

The Early Earth



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 2.*

Memory Verse: “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them” (*Genesis 2:1*).

Having dealt with how all of Creation came into being, Moses now focuses on human beings and their immediate environment. While Genesis 1 answered the question How did it all originate? Genesis 2 explains why we are what we are. Without the information provided by Genesis 2, the test of allegiance to God and the subsequent Fall described in Genesis 3 would, to a large extent, be unintelligible.

The intimate world of Adam and Eve surrounded by trees and animals in a garden complements the previous majestic account of Creation. Chapter 2 introduces the reader of the Bible to the social dimensions of humanity and gives some insight on prehistory and the original geography of the world.

Genesis 2 also deals with such divine institutions as Sabbath, work, home, and marriage. Given to the human race before the Fall, these institutions lie at the basis of human existence, conduct, and happiness even today. Though we are, indeed, a long way from Eden, it still presents a model, a template of principles, for we who are on the periphery of Eden restored. What messages are found in this divine account of a prefallen world for the rest of us, we who have known only a fallen existence?

This week we'll take a look at, literally, paradise, one of the few we'll ever see, at least for now.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 21.*

The Sabbath *(Gen. 2:1-3)*

Last week we saw a progression in the Creation account: from darkness to light, from only water to earth and water, to an atmosphere, to vegetation, and so forth, culminating in the creation of human beings, first the man and then the woman. Only after all these things were created do we get the words in Genesis 2:1—“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.” God’s work of Creation, at least as attested to here, was a finished work. This notion is implied in Genesis 2:2, 3, where both verses say that God “rested” from His work. Was God tired, or did He rest because His work was completed?

Read Genesis 2:2, 3 and answer the following questions:

1 Is there anything in the texts that implies that Creation was an ongoing process that continued after the sixth day? What are the implications of your answer?

2 Considering what the Sabbath stands for, the Creation, how do these verses already imply the universality of the Sabbath; that is, its meaning for all humanity?

Although the noun *sabbath* is not mentioned in Genesis 2, the verb for “rested,” from which the term *sabbath* is derived, proves that the Sabbath is meant (*see Exod. 20:8-11*). Just as six literal days came before it, the Sabbath is a literal day, as well.

Notice, too, that the first thing God declared holy was time, the seventh day. Not a hill, not a river, not a shrine, but a segment of time itself was the first thing in God’s new Creation specifically “set apart” (another way of expressing “to be made holy”). Thus, we see the Sabbath as something special, something universal, something not bounded by the limits of place or geography but as something that can reach every human being no matter where they live.

Next time you welcome in the Sabbath, dwell on the fact that you are keeping a day that goes all the way back to Eden, to the first week of human existence. How does that make you feel, linking yourself in such a tangible way to your origins?

Nephesh Hayyah

In Genesis 2, the scene shifts from the Creation of the world to a local garden. Rather than being a second and different Creation narrative, Genesis 2 complements Genesis 1. Human beings are the pinnacle of the pyramid in Genesis 1. In Genesis 2 they become the center of the circle. The spotlight falls on the human race, and everything else is relegated to the background.

Back in Genesis, it wasn't until the fifth day that God created "living creatures," from the Hebrew *nephesh hayyah*. *Hayyah* here means "life," and *nephesh* means "creature." Interestingly enough, that same phrase appears in 2:7.

Read Genesis 2:7. What phrase seems most likely in the text to have been translated from *nephesh hayyah*?

Most people are surprised to learn that the phrase often translated "living soul" (*Gen. 2:7*) in the creation of humanity is the same one used to describe fish and birds and other creeping things. Though unlike these other creatures, humanity was made in the "image of God" (*Gen. 1:27*); in a purely physical sense humanity is tied to other life on earth. And, of course, we see this in the sense that, like other life on earth, we need certain physical things in order to stay alive.

How does this use of the word *nephesh* in Genesis 2:7 (often translated "soul") help us understand why the soul isn't immortal? (*Ezek. 18:4, Matt. 10:28*).

