

In *the* Beginning



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 19:4; Job 38:4–7; Deut. 32:10, 11; Psalm 19; John 1:1–13; Rom. 5:12; Isa. 66:22.*

Memory Text: “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him” (*Colossians 1:16, NKJV*).

Key Thought: The doctrine of Creation, a literal six-day Creation, is foundational to all that we believe.

It's hard to imagine two more diverse views of our origins than the biblical model of Creation and atheistic evolution. The first presents a creation that was planned, calculated, with nothing left to chance. In contrast, the evolutionary model is all chance. Second, in the biblical account, everything was created for a purpose; God had an end goal, a purpose for what He created. In contrast, evolution works on the premise that there is no final goal, no purpose-driven force motivating what's created. Random mutation and natural selection (products of chance) work together blindly, keeping what functions and discarding what doesn't. Finally, the biblical account teaches that humans were made in the image of God. Evolution teaches that they are made in the image of whatever primate just happened to precede *Homo sapiens*.

This week, we'll look at the biblical doctrine of Creation. If we get Creation wrong, we're all but certain to get many other things wrong. That's how crucial the teaching is to what we believe as Seventh-day Adventist Christians.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 14.*

Creation Week

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1, NKJV). How does this opening line automatically make the Bible and Darwinian evolution mutually exclusive?

The book of Genesis opens with God already in action as Creator. No explanation for, or introduction of, God is given. None of the Bible writers thought that God needed an introduction. The closest thing for a proof of the existence of God might be the sentiment of the psalmist: “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’ ” (Ps. 14:1, NKJV).

Scholars have noted an amazing artistry, not just in creation but in how it is presented in the Bible. Genesis 1:2 provides the introductory aspects upon which God’s masterpieces of matter are organized: “The earth was without form and void.” The first three days He “forms” what was “unformed.” The next three days He “fills” what had been “void” or empty.

The light created on *day one* was filled or completed on *day four* with the great lights of the sun and moon (and “the stars also,” Gen. 1:16). The air and water that had been the focus on *day two* were filled up with the birds and water creatures on *day five* (Gen. 1:6–8, 20–23). The dry land separated from the waters and then filled with vegetation on *day three* (Gen. 1:9–13), and was completed with the land animals, along with humans, on *day six*. Finally, all was pronounced “very good” and then regally celebrated on the seventh day by God Himself (Gen. 2:1–3).

The point is that nothing in these texts leaves any indication that anything was left to chance. On the contrary, the texts teach the opposite: everything was meticulously worked out and planned.

According to the following texts, who also believed in the biblical account of Creation?

Matt. 19:4 _____

Exod. 20:8–11 _____

1 Tim. 2:13 _____

Isa. 40:26 _____

Everything in the Bible testifies to the fact that the Lord created the world, speaking it into existence just as depicted in Genesis 1 and 2. Scripture leaves us no wiggle room regarding that matter. One can choose Creation, or one can choose evolution, but honesty allows no melding of the two. The texts themselves don’t leave us that option.

The Heart of the Creator

The drama of Creation week is extraordinary. Day after day, the Creator speaks into existence the life systems and life forms that continue to amaze scientists. Even God refers to the extreme joy of that time.

How does God express to Job the excitement that was part of the earth's creation? *Job 38:4–7.*

A hint of the joy in the Creator's heart that first week can also be found in the second verse of Genesis chapter one (*NKJV*): "And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." Biblical scholars become ever more appreciative of the fine literary crafting of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) by Moses. In this instance, as Moses describes the Spirit of God "hovering" over the face of the waters at the opening of Creation week, he deliberately chooses a word that he will only use one more time—in Deuteronomy 32. That chapter is part of his farewell sermon to Israel.

How does Moses use the word *hovering* this second time? *Deut. 32:10, 11. (See also Matt. 23:37.)*

Think of how mother birds lovingly prepare the nest for their babies. Then, picture them hovering over their babies, bringing them food, and then teaching them how to fly. Moses, who had taken care of sheep for 40 years, must have seen this natural phenomenon happen each spring, and it must have made him think of God's tender care. Under inspiration, he pictured the same emotions in the Holy Spirit's heart as our human "nest" was being constructed.

