

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 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 is 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 they 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. It should not be 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, is how the seventh day should be kept, not whether it is to be abolished or superseded by something else.

Jesus' example shows not only that the Sabbath remains something that should be observed, but it shows 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 to 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 it is 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 will create 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 did 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:

❶ 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.

❷ 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?

❸ 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.

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Genesis 2:1–3*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Understand that the Sabbath was given to humanity prior to the Fall as a means of recalibrating humanity’s relationship with God on a weekly basis.

Feel: Appreciate the importance of recognizing and protecting the rights of others to have the Sabbath experience.

Do: Gratefully keep the Sabbath in a way that recalibrates his or her relationship with God and avoids depriving others of this experience.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: God and the Sabbath

- A** Why did Adam and Eve need the Sabbath in an unfallen world?
- B** How does the keeping of the Sabbath reveal God’s purpose for our lives?

II. Feel: The Gift of the Sabbath

A The fourth commandment identifies a list of creatures whom we have the power to deprive of a Sabbath rest. Why is it important to feel a need to protect their Sabbath rest, as well?

B We were made for intimate fellowship with God. How can Sabbath keeping strengthen your desire to deepen your communion with your Creator?

III. Do: Keeping the Seventh Day Holy

- A** How does the Sabbath recalibrate our relationship with God?
- B** How can we use our influence to protect the access of others to the Sabbath rest?

► **Summary:** The Sabbath was given before the Fall as a tool to help humanity to remember who they are—finite creatures under the sovereignty of an infinite God. The Sabbath, thus, was given as a tool to recalibrate one’s relationship with God. As such, the Sabbath shows that God made us to be more than mere producers of products and services. We were made to have intimate fellowship with God. Additionally, in a sinful world, we have the power to deprive others of that recalibrating experience; we can do that by making them continue to produce products and services for us on the Sabbath. The fourth commandment calls us to self-restraint and asks to use our power to protect others’ access to the Sabbath rest.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Creation and the Sabbath are intimately connected. Denial of Creation tends to lead to a denial of other Bible truths, such as the Sabbath, the Flood, the Second Coming, and the new heavens and earth.

Just for Teachers: Help your class to realize that the teaching of Creation is intimately tied to the rest of biblical theology. Change your view of Creation, and you will be forced to change other views in order to maintain logical consistency.

Our lesson mentions the fact that Peter connects a denial of Creation to a denial of the Flood and other biblical teachings. Peter may have been an early witness to such phenomena, but the same pattern is also alive and well today. Process theologians, evolutionary theologians, and others deny the six-day Creation of Genesis 1 as factual history. A number of these theologians also deny the Second Coming, the new heavens and earth, and more. For them, modern science has relegated Scripture to mere fables. But once faith in the authority of Scripture wanes, religion becomes a humanly constructed collection of religious ideas and nothing more.

Creation, then, functions as a litmus test of one's view of Scripture and its authority. If one decides that the Bible is wrong about origins, one is more likely to question other miraculous stories, such as the Flood, the resurrection of Jesus, or concepts such as the Sabbath. The core issue is not Creation per se but the impact on biblical authority that comes with denying Genesis 1.

Opening Activity for Discussion: How does a person with a humanly constructed faith approach Scripture differently from one who holds Scripture to be the authoritative Word of God? How can you discern if your faith is humanly constructed or grounded in Scripture?

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Just for Teachers: The Sabbath is more than merely a day of rest. God made us to be more than just producers of goods and services for Him. The Sabbath is a day for renewing our relationship with God.

Bible Commentary

I. The Deeper Dimensions of Sabbath Keeping (*Review Genesis 2:1–3 with the class.*)

On one Seventh-day Adventist university campus, it is not uncommon to regularly see cars with bumper stickers reading, “The seventh day is the Sabbath, and God never changed it.” This statement begs the question: Is it possible that Seventh-day Adventists can focus so much on which is the day of the Sabbath that they miss out on the deeper dimensions of Sabbath keeping? Furthermore, it is not infrequent to hear the Sabbath explained as being an enhancer of human productivity. By resting one day, we can produce more during the following six. But is the Sabbath merely a rest day, permitting us to destroy ourselves with overwork during the other six days? If this were the case, why would the Sabbath be needed in a pre-Fall Eden where fatigue was, presumably, not a meaningful factor? Why did sinless humanity need the Sabbath?

Several reasons can be cited.

First, Adam and Eve had jobs to do in the garden; yet, God commanded them not to do those jobs on Sabbath. This prohibition suggests that God made humanity for more than the production of goods and services. Intimate fellowship with God was a higher priority than purely efficient production. God’s love for us is based not on what we produce for Him. Instead, His love extends an invitation to a special personal friendship with Him. Additionally, it seems that even Adam and Eve could get so absorbed in the tasks related to serving and protecting the garden that they could lose track of whom they were under—God.

So, even prior to the Fall, the Sabbath provided a time to recalibrate one’s relational orientation to God, reminding one that he or she is a finite creature under the claims of a sovereign but gracious God. Whether pre-Fall or post-Fall, this recalibration is a vital function of the Sabbath.

Second, Adam and Eve had to accept the Sabbath on God’s terms and timing, thus acknowledging His right to make claims in this area. For Adam and Eve, Sabbath was their first full day of existence. They had no way of knowing how much time had transpired prior to their coming to consciousness. Common sense might have suggested to them that the mature ecosystem upon which they gazed could never have appeared mere days earlier. The only way they could have known what really happened is that God must have revealed the nature of the prior Creation days to them. By faith, they had to accept that the Sabbath was indeed the seventh day of earth’s history and then submit to a weekly cycle ordained by God. Thus, Sabbath keeping is an act of faith, surrendering

to God’s timetable and acknowledging His right to structure our time and our worship. Sabbath thus helps to reinforce and reverse Eve’s problem of forgetting who she was and trying to become co-creator. It shows us that God made us for more than utilitarian benefits for Himself. The Sabbath was created in order to foster intimate fellowship between God and humanity.

Consider This: Beyond the difference of day, how does our keeping of Sabbath differ from the ways that others observe Sunday? How do those differences benefit spiritual life?

► **STEP 3**—Apply

Just for Teachers: Those we hire and employ have a right to the Sabbath rest, and God has a right to their Sabbath observance. But we have the power to deprive people of their right to the Sabbath rest and to deprive God of His rights, as well.

Thought Questions:

❶ Do you view people as utilitarian tools made to produce products and services for yourself, or do you see them as having been created for something more? How will this perspective affect the ways in which you treat others?

❷ Whom do you have the power to exploit and lord over? How would both Creation principles and the Sabbath inform how you exercise your power?

❸ How is Isaiah 58:1–12 related to verses 13 and 14 of the same chapter?

► **STEP 4—Create**

Just for Teachers: The two versions of the fourth commandment show that Sabbath celebrates both creative and redemptive power.

Questions:

❶ How are creative and redemptive power related?

❷ If God had created through evolutionary processes, how would that have affected our understanding of the connection between creative and redemptive power? How might our understanding of new birth and spiritual renewal change?

❸ How do the principles of Christian growth and character development differ from the processes of evolution? Why is Christian growth not merely a form of evolution?
