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# God's Creation

Looking at the Biblical Account



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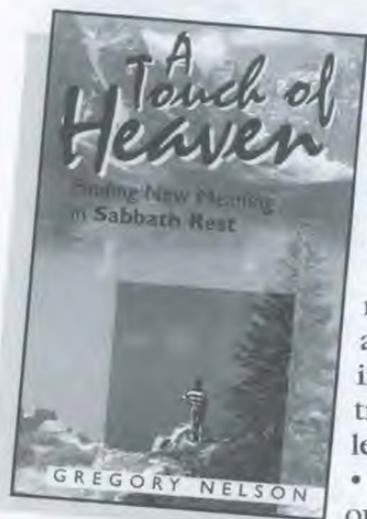
Dr. Younker has taught a number of courses in science and religion on the undergraduate and graduate level for several years. In addition to teaching, Dr. Younker has been a field archaeologist for nearly twenty years, working in both Israel and Jordan. Currently, he directs excavations for the Madaba Plains Project at Tell Jalul, a major site from the biblical period located near Mt. Nebo in Jordan. He has authored or coauthored over fifty scholarly and popular articles. Dr. Younker and his wife, April, have four children: Rebecca, Michael, Elizabeth, and Sarah.

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# God's Creation

## Looking at the Biblical Account

The doctrine of Creation is foundational to Seventh-day Adventist beliefs. To recognize that the earth and its inhabitants came about by creation, not by chance, is to recognize the existence of a Creator. To acknowledge God as our Creator is fundamental to recognizing both His power to redeem us and His right to judge us. Creation also is intricately tied to our belief in the Sabbath, which is a memorial to God's Creation and a sign of the believer's faithfulness to God at the close of time (Rev. 14:7).

Seventh-day Adventists take Genesis 1–11 as an accurate historical account of the origins of life on earth. We accept the biblical account's straightforward testimony that the creation of life on this planet and its various habitats occurred in six literal, 24-hour days. Based on the available biblical data, we also believe that the period of time since the Creation has been a short chronology of a few thousand years, as opposed to millions of years required by the general theory of evolution. Further, we accept the account of the Fall, which brought a radical change to life on this planet, as well as the worldwide Flood, which destroyed that life and dramatically altered the physical face of the planet.

The conclusions one reaches about what the Bible teaches on this crucial subject depend much on the method of interpretation one brings to the Bible. Our church has historically rejected external authorities that claim to supersede what the Bible itself says. We affirm that the Bible has final authority in matters of origins. We accept the Bible as it reads in its most straightforward manner.

Maintaining the historical-biblical view of Creation is not simply based on an uncritical or apathetic disregard for modern science. Denial of the historicity of Genesis 1–11 undermines the very essence of Christianity—the plan of salvation—for it necessarily denies the historical Fall and death resulting directly from it. Acceptance of biblical Creation reminds us of our desperate need of a Savior and gives us insights into God's love and power to redeem us. Join us this quarter as we study what the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy say about God's Creation.

“God is Creator of all things, and has revealed in Scripture the authentic account of His creative activity. In six days the Lord made ‘the heaven and the earth’ and all living things upon the earth, and rested on the seventh day of that first week. Thus He established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of His completed creative work. The first man and woman were made in the image of God as the crowning work of Creation, given dominion over the world, and charged with responsibility to care for it.”—SDA Fundamental Belief, 6.

# God the Creator



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Gen. 1, 2; John 1:1-18; 14:16-28; 16:5-16.

**MEMORY TEXT:** “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1, NKJV).

**KEY THOUGHT:** The divine unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is reflected in the Creation. God's acts in the past, present, and future help us understand where we come from, who we are, and where we are going.

**UNITY IN CREATOR AND CREATION.** People are interested in their roots and backgrounds. They want to know about their origins, for that has an impact on their present experience and future destiny. They are proud of their lineage and heritage, which helps them to have an anchor and a connection to their world.

Yet regardless of their lineage, heritage, gender, race, education, or position in life, their glorious origin is found in God Himself. In recounting the genealogy of Jesus, Luke concludes the list with this striking verse, “the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God” (3:38, NKJV). People originate from God and belong to Him by Creation and redemption. This is the sure basis for true human worth, meaning, and destiny and also the sure basis for unity and communion with God and with one another.

Although as humans we are different, living in a diverse world, yet we all find our unity in God, our Creator.

**GOD IS ONE (Gen. 1:1, 2; Deut. 6:4; John 1:1-3).**

**What can we learn about God from the following texts?**

**Isa. 45:5, 6** \_\_\_\_\_

**John 17:3** \_\_\_\_\_

**1 Cor. 8:4-6** \_\_\_\_\_

The God of Israel testifies: "I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God" (Isa. 44:6, NIV). In contrast to the nations around them, Israel's confession of faith, called the "Shema," testifies that there is one divinity. "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deut. 6:4, NKJV). Jesus also emphasizes divine unity. He begins His comments on the greatest commandments by quoting the Shema (Mark 12:29).

**What do these references from Genesis tell us about the nature of the one God? Gen. 1:2, 26; 3:22; 11:7.**

There seems to be a tension between Paul's statement that "there is no God but one" (1 Cor. 8:4, NIV) and that there is one Spirit, one Lord, and "one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:4-6). Consider also his reference to "one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).

However, reference to Jesus as mediator does not contradict His divinity any more than His reference to Himself as God's unique Son contradicts it. The Jews sought to kill Him because they understood this to be a claim of equality with God (John 5:18). The apostle Paul also regarded Christ as equal with God and therefore divine (Phil. 2:6). Similarly, reference to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of the Father and of the Son (Gal. 4:4, 6) makes Him the divine Spirit. The Bible teaches that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together constitute divinity.

**What relationship do you see between the Godhead and creation? John 1:1-3, 14; 14:16, 17.**

The Bible distinguishes God from His creation. Yet He has not abandoned it, for He sustains and directs it. The Bible presents the Creator as active within creation through the Father, the Son, and the Spirit (John 5:17; 14:16, 17).

**How is it encouraging to you to know that God did not abandon His creation but forever linked Himself with it?**

**EQUAL YET DISTINCT (John 1:1-18; 14:16-28; 16:5-16).**

**How can the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be equal and yet different? 1 Pet. 1:2; John 20:28; Acts 5:3, 4.**

The Bible presents the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as equally divine yet distinct Persons. Christ is the express image of the Father's Person (Heb. 1:3), but He is not the Person of the Father. The Holy Spirit reflects the Son and the Father, but He is Himself a divine Person. "There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons."—SDA Fundamental Belief, 2.

**How do titles of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit indicate their equality? Gen. 1:1; John 1:1-3; 2 Cor. 3:16-18; 11:31.**

Titles that are used primarily for one divine Person are often attributed to the other divine Persons as well. According to the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word . . . and the Word was God. . . . All things were made through Him" (1:1-3, NKJV). This echoes words from the book of Genesis: "In the beginning God [*Elohim*] created the heavens and the earth" (1:1). This suggests that the title *Elohim*, which is used for God in the Old Testament, also applies to Christ through whom all things were created. This is confirmed by the use of this title, as well as the word *Father*, to refer to Christ in the prophecy of Isaiah 9:6. The sharing of divine titles may explain why Jesus referred to the singular name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the baptismal formula. Paul uses the titles God and Father interchangeably (2 Cor. 11:31). Christ and the Spirit are also referred to as Lord (2 Cor. 3:14-18).

**How does Scripture describe the creative activity of the three Persons of the Godhead?**

**The Father (Gen. 2:7; Ps. 102:25; 1 Cor. 8:6)** \_\_\_\_\_

**The Son (John 1:3; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2)** \_\_\_\_\_

**The Spirit (Gen. 1:2; Job 26:13; 33:4; Isa. 40:12, 13)** \_\_\_\_\_

**What implications does the sharing of divine titles despite different divine roles have for human relations in our homes, in our churches, and in our society?**

**UNITED YET DISTINCT (Gen. 1:26, 27; 3:22; Mal. 2:10; John 14:10).**

**Explain the significance of what John 14:10 says about the relationship between the Father and the Son?**

Scripture describes each divine Person of the Godhead as having a unique role in His relationship of mutual indwelling. While the Father is not the Son, yet the Father is in the Son, and the Son is in the Father (John 14:10). Thus Jesus says: "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father" (John 14:9, Contemporary English Version). Jesus says that the Father sends the Son and the Spirit (John 14:24, 26). The Son sends the Spirit (John 15:26). Jesus gave Himself (John 6:51), yet He was given by the Father (John 3:16) and by the Spirit (Matt. 1:18, 20). The same is true when Paul writes of Jesus Christ: "through whom are all things and through whom we exist" (1 Cor. 8:6, RSV). The Father's work in Creation is also described by the word *through* (Rom. 11:36; Heb. 2:10). Distinct roles of the three divine Persons may be described in similar words.

**Explain how creation reflects the unity and diversity of the Creator? Gen. 1:26, 27; 3:22; Mal. 2:10.**

Sinful human beings tend to overlook the important distinction between the creation and the Creator. This leads to the worship of creation rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:20-25). While sin distorts God's creation, it does not completely destroy the revelation of God in creation.

All things exist in a network of relationships. The world is shaped in part by what human beings make of it. The image of God in creation includes a diversity of human individuals united by relationships. This reflects the fact that God is a Person experiencing time and space. He said: "Let us make man in our image" (Gen. 1:26, KJV). The plural image of male and female is simply "God's image" (Gen. 1:27). Concerning human relations in general, Malachi asks: "Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?" (2:10, NIV).

As you read this statement, contemplate God's glorious plan for you to reflect His image now and for eternity: "When Adam came from the Creator's hand, he bore, in his physical, mental, and spiritual nature, a likeness to his Maker. . . . It was His purpose that the longer man lived the more fully he should reveal his image. . . . All his faculties were capable of development."—*Education*, p. 15.

**BEGINNING, MIDDLE, AND END OF CREATION (Rev. 1:8).**

**What does Revelation 1:8 tell us about God and how He views the past, the present, and the future?**

The present and future nature of reality is determined in part by its past history. God is Lord of time and eternity. The past is the divinely sustained womb from which our present is birthed. The present is the gift of Christ, in whom all things consist (Col. 1:17). The future is a promise through the Spirit (Rom. 8:23, 24).

The unity of time in the past, present, and future reflects the unity of God and His eagerness to bring all things to culmination. The whole creation has been groaning for future restoration and for the manifestation of all the redeemed at the Second Coming (Rom. 8:19, 23). We, too, who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly as we eagerly wait for our adoption as children of God and the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:21-24).

It is interesting to note that the unity among the divine Persons is also evident in the use of the terms *adoption* and *redemption* in connection with the Spirit. The Bible also refers to adoption and redemption by the Father and the Son (Isa. 63:16; Heb. 9:12; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). Moreover, the future is described in terms of the Father. For when the controversy between good and evil is over, Christ will subject Himself to His Father and God will be all in all (1 Cor. 15:28).

**How does God act in history? How did He act in the past? How does He act in the present? How will He act in the future? 1 Cor. 10:1-4; 2 Cor. 5:19; Acts 1:11.**

Scripture records the mighty acts of God as the Creator, Sustainer, Deliverer, and as the One who intervenes within history. "All through the pages of sacred history, where the dealings of God with His chosen people are recorded . . . the glory of God was manifested through Christ. Not alone at the Saviour's advent, but through all the ages after the fall and the promise of redemption 'God was in Christ.'"—*That I May Know Him*, p. 102.

In the midst of history, God had acted in a special way in the incarnation of Christ (2 Cor. 5:19), who was active with the Father and the Spirit in the original Creation (John 1:1-3). This same Jesus (Acts 1:11) promised to return in history (John 14:1-3) in the glory of His Father (Matt. 16:27) and the Spirit to inaugurate a new creation in history (2 Pet. 3:13).

## SCRIPTURE AND THE PAST, THE PRESENT, AND THE FUTURE (2 Pet. 3:5-7).

Naturalism may be defined as the teaching that scientific laws and observations are sufficient to explain all reality without the supernatural. Why can't naturalism explain the unity of God's acts in the past, present, and future of creation? 2 Pet. 3:4-7.

Scripture teaches that God sustains His creation moment by moment and that He has a goal for creation, which includes the restoration of its original perfection. Yes, the creation is subject to futility because of sin. But God will act decisively. When sin is eliminated, fallen creation will come to an end. The creation of God will be restored when sin and sinners are no more.

If we reject the miracles of the original creation and its present sustenance, we are likely also to reject the miracle of its future re-creation. God's Word guarantees the actions of God. The apostle Peter writes that as the world was created by the Word of God, so its future is determined by that same Word (2 Pet. 3:5-7).

God created human beings for face-to-face communion with Himself. This communion was interrupted by sin but will be restored at the end (Rev. 21:3). Christ promised to send to the church the Holy Spirit, who would continue His work there. Neither Creation, the church, nor the future re-creation to come can be explained by natural law independent of God. The Scripture is essential to the understanding of Creation.

**Why was the Bible given to us? 2 Tim. 3:16; Isa. 8:20.**

As you reflect on the lesson for today, how does this statement encourage you to put your full trust in God and His word? "God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain 'Thus saith the Lord' in its support.

"Satan is constantly endeavoring to attract attention to man in the place of God. He leads the people to look to bishops, to pastors, to professors of theology, as their guides, instead of searching the Scriptures . . . for themselves."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 595.

