

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 birds do. 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 available 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?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Genesis 1*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Analyze the textual evidence that shows that Genesis 1 was written as a historical narrative.

Feel: Appreciate the importance of the different ways that one can approach the biblical text.

Do: Seek to approach the biblical text on its own terms without importing nonbiblical ideas into the interpretive process.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Historical Authenticity of Genesis 1

A Some people question whether the literary genre in Genesis 1 is historic narrative or something more symbolic, such as poetry. What evidence in Genesis 1 helps to answer this question?

B How does the Hebrew word for “day” help to answer this question?

C How does the *waw* consecutive construction in Hebrew (meaning “but” or “and”) help to answer this question?

II. Feel: Reverence in Approaching the Word

A Why is the way in which we approach the biblical text so important?

B How can we cultivate a feeling of reverence and awe for God in our approach to the biblical text?

III. Do: Interpreting Scripture With Scripture

A How can you better approach the biblical text without corrupting the message with outside ideas?

B How can you approach and interpret the Bible on its own terms?

► **Summary:** How we approach the Creation story sets a tone for how we approach the rest of the Bible. Methods of reinterpretation, designed to make Genesis more palatable to the modern mind, sometimes show similarities to the way in which some Christians reinterpret the biblical text to make the Sabbath more palatable to a Sunday-oriented society. Biblical interpretation, however, should not be driven or influenced by human desire but should center instead around letting Scripture interpret Scripture.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1**—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: How do we treat the biblical text? Should Scripture interpret Scripture, or should we import ideas from modern society in order to make the message more palatable?

Just for Teachers: Your task is to help class members to understand how important the correct interpretation of Scripture is to their faith and spiritual growth.

The way in which we approach a text can have a big impact on the meaning of the message received. How does one's treatment of the Genesis 1 text affect its message for us today?

If we treated texts, e-mails, and letters from our spouses or business associates with the same indifference or disregard with which some treat the text of Genesis 1, how would our marriages and careers fare? Jesus raised a similar question when He asked, “ ‘What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?’ ” (*Luke 11:11, 12, ESV*). If we believe that God inspired the messages of the biblical authors, how much creative license can we take in the task of interpreting Genesis 1? Should the days of Genesis 1 be reinterpreted in the way that the father in Jesus' illustration “reinterpreted” a fish into a snake? Or should we look for internal evidence of the writer's intent regarding how to understand Genesis 1?

Opening Activity for Discussion: Have you ever thought that you had communicated something very clearly only to discover that the recipient of your message did some very creative interpreting in order to bypass your intended goal? How did this creative interpretation of your message make you feel?

► **STEP 2**—Explore

Just for Teachers: Genesis 1 provides a useful and convenient test case for exploring the question of how we approach and interpret the biblical text.

Bible Commentary

I. Flexible Facts Versus Fixed Truth: The Challenge of Evolution to a Belief in Young-Earth Creation *(Read Genesis 1 with the class.)*

Young-earth creationists treat Genesis 1 as a straightforward historical account that depicts how God made the world in six literal, consecutive, contiguous days. Current scientific theory presents difficulties for this view. As a result, some Christians try to solve this dissonance.

One alternative denies the inspiration of Scripture, relegating stories, such as Genesis 1, to the status of relics from humankind’s prescientific past. While admitting that the author of Genesis intended to teach a literal, seven-day Creation week, the believers in this alternative assert that the author was scientifically wrong. Others attempt to affirm both the inspiration of Scripture and the authority of current scientific theory. A frequent tactic is to assert that Genesis 1 is some kind of literary genre other than historical narrative, thus allowing us to understand the Creation days as being nonliteral and in harmony with long chronologies. Such assertions have some challenges, however, when looking at the text itself.

First, when the Hebrew word for day (*yom*) appears in the Old Testament with an ordinal number (first, second, et cetera), the combination always depicts a literal day. Additionally, the presence of evening-morning vocabulary in Genesis 1 makes it hard to escape the obvious: the author clearly intended us to read the account as a basic chronological history with real days like the days that we experience now.

Second, there is a Hebrew construction called the “*waw* consecutive,” which is a hallmark of Hebrew historical narrative. (*Waw* is a conjunction that is generally the equivalent of “and” or “but” in English. The consecutive *waw* is used in a story that is reporting sequences of consecutive events in historical narratives.)

All the classic stories in Genesis, including the Flood and the sacrifice of Isaac, are liberally sprinkled with *waw* consecutives. By contrast, *waw* consecutives are rarely used in poetic genres, such as the Psalms and wisdom literature. With Genesis 1 employing over forty *waw* consecutives, we have strong evidence that the author felt that he was writing a historical narrative. But why might this be important?

Reinterpretations of Genesis 1 attempt to make the Creation story more palatable to the modern mind at the expense of the obvious reading of the text, raising questions about biblical authority. As such, there is some similarity to attempts to reinterpret the plain meaning of the Sabbath, especially the seventh-day aspect, in order to make one of God’s commandments

more palatable to a Sunday-oriented society. The “literal-but-wrong” advocates mimic the method of medieval Catholicism, which admitted that the Bible taught the seventh-day Sabbath but claimed that there was a higher authority than Scripture, allowing the change of interpretation. And other Christians, trying both to affirm biblical authority and to circumvent the seventh-day dimension of the Sabbath, introduce various textual reinterpretations not unlike the current attempts to reinterpret Genesis 1. Those trying to affirm the authority of the text while attempting to provide a more palatable reinterpretation may have more difficulty acknowledging the plain sense of the text than those who outright deny biblical inspiration and authority.

Consider This: Scientific knowledge is always subject to revision and, therefore, is never fixed and absolute. By contrast, we believe that God, and hence His Word, is eternally true and unchanging. Consider the irony in this question: why do some Christians reverse the concepts, treating flexible scientific knowledge as fixed, absolute truth while treating Scripture as relative and revisable? While this sort of treatment seems to be an attack on the authority of Scripture, what does the answer to this question reveal about what is really under attack?

► **STEP 3**—Apply

Just for Teachers: Much of this week’s lesson hinges on the concept of principles of interpretation. How are we to approach the text? Do we let Scripture supply the interpretational norms and rules, or should we import other ideas, especially from our own culture and era, to help us to better understand the text? How one answers these questions has great implications for the meaning of biblical authority in the life of the student.

Thought Questions:

Our lesson looks at connections to Genesis 1 in Job, Psalms, the Hebrew prophets, and the teachings of Jesus.

1 In Genesis 1, what evidence do you see in the text that direct us to the author’s intent for how to understand the story?

2 How does your interpretational approach to Genesis 1 affect your interpretational approach to other areas of biblical teaching, especially when these areas conflict with modern lifestyle and ideas?

3 Why is it important to take Genesis 1 on its own terms instead of blending outside ideas into its framework?

► **STEP 4**—Create

Just for Teachers: This is a final opportunity to emphasize to your class the importance of letting Scripture interpret Scripture.

Activity: Compare and contrast the ways in which people try to circumvent the historicity of Creation with the ways that some try to circumvent elements of the Sabbath truth or the nature of man. What similarities do you see in the ways in which the biblical text is handled? Do you see any differences? What does this teach you about the importance of how we approach the text of Scripture?
