

Creation: Forming *the* World



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 1:1–13, Isa. 45:18, 1 John 1:5, Rev. 22:5, 2 Cor. 4:6, 2 Pet. 3:5, Job 38:4–6.*

Memory Text: “For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens, who is God, who formed the earth and made it, who has established it, who did not create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited: ‘I am the Lord, and there is no other’ ” (*Isaiah 45:18, NKJV*).

Scientists are increasingly impressed by the fitness of the world for living creatures. And no wonder, for design and purpose are affirmed throughout the Bible, beginning in Genesis 1. Starting with a planet that was unformed and unfilled, God spent the first three days forming the world for occupation and the last three filling it. This week's lesson focuses on those first three days of the Creation week.

Some scholars have objected to the idea that God would “impose” a purpose on nature, arguing instead that He simply allowed the material world to “be itself” and to develop by natural processes supposedly inherent in itself. This is a common theme among those who promote various forms of “theistic evolution.” Yet, such ideas are not compatible with Scripture or with our understanding of Creation. The universe has no inherent will of its own. The creation is not an entity independent of God, but it is instead God's chosen arena in which He can express His love to the creatures that He has made.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 12.*

Without Form and Void

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:1, 2, NKJV). What do these verses reveal about the earth before the Lord began creating life on it?

The Bible starts with the story of Creation, and the Creation story starts with a statement that God is Creator. It then describes the condition of the world when God began to prepare it for occupancy. When the story begins, the planet is already here but unformed, unfilled, dark, and wet. The succeeding verses describe how God first formed the world into an inhabitable place and then filled it with living creatures. The text does not tell us exactly when the rocks and water of the earth came into existence, only that the world had not always been suitable for life. The world became fit for living creatures only because God acted to make it so.

What does Isaiah 45:18 teach us about God’s intention at Creation?

When the earth was first brought into existence, it was unsuitable for life. The Bible says nothing about the time period between the original creation of the rocks and water and the creation of the environment and the creatures. Some scholars think it might have been immediately; others that it may have been after a long period of time.

The simple fact is, we don’t know, nor does it really matter. Whatever the case, the material of the earth was created by God; then, at the time of His choosing, He created a suitable environment for life. The crucial point is that the Lord, who was not dependent upon preexisting matter, used matter that He had at some point already created, something that in its “primeval” state was *tohu vabohu* (“without form and void”). Then, afterwards, through the power of His Word, He created our inhabitable world.

Let There Be Light

“Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day (Gen. 1:3–5, NKJV). What do these verses teach us about the first day of Creation?

Numerous points can be inferred from this passage.

First, light appeared in response to God’s command. God’s word is effective in determining the state of the Creation.

Second, the light was “good.” We may wonder why the text says that God “saw” the light; is there any doubt that God sees everything? The point is that the light made by God was good, even in God’s eyes. We know that the light is good because God Himself evaluated it as such.

Another point is that God divided the light from the darkness. Both light and darkness are under God’s control, and neither one makes any difference to His activity and knowledge (see *Ps. 139:12*). God gave names to the dark and light portions of time, calling them “day” and “night.” God has the right to give names to periods of time because He is the Creator of time. As Sovereign over time, God is not limited by time. Rather, time depends on God.

Another point of this passage is that there was a period of darkness and a period of light that together comprised a day. Much has been written about the meaning of “day” in the Creation story. We will consider this question later, but we note in passing that the first day was composed of a period of darkness and a period of light, in the same way that we observe days now.

Also, light is one of the features that accompanies the presence of God. We do not need to suppose that light was invented on the first day of Creation, since God existed before the earth was created and His presence is often associated with light (*1 John 1:5, Rev. 22:5*). At Creation, light was introduced to the previously dark planet.

How, though, could there be day and night before the introduction of the sun into the Creation account? Moses surely knew the connection between the sun and daylight. Yet, despite that obvious knowledge, he wrote what he did about the light and darkness on the first day. God must have given him knowledge about Creation that, at present, we don’t understand, knowledge that cannot be discerned from looking at the natural world. Why, though, shouldn’t we be surprised that some things about Creation remain a mystery?

The Heaven Created

“Then God said, ‘Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.’ Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. So the evening and the morning were the second day” (*Gen. 1:6–8, NKJV*).

God created the firmament, appointed its function, and gave it a name, heaven. The function of the firmament (heaven) was to divide the water below from the water above it. Today, we would probably use the term “sky” and recognize the division of the sky into the atmosphere, which is a part of our environment and the space beyond our atmosphere where the sun, moon, and stars exist.