**FURTHER STUDY:** For further insight on God's relation to His creation, read Job, chapters 38–41, and *Patriarchs and Prophets*, "The Creation," pp. 44-51.

"In dwelling upon the laws of matter and the laws of nature, many lose sight of, if they do not deny, the continual and direct agency of God. They convey the idea that nature acts independently of God, having in and of itself its own limits and its own powers wherewith to work. In their minds there is a marked distinction between the natural and the supernatural. The natural is ascribed to ordinary causes, unconnected with the power of God. . . .

"This is false science; there is nothing in the word of God to sustain it. God does not annul His laws, but He is continually working through them, using them as His instruments. . . . Nature in her work testifies of the intelligent presence and active agency of a being who moves in all His works according to His will. . . .

"The mechanism of the human body cannot be fully understood; it presents mysteries that baffle the most intelligent. It is not as the result of a mechanism, which, once set in motion, continues its work, that the pulse beats and breath follows breath. In God we live and move and have our being. Every breath, every throb of the heart, is a continual evidence of the power of an ever-present God."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, pp. 259, 260.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Do we experience God differently as Father, as Son, and as Holy Spirit? If yes, in what ways?
2. What spiritual lessons may we learn from the biblical teaching on Creation that will prepare us for re-creation at the end?
3. List ways in which Christ illuminates the past and the future of creation.
4. How can a biblical concept of Creation be compatible with a scientific study of nature?

**SUMMARY:** The triune God, who was, is, and is to come, created, sustains, and will consummate all things through the Son by the Holy Spirit. God holds the past, the present, and the future in His hands. The reality of Creation is illuminated by the revelation of the triune nature of God. We have assurance of these things because of the sure Word of God, the Bible.



## The Long Journey

J. H. Zachary

Eugene Again turned to his friend Serge Kolinsky. "We must return to Votinsk (voh-TINSK)!"

Serge also had been thinking about the new believers the two had brought to Christ in Votinsk. "I am eager to see our brothers and sisters and to be sure that they are remaining faithful to God," Serge agreed.

Eugene, 20, and Serge, 19, had spent several months working as Global Mission pioneers in Votinsk, a city some 550 miles from their home town of Nizhni Novogrod (NEECH-nee NOV-oh-grod) in the Russian Federation. They had raised up a small group of believers and yearned to visit their new brothers and sisters and encourage them.

They had no money for train tickets, so they borrowed two bicycles and set out for Votinsk. The snows of winter had given way to spring rains, making the journey difficult. They stopped frequently to inflate a leaky tire, and their ration of bread and cheese ran out before they reached their destination, but the boys pressed on. Finally, after more than four days, they arrived in Votinsk.

Word of their arrival spread quickly among their friends; that evening the new believers greeted their former Bible teachers with love. With joy the two youthful missionaries noted that the entire group of believers had not only remained faithful, but were reaching out to others.

Eugene and Serge spent two weeks visiting and nurturing the believers in Votinsk. And even though the trip home took nearly a week, they were grateful for the chance to encourage the new believers.

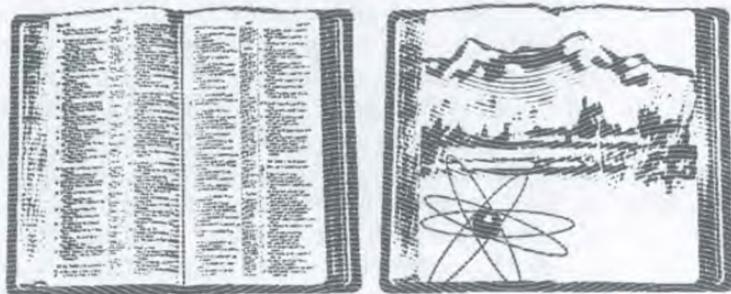
Serge and Eugene have been assigned to a town not quite so far away, where they are seeking out interests to start a new church.

The Quiet Hour has sponsored hundreds of Global Mission pioneers such as Eugene and Serge, who enter cities throughout the former Soviet Union to study the Bible with interested people and plant churches. These dedicated workers usually remain for a year, teaching and nurturing the new believers. When properly grounded, these new believers remain firmly in the church when the pioneers move on.



**Eugene Again and Serge Kolinsky (left). J. H. Zachary is evangelism coordinator for The Quiet Hour in Redlands, California.**

# God's Two Books: Scripture and Nature



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** 2 Tim. 3:16; Rom. 1:20; 2:14, 15; 2 Pet. 1:19-21; Ps. 19; 33:4-9.

**MEMORY TEXT:** “For the word of the Lord is right, and all His work is done in truth” (Psalm 33:4, NKJV).

**KEY THOUGHT:** God communicates with fallen humanity through His words in Scripture and His works in nature. Scripture illuminates nature and nature testifies about God.

**GOD'S WORDS AND WORKS ARE INSEPARABLE.** A student studying about atoms and molecules in a chemistry lab, recognizing the marks of a Grand Design, gave praise to God's creative genius. “Leave God out of this,” his professor interrupted. The student however, kept wondering, “How can the very Creator of the atom be excluded from the study of His Creation!”

The idea that the Bible and nature can be studied together is unacceptable to many because it challenges their theories of scientific thought. Many in the scientific community regard the study of nature and of Scripture as separate and mutually exclusive realms of human thought.

“The deepest students of science are constrained to recognize in nature the working of infinite power. But to man's unaided reason, nature's teaching cannot but be contradictory and disappointing. Only in the light of revelation [Scripture] can it be read aright. ‘Through faith we understand.’ Hebrews 11:3.”—*Education*, p. 134.

**THE BOOK OF NATURE (Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:20; 2:14, 15).**

**What can you glean from 2 Peter 3:7-13 and Revelation 21:1-7, 23-27 to show that God's creation has been affected by sin and is in need of restoration?**

The communion among the divine Persons of the Godhead was there before the creation of humanity. For example, "Let Us make man in Our image" (Gen. 1:26, NKJV). Later, at Creation, God communed with human beings (Gen. 1:28). This communion was interrupted by sin (Gen. 3:8). However, God has bridged the separation between Himself and humanity by His saving grace in Christ.

**In what ways can we see God's attributes in nature? Rom. 1:20.**

As Christians we appreciate divine revelation in nature, because we have such a high regard for God the Creator. What may be known of our God through nature is clearly revealed there. And though it has a relationship with its Creator, nature remains distinct from Him. "The work of the Creator as seen in nature reveals His power. But nature is not above God, nor is God in nature as some represent Him to be. God made the world, but the world is not God; it is but the work of His hands. Nature reveals the work of a positive, personal God, showing that God is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."—*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 4, p. 58.

Yes, God used nature to reveal many things about Himself, but in that same nature His unique and most supreme revelation came through Christ (Matt. 1:23). "There is nothing true but God; for Christ, the revelation of God, is 'the truth.' He is also the reality, the fullness, of everything that is, because he is the life—the whole of life. He is, and without him there is nothing."—*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 24, 1902.

**What does Romans 2:14-16 tell us about those who do not have a knowledge of Christ and the law of God? How do they "by nature" do God's will? Explain how sin has distorted but not destroyed God's revelation in nature.**

**In what ways have you experienced God's writing of His laws in your heart and mind? How does contemplating His work in nature help you grasp this spiritual reality?**

**THE BOOK OF SCRIPTURE (Ps. 19:7-11; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19-21).**

**To what extent does Scripture reveal God? Ps. 19:7-11; 2 Pet. 1:19-21.**

What can be known of God from nature, as well, is revealed clearly enough so that if we reject Him we are without excuse (Rom. 1:20). According to the psalmist there is a word from God in His handiwork in nature (Ps. 19:1-6). However, this word does not provide the full knowledge of God. This full knowledge comes through His revelation in the Bible; for His law is perfect and His testimony is sure (Ps. 19:7).

God's creation was originally very good (Gen.1:31). However, because of sin, Peter refers to the world as a dark place where the light of Scripture points to the even greater light of Jesus (2 Pet. 1:19-21). Nevertheless, in spite of sin, "Nature still speaks of her Creator. Yet these revelations are partial and imperfect. And in our fallen state, with weakened powers and restricted vision, we are incapable of interpreting aright. We need the fuller revelation of Himself that God has given in His written word."—*Education*, p. 17.

**God in His love desired that His Written Word be adapted to humans. He also sent His divine Son clothed in humanity. Explain why this neither diminishes His Written Word nor His Living Word. 2 Pet. 1:19-21; Heb. 1:1.**

The Word of God came through human beings who, though holy, were finite (2 Pet. 1:19-21). God adapted His word to humanity by speaking in different ways at different times (Heb. 1:1). Correct interpretation of Scripture depends in part on recognizing that the infinite God cannot be completely embodied in finite words. However, like the revelation of God in the divine-human Person of Jesus, the revelation of God in the divine-human Scripture is perfect for the purpose for which it is designed.

"God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not His pen. . . . But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 21.

**What does God's willingness to reach you where you are say about His love for you? What makes you confident in the Word of God as He has chosen to reveal it?**

**THE HARMONY OF NATURE AND SCRIPTURE (John 1:1-5; Ps. 33:4; Job 12:7-10).**

**How does Scripture illuminate the study of nature? John 1:1-5; Rom. 1:18-21.**

The theme of the Bible is Jesus, through whom all things of nature were created. When we reject His light revealed in Scripture, we are left in darkness. Jesus, the Master Teacher, often employed object lessons from His creation to illustrate gospel principles. The parables are full of such examples. Our minds are to be enlightened by what the Bible says about the creation. "The greatest minds, if not guided by the word of God in their research, become bewildered in their attempts to trace the relations of science and revelation."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 113. "Above all other people on earth the man whose mind is enlightened by the word of God will feel that he must give himself to greater diligence in the perusal of the Bible and a diligent study of the sciences."—*Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 510.

**In what ways does nature illuminate the study of Scripture? Job 12:7-10; Ps. 19:1-6.**

The general revelation of divinity in nature is in a sense related to the inspiration of the divine-human Scripture. While the Bible illuminates nature, it is not to be regarded as a textbook for all facts about nature. The study of nature from the standpoint of the Bible leads to a knowledge of God. "In the study of the sciences also we are to obtain a knowledge of the Creator. All true science is but an interpretation of the handwriting of God in the material world. Science brings from her research only fresh evidences of the wisdom and power of God."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 599. "As we observe the things of the natural world, we shall be enabled, under the guiding of the Holy Spirit, more fully to understand the lessons of God's word."—*Education*, p. 120.

**Recall a special time in your life when you enjoyed being in nature, reflecting particularly on how the experience brought you into a deeper closeness with God and His Word. Maybe you were walking by a seashore, hiking in a forest, or climbing a mountain. Are those special times only in your distant memory, or are they still very much a present reality? Why not plan today to spend some quiet time in nature, close to the Creator?**

## CONTRADICTION OF NATURE AND SCRIPTURE? (2 Pet. 3:3-13).

**How should we respond to last-day scoffers who claim that there are contradictions between God's promises in the Bible and the things they observe in nature? 2 Pet. 3:3-7.**

Observation of nature has led some to conclude that everything can be explained by natural law alone. In other words, all things continue as they were from the beginning. Even people who believe that God created the universe often assume that natural law can explain its history since Creation. However, the same Word that raised the dry land out of the waters allowed the earth to be covered by a Flood. This same Word sustains the world till its destruction by fire, and the same Word will create it anew.

When our interpretations of Scripture and nature contradict each other, we should reconsider our conclusions. Apparent contradiction between nature and Scripture has led many to assume an inevitable conflict of science with theology. However, "*The book of nature and the written word do not disagree; each sheds light on the other. Rightly understood, they make us acquainted with God and his character by teaching us something of the wise and beneficent laws through which he works. We are thus led to adore his holy name, and to have an intelligent trust in his word.*"—Ellen G. White in *Signs of the Times*<sup>®</sup>, (March 20, 1884), number 12, emphasis supplied. (This concept will be discussed further in lesson 10.)

**What are the two reasons mentioned in 2 Peter 3:3, 5 that are at the root of the scoffers' distrust of God's promises as they observe nature's course?**

Verse 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Verse 5 \_\_\_\_\_

Is it possible to harmonize incorrect interpretations of the world and Scripture? Will we follow God's truth or our own self-centered desires? "Inferences erroneously drawn from facts observed in nature have . . . led to *supposed conflict* between science and revelation; and in the effort to restore harmony, interpretations of Scripture have been adopted that undermine and destroy the force of the word of God. . . . In order to account for His works, must we do violence to His word?"—*Education*, pp. 128, 129, emphasis supplied.

**How does 2 Peter 3:9 help you in times of impatience and doubt?**

**RATIONAL AND FAITHFUL (Rom. 1:16-21; 1 Pet. 3:15).**

**How are faith and reason relevant to the study of both nature and Scripture? Rom. 1:16-21.**

The evil suppression of the truth (Rom. 1:18) in nature (1:19-21; 2:14, 15) results from a futile and foolish reasoning (1:22, 23). The remedy to this foolishness is the righteousness of God, which comes by faith alone (1:16, 17). However, Paul's emphasis on faith alone points to its unique role. This does not mean faith without reason, for faith does not negate reason, but it provides a foundation for it.

Scripture describes other such instances of singularity. The Bible itself stands alone (*sola scriptura*) in its unique role as our rule for faith and practice. However, Christ is the supreme revelation of God. Nature plays its role, as well, in revealing God.

