

The Environment



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 1–2:7, 18–24; 3:7, 17–19; Ps. 24:1; Matt. 25:34–46; Mark 2:27, 28; 3:4.*

Memory Text: “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it” (*Psalm 24:1, NIV*).

The Creator spent the first five days of Creation week preparing the environment for the human beings who were to follow. He placed Adam and Eve in a garden (*Gen. 2:8, 15*) and gave them the oversight of all earthly creatures. This offered them the opportunity for study and enjoyment and the chance to develop as God’s representatives on earth. The Sabbath would seal their relationship with Him.

Sin changed God’s preferred plan. The environment became hostile. Hard toil replaced pleasurable work. Selfishness ruled. Exploitation of the earth’s resources began and continues to this day. Forests have been cut down. Water courses have been changed, and pollution is rampant. The richness of the soil has been squandered thoughtlessly. Sunlight, though crucial for health, can become a foe of health if we are exposed to it in excess. Through all this, the world still supports our existence here, despite our endless abuse of the planet.

The Week at a Glance: Our environment is just as much a gift from God as life itself; thus, we have a responsibility toward it.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 1.*

Creating the Environment

Some theories today depict the creation of the earth, and life on it, as nothing more than an accident, nothing but the chance creation of amoral forces that over time and without thought brought the earth and all life on it into existence. In contrast, the Bible presents a radically different picture of our origin. The contrast between the godless and purposeless model of our origin, as expressed by the theory of evolution, and the Genesis Creation account could not be more distinct. These two views are, at their core, incompatible.

Read Genesis 1 and Genesis 2:1–7. How did God’s acts of Creation week prepare the way for the crowning act of Creation—man and woman? How did creation of humans differ from the rest of creation?

Let us pause for a moment at the scene of the Creator God working on the creation of man and woman. First, He forms Adam from the ground; here is God, the Sculptor. Then, when all else is ready, He bends down and breathes His own breath into Adam’s waiting form. God the Giver of life brings Adam to life. What a marvelous picture of our God at work!

But that is not all. He becomes God the Surgeon as He takes a rib from Adam and forms Eve to be the partner of Adam and the mother of the race. She is also to stand by his side in this perfect setting (*see Gen. 2:18–24*). He then puts these brand-new beings into the place of beauty and wonder He had spent previous time preparing.

God provided the most healthful surroundings for Adam and Eve. The restful green of foliage, the color of flowers and fruit—all combined to make the ideal home for them. The Lord did not plan a life of idleness for our first parents. They were to work in the Garden and care for it. In this way they would find satisfaction and enjoyment. They would learn more of God in what we have come to call God’s second book—*nature*.

Read through the Genesis Creation account again in Genesis 1 and 2. What do we find there that points us toward the idea that, as humans beings, we should be good stewards of the earth?

The Sabbath Environment

How interesting that amid all the work of creation, God was not quite done until He created the Sabbath day. What a contrast: all the work of creating the world, the animals, the seas, the grass, and finally humankind—and then, one final act, the act of resting.

Read Genesis 2:2, 3. What can we read into the fact that God Himself rested on the Sabbath day?

God Himself, in the role of Creator, keeping the seventh-day Sabbath? Talk about showing us the deep roots of the Sabbath! Whatever the implications of that idea, one thing is sure: the seventh-day Sabbath came from God long before there ever was a Jewish nation and people.

The Sabbath, meanwhile, has provided us an opportunity to focus attention on the Creator, His love, and His care for His creatures in a way that would otherwise not be easily available to us. It helped set a limit to labor, even in a time when labor was relatively easy and productive. After sin entered and work became much harder and tiring (*Gen. 3:17–19*), this limit on work and the call to remember the Creator became even more important. As a reminder of the Creation itself, it should help us focus on our responsibility to our created world, as well.

As the centuries passed, the true meaning of the Sabbath rest became lost in numerous rules and regulations that turned the thoughts of the people away from the true meaning and value of the Sabbath.

Read Mark 2:27, 28 and Mark 3:4. What was Jesus' understanding of the Sabbath?

Christ restored the meaning of the Sabbath to what God originally intended it to mean. He showed how God viewed the day as a time for doing good, for seeking the advancement of His kingdom, and for being of service to all in need.