The atmosphere appears to be the portion of the “heaven” that was formed on the second day of Creation. The atmosphere provides a method for moving water uphill; water can evaporate and enter the atmosphere, where it can be transported to any place on the earth. Then it can be brought back to the surface, either through the mist as described in Genesis 2:6 or as rain.

God named the firmament, signifying His sovereignty over it. The act of naming implies that God is sovereign over space. Space does not limit God’s actions in any way, because He created and rules it. As with the lighting of the world on the first day, the creation of the firmament was completed before the end of the second day, another dark period of evening and a light period of morning.

Much discussion has centered on the meaning of the word *firmament*. The Hebrew word *raqia* is sometimes used to describe a sheet of metal that has been hammered into a thin sheet, hence the term “firmament.” Critics have argued that the ancient Hebrews actually believed there was a hard surface above the earth; thus, they argue, because no such thing exists, the biblical account is wrong. But this is faulty reasoning. The use of the word *firmament*, in that context, simply applies to the sky above—both the atmosphere and space itself. We only have to look at the immediate context to know what is being talked about. In Genesis the birds are described as flying on “the face of the firmament” (*Gen. 1:20, NKJV*), and in another place the firmament is where the sun and moon are seen (*Gen. 1:14*). Obviously, the birds don’t fly in the part of the *raqia* where the sun and moon are.

Whatever the mysteries of the Creation narrative itself, one point comes through very clearly: nothing is left to chance. Why is that point important for us to know, especially at a time when many believe that chance played a big role in our creation?

Space for Living

Read Genesis 1:9–13. Try to envision the incredible creative power of God as He is doing that which is described in this text. How does this account give a logical answer to the old question, “Which came first, the chicken or the egg?”

Previous to this time, the earth was covered with water. In order to provide living space for the humans that God planned to create, He changed the surface of the earth to produce basins that received the water and formed seas, allowing continents to appear. This involved a third division of the physical features of the earth. (The first division was between light and darkness; the second division was between waters above from waters below; and the third division was between dry land and seas.)

Also, for the third time, God gives names to the things that He has divided. The dry land is called “earth,” and the gatherings of waters are called “seas,” once again illustrating God’s sovereignty over space. God examines the arrangement of land and seas and declares it “good.”

A second Creation event is recorded for the third day of Creation. The dry land provides space for God to place a food supply for the creatures soon to be created. God calls forth plants from the dry land (earth). Grass, herbs, and fruit trees are mentioned specifically. These are to be the sources of food for terrestrial creatures. The text does not indicate how many different kinds of plants were created, but it does indicate that there was a diversity of plants from the beginning. In fact, from what we see today, we know that there must have been an incredible variety of these life forms. Also, Scripture is clear that there is no single ancestor here from which all plants evolved; instead, right from the start, there is a diversity of plant life. The concept, fundamental to evolutionary biology, of a single plant ancestor is contradictory to the biblical account.

Look at the incredible diversity of fruit and vegetables and other edibles. How do they present powerful evidence of God’s love for us? Why is it absurd to think that all these things were created, as evolution teaches, by random processes?

God's All-Powerful Word

What do the following texts teach us about the power of God's word?

2 Cor. 4:6 _____

Isa. 55:11 _____

2 Pet. 3:5 _____

The Bible teaches that God created out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), by the power of His Word and without conflict or resistance in any form. This view of creation is unique to the Hebrews among all the peoples of the ancient world. Most nonbiblical creation stories tell of conflict and violence in creation. For example, the ancient Babylonians had a creation story in which the monster Apsu and his consort Tiamat produce a generation of deities that they then attempt to destroy, but Tiamat is killed in the battle. Her body is divided into two parts, one that formed the heavens and the other that formed the earth.

Modern men have also created a popular story of creation through violence. According to this story, God willfully created a world in which resources would be in short supply, causing competition among individuals, with the result being that weaker individuals would be eliminated by the stronger. Over time, according to this modern story, organisms have become more and more complex, ultimately producing humans and all other living organisms from a common ancestor.

Yet, the "gods" of evolutionary theory (random mutation and natural selection) are not the same as the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible is the Defender of the weak and the generous Provider for all creatures. Death, suffering, and other evils were not caused by God; on the contrary, they came as a natural result of rebellion against His good rulership. The gods of evolutionary theory use competition and elimination of the weak by the strong in order to create. Even worse, they are responsible for death and suffering; indeed, death and suffering are their very means of creating.

