

# Jesus, Provider *and* Sustainer



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:16, 17; Job 42; Matt. 5:45; 6:25–34; 10:28.*

**Memory Text:** “And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus” (*Philippians 4:19, NIV*).

God sustains the creation in such regular ways that the universe is sometimes compared to a machine that God left to run on its own.

Rather than a machine, however, a better metaphor is that the creation is like a musical instrument that God uses to produce the desired “melody.” That is, He is constantly involved in sustaining what He has created.

Nothing in the universe exists independently of the Lord. He created everything that was created. “Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (*John 1:3, NIV*). Not only that, He is the One who sustains it all. Even more astonishing, the One who created and sustains it all was the One who was crucified for us.

“The apostle Paul, writing by the Holy Spirit, declares of Christ that ‘all things have been created through Him, and unto Him; and He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.’ Colossians 1:16, 17, R.V., margin. The hand that sustains the worlds in space, the hand that holds in their orderly arrangement and tireless activity all things throughout the universe of God, is the hand that was nailed to the cross for us.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 132.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 23.*

## The Sustainer

**Read** Hebrews 1:3 and Colossians 1:16, 17. What is the role of Jesus in the ongoing existence of the universe?

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The implication here is that Jesus continues to sustain the existence of the universe by His power. The universe is not independent; its existence depends on the continuous exercise of divine will. This is a refutation of deism, the philosophy that teaches that God created the world to govern itself and then left it to evolve without any further action on His part. The Bible rules out such theories.

Also, God is not within the creation, constantly creating it, as in the false theories of pantheism (God and the universe are the same thing) or panentheism (God inhabits the universe as though it were His own body). God is not dependent on the universe in any way. He is separate from the universe. He existed and continues to exist, independently of it. The universe depends on God; God does not depend on the universe.

**Read** 1 Corinthians 8:6 and Acts 17:28. How does Paul describe our relationship to Jesus?

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We are dependent on God's sustaining power, moment by moment, day by day. It is because of His love that we continue to exist and are able to act and also form relationships. This is true in a special way for those who have committed themselves to God and who are, as Paul would describe it, "in Christ" (*2 Cor. 5:17, Eph. 2:10; note the references to creation in these texts*). It is also true that even those who reject salvation are, nevertheless, dependent on God's sustaining power for their existence. Daniel made this point very poignantly to King Belshazzar when he said, "The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified" (*Dan. 5:23*).

**With all this in mind, how do we understand the reality of free will and free choice? Why are these elements of our existence so important to all that we believe?**

## The Generous Provider

Genesis 1:29, 30 shows that when God first created living creatures, He provided food for them. Herbs, fruits, and seeds were the food chosen for both humans and animals. Nothing is said of predation or competition for resources. The generous Provider made plenty of food for everyone to partake in without any need for violence.

What a contrast to the common models for existence proposed by evolutionary theory, which teaches that human life, indeed all life, exists only through a violent process of predation and survival of the fittest. The early chapters of Genesis know nothing about that. On the contrary, they reveal a world that was, literally, a paradise from the beginning. That's why, when the Lord had finished creating it, the Bible records these words: "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day" (*Gen. 1:31*).

**Read** Genesis 2:8, 9. What does this passage indicate about God's special interest in providing for Adam and Eve?

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We already noted that God had provided food for all His creatures, including humans. Now we see God going a step further. Not only does He provide food in abundance throughout the earth, but He has prepared a special Garden for Adam and Eve, with trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food (*see Gen. 2:9*). The Garden, with its beauty and its variety of food, was a provision of God's extravagant love and grace. It was a gift of grace because Adam and Eve had done nothing to earn it, but it was freely offered and abundantly furnished.

As stated in an earlier lesson, we are far removed from the original Creation. Ours is a greatly damaged world. Nothing on the earth, it seems, has been spared either. Yet, even amid the damage, powerful evidence of God's love exists.