Everything in the Creation account, then, in contrast to the various evolutionary models—which depict our Creation as the work of forces violently competing with each other—reveals a God who loves His creation, who cares about it, and who purposely and carefully designed it. There's nothing impersonal about the creation, nothing emotionless, nothing purposeless. Love was there at the start of the Creation week. What a contrast to evolution, which teaches that love somehow emerged only after billions of years of selfish violence. Love motivated the Creation, and love will be there when this damaged version of Creation is created anew.

Dwell on the marvels of nature. How do you see the amazing love of God manifested there?

The Heavens Declare

The book of Psalms contains a rich corpus of songs praising the Creator. Regularly and jubilantly the psalmists refer to the “great works” of God.

Psalm 19. The progression of thought is audacious. First, David describes the glories of the heavens and firmament, including the blazing sun. He compares the brilliant energy of the sun to a bridegroom going to his wedding and also to an athlete in training (*vss. 1–6*). He then links this splendor of the sun to the perfection of God’s law and the power of its precepts. The contents of the law are thereby linked with the grandeur of God’s creative actions (*vss. 7–11*).

Psalm 92. This “Song for the Sabbath” opens with the attitude of praise from a grateful heart. The one who traces the use of “the works of Your hands” and “Your works,” as used throughout the Psalter (or throughout any biblical book for that matter), will be drawn to the extensive praise for the created world included in the Bible. And the more that any person learns about the created works of God—whether the smallest detail seen through a microscope, or the farthest star or planet seen through a telescope, or whatever creature of animal life (whether it swims, flies, or walks)—the more the amazing power of God’s creative activity comes through. Scientists continue to learn more and more, not only about the different plants and animals but also about how all systems of life interact with each other in the complex web of life. The more they learn, the more amazing it all appears.

“[The] jaw is clearly not an example of intelligent design; rather, it is an imperfect adaptation that has occurred as a result of natural selection, working with the materials at hand to refashion and shorten the mammalian muzzle into a face.”—Owen Gingerich, *God’s Universe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 98, 99. What important point has this Christian—fruitlessly attempting to meld evolution with a Christian worldview—unfortunately missed?

No question, the created world reveals the love and power of the Creator. But our world has also been devastated by sin, by the scars and disruption caused by the great controversy. We see the horrible results all around us in sickness, death, natural disasters, and the like. No part of the earthly Creation has escaped, and certainly no human being has. And yet, even amid this devastation, we can see the love and power of the Creator. The key is to focus not on the bad but on the good that underlies it. We might see, for example, a cherry tree smitten with the blight that destroys all the fruit. The blight, however bad, does not, and cannot, erase the love and goodness revealed in the tree itself, a love and goodness that points to the character of the Creator.

The Cross and Creation

Read John 1:1–13. In what ways does John link Creation with the Cross? Why are the two teachings inseparable?

In numerous places the Bible clearly links the Lord as Creator with the Lord as Redeemer, a link that provides more evidence that evolution cannot be reconciled with the Bible, especially with the teaching of the Cross. Otherwise, what? The Lord would have incarnated into an evolved ape created through the vicious and painfully murderous cycle of natural selection, all in order to abolish death, “the last enemy” (1 Cor. 15:26)? But how can death be the “enemy” if it was one of God’s chosen means for creating humans, at least according to the evolutionary model? The Lord must have expended plenty of dead *Homo erectus*, *Homo heidelbergensis*, and *Homo neanderthalensis* in order to finally get His own image (*Homo sapiens*). What this would mean, then, is that Jesus came to save humankind from the very process He, as Creator, used to create it in the first place. If that sounds ridiculous, it’s because it is.

Read Romans 5:12. How does this text help us to understand how crucial a literal reading of the Genesis Creation account is to the whole plan of salvation?

How is the idea of the Fall, so clearly biblical, explained by those who seek to meld evolution with the Bible? Does God use processes of violence, selfishness, and dominance of the strong over the weak in order to create a morally flawless and selfless being who then “falls” into a state of violence, selfishness, and dominance of the strong over the weak—a state from which he has to be redeemed—or else face final punishment?

Again, the absurdity of the position utterly rules it out. The only way to make sense of the Cross, of the need for the Savior to redeem a fallen race, is for human beings to have “fallen” from something, and a “fall” implies a descent, a degeneration, it means that we went from that which was good to something that wasn’t as good. That makes perfect sense from a literal understanding of Genesis; with evolution, it makes no sense at all. Indeed, the idea of evolution makes a mockery of both the Fall and the Cross.