Thus, Genesis 1 and 2 cannot, in any way, be harmonized with modern evolutionary theory, which at its core opposes the biblical account of Creation.

Further Study: Though Scripture doesn't explicitly say it, we have good biblical reasons for believing that the universe existed long before life on earth began. First, in Job 38:4–6, God states that there were living beings who shouted for joy when God formed the world. This implies preexisting beings who lived in the universe before the earth was created. The reference to an on-looking universe in 1 Corinthians 4:9 may refer to the same group of beings. Second, the serpent was present in the Garden of Eden before Adam and Eve sinned. In Revelation 12:9, the serpent is identified as Satan, who was thrown out of heaven. Jesus said that He saw this happen (*Luke 10:18*). Ezekiel 28:14, 15 describe the covering cherub, who was perfect at first but eventually rebelled. This implies that there was a period of time before Satan's rebellion and that presumably Satan lived in the universe also. These texts indicate that Adam and Eve were not the first beings created.

“As the earth came forth from the hand of its Maker, it was exceedingly beautiful. Its surface was diversified with mountains, hills, and plains, interspersed with noble rivers and lovely lakes; but the hills and mountains were not abrupt and rugged, abounding in terrific steeps and frightful chasms, as they now do; the sharp, ragged edges of earth's rocky framework were buried beneath the fruitful soil, which everywhere produced a luxuriant growth of verdure. There were no loathsome swamps or barren deserts. Graceful shrubs and delicate flowers greeted the eye at every turn. The heights were crowned with trees more majestic than any that now exist. The air, untainted by foul miasma, was clear and healthful. The entire landscape outvied in beauty the decorated grounds of the proudest palace. The angelic host viewed the scene with delight, and rejoiced at the wonderful works of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 44.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Identify as many features as you can that show that the world is designed.
- 2 What reasons can you give to show how the theory of evolution cannot be harmonized with the biblical doctrine of creation?
- 3 Without doubt, there are elements in the Genesis Creation account that we can't explain. Why, though, is that not a reason to reject it as a literal account of the way in which God created our world?

A Card, a Garage Door, and a \$50 Bill

When Dennis Hulett stepped into the baptistry that was set up on the lawn of his new home church in Wisconsin in the United States, dozens of his new church friends watched with tears in their eyes. It had been a miraculous journey for Dennis—a journey involving an invitation card, a garage door, and a \$50 bill.

Things had been rough for Dennis. He had lost his job and was going through a divorce. He felt worthless. Looking through his mail one day, he found a card showing a multiheaded dragon with crowns on it. Dennis, who had always been interested in Bible prophecy, recognized the image.

Dennis went to the prophecy meeting. As he listened to the presenter explain the Bible truths of Daniel and Revelation to the audience, Dennis discovered that the Bible presented prophecy very differently from a series of books he had been reading on the Second Coming. Dennis liked the way the presenter let God's Word defend itself. *This is exactly the way Bible studies should be conducted*, he thought.

Dennis made friends with others attending the seminar, including Karl and Karen, members of the Seventh-day Adventist church that was sponsoring the meetings. Dennis rented the house next door to Karl and Karen, who prayed that they would be a good influence on him.

The prophecy seminar ended, but Dennis continued attending the Adventist church on most Sabbaths. Then he noticed something that made everything he was learning fall into place. "Karl has a shop in his garage," Dennis said. "I noticed that the shop door was closed on Sabbath." Dennis was unemployed and was trying to earn money by recycling cans.

One Friday evening Dennis headed out to recycle more cans, hoping to earn some money to spend with his daughter, who was coming for a visit the following Monday. When he saw Karl's closed garage door, he thought, *I can't insult God by working on Friday night*. Dennis didn't know how he would earn the money he needed. *I'll just have to figure something else out*, he decided.

The next morning at church somebody put a \$50 bill in the offering plate with a note that read, "Give to Dennis." When Dennis received the money, he was speechless. "It was enough to buy food and gas and have a nice week with my daughter!"

Since then God has blessed Dennis with a job that gives him Sabbaths off. Dennis says thanks to God by serving Him in any way he can.

Our mission offerings help to promote outreach to neighbors and strangers alike. Thank you for giving.

JUANITA EDGE is communication director of the Wisconsin Conference in the North American Division.