For Paul, faith is the antidote to the foolishness of sinners, and it is reasonable in the light of Christ. He uses the Greek word *nous* (translated "mind") to indicate the seat of human understanding (1 Cor. 14:14-19) and conviction (Rom. 14:5). However, the "reason" that Paul rejects (Col. 2:8) is the "hollow and delusive speculations, based on traditions of man-made teaching" (New English Bible); "intellectualism or high-sounding nonsense" (Phillips); and "secondhand, empty, rational philosophy" (Jerusalem Bible).

**What do Paul and Peter tell us about using reasoning power in our search for or defense of truth? Acts 17:2; 18:4, 19; 24:25; 1 Pet. 3:15.**

We will take our reasoning power with us to heaven. However, it is a sin to extol reason above Scripture or to the neglect of it. To place the human in rivalry with the divine is deplorable. We can never adequately explain Creation by reason alone. However, while God does not promise to remove every doubt, He gives sufficient evidence for faith. The Bible strengthens the intellect and is the source and standard for the reasons for our faith in Jesus.

**Considering our finite reason as compared to the wisdom of our infinite God, is our faith strengthened or weakened by an absence of supporting evidence?**

The secular mind rejects belief in the unseen and exults "facts" over faith, science over spiritual things. How have you responded to the challenges that secular thinking poses to your belief in Creation?

**FURTHER STUDY:** Read the “Introduction” to *The Great Controversy*, pp. v-xii; “The Inspiration of the Prophetic Writers” in *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 15-21; and “Science and the Bible” in *Education*, pp. 128-134.

“As divine truth is revealed in Holy Writ, so it is reflected, as from a mirror, in the face of nature; and through his creation we become acquainted with the Creator. And so the book of nature becomes a great lesson book, which instructors who are wise can use, in connection with the Scriptures, to guide lost sheep back to the fold of God. As the works of God are studied, the Holy Spirit flashes conviction into the mind. It is not the conviction which logical reasoning produces; but unless the mind has become too dark to know God, the eye too dim to see Him, the ear too dull to hear His voice, a deeper meaning is grasped, and the sublime, spiritual truths of the written word are impressed on the heart.”—*Special Testimonies on Education*, p. 59.

“These words of Holy Writ say nothing of the independent laws of nature. God furnishes the matter and the properties with which to carry out His plans. He employs His agencies that vegetation may flourish. He sends the dew and the rain and the sunshine, that verdure may spring forth, and spread its carpet over the earth; that the shrubs and fruit trees may bud and blossom and bring forth. It is not to be supposed that a law is set in motion for the seed to work itself, that the leaf appears because it must do so of itself. God has laws that He has instituted, but they are only the servants through which He effects results. It is through the immediate agency of God that every tiny seed breaks through the earth, and springs into life. Every leaf grows, every flower blooms, by the power of God.”—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 294.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What would be your response if you were confronted with an apparent contradiction between nature and Scripture?
2. Is it reasonable to adjust the interpretation of nature in response to insights from Scripture? Is it faithful to adjust the interpretation of Scripture in response to insights from nature? Explain why.
3. Choose two “works of God” in nature to study. What does the Holy Spirit teach you from such observation?

**SUMMARY:** In spite of sin, God has communicated with humanity through His Scriptures and through His works in nature. The Bible gives us the foundation for understanding God’s revelation in nature.



## The Bible and the Hymnal

Farid M. De la Rosa

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Javier Perez was a young man with little to look forward to. His marriage had failed; his furniture business was struggling, and his nerves were a wreck. Moments of panic overtook him, but he had no where to turn for help. As he looked at his life, he saw only senseless waste. He was a failure.

Javier shivered in the chill night air of Cali, Colombia. He was late for a business appointment. Finally the lights of the bus approached and stopped. He climbed the steps and found a seat. Relaxing, he looked around. He noticed a woman holding a Bible and hymnal. *Wednesday night*, Javier thought. *She must be going to church*. Javier remembered the times he had attended church as a child.

The Holy Spirit spoke to him; he stood and approached the woman. "Pardon me, Miss," he said. "What church do you go to?"

The woman looked at him, surprised. "The Seventh-day Adventist Church," she answered.

"You're an Adventist?" Javier asked, his interest rising. "May I go with you to church?" Javier was so excited that he did not even ask the name of the woman on the bus.

Javier followed the woman to the church. He enjoyed the worship, and when a friendly woman offered to study the Bible with him, he agreed.

Javier's employees noticed the difference almost immediately. He cut his long hair and shaved; his language and demeanor changed too. With the support of church members, he struggled with other life changes he needed to make. He quit working on Sabbaths and several months later was baptized.

He has set aside a room in his store where he and his employees pray for one another and the business. It has not been easy for Javier to turn from the world. His business continues to struggle, but he refuses to quit. "I will not turn back," he says. "The Lord will provide for me."

Today, Javier seldom attends church alone. He brings someone with whom he is sharing his faith, just as the woman on the bus shared her faith simply by carrying her Bible and hymnal with her.

**Farid M. De la Rosa is a pastor in Cali, Colombia.**

## But Did It Really Happen?



### *Sabbath Afternoon*

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Ps. 103:7; Isa. 46:9, 10; 2 Pet. 1:16-19; 3:3-7.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember Your wonders of old. I will also meditate on all Your work, and talk of Your deeds" (Psalm 77:11, 12, NKJV).

**KEY THOUGHT:** Through His Word, God has given us a reliable account of His workings in earth's history, in order to help establish faith, give encouragement, and provide a better understanding of His will for the present and future.

**GOD'S WORD: A RELIABLE HISTORY.** A recent Public Broadcasting Service special on Genesis aired to critical acclaim in North America. While viewers across the nation found the program fascinating, a question that apparently lurked in the back of many minds was openly voiced by *Newsweek* magazine, "But Did It Really Happen?" It is one thing to read and even enjoy the stories of the Bible; it is quite another to hold that they actually happened. Yet, if the statements of the biblical writers are to be taken at face value, this is precisely what they believed and what they intended their readers to believe.

"It [the Bible] came fresh from the fountain of eternal truth, and throughout the ages a divine hand has preserved its purity. . . . In God's Word only do we behold the power that laid the foundations of the earth and that stretched out the heavens. Here only do we find an authentic account of the origin of *nations*."—*Education*, p. 173, emphasis supplied.

**A RELIABLE WORD OF GOD (Prov. 16:25; John 7:17; 14:26).**

**What does Proverbs 16:25 imply about the importance of an accurate understanding of God's Word?**

“The truth and the glory of God are inseparable; it is impossible for us, with the Bible within our reach, to honor God by erroneous opinions. Many claim that it matters not what one believes, if his life is only right. But the life is molded by the faith. If light and truth is within our reach, and we neglect to improve the privilege of hearing and seeing it, we virtually reject it; we are choosing darkness rather than light.”  
—*The Great Controversy*, p. 597.

**What does Jesus say about the relationship between doing God's will and understanding His teaching? John 7:17.**

“The language of the Bible should be explained according to its obvious meaning, unless a symbol or figure is employed. Christ has given the promise: ‘If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine.’ John 7:17. If men would but take the Bible as it reads, if there were no false teachers to mislead and confuse their minds, a work would be accomplished that would make angels glad and that would bring into the fold of Christ thousands upon thousands who are now wandering in error.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 599.

**What do Acts 17:11 and Isaiah 28:10 tell us about arriving at God's truth?**

“Scriptural difficulties can never be mastered by the same methods that are employed in grappling with philosophical problems. We should not engage in the study of the Bible with that self-reliance with which so many enter the domains of science, but with a prayerful dependence upon God and a sincere desire to learn His will.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 599.

**Jesus promised His disciples in John 14:26 that the Holy Spirit “will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (NKJV). Recall particular instances in your spiritual journey when the Holy Spirit helped you to understand and to remember God's truth. How did such divine insight comfort or help you in your situation?**

**THE DAYS OF OLD (Pss. 77; 105; 106; Isa. 51; Hos. 11).**

**What historical events did later biblical writers frequently refer back to for understanding their current situation? Pss. 105; 106; Isa. 51; Hos. 11. Why do you think they did this?**

Biblical writers frequently recounted earlier key events in their history, such as the Exodus, to give the people confidence and assurance that God could and would see them through their present crisis. Claims to the past also served as a motivator for the Israelites to take action with confidence that God was leading them.

Therefore, unless, the Exodus actually took place, there is nothing to the claim "I am the Lord God who brought you up out of the land of bondage," a statement repeated 125 times in the Old Testament. If it were believed that God hadn't really led them out of Egypt, why then would later generations of Israelites pay any attention to any later prophet's appeal based on that claim?

**How did David regain confidence when he was feeling discouraged? Ps. 77:3-15.**

Psalm 77 reflects a particularly low point in David's life. He felt completely abandoned by God. But he regained his courage by remembering, meditating on, and considering the mighty deeds that God had accomplished in the past. He particularly took courage from remembering how God had helped his people escape from the Egyptians through the Red Sea, an event that was well in the past by David's time. The remembrance of that miraculous event gave David hope for a genuine deliverance from present and future troubles.

Suppose for a moment, David believed the history in the Scriptures was made up of people who did not really live and who did things that did not actually happen. How effectively, then, could he have trusted in God's promises for deliverance? Belief that the Bible is merely fiction, in whole or in part, undermines trust in God's promises and ultimately dwarfs spiritual growth.

**Make a list of past events in your life in which you knew beyond a doubt that God was involved. Perhaps God delivered you from sickness or despair or even a financial crisis. Keep this list tucked somewhere in your Bible so that, when you become discouraged, you can meditate upon it as David did on his "list." Compare your list with David's, noting any similarities. How did David's list serve as a source of inspiration for him? How does it inspire you?**

**NO DEvised FABLES (Luke 1:1-4; 1 Cor. 15:15; 2 Pet. 1:16).**

**How did the early Christian witnesses view the reliability of the things they preached about? How did they expect their hearers to respond? Luke 1:1-4; 1 Cor. 15:15; 2 Pet. 1:16, NIV.**

Most of the messages in the Scriptures were originally directed to the community of believers, whether ancient Israel or the early Christian church. Therefore, the historical trustworthiness of the Scriptures was usually not questioned. However, it could not necessarily be supposed that these messages would automatically be accepted at face value when witnessing outside the community of faith.

Peter recognized this as he prepared to share the “new light” of Jesus with his listeners. He affirmed the historical reality of the things he was describing by insisting that he and his friends had not followed “cleverly invented stories!” Before writing his account of Jesus’ life and ministry, Luke carefully checked the available historical sources. In the same way when Stephen (Acts 7) and Paul (Acts 24:14; 26:6-8, 22) defended their beliefs, each insisted on tying the rise of their new Christian faith into the historic flow of Old Testament history. The historical reality upon which their testimonies depended was a major concern in their witnessing efforts.

**To what event did Paul ultimately appeal in his attempt to persuade the Athenians that they were all under the same invisible God? Why? Acts 17:26, 27.**

It is interesting that Paul used an argument derived from the table of nations in Genesis 10 to convince the Athenians that all humans were brothers and sisters and thus were all under that one invisible, unnamed God.

Ellen White pointed out that the use of this argument by Paul (in Acts 17:26, 27) “reveals the true philosophy of history. In those words of matchless beauty and tenderness spoken by the apostle Paul to the sages of Athens is set forth God’s purpose in the creation and distribution of races and nations.”—*Education*, pp. 173, 174. Implicit in Paul’s argument is an acceptance of the historicity of the idea that all humans are descendants of Adam and Eve and descendants of Noah after the Flood.

**How does the fact that all humans are related, brothers and sisters, affect your relationship with others?**

**HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CREATION (Deut. 32:6, 7; Luke 17:26, 27; Rom. 5:12; 2 Pet. 2:5; Rev. 14:7).**

**How was the story of Creation viewed within the flow of biblical history? Deut. 32:6, 7.**

It is interesting how many times the word *remember* occurs in the Old Testament. Repeatedly, the Israelites are told that if they want to understand what is expected in the present, they must “remember” the past. This shows the importance that history played in providing a foundation for future understanding.

**What do the following verses tell us about how the New Testament writers viewed the historical reality of Genesis 1–11? Rom. 5:12; 2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:13, 14; 1 Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 2:5; 1 John 3:12; Rev. 14:7.**

As the various New Testament writers set out the doctrinal foundations for the Christian faith in areas such as the Fall, marriage, worship, spiritual renewal and salvation, baptism, judgment, and the Second Coming, they repeatedly appealed to events in the first eleven chapters of Genesis for the historical context that justified and made clear the need for the doctrine. The New Testament affirms the historicity of Genesis 1–11.

**How did Jesus view the historical reality of the first eleven chapters of Genesis? Matt. 19:4, 5; Mark 10:6; Luke 3:38; 17:26, 27.**

Even more important than the attitude of the various New Testament writers toward the Creation is that of our Lord Himself. Jesus repeatedly referred to events in Genesis 1–11, indicating that He did believe they really happened. He used the reality of these events to justify His pronouncements on marriage and divorce, for example.

His comments in Matthew 19 on divorce are prefaced with the challenging remark, “Have you not read . . . ?” (NKJV), making it clear that Jesus saw the Creation account as authoritative. He then goes on to remind His listeners that “at the beginning [the Creator] ‘made them male and female.’”