How could and should Sabbath keeping help us better understand the wonderful gift we've been given of this created world and, more so, how could and should it help us understand better our obligation to take care of it?

Changes in the Environment After Sin

Read Genesis 3:7, 17–19. What was the first indication to Adam and Eve that their action in eating the forbidden fruit had consequences?

With the entry of sin into their lives, Adam and Eve faced some hard consequences. First, as Ellen White wrote, the clothing of light that had covered them disappeared. The environment that had clothed them changed. The environment of the plant world changed, as well. Thorns and thistles grew. The soil became hard and unyielding. And, worst of all, there was now the entrance of death, something that they never were to have known.

Suddenly, the wonderful environment that had been theirs to enjoy now had a new face, and it presented to them new challenges, challenges that over time and in subsequent generations only became worse. Humans, meanwhile, began to exploit the earth, often for their own gain and glory.

See 1 Kings 10:14–22. What does this tell us about how humans had come to view the Creation?

Exploitation, decay, loss of substance, and death have been present with all peoples—so much so that we may take them for granted as part of the cycle of life. But it was not so in the beginning and is not in God’s final plan. Humankind’s stewardship of the earth has turned into an exploitation of it, as greedy people seek to take all from the earth that they can, regardless of the consequences.

The pollution of air and water, the contamination of soil, and the presence of new and fearful disease agents all point to the aging of the earth and the escalating need for renewal. As more and more countries seek to develop, and as developed countries seek to continue to maintain their standard of living, the health challenges humanity faces are becoming enormous because of damage to the environment.

Years ago, a political leader made a statement to this effect: “We don’t have to worry about the environment because Jesus is coming back soon.” What is the logic of that argument? How would you respond to it?

Our Responsibility for the Environment

Read Psalm 24:1. What implications do these words have for us and how we relate to the world? As we look around at the conditions in our world, we need to ask the question, “What, if anything, can we do to improve the environment?”

We need to begin by reminding ourselves of the Lordship of God over the earth. We are not free of responsibility to Him and His created works. Not only the earth is His but the people also—we and everyone else. We are responsible to Him for other people, as well as the rest of the earthly creation. We can conserve resources.

One example is water. We can be thoughtful in using water. We can support efforts to provide clean water to those who do not have it. In certain parts of the world, lack of clean water is a very serious problem, leading to a tremendous loss of life.

We can follow the diet that the Lord has outlined for us. If more people were on a vegetarian diet, there would be more food to go around because it takes a lot more natural resources to sustain a meat-eating diet than to sustain a vegetarian one.

We can care for the plants and trees that we have responsibility for. This will assist in maintaining clean air.

To whatever degree we can, we should seek to reduce the level of carbon emissions, which is increasingly becoming a worldwide concern due to the potentially dangerous impact to the environment caused by carbon emissions.

By being good stewards of the earth, by seeking to take care of the environment, by not hoarding natural resources for ourselves, by being willing to share with others out of our own abundance (if we have it), we can improve the daily lives of those who need our help. As Christians, as those who profess to follow the Lord Jesus, we are obligated to help those in need.

Read Matthew 25:34–46. How might our stewardship of the earth in some way play a role here in doing what Jesus asks us to do? What other verses could you think of that also could apply to this issue?

Sun Worshipers

Only in the light of eternity will we be able to grasp fully the negative impact of sin on the environment. It's hard for us to imagine what this world must have looked like and how perfectly suited for life the environment must have been for our first parents.

Of course, sin didn't just impact the earth. It impacted humans, as well. Among the negative impacts of sin on humans was their degeneration into idolatry, which was manifested in (among other ways) their worshiping and serving "created things" (*Romans 1:25, NIV*) as opposed to the Creator.

Read 2 Kings 23:1–5; Jeremiah 8:1, 2; and Ezekiel 8:16. What was going on here? Why, in one sense, would it make sense to worship the sun?

One thing we can know for sure about the environment of the earth today is that sunlight, though very important for our health, can have exceedingly deleterious effects if we're exposed to too much. Thus, in a sense, modern sun worshipers are living in almost as much ignorance as their ancient predecessors.

We now know that too much exposure to sunlight increases the risk of various skin cancers.