Though the Bible uses the word *nephesh* in numerous ways, denoting a variety of ideas ("person," "self," "life," or "being"), it never means in the Old Testament the popular notion of some separate conscious immortal entity that can exist apart from the body. That's a pagan Greek idea that has filtered into almost all monotheistic religions today.

Make a list of the common popular deceptions that arise from belief in an immortal soul. Why should one who understands the truth about the soul be so grateful that he or she does understand? What does that knowledge protect you from?

The Garden Home *(Gen. 2:8-17)*

The specific geographical details presented in verses 10 through 14 indicate that, in the mind of the Bible writer, Eden was a specific locality rather than merely being a symbol or a metaphor. Several of the names mentioned in verses 11 through 14 are later applied to post-Flood localities and rivers. However, the Flood changed the surface features of our planet so radically that identification of pre-Flood geography with places and rivers known to us is impossible.

What elements mentioned in verses 8 through 17 indicate that the garden home was an ideal model? (Note particularly the setting and the attention given to humanity's physical, mental, aesthetic, and moral needs.)

Even today, with a world ravaged by six thousand years of sin, we can get hints of what the original beauty must have been like. Traces remain, and they speak to us of God's wonderful creative power (*Job 12:7-9; Rom. 1:19, 20*). It's hard to imagine what Eden must have looked like and what a paradise it must have been.

What's the closest thing to paradise that you've ever seen? What made it like paradise? In what ways does it parallel what Eden, or the earth as a whole, must have been like?

Read Genesis 2:15. How interesting that Adam, even in this earthly paradise, with everything he could possibly need, was given the task of working in the garden. The Hebrew word translated "dress" is a common term meaning to "work" or to "serve." Thus, even before the Fall, even before sin, humanity wasn't to sit idle but to work. This alone should get rid of the notion that work itself is somehow bad.

Though we're a long way from Eden, what practical things could you do now to make your environment more like Eden for yourself and those around you? What changes would need to be made?

The Woman in Adam's Life *(Gen. 2:18-25)*

Here's Adam, in a garden paradise, with rulership over the animals, with everything at his disposal except one tree (*see Gen. 2:16, 17*). And yet, still God has more for him.

What was God's purpose in giving woman to man? *Gen. 2:18, 20.*

The woman was to be a "help meet for him" (the Hebrew suggests a "helper over against him," "a help equal to him," "his counterpart"). The Genesis record places value on woman as an equal, a counterpart, a partner, or a complement in whose company man finds his fullest satisfaction and with whom he shares God's image and likeness.

Read Genesis 1:27, 28. How do these two verses together show the important role the woman was to have in life on earth?

Considering the basic physical makeup of Adam, he couldn't fulfill the command given in Genesis 1:28 without a woman, could he? Though the woman was to be his companion, wife, and co-worker in subduing and having dominion over nature, she was to be so much more, as well (*see Gen. 2:24*).

How was Eve created? *Gen. 2:21, 22.* What distinguished her creation from that of all other living things?

Everything else, including man, came out of the dirt; Eve came out of man. Though the Bible doesn't explain just what that difference means, it certainly shows that she wasn't to be treated as an inferior to him. Sadly, in so many societies, women are treated almost as slaves, afforded little dignity and few rights, a powerful example of what sin has done to the human race.

Have you, either as a man or woman, acquired from your culture (maybe even subconsciously) some of the wrong attitudes about women? How could what's taught in Genesis 2 help change these attitudes?

Eve Becomes Adam's Wife (*Gen. 2:23, 24*)

In Genesis 2:23, Adam was so rapt that he expressed his triumphant welcome of his wife in poetry (verse 23 is the first poetic couplet in Scripture). The creation of Eve and her and Adam's subsequent marriage were designed to be a great blessing. One man, with one woman, were to form the foundation of the home, the basic unit out of which all human life was to spring and then exist. This model was how they were, indeed, to "be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (*Gen. 1:28*).

What has sin done to this ideal? What common things occur now that deviate from it? What have been the results?

What steps in marriage are outlined in the words of God, and in what order are these steps to occur? *Gen. 2:24*.