**Certainly Jesus took the account of Creation as a literal and historical event. How does His solid testimony boost your confidence in God’s Word? Why?**

## **DANGER OF IGNORING THE CREATION (2 Pet. 3:3-7; Rev. 14:7).**

**Second Peter 3:3-7 tells us that in the last days people will be in danger of forgetting what happened at Creation. Why is this? In what ways have you seen it happening?**

Here we read that in the last days there will be scoffers who will deny the historical reality of both God's Creation of the earth, as depicted in Genesis 1, and the Flood. The context of chapter 3 is the concern Peter has of both false prophets and teachers who will introduce destructive heresies among God's people (2 Pet. 2:1, NIV).

Both of these key events appear in the first eleven chapters of Genesis, and they are generally denied by modern secular scholarship as having any place in historical reality. The tendency is to explain these chapters as some form of nonhistorical literature. The more common suggestions have been that these first eleven chapters are myth, poetry, saga, parable, a theological statement, or something else but not history. These chapters are theological, and in the original Hebrew, considerable portions are poetic, but such facts in no way preclude their being factual history.

**What other reminder in the New Testament points us back to the Creation? Rev. 14:7.**

The first of the three angels' messages was to announce "the hour of [God's] judgment" that began in 1844. It contains an explicit reminder to "worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water." This is a virtual quote from Exodus 20:11 (the Sabbath commandment), which, itself is referring to God's original proclamation given in Genesis 2:2, 3. The fact that God felt it important to remind the world to worship Him as the Creator reinforces the prediction of Peter that, in the last days, people would forget their Creator.

**Jot down the blessings that come from trusting God's record of the early history of our world as you contemplate Ellen White's account in *Medical Ministry*, p. 89: "We are dependent on the Bible for a knowledge of the early history of our world, of the creation of man, and of his fall. Remove the word of God, and what can we expect than to be left to fables and conjectures, and to that enfeebling of the intellect which is the sure result of entertaining error. We need the authentic history of the origin of the earth, of the fall of the covering cherub, and of the introduction of sin into our world."**

**FURTHER STUDY:** Use a Bible concordance and look up the word *remember*. How often does it appear that God asked His people to remember His past deeds in their behalf? Why would He do this?

“Science is ever discovering new wonders; but she brings from her research nothing that, rightly understood, conflicts with divine revelation.” “Both the revelations of science and the experiences of life are in harmony with the testimony of Scripture.”—*Education*, pp. 128, 130.

“But God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain, ‘Thus saith the Lord’ in its support.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 595.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Do we have all the details of how God created the world? From a human perspective would this even be possible? Is a record of every detail of a historical event necessary for an account to be historically accurate or reliable? Explain why, or why not.
2. How important is the historicity of an event in the Bible to our understanding of God and His plan of salvation for us?
3. A scholar recently asked the question that if Jericho was not razed is our faith in vain? What do you think?
4. Do you see implicit in Paul’s argument in Acts 17:26, 27 the idea that we are also all sinners and in need of the Creator’s offer of salvation? Explain your answer.

**SUMMARY:** We can have confidence in God’s Word; not just in its theological statements but also in its historical accounts. This includes the story of Creation and the Flood. By reviewing how God has worked with His people in the past, we can have confidence in the future.



## The Master Conductor, Part 1

Mateus Barroso

When a musician plays one instrument's part of an orchestra arrangement, the listener may question that the notes could ever make great music. Perhaps a single note is held over several measures, or a series of quick runs is followed by rests that seem to make no sense. But when the conductor brings the orchestra together, those apparently haphazard notes blend to create music that stirs the soul.

So it is with life. The parts we are given to play may seem haphazard and make little sense until God, the Master Conductor, blends the parts of many performers to create a masterpiece of beautiful harmony. We may be unable to see God's overall plan, but if we trust Him and play our part in faith, He will blend it with other parts into one perfect whole.

Janoario and Raimunda Costa lived in a small town in northeastern Brazil. The family loved God and enjoyed studying the Bible together. One day Mr. Costa discovered that the Sabbath, which he had thought was a commandment given to the Jews, was in fact a gift to all humanity. He asked his pastor why Christians do not observe God's Sabbath, but the pastor brushed his question aside.

Disappointed in his pastor's response, Costa quit attending church, but he continued studying the Bible at home with his family. The Costas were convinced that the Sabbath was still binding; they worshiped in their home on Sabbath, for they knew of no other Christians who kept Sabbath.

Then one day Francisco, a traveling photographer, arrived in the little town where the Costas lived. This man was an Adventist lay evangelist who used his skills in photography to meet people and share his faith in Christ. Someone told him of the Costa family, who worshiped in their home on Saturday.

Francisco found the Costas and introduced himself. As they shared their faith with one another, excitement mounted. Francisco realized that God had led this family to embrace Bible truths even without a teacher. And the Costas were thrilled to learn that other Christians keep God's seventh-day Sabbath. The photographer introduced the Costas to his friends Valerio and Florencio, laymen from a town some 34 miles away. These men began to study the Bible with the Costas.

(continued next week)

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# Creation in Six Days



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Gen. 2:1-3; Exod. 20:8-11; Pss. 33:6, 9; 104; Heb. 1:10; 2 Pet. 3:3-5.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it" (Exodus 20:11, NKJV).

**KEY THOUGHT:** The Bible teaches that both the habitats and the life forms of our planet were created by God in six literal, consecutive, 24-hour days. God celebrated this activity by resting on, blessing, and making holy the seventh day.

**CREATION IN ONE WEEK!** The lessons for this week and next will focus on a biblical teaching that is considered by secular science as incredible and naive at best—that life on this planet was created by the Word of God in only six days, only a few thousand years ago. This particular biblical teaching, once commonly accepted, has been virtually rejected in the modern world.

There is no doubt that the challenges posed by secular scientists are many and difficult. That is not to say that there are not some possible viable alternate interpretations of the scientific data. However, our task here is to determine what the Bible does say on this matter. We will also want to learn what the Spirit of Prophecy can tell us about this subject, since the theory of evolution was already one of the challenges that our earlier pioneers had to face.

**CREATION IN ONE WEEK (Gen. 1:1–2:3).**

**According to Genesis 1:1–2:3, how long did God take to create our present world and the various life forms that live on it? What clues do these verses give us that imply literal, 24-hour days?**

The Hebrew word for day is *yom*. It is true that on occasion *yom* can mean an indefinite period of time (just like the word *day* in English). Some scholars have used this to propose that the six days of Creation were vast periods of time. They often cite passages like Psalm 90:4 in support of their position. However, the common usage of *yom* is for the 24-hour day. A basic rule in translation is for the common meaning to be utilized unless the context provides a clear indicator or sign that a different meaning is intended.

Such signs are missing in Genesis 1, and there are several indicators that point directly to a literal, 24-hour day. One is the way that the days are designated by ordinal numbers (“day one,” “day two,” etc.). This is done only when a 24-hour day is intended. Another is that the days are set off by the expression “and there was evening, and there was morning”(NIV). Again, this is done in Hebrew only when a literal 24-hour day is meant. There are several more technical arguments involving grammar and syntax that also support the 24-hour-day meaning for the word *day*. Most scholars believe that the writer indeed meant to convey the idea of a literal 24-hour day. However, many of them still do not accept what the text says, because it contradicts their understandings of the findings of evolutionary theory.

**How did Ellen White view the days of that first week?**

“I was then carried back to the creation and was shown that the first week, in which God performed the work of creation in six days and rested on the seventh day, was just like every other week. The great God in his days of creation and day of rest, measured off the first cycle as a sample for successive weeks till the close of time. . . . God gives us the productions of his work at the close of each literal day.”  
—*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, p. 90.

**What does it mean to you that God said what He meant and meant what He said regarding the six literal days of Creation? What does this say to you about the power of God and His character? What principles for keeping the Sabbath holy can you draw from Exodus 20:8-11?**

**THE FIRST AND SECOND DAYS OF CREATION (Gen. 1:3-8).**

**Why do you think God created light on the first day of Creation? Gen. 1:3-5.**

Students of the Bible have often wondered what the source for the light of day one was, especially since the sun is not mentioned until day four. Was the light of day one simply the phenomenon of light? (This seems unlikely since light surely existed in heaven and on other planets prior to the creation of our earth). Was it a diffused solar light that penetrated some sort of vapor canopy? (This assumes that the sun was not created on day four but was only “revealed.”) Or, was it the light that emanates from God? The *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 210 suggests the latter. The Bible often refers to God as light or as a source of light (1 John 1:5).

In ancient times, the sun, moon, and stars were seen by many as divine entities. The light that emanated from them would have been understood as the creation of these deities. By separating the light of day one from any of these heavenly bodies, the writer of Genesis 1 was in essence “depriving them of every creative dignity.” The ultimate source of all light is only God.

**What questions come to your mind about the firmament and its relationship to the water? Gen. 1:6-8.**

The Hebrew word that is often translated firmament is *raqia*. An earlier generation of scholars thought this word referred to an inverted metal bowl or sheet that was thought to cover the earth. They also thought that it reflected the early Hebrews’ naive view of the world, which they had borrowed from neighboring pagan cultures. However, this interpretation has been shown to be false by Assyriologist Alan Millard. *Raqia* does not refer to a material substance; rather, it simply refers to an expanse. In this case it is something that includes, but is not entirely equated with, what we call the atmosphere.

The Hebrew synonym in Genesis 1:8 is *shamayim*, translated as “sky” or “heaven” and refers simply to the expanse that exists above the line of the horizon. Some creationists have suggested that the waters “above the firmament” refer to a high-altitude vapor canopy that protected our planet before the Flood, but the more obvious understanding is that it simply refers to clouds. On day two God is creating the stage or areas for what He will create on day five—the birds, fish, and animals.

**THE THIRD DAY OF CREATION (Gen. 1:9-13; Ps. 104:5-9).**

**Explain how the earth and the seas emerged on the third day of Creation. Gen. 1:9-13; Ps. 104:5-9.**

The forces described here are enough to excite the imagination of any geologist, especially those who firmly believe in Scripture. Bible-believing geologists have wondered whether any of this powerful activity can still be discerned in the geologic record—especially since much of that record was altered at the time of the Flood.

**What did the dry ground “bring forth”? Gen. 1:11-13.**

After the dry ground emerged, God commanded the land to produce vegetation—specifically seed-bearing plants and trees that would produce fruits. An interesting question that some Creation scientists have asked is whether or not these plants would have had the appearance of age. If you would have cut down one of the trees created on day four, would it have had tree rings, which indicate the number of years of growth? Since the rings are necessary for life and support, many scientists assume they would have. This would give the trees an “apparent” age, much older than they really were. This type of process may explain why some things in nature appear older than they really are.

**What does the expression “according to their kinds” mean? See Gen. 1:11, 12.**

Some have seen the English expression that describes these plants as producing “according to their kinds”(NIV) as a way of affirming their fixity—that no new “kinds” have come into existence since God created the original “kinds.” Actually, the probable intent of the Hebrew was to indicate that fruit-bearing plants were to be produced “in all their varieties.” The expression does not deny or affirm fixity of species. In the larger picture of chapter one, however, it is clear that the Bible writer sees God as the only originator of all things on this planet. Neither pagan gods nor natural processes is allowed to usurp God’s role as the Creator.

**Take some time to observe a blade of grass, smell a flower, or pick and eat a fruit you like. Write down the things that come to your mind. What does this teach you about the love and wisdom of God the Creator? Pause to thank Him.**

**FILLING THE EARTH: DAYS FOUR TO SIX OF CREATION  
(Gen. 1:14-25).**

**Why are the names of the sun and moon not given in Genesis 1:14-19?**

Many scholars believe that the reason the sun and moon are not mentioned by name is that the Semitic names for them were seen by many of Israel's neighbors as names for deities. The author of Genesis wanted to leave no doubt that these lights were not gods but merely objects created by God. Thus, the proper names were carefully avoided in this verse. Moreover, the text makes it clear that their reason for existing was appointed solely by God.

Some students of Hebrew have noted that the Hebrew word for "made," *asah*, is not the same word as that used for "create," *bara*, in earlier verses. Perhaps the intent is not to say that the sun, moon, and stars were created on day four but were rather "appointed" or "set" to their tasks on this day—God was still ultimately their Creator. Light was needed the first day to mark off the daily cycle of light and darkness. However, the place where the sun and moon would reside had not been provided until the firmament had been created on day two. The sun, moon, and stars would begin functioning in their appointed way and place on day four.

Others believe that the best translation does mean that the sun and moon came into existence for the first time on day four. Even if the best translation of the text is that the sun and moon came into existence on day four, many scholars believe that the Hebrew suggests that the stars had already been created. Ellen White seems to indicate that other stars and even planets with intelligent beings on them were created prior to our own earth—so some stars must have been in existence before day four. (See *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 69.)

**Describe the activities of days five and six. Gen. 1:20-25.**

Continuing the pattern of Creation, where days one to three prepared the environments for the creatures made on days four to six, God, on day five, filled the stage He had prepared on day two. The conclusion of the symmetrical pattern of Creation comes on day six when all the animals are brought forth to fill the land that God created on day three. The variety of animal life is broadly inclusive.

**Jesus says to us, "You are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14).  
How can Jesus be the greater light and you the lesser light in life?**

**ADAM AND EVE: THE CROWNING ACT OF CREATION (Gen. 1:26-29; Ps. 8:4-8; Rom. 5:12-14; 1 Cor. 15:22).**

**In what way was the climactic act of God's creative activity on the sixth day different from what had already preceded? Why did this happen at the end? Gen. 1:26-29.**

"Here is clearly set forth the origin of the human race; and the divine record is so plainly stated that there is no occasion for erroneous conclusions. God created man in His own image. Here is no mystery. There is no ground for the supposition that man was evolved by slow degrees from the lower forms of animal or vegetable life."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 44, 45.