On the other hand, sunlight exposure helps to produce vitamin D, which is essential for body metabolism and the building of strong and healthy bones. Adequate exposure to sunlight also helps to prevent certain types of cancer.

What, then, is the optimal exposure to sunlight? Light-skinned people in equatorial environments who rely on sunlight for their vitamin D require at least five minutes per day of direct exposure. Dark-skinned people in the same environment require about thirty minutes to make the same amount of vitamin D. In areas where the hours of sunlight are more limited, vitamin D should be supplemented under medical supervision.

It also is healthful to open curtains and windows to allow sunlight to enter our rooms, which helps destroy certain bacteria.

Studies show that folk without adequate sunlight exposure can be more prone to suffer from seasonal depression (known as seasonal affective disorder); this problem occurs especially in areas where the days are short in winter. The cure is very straightforward: more exposure to light, even if artificial, in the winter months.

The bottom line? As with so much else regarding healthful living, temperance and balance in regard to sunlight exposure are crucial.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Creation,” pp. 44–51, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “The Controversy Ended,” pp. 675–678, in *The Great Controversy*.

“ ‘Since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead.’ Romans 1:20 [NKJV]. The things of nature that we now see give us but a faint conception of Eden’s glory. Sin has marred earth’s beauty. On all things may be seen traces of the work of evil. Yet much that is beautiful remains. Nature testifies that One infinite in power, great in goodness, mercy, and love, created the earth and filled it with life and gladness. Even in their blighted state, all things reveal the handiwork of the great Master Artist. Wherever we turn, we may hear the voice of God and see evidences of His goodness.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Health and Healing*, p. 234.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 The issue of the environment, especially the question of global warming, has in recent years come to the forefront of the news. What is the response of your nation, community, and church to these issues?
- 2 How should a Christian, someone who believes that God did create the world, relate to questions of the environment differently than someone who believes we are here as products of pure chance alone?
- 3 How can and should the Sabbath play a role in our concern for the environment? How does Sabbath keeping help us be better environmentalists?
- 4 If Jesus is coming back soon, as we believe, should we really be all that concerned with the environment? Justify your answer.
- 5 Do some research, if possible, on the negative health effects that damage to the environment is causing in various parts of the world. What about in your own community? What role could and should your church take in this area? How might you be able to use any activism here in outreach?
- 6 What are ways, even small ways, you could make some lifestyle changes that could impact the environment for good? How much self-sacrifice would it take on your part?

The Prodigal Soul Winner

by ALBERTO VILLANUEVA

As a youth I found no reason to live. I was deeply into alcoholism and was having problems with my family. I left home and moved to another part of Mexico.

I met an Adventist man who gave me a well-marked Bible. I read it, especially the marked verses, and was amazed that God's Word was so alive. I began attending church and eventually asked the pastor to prepare me for baptism.

God rescued me from a hopeless life and gave me a ministry to people who are living as I once lived. I've seen God open many doors.

My wife had some distant relatives with whom we became friends. I wanted to study the Bible with them, but when I asked the husband, he said it was impossible; they were strong members of another faith. Right there I silently prayed for God to open this man's heart. As we stood to leave, the man said, "Come back soon and share the Bible with us!"

The family began Bible studies, but one of the sons, Servino, refused to study with us. We continued studying together for three months, and eventually Servino joined us again. Seven family members committed their lives to Christ, including Servino. Only later did I learn that Servino had been so angry about the Bible studies that he had plotted to kill me.

I held a short evangelistic series in a mountain village. As I walked to one family's home, I noticed that I was being followed. When I arrived at the family's home, the man of the house recognized one of the men following me. "Be careful," he whispered. "These men are thieves. Carry a weapon to protect yourself." I told him that I carried no weapon.

The host, who owned a small store in the area, told the thief, "Leave this man alone. He's a missionary who has come to share God's love with us." The thief disappeared and didn't bother me. Eventually, two members of this man's family were baptized, along with five other people.

I share the gospel with others because God shared it with me. I praise God that some 50 people have been rescued from Satan's lies and have committed their hearts to Christ.

Pray for those who are searching for something better in life. And remember that your mission offerings help make a difference in the lives of those who need to know about God's love.

ALBERTO VILLANUEVA *shares his faith in Morelos, Mexico.*