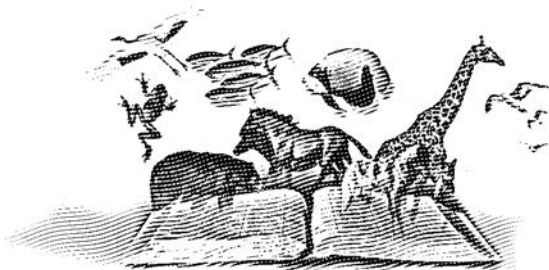


The Creation Completed



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 1; Ps. 8:3; Rom. 8:19–22; Lev. 11:14–22; Gen. 2:1–3; Mark 2:27, 28.*

Memory Text: “By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work” (*Genesis 2:2, NIV*).

This week's lesson reviews the Bible's brief description of the last three Creation days and the Sabbath rest. This description is found in *Genesis 1:1–2:3*, but numerous references to it exist in other parts of Scripture. One of the most striking aspects of the Creation account is its division into days of Creation. Why did He choose to make the seven-day time cycle that we call a week?

Scripture does not tell us directly, but we can look for clues. Perhaps the most important clue is the Sabbath itself, which reserves a special time for communion between God and humanity. It may be that God established the week to provide a period of time suitable for ordinary work, yet with a regular period of time set aside as a reminder of our relationship to God (*see Mark 2:28*). This would help humans to remember that God is the true provider and that we are totally dependent upon Him.

Whatever the reason, it is apparent that the *Genesis* Creation account reveals a Creation done with exceeding care and purpose. Nothing is left to chance.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 19.*

Sun, Moon, and Stars

Read Genesis 1:14–19. What actions are mentioned on the fourth day of Creation? How are we to make sense of this, especially given our present understanding of the physical world?

The fourth day has probably been discussed more than any of the other six Creation days. If the sun was created on the fourth day, what caused the daily cycles for the first three Creation days? On the other hand, if the sun already existed, what happened on the fourth day?

Uncertainty over the events of the fourth day of Creation does not arise from a logical contradiction but from a plurality of possibilities. One possibility is that the sun was created on the fourth day, and the light for the first three days came from God's presence or from another source such as a supernova. Revelation 21:23 is consistent with this idea, as the sun is not needed in the heavenly city because God is there. A second possibility is that the sun, moon, and stars were appointed their functions at that time. Psalm 8:3 seems consistent with this view. Hebrew scholar C. John Collins writes that the Hebrew wording of Genesis 1:14 may allow for either of these two possibilities. (See C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* [Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing Co., 2006], p. 57.)

A third possibility is that the sun was already in existence but was obscured by clouds or volcanic dust and was not visible or fully functional until the fourth day. One can compare this possibility with the planet Venus, where a similar situation occurs today.

The text does not seem clearly to endorse or rule out any of these interpretations, although this does not deter strong opinions on the topic. It is probably a good rule not to give a question more significance than the Bible gives it, and we ought to acknowledge that our understanding is limited. This acknowledgment, especially in the area of creation, shouldn't be that hard to accept. After all, think about how many scientific mysteries exist at present; that is, they are right here for experimental science to investigate and yet still remain mysteries. How much more mysterious is something hidden so far in the past?

Creation of Air and Water Animals

Read Genesis 1:20–23. What evidence, if any, exists in the texts that would imply randomness?

The waters and the atmosphere were populated on the fifth day of Creation. Many have seen a relationship between the second and fifth Creation days. The waters were separated by the atmosphere on the second day, and both were filled with living creatures on the fifth day. The Creation events seem to have occurred in a sequence that reflects an intentional pattern, showing the care and orderliness of God's activity. In other words, nothing in the Creation account provides any room for randomness.

Notice that both water creatures and air creatures are mentioned in the plural, indicating that a diversity of organisms was created on the fifth day. Each creature was blessed with the capacity to be fruitful and multiply. Diversity was present from the beginning. There was no single ancestor from which all other species descended, but each species seems to have been endowed with the possibility of producing varieties of individuals. For example, more than four hundred named breeds have been developed from the common pigeon, and at least twenty-seven breeds of goldfish are known. God apparently gave each of His creatures the potential to produce a great variety of various offspring, further adding to the diversity of the Creation.

In verse 21, God saw that the creatures He had made were good. This implies they were well-designed, attractive to the eye, free from defects, and harmoniously participating in the purpose of the Creation.