**Why is the historical accuracy of the story of Adam and Eve so important theologically? Gen. 2 and 3; Rom. 5:12-14, 18-20.**

One of the clear teachings of Genesis is that humans came into existence directly as a creative act by God. This is clearly in contrast to the prevailing theory of the evolutionary origin of humankind. If all humans are not descendants from a literal, historical first couple who fell and needed redemption, then the essence of Christianity and our need for Jesus as a Saviour is seriously undermined. There have been those Christians who, in trying to find a compromise with evolution, have suggested that God used the process of evolution to bring humans into existence, stating that the Fall came as a result of groups of humans rejecting God as they became aware of their individuality. Besides contradicting the plain reading of Scripture, such a view raises more questions than it solves. However, the biblical view teaches that we are all made in God's image, descendants of Adam and Eve and brothers and sisters in need of a Savior.

But what does it mean for us to be created in the "image of God"? (Gen. 1:26, 27; Ps. 8:4-8). Does it refer to a physical or a spiritual resemblance? The Old Testament commentator Gerhard von Rad correctly realized that *both* are intended here. This view is endorsed by Ellen White. "Man was to bear God's image, both in outward resemblance and in character. . . . His nature was in harmony with the will of God. His mind was capable of comprehending divine things."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 45.

**Because we are created in God's image and are therefore sisters and brothers by creation and redemption, how should we then treat one another?**

**FURTHER STUDY:** Hebrew writers, even when writing historical accounts, often built poetry and symmetry into their literary structure. Compare the first three days of Creation with the last three days. How does day four relate to day one? Day five with day two? Day six with day three? During the first three days God made habitats; during the second three days He filled them.

“The sophistry in regard to the world’s being created in an indefinite period of time is one of Satan’s falsehoods. God speaks to the human family in language they can comprehend. . . . 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*, pp. 135, 136.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Explain how Genesis 1 does not only make a theological point but is also a historical account.
2. Someone suggests to you that the Bible only tells us who created, not how—implying that God may have used slow processes that took millions of years. Doesn’t Genesis also tell us how? How do you respond to such a person?
3. Why does a biblical account not have to be complete in every detail to be considered historical? Explain. What kind of details are included in our present account? Why are such details adequate?
4. What is your reaction to this statement? “Such teaching [evolution of man] lowers the great work of the Creator to the level of man’s narrow, earthly conceptions. Men are so intent upon excluding God from the sovereignty of the universe that they degrade man and defraud him of the dignity of his origin.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 45.

**SUMMARY:** According to the biblical evidence, the writer of Genesis intended to describe the Creation as an event that took six literal days and that all things came into existence by the power of God’s spoken Word.



## The Master Conductor, Part 2

Mateus Barroso

Janoario and Raimunda Costa of Brazil are diligent Bible students. When Mr. Costa discovered the Sabbath truth, he asked his pastor why Christians did not keep the Sabbath. His pastor's answer did not satisfy him, so he and his family began studying the Bible together at home. They knew of no other Sabbath-keeping Christians until they met Francisco, a photographer and Adventist lay worker. He introduced the family to his friends Valerio and Florencio, who offered to study the Bible with the family.

Because Valerio and Florencio lived about 34 miles away through the jungle, they could not meet regularly with the Costa family. But when they did come, the small group spent many hours studying the Bible together. As they studied, Valerio and Florencio shared other Bible truths with them. After studying with the Adventist layworkers for a year, Mr. and Mrs. Costa and five of their children were baptized.

The family shared the gospel with others in their town. Because there was no Adventist church in the area, the Costas opened their simple mud house for the little group to meet on Sabbath. During the week Mr. Costa used the front room as a carpentry shop. On Friday the family cleaned the room and arranged the simple furnishings for a church.

Soon after the Costas were baptized, another Adventist family moved to town. It was not long before the families found one another. Others joined the branch Sabbath School, and soon they needed a larger place to meet. They built a chapel of mud bricks and palm branches.

The group continued to grow, and the conference sent a Bible worker to help the lay people establish a church there. Then one of the church members, who had been quite sick, promised God that if he recovered, he would build a proper church. Another member provided land for the church, and the little congregation joined hands to build their church. The group continues to grow.

The Costas have since moved to another town, where they are working to plant another church. Today, because of lay people such as Janoario and Raimunda Costa, Francisco, Valerio, and Florencio, who are playing the parts that God has assigned to them, the heavenly music that they produce is bringing souls to God's kingdom, and the church in northeastern Brazil is growing rapidly.

**Mateus Barroso is a pastor in northern Brazil.**

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## A Recent Creation



### *Sabbath Afternoon*

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Gen.1:1, 2; 5:11; Rom. 8:19-21; 2 Pet. 3:3-7.

**MEMORY TEXT:** “For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Romans 8:19-21, NKJV).

**KEY THOUGHT:** The Bible presents the history of this planet as a great controversy between Jesus and Satan that has been going on for a few thousand years. Throughout history, God has been aware of the sufferings of the inhabitants of earth and has desired to bring pain, suffering, and death to an end as soon as possible.

**A RECENT CREATION.** One of the most hotly debated topics of modern times is the question of how life came to exist on earth. There are two basic choices: (1) through slow, naturalistic processes of evolution or (2) through a recent, fiat Creation. Closely related to that topic is the question of time—how long has life been on this planet? The contrast is stark—either hundreds of millions of years or a few thousand years. The conclusions of modern evolutionary science have made the defense of a recent Creation less and less popular even among conservative Christian denominations. The arguments presented here are based on the acceptance of God's Word.

**HOW LONG? (Gen. 1:1, 2; 2 Pet. 3:3-5; Gen. 5 and 11).**

**Do we know how long it has been since Creation week? Do these passages in Genesis 1:1, 2; chapters 5 and 11; 2 Peter 3:3-5 suggest that the world is about six thousand years old?**

It must be recognized that there is no single verse in the Bible that tells us precisely in what year or how long ago Creation week took place. Nevertheless, there is a considerable amount of chronological data in the Bible that, when looked at collectively, points to a recent Creation. For this reason, the idea that the first week of Creation occurred only a few thousand years ago has been the general understanding of both Jewish and Christian believers throughout history. This understanding was almost universally accepted among believers until the nineteenth century, when findings of modern geology began to challenge that conclusion. Ellen White said that "Many who profess to believe the Bible are at a loss to account for wonderful things which are found in the earth, with the view that creation week was only seven literal days, and that the world is now only about six thousand years old."—*Signs of the Times*<sup>®</sup>, (March 20, 1879), vol. 5, number 12.

Over the centuries, many students of the Bible have been fascinated by the chronological data in the Bible and have attempted to use that information to reconstruct a chronology of the world. However, the chronological material in the Bible is not always easy to understand, and scholars have not been able to agree on a single biblical chronology. Thus, it is not surprising that by 1738, Des Vignolles of the Royal Society of Berlin, could claim that he knew of at least 200 biblical chronologies, with the dates for Creation ranging from 3500 to 7000 B.C. The most familiar of these chronologies was that of the Archbishop James Ussher (1581–1656), of Armagh, Northern Ireland, whose time scheme was widespread because it was selected for use in the margins of the King James version of the Bible in A.D. 1679. According to Ussher's time scheme, Creation took place in the year 4004 B.C. Ussher's date was later refined by Dr. John Lightfoot, of Oxford, who argued (unfortunately without solid biblical support) that Adam was created at 9:00 a.m. on October 23, 4004 B.C.!

There are other evidences besides Ussher for a short chronology. The 200-plus different biblical chronologies noted by Des Vignolles tell us two things. First, it tells us that biblical data can be put together or interpreted in many different ways. This teaches us not to be too dogmatic. Second, all of these chronologies point to a recent Creation. Thus, in spite of some uncertainties, there is no reason for suggesting that the Bible teaches that Creation occurred millions of years ago, or over a period of many millions of years.

**GAPS IN TIME? (Ezra 7:1-5; 1 Chron. 6:3-15).**

**Can anything be found concerning gaps in the biblical genealogies? Ezra 7:1-5; 1 Chron. 6:3-15.**

Some have suggested that the amount of time that has elapsed since Creation week might be extended if there were generational “gaps” in the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11. It is true that often in both the modern and ancient Near Eastern genealogies, the father-son relationship is not always meant to be taken as direct—the so-named “father” may actually be a grandfather, great-grandfather, etc. There appear to be such cases of compressed genealogies in portions of the Bible written later. For example, if the genealogy of Ezra 7:1-5 is compared with the one given in 1 Chronicles 6:3-15, it appears that six generations are omitted in Ezra. Apparently, in this passage, noting the line of descent was more important than providing the complete record of the genealogy (see *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 186).

Genealogies were produced by ancient peoples for a variety of reasons. Many ancient Near Eastern genealogies that have been discovered were produced by the sociopolitical elite of large state or government bureaucracies. The genealogies produced were, not surprisingly, usually concerned with the succession of office holders—especially kings, and also on occasion, priests (who functioned politically as well as religiously) and scribes. The purpose of these genealogies was to give status to individuals and to justify their holding of an office or certain land.

Later biblical genealogies—especially after the rise of the monarchy—also at times had this purpose. The Israelite exiles returning to their homeland were undoubtedly concerned on occasion as to how they could reclaim ancestral lands, and genealogies might be important in assisting them in this purpose. Genealogies would also be important for determining the legitimacy of those who claimed to have rights to certain offices, especially levitical offices. This may be part of the reason why the books of Ezra and Nehemiah recorded genealogies of the returning exiles (see Ezra 7 and 8 and Nehemiah 7). Disputations over genealogies to establish one’s rights or status in society is probably what was behind Paul’s caution not to waste time arguing about genealogies (1 Tim. 1:4 and Titus 3:9); it was not a concern over chronology. By contrast, the genealogies of Genesis 1–11 have a different function, which clearly reflects the concerns of a premonarchal, tribally structured society (the people for whom Moses was originally writing). The genealogies, thus, are uniformly concerned with ancestral lines that involve relationships that are only those of kinship; not of office and land-holding where compressed genealogies were sufficient.

**THE DIFFERENT PURPOSES FOR ANCIENT GENEALOGIES (Gen. 5; 11).**

**After reading the following explanation, do you think there are gaps in the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11?**

There are several reasons for believing that the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 were not deliberately compressed as others sometimes were. First, these early biblical genealogies cannot be simplistically compared with other ancient Near Eastern genealogies, or even those that appear later in the Bible. None of the ancient Near Eastern examples have a precise parallel with the way the genealogies of Genesis 1-11 are written (see Richard Hess, *Biblica*, vol. 70, pp. 241-245).

Specifically, the genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11, are unique in that they are expressed in what is called a “chrono-genealogical” formula. That is, when person X lived so many years, he begot person Y; after he begot Y, he lived so many more years; altogether he lived Z years. (See *Origins*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1980, pp. 23-37; vol. 7, no. 2, 1980, pp. 53-70.) As T. C. Hartman observes, the length of years lived and the age at which the next figure named was begotten “is never recorded in the Ancient Near Eastern king lists. This is in contrast to the biblical genealogies for whom the only purposes in using numbers seems to be that of recording the life span of each name bearer and the age at which he begot the next name bearer. . . .”—“Some Thoughts on the Sumerian King List. . . .,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 91, pp. 25-32. Not only is this formula unique to the Bible, it is constructed so tightly as to make it impossible to disrupt by the insertion of a generational gap.

This tightness is reinforced by the Hebrew verb used in these passages “begot” (*wayyoled-et*); it is the verb most commonly used in the Bible to express the actual physical fathering of an offspring (Judg. 11:1; 1 Chron. 8:9; 14:3; 2 Chron. 11:21; 13:21; 24:3). When combined with the unique genealogical formula, it is virtually impossible to insert generational gaps into these particular genealogies. The combination of the unique time formula with this verb form suggests that the author of Genesis 1–11 was interested in both time and the accuracy of this genealogy.

**When you consider all the seemingly uninteresting genealogies in the Bible, why do you think God wanted them there? In light of what we have just studied about genealogies, how might an understanding of the way they function in the Bible strengthen one’s belief in Creation?**

**NOT WITHOUT WITNESSES.**

**What insights does the Spirit of Prophecy give concerning the purpose of these early genealogies, as well as the possibility of gaps? (See *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 125, 83.)**

In *Patriarchs and Prophets*, Ellen White emphasizes an important point—that God has never been without faithful witnesses on the earth (p. 125). Thus, she writes, “The antediluvians . . . had no written records; but . . . had strong memories, able to grasp and to retain that which was communicated to them, and in turn to transmit it unimpaired to their posterity. And for hundreds of years there were seven generations living on the earth *contemporaneously*, having the opportunity of consulting together and profiting each by the knowledge and experience of all.”—Page 83, emphasis supplied.

**According to Ellen White, how did Enoch learn of the Fall and the plan of salvation? (See *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 84.)**

Enoch heard “from the lips of Adam” the “dark story of the Fall” and the story of “God’s grace as seen in the promise”—page 84. The idea that Enoch could have met Adam is possible only if one assumes that the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 are to be taken in a straightforward manner as they read—with no gaps. If this is the case, then Adam and Enoch would have overlapped by 308 years (see *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 185).