**"Nature is a power, but the God of nature is unlimited in power. His works interpret his character. Those who judge him from his handiworks, and not from the suppositions of great men, will see his presence in everything."—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, March 13, 1884. Look at nature; in what ways do we see "his presence in everything"?**

## Natural Evil

Of course, one of the great questions that all believers in a loving God have had to deal with is the question of evil; not just human evil but what is called “natural evil.” This natural evil occurs when bad things happen in nature (floods, hurricanes, drought, earthquakes, etc.) that cause so much pain and suffering, not just for humans but for animals as well.

How are we to understand these things? After all, if God is in control of the creation, why would such things happen?

One of the earliest books of the Bible is the book of Job, where these questions (and others) became painfully real for Job (see week four).

**Read Job 42. What does this chapter answer for us? What questions remain unanswered?**

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Anyone who has ever read the book of Job came away with, perhaps, more questions than answers. The book does reveal important truths about the great controversy (*see also Rev. 12:12*), which help to form a background crucial for us to even begin to understand the existence of evil. The great controversy scenario, however, doesn't explain every instance of evil. In fact, to explain evil would in a sense be to justify it, and we can never do that. The great controversy can reveal the grand issues behind evil; the motif tells us little, if anything, about each instance of evil.

Job did not understand, and neither do we when we face such catastrophic losses. Although God spoke to Job, He did not provide the answer to Job's questions, nor did He explain the cause of what happened. He simply reminded Job that there were things beyond his knowledge and that he would have to trust God, which Job did. Our experience is often similar; we may not receive an answer to our questions. But the story of Job does give us important insight into the nature of evil, and it shows us that God is not unaware of the struggles that we face.

**Go back to Sabbath's introduction and read the Ellen G. White quote. How does that help us to come to grips better with the question of evil, knowing that God Himself suffered greatly from it, as well?**

## Governing a Damaged Creation

**Read** Matthew 5:45 and Psalm 65:9, 10. How does God act in creation in order to maintain the creatures that He created? What does this tell us about God’s interest in the created world?

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We are familiar with sunshine and rain, and scientists have provided explanations for the processes involved in each. Yet, there is more to the story than science can tell. Behind the scenes, God is actively providing for the necessities of His creatures. We may not understand His ways, but we know He is in control. Just as a skilled musician may play an instrument to produce music so beautiful that one’s attention is focused on the music rather than on the musician, so God orders the creation so that we often see the order and are impressed with the majesty of the creation. At the same time we may not recognize that God is behind the scenes, ordering events according to His will and intending that all things will eventually work together for the good of those who love Him (*Rom. 8:28*).

**What** similar phenomenon is noted in the following texts? *Gen. 8:1, Exod. 10:13, Num. 11:31.*

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Wind is a common event, and we generally understand what causes it. But in these texts, the winds occur in special circumstances. We might call them “providential winds.” They occur at specific times and places and accomplish specific purposes. Though they may appear “natural,” there is an unseen Cause working out the purposes of His own will, using features of the world that He created to accomplish His own purposes.

In 2 Kings 20:9–11, we see one of the most unusual miracles of the entire Bible. The relationship of sun and earth and day length seems like one of the most stable and predictable features of human experience. Imagine the reaction of today’s scientific community if a similar event should occur in our day. Yet, we must ask, “Is any thing too hard for the Lord?” (*Gen. 18:14*). What this miracle and others should tell us is that there is much about the creation, and God’s actions in His creation, that is way beyond our understanding. That’s why it’s so crucial that we come to a personal knowledge of God and know for ourselves the reality of His love. That way, we learn to trust Him despite all that we don’t understand.

## Provider for a Damaged Creation

**“Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?”** (*Matt. 6:26*).

Even after Adam and Eve sinned and could no longer enter the Garden, God provided for their immediate physical needs (*Gen. 3:21*). Sin brought a new need, the need for clothing. Adam and Eve tried to provide clothing for themselves, but fig leaves were quite unsatisfactory. Something better was needed, which God provided in the form of skins. (We will consider more of the meaning of the skins in another lesson.) The point is that God provided for their needs, even though they had fallen into sin. This is another example of God’s grace providing for us despite our unworthiness.