Few living creatures excite our imagination and admiration more than the birds. Birds are truly amazing creatures and are wonderfully designed. Their feathers are lightweight but strong, stiff yet flexible. The parts of a flight feather are held together by complex sets of tiny barbs that provide strong but lightweight bracing. A bird's lung is so designed that it can obtain oxygen as it inhales and also as it exhales. This provides the high level of oxygen required for powered flight. This result is accomplished by the presence of air sacs in some of the bones. These sacs function to sustain the flow of oxygen and, at the same time, to lighten the body of the bird, making flight easier to maintain and control. Birds are amazingly constructed.

With all this in mind, read Matthew 10:29–31. What comfort can you find in these words?

Creation of the Land Animals

In Genesis 1:24–31, terrestrial animals and humans were created on the sixth day. As with the correlation between the second and fifth days, a correlation is also seen between the division of the land and sea on the third day and the filling of the land on the sixth day. One is reminded again of the orderly and purposeful sequence of Creation events, as is consistent with a God of order (*compare 1 Cor. 14:33*).

As with the creatures created on the fifth day, the wording of the text indicates that a plurality of types was created on the sixth day of Creation. A diversity of beasts, cattle, and creeping things were created, as well.

There is no single ancestor of all land animals; God, instead, created many distinct and separate lineages.

Note the expression “according to their kind,” or similar phrases in Genesis 1:11, 21, 24, 25. Some have attempted to use this phrase to support the idea of fixed “kinds,” an idea taken from Greek philosophy. The ancient Greeks thought that each individual was an imperfect expression of an unchanging ideal, known as a type. Yet, the fixity of species is not consistent with the biblical teaching that all of nature suffers from the curse of sin (*Rom. 8:19–22*). We know that species have changed, as expressed in the curses of Genesis 3 (Ellen G. White wrote about the “threefold curse” on the earth—the curse after the Fall, after Cain’s sin, and after the Flood), and as seen in the parasites and predators that cause so much suffering and violence. The meaning of the phrase “according to their kind” is best understood by examining the context in which it is used.

Read Genesis 6:20, 7:14, and Leviticus 11:14–22. How is the expression “after its kind” or an equivalent phrase applied? How do these examples help us to understand the phrase in Genesis 1?

The phrase “after his kind,” or an equivalent, should not be interpreted as some rule of reproduction. Rather, it refers to the fact that there were diverse kinds of creatures involved in the respective stories. Some Bible translations use the phrase “of various kinds,” which seems more true to the context. Instead of referring to fixity of species, the phrase refers to the diversity of creatures created on the sixth day. From the time of the Creation, there have been many kinds of plants and animals.

The Creation Completed

After the Creation was completed in six days (we will study the creation of humanity later), we find the first mention in the Bible of the seventh day.

Read Genesis 2:1–3. Notice especially verse 1, which emphasizes the completion of all that God had done. Why is this so important in our understanding of the significance of the seventh day?

The Hebrew word for rest in this text is *shabath*, which is closely related to the word for Sabbath. It indicates a cessation of labor upon completion of a project. God was not weary and in need of rest; He was finished with His work of creating and so He stopped. God’s special blessing rests on the seventh day. It is not only “blessed” but also “sanctified,” which carries the idea of being set apart and specially devoted to God. Thus, God gave special significance to the Sabbath in the context of the relationship between God and humans.

Read Mark 2:27, 28. What did Jesus say was the purpose of the Sabbath?

Notice that the Sabbath was not made because God had a need but because man had a need for which God made provision. At the end of that first week, God rested from His acts of creation and devoted His time to relationship with His creatures. Humans needed the communion with their Maker in order to understand their place in the universe. Imagine the joy and wonder that Adam and Eve experienced as they conversed with God and beheld the world that He had made. The wisdom of this provision for rest became even more evident after sin. We need the Sabbath rest in order to prevent us from losing sight of God and getting caught up in materialism and overwork.

God commands us to give one-seventh of our lives to the remembrance of the act of Creation. What should that tell us about the importance of the teaching? How can you learn to have a deeper and richer experience with the Lord through resting on the Sabbath as He Himself did?

The Literal Day

Read Genesis 1:5, 8, 31. What are the components of a creation day? Does anything in the verses imply that these are not literal 24-hour days as we experience them today?

The nature of the days of Creation has been the subject of much discussion. Some have questioned whether the days were ordinary days or whether they might represent much longer periods of time. The text's description of the Creation days provides the answer to that question. The days are composed of an evening (dark period) and a morning (light period) and are consecutively numbered. That is, the days are expressed in a way that very clearly shows that they are days just as we now experience them, an evening and a morning, a period of darkness and a period of light. It is difficult to see how the statement could be more clear or explicit in describing the days of a week. The repeated expression "and there was evening and there was morning" emphasizes the literal aspect of each day.