**Based on the explanation below, for what major event did Enoch’s translation serve as a warning?**

Enoch’s translation to heaven just before the Flood is paralleled by the translation of the living righteous from the earth and the destruction of the wicked at the Second Coming. Methuselah, the son of Enoch, listened to the preaching of his grandson Noah, who faithfully warned the inhabitants of the old world that a flood of waters was coming. Methuselah, his sons, and grandsons lived in the time of the building of the ark. They, with some others, received instruction from Noah and assisted him in building the ark. (See *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, pp. 59, 60.)

**Enoch walked with God prior to his translation from this world to heaven. Walking with Him here leads us to walking with Him there. How am I walking with Jesus here and now as I await His soon coming?**

## THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY ON THE AGE OF THE EARTH.

**What was Ellen White's view on the age of the earth?**

There is no doubt whatsoever that Ellen White endorsed a recent Creation—that is, that Creation week took place only a few thousand years ago. Scores of times she makes reference to the fact that “the world is now only about six thousand years old.”—*The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 87. Some have wondered whether the six-thousand-year figure she repeatedly used was something revealed to her by the Lord or whether it was a figure she used from the margin of the King James Bible, much as she used facts from history books.

While it is true that she never explicitly indicated that the 6,000-year figure was revealed to her from the Lord, she was quite specific in stating that the Lord's revelations to her explicitly denied a date for Creation earlier than that permitted by the Scriptural account. “But apart from Bible history, geology can prove nothing. Those who reason so confidently upon its discoveries have no adequate conception of the size of men, animals, and trees before the Flood, or of the great changes which then took place. Relics found in the earth do give evidence of conditions differing in many respects from the present, but the time when these conditions existed can be learned only from the Inspired Record. In the history of the Flood, inspiration has explained that which geology alone could never fathom.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 112.

Earlier, in reference to the “day-age” theory, she explicitly denies the claim of unbelieving geologists who claim that the world is very much older than the Bible record makes it. She notes that such geologists “reject the Bible record, because of those things which are to them evidences from the earth itself, that the world has existed tens of thousands of years.”—*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, pp. 91, 92.

These statements suggest that if one were to challenge Ellen White on the 6000 years, her answer would simply be—“Fine, let's see what the Bible says and follow its lead.” However, the Lord left no doubt in her mind that the time back to Creation was to be measured only in thousands of years—not millions, hundreds of thousands, or even tens of thousands of years.

Since Ellen White's day secular science has concluded that most of the life-bearing rocks in the earth are nearly 570 million years old (for some organisms, even older). The real battle is between those who argue for a recent Creation of only a few thousand years and those who argue that life (and death) has existed on the earth for millions of years.

**How does a belief in a short history of the earth help you trust God?**

**FURTHER STUDY:** Look up the following passages: Rev. 6:10; 21:3-5; Rom. 8:22-27. What do these texts tell us about God's concern for humanity's suffering?

"Noah, the faithful preacher of righteousness, lived for three hundred and fifty years after the flood, Shem for five hundred years, and thus their descendants had an opportunity to become acquainted with the requirements of God and the history of His dealings with their fathers. But they were unwilling to listen to these unpalatable truths; they had no desire to retain God in their knowledge; and by the confusion of tongues they were, in a great measure, shut out from intercourse with those who might have given them light."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 120.

One reason many people have suggested that there are gaps in the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 is that because in his recounting of the genealogy of the post-Flood patriarchs, Luke includes an additional name, Cainan, after Arphaxad (Luke 3:35, 36; Gen. 11:10-26). This Cainan's name is included in the LXX (Greek Septuagint) version of Genesis 11 but not in the Masoretic (Hebrew) text. Scholars have long debated which version is correct. If there were originally an additional Cainan in the Hebrew version, the omission of his name was more likely the result of a later scribe's error rather than an attempt at abbreviating this genealogy. (See *Selected Messages*, vol. 1, p. 16.)

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How important is it to know the exact year of Creation? What is a kind and appropriate way to deal with disagreements on controversial topics like this?
2. Does the Bible always give us all of the details that a specialist might like to have? Why, or why not?
3. How does rejection of the literal six days of Creation affect our view of the Sabbath and salvation?

**SUMMARY:** While we cannot be dogmatic on the precise year when Creation took place, all the available biblical information points toward a recent creation of life on this planet, only a few thousand years ago. God's love will not allow pain, suffering, and death to continue much longer. He intends to redeem the earth and its inhabitants soon!



## The Runaway

J. H. Zachary

Stephen grew up in a Christian home in Bangladesh. His parents sent him to an Adventist school, where he could grow in his knowledge of Christ. But Stephen took the spiritual environment for granted and put off making a decision for Christ. After he graduated he studied in a government school, where he soon forgot the lessons he had learned in the Adventist school. He eventually turned from God and married one of his classmates.

He borrowed money to start a business, but when his business collapsed, he ran from his creditors, neglecting his family responsibilities. As his life crumbled, Stephen remembered the peace he had known in a Christian environment. He recalled the teachings he had learned but never appreciated and the close walk with Jesus he could have had.

While still in hiding, Stephen heard about Sathsumila (sath-soo-ME-lah), an Adventist training center in Bangladesh. The school trains lay volunteers to plant churches. Stephen enrolled in some classes. He gave his life to God for service, and he determined to make amends for his past mistakes and to be a good husband and father. He sent for his family in India.

Steven learned how to reach Hindus and Muslims with the gospel, how to help people stop smoking, how to conduct small group evangelism, and how to review the Adventist doctrines with them.

After he completed his studies, Stephen accepted a call to work in two Muslim communities in Bangladesh. He makes friends with the villagers, helping them in their gardens and teaching them ways to improve their health. He has helped many villagers stop smoking. Stephen has organized small groups for Bible study; currently 30 villagers worship with him in three small groups.

Thus far Stephen has led 11 people to the Lord. He hopes to plant a church in each village before the year is over and to construct a small clinic to help with the medical needs of the villagers.

After years of running from God, Stephen feels that finally he is where God wants him to be.



**Stephen Biswas (left). James H. Zachary is international evangelism coordinator for The Quiet Hour, located in Redlands, California.**

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# A Closer Look at the Creation Story



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Gen. 1:1–3:24.

**MEMORY TEXT:** “Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made” (Genesis 2:1-3, NKJV).

**KEY THOUGHT:** A close reading of Genesis 1 through 3 shows that God, through Moses, has provided us with a reliable account of human origins, the Fall, and the hope of restoration.

**CHALLENGES TO UNDERSTANDING THE CREATION ACCOUNT.** Here are some of the biggest Creation issues: Was there a gap of time somewhere between the first two verses of Genesis 1? Was there a gap between God's initial creation of the whole universe and His creation of life on this planet? Or was the whole universe created only a few thousand years ago? The Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy are quite clear that life was created on this planet a few thousand years ago.

Another issue is the challenge that Genesis 2 offers a contradictory account of the Creation from that of Genesis 1 and further assumes that both chapters were written by two different people, neither of whom was Moses. This challenge directly contradicts key statements in the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy about the divinely inspired authorship of this book by Moses.

## IN THE BEGINNING GOD . . . (Gen. 1:1, 2).

**What relationship do you find between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2? Do you think there was a time gap there? How would you write these two verses in your own words?**

There has been considerable debate among scholars over how properly to translate Genesis 1:1, 2 and what these verses mean. The King James Version simply translates these first two verses as two independent sentences: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep."

Some individuals have suggested that these sentences actually say, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth *became* without form and void." What is implied in this approach is that life forms existed on the earth millions of years before the appearance of humankind, suggesting that the first two verses of Genesis portray a "double-creation." (This is sometimes called the "ruin and restoration" theory.)

Supporters of this interpretation argue that verse 1 actually describes an *earlier* creation of *life* on earth, millions of years *before* the Creation week presented later in chapter 1 and that verse 2 describes the destruction of that earlier life (it "became" without form and void). These Christians speculate that Satan was the ruler of this first creation, but because of his rebellion the earth "became" without form and void. Verse 3 supposedly begins a second creation of our present earth.

However, there are many problems that arise with this theory, not least of which is substituting the word *became* for *was*. Hebrew scholars are virtually unanimous that this is not a valid translation, because it contradicts fundamental laws of Hebrew grammar. The best translation remains the "*earth was* without form and void."

There is another interpretation, which argues that the first verse should be translated: "*When* God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was without form and void." The idea for this translation comes from comparing Genesis 1:1 with ancient Mesopotamian creation stories, which typically began with "when." This view suggests that before God began any creative activity with regard to this earth, something was already here—albeit, without form and void! Still the best reading is the simple, straightforward, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

**Compare and contrast the "ruin and restoration" theory with the straightforward view that God simply created the heaven and the earth. Why is the latter view the best way to interpret Genesis 1:1?**

**IN THE BEGINNING GOD . . .** (Prov. 8:22-26, 30; Mic. 5:2; Job 38:4-11; Isa. 14:12-21; Ezek. 28:12-17; 1 John 3:8).

What hints can we find for God's creative activity in the universe before the creation of life on our planet? Prov. 8:22-26, 30; Mic. 5:2; Job 38:5-10; Isa. 14:12-21; Ezek. 28:12-17; 1 John 3:8.

One wonders as to when the absolute beginning of the heavens and the earth in Genesis 1:2, 3 did occur. What else was created before our planet was created? A number of factors point to the existence of stars, planets, and other beings *before* the creation of life on this earth. Let's take a moment to explore some of these factors that are mentioned in our Bibles:

1. Proverbs 8:22-26, 30 appears to speak of a beginning prior to the "In the beginning" of Genesis 1:1. "The Lord possessed me [wisdom] in the beginning of his way, before His works of old."

2. Micah 5:2, NKJV, describes a Ruler (Christ) whose goings forth are "from of old, from everlasting" (see also Heb. 1:8).

3. Job 38:4-11 indicates that the sons of God pre-existed the creation of the earth since they were there to sing and shout for joy at the Creation.

4. The Hebrew of Genesis 1:16 suggests that the sun and moon received their appointments to govern the times and seasons "with" or "in addition to" the stars; the implication is that the stars were already there before Creation week, fulfilling their appointed tasks.

5. God's throne, which is in heaven, has existed from eternity (Ps. 45:6; 93:2). Heaven is also the home of the angels, who appear to have been created prior to the earth.

6. According to 1 John 3:8, the devil sinned from the beginning; this "beginning" of Lucifer's iniquity preceded the six-day Creation (see Isaiah 14; Ezekiel 28); by inference the creation of the angels preceded the creation of life on this earth.

These verses, among others, tell us that God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit ever existed from eternity. Heaven, the stars, Lucifer, the angels, and perhaps other intelligent beings pre-existed the creation of our planet.

"The Lord has given me a view of other worlds. . . . The inhabitants of the place were of all sizes; they were noble, majestic, and lovely. They bore the express image of Jesus."—*Early Writings*, pp. 39, 40.

**The eternal God and the Creator of the vast universe chose our planet Earth, "without form and void," to create life on it. He also manifested His supreme love for our world by giving His only Son to die for us. What does this tell us about His commitment to us and to our planet?**

**OUR CREATOR: THE ALL-POWERFUL GOD, OUR PERSONAL FRIEND (Gen. 1 and 2; Matt. 19:4, 5; Mark 10:2-9).**

**What name is used for God in Genesis 1 and 2? How is God portrayed in each chapter?**

Bible scholars have long noted that in the Hebrew language, God is addressed differently in chapters 1 and 2. In chapter 1 God is called *Elohim* (God) while in chapter 2 He is called *Yahweh* (Lord) or *Yahweh-Elohim* (Lord God). Moreover, in chapter 1 God is portrayed as very powerful, orderly, and transcendent—He merely speaks, and things come into existence! In chapter 2, on the other hand, we see God down on His hands and knees, so to speak, gently forming man out of clay with His own hands and breathing into the lifeless nostrils the breath of life.

**After reading the following comments, why do you think two different names for God are used in Genesis 1 and 2?**

An earlier generation of biblical critics thought that the use of two different Hebrew names for God in chapters 1 and 2 was evidence that different authors wrote these two chapters and that the chapters were indeed two different, and in places, contradictory accounts of Creation. However, more recent scholars such as Egyptologist Kenneth Kitchen have noted that the use of different names for the same God in the same text was actually a common practice in Egyptian and Mesopotamian texts.

Why, then, would different names have been used in the Genesis account of Creation? Hebrew scholar Umberto Cassuto suggests that the use of the two Hebrew names for God simply points out two different aspects of God's character—Yahweh is the covenant name for God, and Elohim emphasizes His universality as God of all the earth. To put it another way, Yahweh describes who God is, and Elohim describes what He is. Biblical scholar M. H. Segal argues that the different names were used merely for the sake of variety. Whatever the purpose for the different names, there is no question that a more detailed, personal, and intimate picture of God is given in the second chapter.

**Jesus implies that Moses wrote the book of Genesis (Matt. 19:4, 5; Mark 10:2-9). Also Mosaic authorship of Genesis was repeatedly endorsed by most New Testament writers (Rom. 4:17; Gal. 3:8; 4:30; Heb. 4:4; James 2:23). How does this affirm your confidence in God's Word in Genesis?**

**WHAT GOD DID NOT CREATE (Gen. 2:4, 5; 3:18).**

**What are the four things that God had not yet made when He had finished creating the earth and heavens? Gen. 2:4, 5.**

Some wonder as to why Genesis 1 indicates that plants and man were created during the first week of Creation (Gen. 1:11, 12, 26, 27), while chapter 2 seems to suggest that God did not get around to making these until later (Gen. 2:4-6). According to Genesis 2:4-6 the four things that God had not yet made were: (1) the shrub of the field; (2) the plant of the field; (3) a man to till the soil; (4) and rain to water the earth.

