological argument of later biblical authors and thus more accurately perceive their message.

There is a well-circulated story about a Russian czar finding a soldier standing guard over what appeared to be a vacant spot in the palace garden. (One version of this story can be found at <http://www.actsweb.org/articles/article.php?i=1285&d=2&c=5>.) When asked what he was guarding, the sentry answered to the effect that he had no idea but that regulations required a sentry to be there. The czar had the records checked and discovered that, many years earlier, Catherine the Great had planted a new rose bush there and had posted a sentry to protect it for an evening. Somehow, the order continued to be implemented even beyond the death of both Catherine and the rose bush. Thus, the current sentry had no idea what he was guarding or why.

Many believers in Creation are like that sentry. They know that Creation is important, but they cannot tell you why. Belief in the Genesis 1 Creation has become a tradition with little-known significance for many. It is important, then, not only to see that the rest of Scripture makes use of the data from Genesis 1 but also to understand why the biblical authors were using that data. In what way did they understand Genesis 1, and how would reinterpreting Genesis 1 affect the message of the biblical authors who were making use of the Creation story?

Opening Activity for Discussion: What are some things in our religious beliefs, societal customs, or family structures that we cherish and guard but may not adequately appreciate and understand? Why is it important to better understand these things?

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Just for Teachers: Creation is part of a larger body of biblical data

that defines concepts used throughout the Scriptures. How we understand Creation will thus impact our understanding of the entire biblical message.

Bible Commentary

I. The First Four Chapters of Genesis: A Foundation for Our Faith (*Read Genesis 1–4 with the class.*)

When systematic theologians write a systematic theology, they usually start with a section (or volume) called “Prolegomena.” The prolegomena expounds upon the philosophical, theological, and historical presuppositions of the author and defines the parameters of the whole system of theology being presented. As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe in a unified, underlying, and inspiring cause of Scripture: God. We, thus, expect the Bible to have a unified theological message. While the Bible is not a formal system of thought, it has a basic consistency of message and meaning. Thus, it may be proposed that Genesis 1–4 forms a theological prolegomena to the rest of Scripture, defining the basic theological concepts used throughout the Bible.

For starters, Genesis 1–4 defines who God is, who man is, the ideal for their relationship, and the nature of reality. Other concepts introduced here include humanity’s assigned role in the larger natural system, what went wrong between God and man, divine judgment, salvation, and more. All these concepts are first introduced in Genesis 1–4 and then are repeated and developed throughout Scripture.

For example, in Genesis 4 we have the first explicit use of the term *sin*. God tells Cain that “sin is crouching at the door,” waiting to gain mastery over Cain (*Gen. 4:7*). Sin is here depicted as an enslaving power that gains mastery over a person. It is much more than merely making a wrong choice. Paul especially develops the sin-as-enslaving-power motif in Romans 3, 5, and 6, depicting sin as a power under which we are born because of Adam’s sin. However, many misunderstand the nature of sin in Scripture because they fail to start to ground their understanding in the prolegomena.

It should be no surprise, therefore, that Genesis 1–4 is often asserted to be mythical in nature, denying the historical veracity of the events depicted there. This denial, however, leads to a problem, because biblical writers—especially New Testament authors, and Jesus Himself—treat these stories as historical narratives. Key theological expositions, which were inspired by God, presuppose that the information in Genesis 1–4 is historical fact, not

mythical fiction. Hence, when some assert that Genesis 1–4 is mythical in character, they immediately undermine key portions of biblical theology by subverting the presuppositions upon which it is built.

The way that we interpret Genesis 1–4, then, has great impact on how we understand the rest of Scripture. If the events depicted are “clever fables” invented by the religious community and are not an inspired historical record, then the rest of Scripture comes into question. If later authors based their theological insights, in part, on previous Scriptures that are not historically accurate, how can their theological concepts be reliable? The Bible roots faith in the actual historical acts of God in earth history. Mere mythical claims are insufficient to ground true faith. To be in harmony with Scripture, we must accept the presuppositions of the prolegomena (*Genesis 1–4*) in order not to corrupt or distort the rest of the biblical message built off those definitions and presuppositions.

Consider This: What is the significance of inspired authors, and of Christ, treating the data in Genesis 1–4 as actual history? How would accepting Genesis 1–4 as mythical fiction impact the veracity of the teachings that were set forth by the biblical authors, and by Christ Himself, as a true basis for spiritual insight?

► **STEP 3**—Apply

Just for Teachers: This section will require some diligent work on your part as a teacher to familiarize yourself with the mega-themes of Job and with the contexts of the Psalms, prophets, and Jesus. It is not enough to note, for example, that Jesus mentions Creation and affirms its historicity. How is Jesus using the historicity of Genesis 1–3 to make a larger spiritual point? (Follow this template used with Jesus for each of the passages in the lesson.)

Thought Questions:

Bearing in mind that our lesson looks at connections to Genesis 1 in Job, Psalms, the Hebrew prophets, and the teachings of Jesus, answer the following questions:

❶ What is the larger message in Job, the various Psalms, et cetera, in our lesson, and how does each biblical author use Creation to help to shape his larger argument?

2 If Genesis 1 can be taken literally only in the sense that it shows that God is the first cause of all things, but we then say that science shows that God actually created through evolutionary processes, how would this impact the messages of Job, the Psalms, Jesus, et cetera? Why would it radically change the message of each? And how?

► **STEP 4—Create**

Just for Teachers: The following activity for discussion is designed to encourage class members to consider the implications of the following question: **If Jesus and other biblical authors under inspiration held Genesis 1 to be historically true, how should our view of Creation impact our belief in biblical authority?**

Activity: Discuss how active and strong biblical authority is in the lives of the class members. What role should Scripture have in their lives? How does what you believe about Creation impact the role of biblical authority in your life?