Read Leviticus 23:3. What indication do we have that all seven days of Creation week were the same kind of days as those that we experience?

The ancient Hebrews were in no doubt as to the nature of the Sabbath day. It was a day of ordinary length but carried a special blessing from God. Note the explicit comparison of God's workweek of six days with our workweek of six days and the corresponding comparison of the day of rest for God and for us (*see also Exod. 20:9, 11*). Even many scholars who reject the idea of these being literal days often admit that the writers of the Bible understood that literal days were meant.

So crucial to our relationship with God is our trust of God and of His Word. If we can't trust the Word of God on something as foundational and as explicitly stated as the Genesis Creation in six literal days, what can we trust Him on?

Further Study: As stated previously, the days of the Creation week are numbered and identified as being composed of a dark period, the evening, and a light period, the morning. There is no reasonable way in which to interpret these days other than as being like the days we experience today. Some have appealed to such texts as Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8 when arguing that each Creation day actually represents 1,000 years. This conclusion is not suggested by the text and does nothing to resolve the issue created by those who think that these days represent billions of years.

Also, if the days in Genesis represented long epochs, one would expect to find a succession in the fossil record that matches the succession of the living organisms created in the successive six Creation “days.” Thus, the first fossils should be plants, which were created on the third “day.” Next should be the first water animals and the air animals. Finally, we should find the first land animals. The fossil record does not match this sequence. Water creatures come before plants, and land creatures come before air creatures. The first fossil fruit trees and other flowering plants appear after all these other groups. The only point of similarity is that humans appear last in both accounts.

“Of each successive day of creation, the Sacred Record declares that it consisted of the evening and the morning, like all other days that have followed.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 112.

“But the infidel supposition, that the events of the first week required seven vast, indefinite periods for their accomplishment, strikes directly at the foundation of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment. It makes indefinite and obscure that which God has made very plain. It is the worst kind of infidelity; for with many who profess to believe the record of creation, it is infidelity in disguise.”—Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, p. 91.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Even from a nonliteralist interpretation of Genesis, two points are obvious: nothing was random in the act of Creation, and there was no common ancestry for the species. Now, along comes Darwinian evolution, which in its various versions teaches two things: randomness and common ancestry for all species. How, then, does one interpret Genesis through a theory that, at its most basic level, contradicts Genesis at its most basic level?
- ② Why is it important to understand that science, for all the good that it does, is still merely a human endeavor?
- ③ All science has to study is a fallen world, one that is very different in many ways from the original Creation. Why is it important to keep that truth ever before us?

Serving in Small Ways

Nora and Jorge enjoyed the fellowship and outreach activities in their large church home in southern Ecuador. But they wanted to do more. They prayed for a special outreach opportunity, and God called them to serve Him in a smaller way in their own neighborhood.

The family knew many of their neighbors and invited them to worship in their home. Five of their neighbors came, along with several Seventh-day Adventists who lived nearby. The visitors enjoyed the worship service and continued to attend regularly. A few more neighbors joined the group. Some brought their children; so, one of Nora and Jorge's daughters gave up her bedroom so the children could have a Sabbath School room.

Then Nora learned that she needed surgery for a blocked artery. She prayed for the doctors and for a successful outcome. But during surgery her lungs filled up with fluid, and her heart stopped beating. Doctors tried to resuscitate her but weren't successful. So, they were amazed when her heart began beating again on its own. And they were even more astounded when she awakened 12 hours after the surgery. She was in the intensive care unit, but she had survived.

One of her doctors stopped by her room the next day and asked, "Nora, you shouldn't have survived. Who is your God?" Because of a tube in her throat, Nora couldn't talk; so, her husband explained that during the surgery Christians across the city were praying for her. "Our God can be your God too," her husband told the doctor.

Three other doctors quizzed Nora's husband about the couple's faith. One said, "In thirty years I've never seen someone whose lungs filled with fluid and whose heart stopped beating survive and respond so well the next day." Nora's miraculous recovery prompted the doctors to reexamine their own faith. Some of them asked more questions, and Jorge gave them copies of *Steps to Christ*.

After Nora left the hospital, two doctors called her to see how she was doing. "They seemed so surprised that I was alive and doing well," Nora said. "I told them that God is my God, and He chose to save me. This miracle has helped our house church grow, as well," Nora added. "Now we don't have enough room in our home for our congregation. We're looking for another place to worship."

We are God's chosen instruments to tell the world. Sharing our faith and our mission offerings helps to grow God's family.

NORA VARGAS DE ARELLANO and JORGE ARELLANO and their daughters share God's love in Guayaquil, Ecuador.