**To what kinds of shrub and plant of the field are Genesis 2:5 and 3:18 alluding? Were they created before or after the Fall? Study the following explanation and summarize it in your own words.**

Upon reading the text in English, one might think that the writer of chapter 2 ignores the fact that these four things were already created during the first week of Creation. However, in the Hebrew text it is clear that the four things mentioned in chapter 2, as having “not yet” been created, have nothing to do with the things created during the first six days of Creation. The Hebrew words for the first two items, the shrub of the field and the plant of the field, are not the same names for the plants created on day three of Creation—vegetation, seed-bearing plants, and seed-bearing fruit trees (Gen. 1:11, 12). Actually, the Hebrew word translated “shrub” in Genesis 2:5 (*siah*) is quite rare in the Bible, occurring only in two other texts—in Genesis 21:15 and Job 30:4, 7. The contexts of these latter two texts have persuaded botanists who have studied the biblical flora that the *siah* is a desert plant; that is, a spiny or thorny plant. The full expression *siah hassadheh* (“shrub of the field,” or better, “field thistle”) occurs only in Genesis 2:5! Significantly, the first time thorns and thistles are explicitly mentioned in the Bible is in the next chapter, in Genesis 3:18, where they are introduced as a direct consequence of the Fall! What the writer of Genesis 2 is actually doing is setting up the question Where did thorny plants come from? They were not part of the “very good” Creation that was completed after the six days of Creation; rather, they came as a result of the Fall! For more details on this, see Further Study in Friday’s section.

**What are the spiritual thorns and thistles in both your character and in those around you that hinder your spiritual growth? How do you deal with them?**

**A MAN THAT TILLS THE SOIL (Gen. 2:5, 7-25).**

**What does the expression “a man to till the ground” refer to? When did the tilling of the soil occur? Gen. 2:5.**

In Hebrew the adjectives that modify a word are very important. “A man to till the ground” in Genesis 2:5 is not man who was created on day six (Gen. 1:26, 27). Rather, it is a description of man that applies only after the Fall when Adam would have to contend with the ground (by tilling and irrigation) for his food (see Gen. 3:17). This new kind of man is in harmony with the “shrub of the field” and “plant of the field,” which likewise make their appearance only after the Fall. Thus, again, “a man to till the ground” did “not yet” exist in chapter 2, because he would not become such a man until chapter 3, after the Fall.

**Who provided the original cultivation and irrigation in Eden? How was it done? Gen. 2:8-15.**

It is interesting to note that in the Mesopotamian creation stories, one of the blessings of the gods to the earthly kings was to provide humans “who would work like cattle” and who would “irrigate” the fields. The God of the Bible, however, did not create humans to provide slave labor. Rather, He lovingly and thoughtfully planted the garden Himself and provided for its irrigation! He then gave it to Adam and Eve as a gift. A number of scholars have noted this important difference between the Bible’s account of Creation and the nonbiblical accounts. They have concluded that the author of Genesis was clearly offering a “polemic” of Creation; that is, an account that was deliberately designed to challenge the erroneous views about Creation that were then in circulation, with a correct account.

The work God gave our first parents to do in the garden of Eden was to “tend and keep it” (Gen. 2:15, NKJV). This is not the same kind of work that Adam would have to endure after the Fall “by the sweat of . . . [his] brow” (Gen. 3:19, NIV). “Their occupation was not wearisome, but pleasant and invigorating.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 50.

There is a more specific recapitulation of the Creation account in chapter 2, but it begins with verse 7 instead of verse 4. The picture given in these verses is indeed one of a loving God providing everything Adam would need in his new existence, including a place to live, plenty to eat and drink, dominion over his dwelling, and a loving companion and wife, Eve.

**In what ways do you find your work a blessing?**

**FURTHER STUDY:** Read Romans 4:17; Galatians 3:8; Hebrews 4:4; James 2:23. What do these texts suggest about the authorship of Genesis? Read *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 251.

Like the “shrub of the field,” the Hebrew expression translated as “plant of the field,” *'esev hassadhe*, is very rare in Scripture. Indeed, it appears only twice—in Genesis 2:5 and 3:18. The key to understanding the nature of this plant is found in Genesis 3:17, 18 (NIV), where we are told that the *'esev hassadhe* is the very plant that Adam will have to eat as a result of his Fall! “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field” [*'esev hassadhe*]. These plants are not the fruit-bearing trees that God provided for man’s food on day three. Rather, they are the plants humans will have to cultivate after the Fall.

When did the absolute beginning of the heavens and the earth in Genesis 1:1 occur? By this we are not referring to just the life on this earth, which Genesis 1:3–2:4 is clearly talking about, but the entire universe. Creationists generally have been of two opinions on this:

First, the “no gap” idea. The possibility that all things in the entire universe, including the stars and the “raw materials” of Genesis 1:1, 2 that went into the making of this earth, are included in the first day of the seven-day Creation week.

Second, the “passive gap” idea. The possibility that the stars and perhaps even the “raw materials” of the heavens and the earth in their unformed, unfilled state were created by God long before the seven days of Creation week.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Can you think of examples of initially telling a broad outline of a story and then going over it again in more detail? When and/or why would you do this?
2. How does the description of God’s forming Adam with His own hands out of clay and breathing into him the breath of life (Gen. 2:7) affect your picture of God?

**SUMMARY:** While we cannot be certain exactly when God began creating the universe, yet Scripture says that He was there in the beginning. Genesis 1 and 2 provides us with a unified and complementary account of God’s Creation activity, showing especially His love in the way He provided for humankind.



## The Unseen Listeners

Bert Smit

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These letters clearly testify that the Farsi programming presented on Adventist World Radio is making a real impact in the lives of the listeners, especially in areas where missionaries cannot go.

**Bert Smit is from the Netherlands. He is regional director for Adventist World Radio in Europe.**

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*I Timothy 6:17-19 NIV*

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# Paradise Lost: The Fall's Impact on Creation



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Gen. 3:14-19; Rom. 5:12-14; 6:23; 8:18-20.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body" (Romans 8:22, 23, NKJV).

**KEY THOUGHT:** The fall of Adam and Eve did not simply affect humanity but the entire created order of this planet.

**THE FALL OF CREATION:** The fossil record refers to the remains of plants and animals in the rocks deep beneath our feet. The conventional explanation by evolutionary scientists is that these fossils represent the evolution of all life forms from simple to complex throughout a period covering hundreds of millions of years. The theory of evolution contradicts the biblical evidence of God's Word for both a recent Creation and a literal six-day Creation.

Some, under the influence of the theory of evolution, have suggested that perhaps death—the consequence of the Fall according to both Genesis 3:19 and Romans 5:12-14—only pertained to humans and that plants and animals may have lived and died for millions of years before humans were even created. This week we will take a look at both the biblical and Spirit of Prophecy evidence for the impact the Fall and sin had on the creation.

**ALIENATION FROM THE EARTH (Gen. 3:14-19).**

**What was the initial impact of the Fall on nature? Gen. 3:14-19.**

The account in Genesis, chapter 3, does not provide much information on the precise nature of the curses that took effect after the Fall. We know that the serpent was cursed, the woman would experience pain in child-bearing, and the ground was cursed and would bring forth thorns and thistles. Of these three curses, the first two are rather specific, pertaining to the serpent and the woman. Let us now look at the implications of the third curse.

**What impact did Adam's disobedience have on the earth? What did it mean for the earth to be cursed? Gen. 3:17.**

It is not just a coincidence that the name for earth (ground) and the proper name for the first man are essentially the same word in Hebrew ('*adamah* and '*adam*'). The word *earth* plays a special role in the Hebrew account of Creation, and it is hard to overestimate its importance. In that account God used the earth as the source from which He made every aspect of the natural world. For example, the earth brings forth the streams to water its surface, man was made from dust of the earth, every kind of tree that was good for food emerges from the earth, and the beasts of the field are formed from the elements of the earth. In essence, all life and those things essential to the support of life emerge from the earth. The relationship between humans and the earth is, thus, very intimate. The Fall resulted in a disruption of this created order, the intimate relationship between humankind and the earth.

Rather than being mutually supportive, the earth and man are now at odds with each other (Gen. 3:17). The earth no longer willingly yields good trees from which to eat (1:12, 29). Indeed, it now produces thorns and thistles, and man must struggle with it by the sweat of his brow (3:18, 19). In essence, man now became a slave to the earth he was created to dominate (1:28). The animals that the earth provided (1:24) would soon be in rebellion against man's dominion (6:11-13; 9:5, 6). The earth from which God formed man would ultimately receive him in death (3:19). The Fall, then, is a complete reversal of the natural created order.

**As you observe the deterioration of humanity and the environment all around you, what can you do as a Christian to be a faithful witness and a responsible steward?**

**LIVING APART FROM GOD (Gen. 2:17; 3:19, 22; 4:8, 23, 24; 6:3, 5, 11, 12; 1 Cor. 15:26, 50-55; Rev. 21:4).**

**What impact did the Fall have on humans? Gen. 2:17; 3:19, 22; 4:8, 23, 24; 6:3, 5, 11, 12.**

They “would have the knowledge of evil—all the days of their life. From that time the race would be afflicted by Satan’s temptations. Instead of the happy labor heretofore appointed them, anxiety and toil were to be their lot. They would be subject to disappointment, grief, and pain, and finally to death.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 59.

“Crime would increase through successive generations, and the curse of sin would rest more and more heavily upon the human race, upon the beasts, and upon the earth. The days of man would be shortened by his own course of sin; he would deteriorate in physical stature and endurance and in moral and intellectual power, until the world would be filled with misery of every type.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 68.

**How did humankind begin to deteriorate after the Fall, and what was the cause of this deterioration? Gen. 3:22.**

“In order to possess an endless existence, man must continue to partake of the tree of life. Deprived of this, his vitality would . . . diminish until life should become extinct.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 60.

**How will the nature of human life be restored in the new earth? 1 Cor. 15:50-55.**

Perhaps it is difficult for some to conceive that the current biological order and ecological balance we see in nature today will be any different in the new earth. Since death and decay are part of the current life cycle, it seems easy for them to assume that it will be the same in the future. But the Bible describes a different biological reality for the future: “I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. . . . For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality” (1 Cor. 15:50-53, NIV).

**1 Corinthians 15:26 and Revelation 21:4 assure us that death will finally be destroyed. How does it make you feel to know that death will be eradicated forever?**

**NATURE MARRED (Gen. 6:11, 12; Rom. 8:19-22).****How did the Fall affect the earth? Gen. 6:11, 12.**

The expression *earth* may include all the things that were derived from it, including the animal kingdom (Gen. 1:24; 2:19). After the Fall the earth began to increase in violence until God felt it was necessary to destroy it (Gen. 6:11, 12). Ellen White describes this process quite vividly: "When God made man, He made him ruler over the earth and all living creatures. So long as Adam remained loyal to Heaven, all nature was in subjection to Him. But when he rebelled against the divine law, the inferior creatures were in rebellion against his rule."—*Conflict and Courage*, p. 18.

It is interesting that the main reason God brought on the Flood is seen in the fact that the earth was corrupt and "full of violence." The Hebrew word for violence (*hamas*) implies the idea of the shedding of blood. Apparently one component of this violence was the killing done by animals. This had been such a problem that God felt compelled to issue a couple of commands: First was to put the fear of humans into the animals (Gen. 9:2); and second was to initiate a special law invoking capital punishment for those animals that shed the blood of humans (Gen. 9:5, 6).

**How does Paul describe the impact the Fall had on nature? Rom. 8:19-22.**

The effects of sin on the world went well beyond the objects that were specifically cursed in Genesis 3. The *entire* creation was affected by the Fall. As a direct result, our first parents "witnessed in drooping flower and falling leaf the first signs of decay, Adam and his companion mourned more deeply than men now mourn over their dead. The death of the frail, delicate flowers was indeed a cause of sorrow; but when the goodly trees cast off their leaves, the scene brought vividly to mind the stern fact that death is the portion of every living thing."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 62.

How one defines "plant death" might be debated philosophically, but there is no doubt that the Bible teaches that a drastic transformation occurred during the original Fall that affected the earth and all that is derived from it.

**Life in the new earth will again be different from what we see today. Reflect on this: "I saw another field full of all kinds of flowers, and as I plucked them, I cried out, 'They will never fade.'"—*Early Writings*, p. 18.**

**OTHER CHANGES IN NATURE (Gen. 1:11, 12, 21-25).**

**What does Genesis 1:11, 12, 21, 24, 25 tell us about the plant and animal kingdoms as they emerged from the Creator?**

One of the basic tenets of the general theory of evolution is that all life forms on the earth evolved from common ancestors, which lived hundreds of millions of years ago. This long, gradual process can supposedly be traced in the fossil record. The biblical account, on the other hand, argues that all life forms were created by God's spoken word during the six days of the Creation week. Have new kinds of life emerged since the original biblical Creation? A related and intriguing question is Where did animals like the dinosaurs come from? Did they evolve as evolutionists say? Did God make them, or did they come into existence since the original Creation?