Creation and Re-creation

What wonderful promises are found in these texts? *Isa. 65:17, Isa. 66:22, 2 Pet. 3:13, Rev. 21:4*. Also, how are these promises linked with the biblical model of Creation, as revealed in the opening chapters of Genesis?

The whole Christian hope rests on the promises of a new heaven and a new earth, a heaven and earth without the devastation that sin has brought to the earth that we inhabit now. Without that hope, that promise, we have, literally, no hope at all. The promise of eternal life is wonderful, but we want that eternal life in a world without the horrors, sorrows, and disappointments of this one. What could be worse than the eternal death that awaits the unsaved except eternal life in a world in which misery is often the rule, rather than the exception?

All of which leads to some very interesting questions in regard to our origins and how the Lord worked in the process of the first Creation—the one depicted so masterfully in Genesis 1 and 2. The question is, will the new heaven and the new earth be created by divine fiat? That is, as depicted in a literal reading of Genesis: God speaks and within an amazingly short time all life exists on the earth fully formed and developed, with nothing left to caprice, violence, or chance?

Or, instead, will the process of creation mean that life will, again, have to endure the “joys” and rigors of natural selection and survival-of-the-fittest for billions of years until a new world, one “wherein dwelleth righteousness” (*2 Pet. 3:13*), finally appears?

After all, if God chose to use evolution the first time around to create this world, why would He do something different the second time? If these were His chosen means in the original Creation, are they not good enough for round two?

The absurdity of the idea that God would use evolution to re-create the heavens and the earth is more evidence pointing to the absurdity of His having created the world that way to begin with. No question, the Cross, Redemption, and the promise of a new heaven and a new earth are themes inseparably tied in with the literal Genesis account.

Try to imagine what our world was like in its pristine beauty. Imagine, too, what it will be like when it is created over. Our minds and hearts can only begin to wrap around what that will be like. Why is nothing in this world worth having if we lose out on what is promised us?

Further Study: Throughout all her ministry, Ellen G. White was uncompromising in her rejection of the theory of evolution.

“It is,” she wrote, “the worst kind of infidelity; for with many who profess to believe the record of creation, it is infidelity in disguise.”—*The Signs of the Times*, March 20, 1879.

“[S]hall we, for the privilege of tracing our descent from germs and mollusks and apes, consent to cast away that statement of Holy Writ, so grand in its simplicity, ‘God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him’? Genesis 1:27.”—*Education*, p. 130.

“When the Lord declares that He made the world in six days and rested on the seventh day, He means the day of twenty-four hours, which He has marked off by the rising and setting of the sun.”—*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 136.

Discussion Questions:

❶ Another problem stemming from the attempt to meld evolution with the Bible is the resurrection of the dead at the end of time. Isn’t that going to be an instantaneous process, in the “twinkling of an eye” (*1 Cor. 15:52*) even? Some folk have been dead for thousands of years; there’s not much left to work with. Yet, if God can re-create them in an instant, why did He use evolution to create them the first time around?

❷ Contrary to popular conceptions, Charles Darwin worked on his theory of evolution from a theological premise. He expressed it like this: “There seems to me,” wrote Darwin, “too much misery in the world. I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created the [parasitic wasp] with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of caterpillars, or that the cat should play with mice.” Of course a “beneficent and omnipotent God” did no such thing. What’s wrong with Darwin’s assumption, and how do you think it influenced him in his development of such a radically wrong theory on human origins?

❸ As a class, spend some time in nature and marvel at the various wonders of the created world. As you do so, keep open to the damage that sin has brought, and see how much you can distinguish between the creation and what sin has done to the creation. Why is it always important to keep this distinction in mind?

Summary: Despite many attempts to mix a biblical worldview with the doctrine of evolution, the two teachings are polar opposites. Christians must stand firm on the literal Creation story; once that goes, the plan of salvation goes with it.

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Colossians 1:16*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Discuss how belief in God as the Creator affects our understanding of other biblical teachings, such as the Cross and the new earth.

Feel: Sense the difference that the belief in a personally caring Creator makes in a life philosophy.