**Read Matthew 6:25–34. What crucial message is Jesus giving us with these words? How are we to understand them in the face of the trials and tragedies that are such a part of so many lives?**

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These are very comforting words, and we need to cling to them with all our hearts, souls, and minds, especially in times of great suffering, loss, and need. Jesus died for us, not for the lilies or the birds. We can be sure of His love for us, regardless of the circumstances. And yet, as we all know, circumstances can at times be quite appalling. We see famine, drought, floods, epidemics, and death all around, and Christians are not immune to these tragedies either.

God does not promise His people a life of luxury without pain, but He does promise to provide for our needs and to strengthen us so that we may cope with our challenges. We just can’t forget the reality of the great controversy and that we are in a fallen world.

**Read Matthew 10:28. How could this verse, read in conjunction with the verses for today, help us to deal better with the harsh realities that we often face?**

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**Further Study:** “Yet men of science think that they can comprehend the wisdom of God, that which He has done or can do. The idea largely prevails that He is restricted by His own laws. Men either deny or ignore His existence, or think to explain everything, even the operation of His Spirit upon the human heart; and they no longer reverence His name or fear His power. They do not believe in the supernatural, not understanding God’s laws or His infinite power to work His will through them. As commonly used, the term ‘laws of nature’ comprises what men have been able to discover with regard to the laws that govern the physical world; but how limited is their knowledge, and how vast the field in which the Creator can work in harmony with His own laws and yet wholly beyond the comprehension of finite beings!”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 114.

(See also Ellen G. White, “Laws of Nature,” pp. 259–261 in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8.)

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Read carefully the Ellen White statement above. What is she saying? In what ways do we see many scientists today doing exactly what she says?
- 2 Modern science today is much better than it used to be at explaining, through natural means, why certain things happen or why they don’t. The problem isn’t with “natural means” or “natural laws” but with the idea that these means and laws are all that exist—that there is nothing, and certainly no supernatural forces, ultimately behind them. What’s wrong with this assumption? Why does it make no logical sense (ask yourself, From where did these laws originate?), and why is that idea so contrary to the most basic teaching of the Bible?
- 3 How does the image of creation as a musical instrument provide a more accurate picture of God’s relationship to the creation than does the image of creation as a machine?
- 4 What other examples can you find in Scripture where God caused special events in what we would consider to be merely “forces of nature”? See, for example, 1 Kings 19:11, 12.

## Ministry to the Military

Kitoli is a Global Mission pioneer in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). His unique ministry is to members of the military in the DRC. He has worked in several military camps and has brought many soldiers to Christ, often hiring motorcyclists to take military personnel to evangelistic meetings in their area.

Recently Global Mission pioneers joined local pastors in the DRC to reach the people in Beni, a city of about a half million people located on the edge of a thick forest. Few Seventh-day Adventists live in the region, and the local Adventist mission planned to blanket the city with Bible studies and prayer as part of Global Mission's Hope for Big Cities program. The Global Mission pioneers met in Beni to go from door to door, sharing the gospel and inviting the people to take Bible studies. Kitoli, true to his calling, focused his efforts on reaching members of the military stationed in Beni. He made friends and shared his faith with a number of soldiers. When evangelistic meetings were arranged, Kitoli was asked to hold meetings near the military barracks.

Following the efforts to blanket the city with Bible studies and visits, Global Mission pioneers joined local pastors to hold evangelistic meetings in several strategic locations throughout the city. Kitoli held his meetings near the military installations around the city. Many soldiers attended Kitoli's meetings. When the meetings had ended, more than two hundred fifty people across the city of Beni made decisions for Christ and prepared to be baptized. One of them was an army lieutenant colonel named Sikiliza, who had been touched by the messages of hope and power in Jesus Christ. Sikiliza stepped forward to be baptized, wearing his military uniform. In his testimony before his baptism, he acknowledged the hand of God in his life and vowed to remain faithful to his newfound faith.

Following the evangelistic series, Kitoli returned to his work, where he reaches out to as many soldiers as he can. His goal is to provide Bibles and Bible study lessons to as many members of the military as possible, and he hopes to plant several churches near military bases.

Your mission offerings help to maintain church groups planted by Global Mission pioneers in the DRC and throughout the world. Thank you for faithfully supporting the mission of the church through your offerings.

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