God's ideal for marriage is expounded in this verse. When the time came to leave those closest to him, his parents, man's first earthly loyalty was to be to his wife. She was to occupy the foremost place in his affections. In God's order the union of bodies between husband and wife is to follow their commitment in marriage. The biblical order "leave . . . cleave . . . and they shall be one flesh" tragically and defiantly has been turned upside down, with tragic results.

What kind of intimate relationship between husband and wife does Scripture uphold long after the Fall? *1 Cor. 7:2-5, Eph. 5:21-29, Heb. 13:4*. What principles do you find in these verses that reflect what marriage was like before the Fall? And, most important, if married, what can you do to better reveal these principles in your own home?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 46–51; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, comments on Genesis 2.

“The home of our first parents was to be a pattern for other homes as their children should go forth to occupy the earth. That home, beautified by the hand of God Himself, was not a gorgeous palace. . . . God placed Adam in a garden. . . . In the surroundings of the holy pair was a lesson for all time—that true happiness is found, not in the indulgence of pride and luxury, but in communion with God through His created works. . . . Pride and ambition are never satisfied, but those who are truly wise will find substantial and elevating pleasure in the sources of enjoyment that God has placed within the reach of all.”
—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 49, 50.

“Eve was created from a rib taken from the side of Adam, signifying that she was not to control him as the head, nor to be trampled under his feet as an inferior, but to stand by his side as an equal, to be loved and protected by him. A part of man, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, she was his second self, showing the close union and the affectionate attachment that should exist in this *relation*.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 46, emphasis supplied.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** How are we today to understand the words in Genesis 1:27, 28 about the man and woman subduing and dominating the earth? What might that have meant then, before sin, and now, after sin? What message does that have for us today in how we relate to our environment?
- 2** How does your society treat women? What practical things can you do, if necessary, to help women who are being mistreated? What can and should your local church be doing that it's not doing now?
- 3** Are there some marriages in trouble in your church? What can you do, as a class, in a very practical manner, to help support those going through this painful turmoil?

One Man's Search for Meaning

by LEONID TALMAZAN

I grew up in Russia. My father was an honest, sincere Communist with a strong sense of right and wrong. But I am sad to say that I did not follow his example. I spent my time hanging out with my friends who lived in the neighboring apartment blocks. Their influence was not as positive as my parents' influence. I refused to apply myself in school, and soon I began to fail. I felt bad that I was disappointing my father but not enough to leave my friends and their influence.

When I was drafted into the army, my artistic ability got me a job drawing for the military. But my poor habits got in the way of advancement, and I lost the opportunity to better myself. I began thinking about the opportunities I had lost because of my bad habits. I began hating my old way of living and decided to better myself. I decided to become a Communist.

When my parents saw the changes in me, they were amazed. I refused to waste time watching TV or visiting friends. Instead, I studied law, obsessed with changing society's evils. But I became disillusioned when I realized that catching criminals would not change the defects of the human race. I quit my studies and joined a circus! I even contemplated suicide.

One night while riding a trolley, I saw a church dome in the distance. *Maybe religion is the answer*, I thought. I got off the trolley and walked into a nearby chapel. As I knelt to pray, peace flooded over me. Suddenly I knew that God exists. I would devote myself to studying about God. But my dying father begged me to enroll in a university, and I could not refuse.

At the university the spiritual hunger remained. Then I learned about some evangelistic meetings being held in the city, and I went. The people there gave me a Bible—the very book that I had searched for! As I read the Bible and listened to the lectures, I realized that God does exist, and He loves me. I knew nothing about the Adventists, who were sponsoring the meetings. I just knew that these meetings were drawing me close to God.

I saved my pennies so I would have an offering to take to church. I refused to study on Sabbath. And God blessed me. I realized that God wanted to be my best Friend, and I invited Him to live in my heart. I am amazed at God's faithfulness and friendship to me. I never want to do anything that will disappoint my best Friend.

Your mission offerings helped support the evangelistic efforts that brought me to Christ. Thank you!



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