Do: Accept and honor God as Creator, as well as Re-creator.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Foundation of Belief

A How does the acceptance of a biblical Creation help us to understand the power that God has to save us from our sins?

B How does our understanding of God's role as Author of the universe and a seven-day Creation affect our belief in the Sabbath, the resurrection, and the re-creation of the earth to come?

II. Feel: Created by Chance or by Design?

A What feelings of awe, joy, and praise are awakened as we contemplate the works of our Creator?

B What difference does the belief that we are created by God's design (rather than by meaningless accident) make in our attitudes toward God and one another?

III. Do: Made by God

A How can we best honor our loving, personal Creator?

B How does the fact that God has not only created us but has given the best gifts of heaven to redeem us affect the ways in which we respond to Him?

► **Summary:** A belief in the biblical story of Creation affects not only our acceptance of an all-powerful Creator God but impacts our understanding of the Sabbath, the Cross, the resurrection, and many other doctrines.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God’s role as Creator is inextricably linked to what we know about His character and, most important, about His role as our Redeemer.

Just for Teachers: Emphasize the importance of our understanding of God as Creator and how it relates to the other aspects of God’s character and His work on our behalf. Explain how we can know more about God by way of a correct understanding of His act of Creation and its results.

Most scientists today work with an assumption known as “methodological naturalism.” In essence, this is the view that everything that has happened, is happening, or will happen, has a natural cause and, specifically, not what we would call a “supernatural” cause. Critics, however, have also labeled the concept “methodological atheism,” because, strictly applied, it rules out God as Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer.

Yet, many people find it to be a persuasive assumption because most of the events that occur in our daily lives or in our observable environment do not appear to have direct supernatural causes. Even events or phenomena in which we, as Christians, can see the hand of God could be explained, however implausibly to us, as resulting from circumstances alone. Methodological naturalists also assume that if this is the way it is now, this is how it has always been. Their position might be compared to the skeptics who are given voice in 2 Peter 3:4: “everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation” (*NIV*).

For this to be true, methodological naturalists need time, a lot of it; as well as some very improbable throws of the dice that somehow resulted in the beautifully designed and ordered world in which we live. But where methodological naturalists see blind chance, Seventh-day Adventist Christians see a world that came into being in a state of perfection at the will of a benevolent Creator—but it is a world now marred by sin. And we await a Redeemer who will restore it to its original perfection.

Discuss With the Class: The current cosmological and evolutionary theory that Creation merely stumbled into being is quite foreign to the worldview of the Bible. How do we see nature (as the psalmist writes) declaring “the glory of God” (*Ps. 19:1*)?

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Just for Teachers: Emphasize the importance of Creation to the

understanding of God in both the Old and New Testaments. That this relationship exists in the Old Testament comes as no surprise. After all, the first question the Bible answers is how we got here, and why. But Creation is foundational to the Redemption story of the New Testament. It also erases the false impression that the God of the New Testament is somehow separate or distinct from the God of the Old Testament.

Bible Commentary

I. “All Things” (*Review Colossians 1:16 with your class.*)

Neither the Old nor the New Testament ever seriously entertains the possibility that God did not create the universe. Most of the peoples and religions surrounding Israel also believed that the universe did have a creator or creators. Some exceptions were the philosopher Epicurus and his successors, such as Lucretius, who believed that the universe was eternal, self-sufficient, and unchangeable in its essence.

The important difference was that the Bible taught that God was the source of *all* things. Some religions and philosophies—Platonism, for example—taught that the material world was created by what they called a Demiurge. In Greek, this word referred to an artisan or a craftsman. This demiurge did not create matter but was merely a clever mechanic who organized it in a functional and more or less aesthetically pleasing way. The imperfections of the visible universe were explained by the imperfect skill of the demiurge. Of course, the demiurge was believed to be ignorant of, or indifferent to, the higher spiritual world.

Zoroastrianism, the religion of ancient Persia, is based on a belief in two gods, one good and one evil. The good god created those animals and plants that adherents regarded as noble and beautiful. The evil god created the “creeping things” and animals and plants that were seen as unpleasant or noxious.

Today, many who want to reconcile the Bible with such theories as evolution, propose that God created the world or the universe, left it on its own to develop for a given period of time, and reappeared to bestow a “soul” on the hominids who had evolved while He was away.

None of these conceptions agree with what the Bible teaches. This passage and others make it clear that God created all things. This includes things too small for us to see and things that we simply don’t: unseen spiritual realities and the most mundane details of our immediate environment. In their original state, they reflected His perfection and goodness, and someday they will again.

Consider This: Why is it so important to specify that God created all things? What do you make of the age-old human tendency to leave God out of His creation or to confine Him to a neat, small corner of it?

II. Present at the Creation (*Review John 1:1–13 with your class.*)

This passage can be read as an elaboration on the Creation story given in Genesis, with a more explicit introduction of God the Son, or the Word. Some commentators characterize the author’s approach as polemic, in that he seems intent upon affirming some points while he dismisses or refutes others. For example, in verse 3 he makes the point (also made by Paul in Colossians 1:16) that God, through Christ, made all things. The author reemphasizes that “without him nothing was made that has been made” (*NIV*). Again, the author lived in a world in which a significant number of people did not regard this fact as self-evident.

Clearly, the author’s point is not so much to give a recap of the Creation as it is to show how the Creation—and, implicitly, all the sacred history recorded in the Old Testament—was foundational to the message of redemption in Christ. Then, as now, there were people who wanted to jettison or alter parts of the Old Testament (particularly the Creation account) while still holding on to Christ as Redeemer. In contrast, the author shows how Creation and Redemption are parts of the same story.

Consider This: Why are Christ’s roles as Creator and Redeemer so inseparable? In what ways does the plan of Redemption depend on the literal truth of the Creation account as given in Genesis?

III. “Through One Man . . .” (*Review Romans 5:12–15 with your class.*)

While Paul’s major point was not to buttress the historicity of Adam, his argument assumes and depends on it. Paul knew of Jesus Christ as a historical figure. The ancient world had no shortage of dying and rising gods who presumably restored fertility to the crops or brought some unspecified, but sublime, state of enlightenment to the adherents of their mystery cults. Most of these gods existed in some mythical dream time. But Jesus Christ was a real man who lived in a distinct historical era and was written about by hard-nosed historians, such as Josephus and Tacitus. He died a real death to redeem real people from real sin. Paul, in addition to his experience with the risen Christ, regularly interacted with people who had walked and talked with the historical Jesus.

If we know that to be the case, why would Paul choose to parallel Him with a figure he regarded as mythical? What would be the purpose of one’s sins being redeemed by a fictional character? If the historical Christ is (as the name implies) the central figure of Christianity, then the historical Adam is only slightly less central.

Consider This: If we claim to trust Christ, why must we make a firm decision to trust His Word?

► **STEP 3**—Apply

Just for Teachers: Use the following questions to help your students to understand what we as Seventh-day Adventists mean when we refer to God as Creator.

Thought Questions:

- 1 In what ways are all other Christian doctrines built upon a correct understanding of God as Creator? For example, the plan of Redemption or the authority of Scripture?
- 2 What is it about currently popular and accepted theories of the evolution of all life that makes them utterly incompatible with the essential Christian understanding of God’s creatorship?

Application Question:

- 1 When we look at the care and precision with which God created and continues to sustain the earth, what do we learn about the ways in which we should relate to God’s creation? How can such an understanding keep us from the extremes of profligacy or the worship of the creation at the expense of the Creator?
- 2 How should we as a church react to people who have honest questions or even skepticism about the way in which we view issues of origins and Creation? How can we maintain a firm position on Creation and keep the church a “safe place” for those who are honestly struggling with these questions?

► **STEP 4**—Create

Just for Teachers: The more we understand the nature and purpose of God’s creation and the care that is evident in the things He created, the less likely we are to seek out explanations that attempt to negate Him or confine Him to the edges or gaps of understanding. The following activity will help your students to see examples of God’s providence in the ways in which He chose to create.

Activity: It is clear, even to the most casual observer, that each animal, plant, and so on, is specifically suited to the environment in which it finds itself. During the week, search for examples of interesting animals or plants that live in unique environments. Show how God has given them the means by which to survive in those environments. Illustrate with photos, videos, anecdotes, etc.

Alternatively, give this as a homework assignment to your students the week before, if you can arrange it.