**What does the expression plants and animals reproducing "after their kinds" really mean? Gen. 1:11, 12, 21-25.**

The expression often translated "after their kinds" can be understood to mean that the life forms God created were to reproduce "their various kinds." This expression can suggest the multiplication of variety of their kinds within their order rather than the idea that each parent would produce offspring that looked exactly like them. This suggests that God built into the original creatures the potential for variety. We see this variety in the families of organisms that populate the earth today. God is the author of genetics. Many scientists who are creationists believe that a substantial amount of change has occurred in many animals as a result of the Fall.

But what about the dinosaurs? Where did they come from? The Bible is silent on that (although some have thought, incorrectly, that the leviathan or behemoth might refer to dinosaurs, Job 41:1, 15). Ellen White was certainly aware of them, however, and made a few comments about them such as "I was shown that very large, powerful animals existed before the flood which do not now exist." She does not say much more about them except to add that "the time of their existence, and how long a period these things have been in the earth, are only to be understood by Bible history."—*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, pp. 92, 93. Scientists who believe in a recent Creation have tended to suggest that God may have made some original dinosaur types, but, along with the rest of the animal kingdom, many of them became violent and were consequently destroyed in the Flood. That is why we find their fossils in the earth.

**NATURE RESTORED (Isa. 11; 65:17; Ps. 37:29; Rev. 21:1-3; Phil. 3:20, 21).**

**How will nature be transformed in the new earth? Isa. 11; 65:17.**

“There the heavenly Shepherd leads His flock to fountains of living waters. The tree of life yields its fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree are for the service of the nations. There are ever-flowing streams, clear as crystal, and beside them waving trees cast their shadows upon the paths prepared for the ransomed of the Lord. There the wide-spreading plains swell into hills of beauty, and the mountains of God rear their lofty summits. On those peaceful plains, beside those living streams, God’s people, so long pilgrims and wanderers, shall find a home.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 675.

**How will nature be restored to humanity? Ps. 37:29; Rev. 21:1-3.**

“The earth originally given to man as his kingdom, betrayed by him into the hands of Satan, and so long held by the mighty foe, has been brought back by the great plan of redemption. All that was lost by sin has been restored. . . . God’s original purpose in the creation of the earth is fulfilled as it is made the eternal abode of the redeemed. ‘The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein forever.’ Ps. 37:29.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 674.

**What effect will the restoration have on us according to Philippians 3:20, 21?**

“In the beginning, man was created in the likeness of God, not only in character, but in form and feature. Sin defaced and almost obliterated the divine image; but Christ came to restore that which had been lost. . . . The mortal, corruptible form, devoid of comeliness, once polluted with sin, becomes perfect, beautiful, and immortal. All blemishes and deformities are left in the grave. Restored to the tree of life in the long-lost Eden, the redeemed will ‘grow up’ (Malachi 4:2) to the full stature of the race in its primeval glory. . . . Christ’s faithful ones will appear in ‘the beauty of the Lord our God,’ in mind and soul and body reflecting the perfect image of their Lord.”—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 644, 645.

**How would you use promises such as Philippians 3:21 and Revelation 21:4 to encourage a terminally-ill friend?**

**FURTHER STUDY:** Read chapter 42 in *The Great Controversy*, pp. 674-678, for a description of the new earth. Note Ellen White's statement on pages 674, 675: "A fear of making the future inheritance seem too material has led many to spiritualize away the very truths which lead us to look upon it as our home." How seriously should we take the Bible's description of our new home?

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. By the time just prior to the Flood, we read that the earth had become "corrupt" and was "full of violence." What was the reason for that? What is the connection between humanity's corruption and earth's corruption?
2. What do you imagine a "perfect" world to be like? What are the things about our present world that you believe are the result of sin and will be different in the new earth? How does studying what Eden was like help us understand the new earth better?
3. Will our existence in the new earth be a real, physical existence? If so, how will our physical existence in the new life compare to our present existence? How will it be different?
4. In what ways can the wonderful truths about our future inheritance be spiritualized away? Compare or contrast your answer with "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Cor. 2:9, NKJV).
5. "All come forth from their graves the same in stature as when they entered the tomb."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 644. What do you understand this statement to mean?

**SUMMARY:** The Fall created alienation, not just between humanity and God but between humanity and the rest of the creation. The earth and all the life forms that were derived from it are in rebellion and have been affected by sin. Only through Jesus Christ will both humanity and the rest of creation be restored to its Edenic state.



## For His Honor

Charles Reid

I grew up in an active Christian home. Both of my parents are teachers; my father teaches music, my mother teaches reading. Music was a part of our family, but I didn't start singing publicly until I was a senior in high school. Music became more and more of a joy to me, and I eventually decided to study opera.

While singing at a music festival, I met Julie Karpenko, a member of the chorus. As we talked, I noticed she was deeply spiritual. We spent many hours sharing our mutual interest of music and becoming friends. I learned that she was a Seventh-day Adventist. I had heard of Adventists, but did not know much of what they believe.

I was convinced that I was following God's truths, but how could we both be right and believe so differently? As I studied my Bible and listened to some super sermons, I kept hearing some things that did not square with my beliefs. I searched my Bible to verify my beliefs and was shocked to discover that the Bible upheld Adventist teachings, especially regarding the Sabbath and prophecy.

Then Julie told me about satellite evangelistic meetings in my area. I found a church that was presenting the programs and attended nearly every meeting. I found answers to several big questions. I saw that there is no reasonable explanation for Sunday worship, but the Bible contains ample support for the Sabbath. I realized that the Adventist church has a more truthful understanding of the Bible as a whole. And as a Christian, I felt it was my privilege and duty to join the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Since then Julie Karpenko and I have been married. We have completed our studies and enjoy singing together for God's glory. We look forward to seeing what God has in store for us in the field of music, for which we have trained.

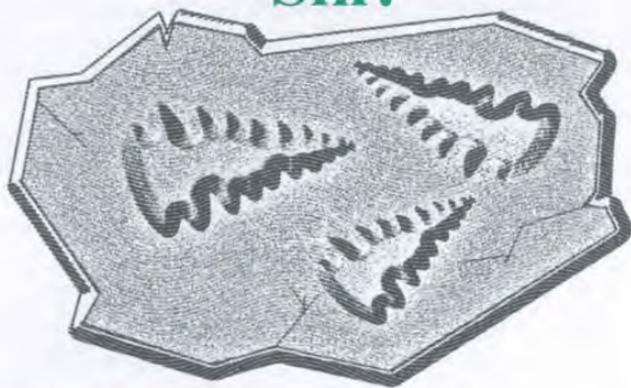
Two years ago I had never heard of Seventh-day Adventists. I've seen how God has led in my life, how He has opened doors that I dared not dream of. He has set me in new places at every turn, and these places have always been better than I could have imagined. Therefore, I have stopped trying to plan for myself or even guess where God will take me. All I know is that the talents He has given to me I gladly give back to Him, to be used for His honor where ever He sees fit.



**Charles and Julie Reid live in Princeton, New Jersey. They continue to sing together for God's glory.**

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# Was There Death Before Sin?



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Gen. 1:20-28; 3:1-24; 6:11-13; 7:21-23; Rom. 5:12-14; 6:23; 8:18-22.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23, NKJV).

**KEY THOUGHT:** Death first entered this planet as a direct result of Adam's and Eve's fall. It not only affected humans but animals, plants, and all of creation. God's plan of redemption includes both humanity and the entire creation.

**WHAT DO THESE FOSSILS MEAN?** One of the current challenges facing those who believe in a recent Creation is the evidence marshaled by secular geologists that life has been on this planet for millions of years before the first appearance of humans. It is true that human fossils only appear near the top of the geologic column (that layer of fossil bearing rocks that covers the surface of the earth), while plants and animals of many different types appear in the rocks deeper down. If one accepts the dating of these rocks, it appears that complex life forms seem to have existed before humans for hundreds of millions of years. The implication of this is that death existed before humans, meaning that man's fall was not the event that really brought death.

Some have tried to get around this challenge by suggesting that it does not matter whether lower plant and animal life forms existed and died before humans. In this lesson we will explore these issues in the light of biblical evidence.

**DO ANIMALS MATTER?** (Gen. 9:8-17; Matt. 6:25, 26; Luke 12:22-24).

**What does Genesis 9:8-17 tell you about God's care for the animals and the rest of His creation?**

There are a number of indications of how important God's creatures were to Him when He first created them. He desired them to be fruitful and multiply; He provided for their food and care; He placed them under man's protection; and, most important, He pronounced what He had made as "very good." It is interesting that after the Fall God did not directly curse the animals (the snake was an exception), although they would suffer as a consequence of Adam's fall. And after the Flood, God included them in the covenant He made with humankind (Gen. 9:8-10).

**How important was the animal kingdom to Jesus? Matt. 6:25, 26; Luke 12:22-24.**

We often cite Matthew 6:25, 26 and Luke 12:22-24 as evidence of the question of God's love. If He cares for a lowly sparrow or raven, then surely He cares for us! Yet, it is easy to forget that the Creator in the New Testament is the same Creator in the Old Testament. Ellen White reminds us that "The Saviour was the One who had instructed the Hebrews in the wilderness . . ." and that the "merciful provisions of the law" that Jesus gave "extended even to the lower animals, which cannot express in words their want and suffering."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 500.

The Bible teaches that the suffering and decay experienced by the animal kingdom were directly linked to the fall of humankind. Yet some suggest that the fossil record reflects nearly 600 million years of animal suffering prior to the creation of humankind. One of the more vexing problems we face is the problem of pain in the animal world, especially if one believes that the animal kingdom existed for millions of years before humans.

The Bible indicates (Rom. 8:18-22) that animal suffering was directly linked to the fall of humankind. To suggest that animals lived and died for millions of years prior to Creation and the fall of Adam and Eve not only contradicts Romans 8 but also runs counter to the fact that Jesus is a compassionate Creator and Savior.

**Considering that animals suffer because of the fall of our first parents, how can we show more compassion to them?**

**ANIMAL KINGDOM'S FATE TIED TO ADAM (Gen. 1:28; 2:19, 20).**

**What was Adam's role in relationship to the animals? Gen. 1:28; 2:19, 20.**

The Bible portrays an intimate, close relationship between Adam and the animals. He is told to “rule” over them and then to name them. What is the point of all this?

By placing Adam in charge of the animals, God hoped to convey to him and Eve and their descendants some important lessons. First, it gave a sense of appreciation for their own relationship to God. By caring for the animals, our first parents experienced the joy they brought God and also an appreciation for His love for them.

Second, it taught them the lessons of responsibility, interdependence, and service. These concepts are beautifully expressed in the following statement: “All things both in heaven and in earth declare that the great law of life is a law of service. . . . The same law of service is written upon all things in nature. The birds of the air, the beasts of the field, the trees of the forest, the leaves, the grass, and the flowers, the sun in the heavens and the stars of light—all have their ministry. Lake and ocean, river and water spring—each takes to give. . . . ‘Give, and it shall be given unto you is . . . written no less surely in nature than in the pages of Holy Writ.’—*Education*, p. 103.

This interdependence and law of service is integral to God's entire creation, including both the plant and animal kingdoms. In the case of the animals, they needed humankind's care and love. Humans, in turn, would see that the animals provided many things for them as well, not the least of which is love. In essence, God created humans and animals in what might be called a “symbiotic” relationship—they needed each other—each had its role to play in God's created hierarchy. Note that both humans and animals share the breath of God.

This created interdependence is one reason why the supposition that animals preceded humankind by millions of years does not fit a biblical perspective. A major purpose for creating lower life forms was to fill out the hierarchy of interdependence that would work within God's “law of service.” The key to this hierarchy is the humans, who were responsible for the lower creation.

**Jesus said, “Give, and it shall be given unto you” (Luke 6:38). How have you experienced this dynamic truth in your relationships with others? How did you receive the greatest blessing in the act of giving? As the recipient or as the “donor,” the one who was doing the giving?**

**NATURE BEFORE AND AFTER THE FALL (Gen. 1:30; 9:3-6; Isa. 11:6-9; 65:25).**

**What indication do you find that there was no death in the animal kingdom before the Fall? What about meat-eating animals? Gen. 1:30; 9:3-6; Isa. 11:7; 65:25.**

Biblical evidence suggests that there were no flesh-eating animals before the Fall. According to Genesis 1:30, the original diet of all animal life was "every green plant." As Ellen White says, "One animal was not to destroy another animal for food."—*Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 396.

From our present understanding of meat-eating animals, it seems that it was not possible for them to live on a vegetarian diet. Carnivores (meat-eaters) are an essential part of the "food-chain" in our ecosystem. Scavengers are nature's garbage disposal system—they help clean up the dead carcasses. However, the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy are quite specific that it was not this way in the beginning. This would suggest that major changes occurred in the plant and animal kingdoms—changes beyond our current understanding.

**How does the Bible describe the nature of the animal kingdom in a sinless world? Isa. 11:6-9; 65:25.**

One way of understanding what nature was like before the Fall is to study the Bible's description of the new earth. The Bible makes it clear that death was an unintended and unwelcome intruder in our world and that it will have no part in the earth to come (Isa. 11:6-9; Rev. 21:4). This mystery is as unfathomable as the one that assures us that our mortal flesh shall put on immortality (1 Cor. 15:50-55). Somehow, the very nature of life on this planet will be transformed! This biblical view, however, contradicts current understanding of the laws of ecology. Modern ecology tells us that death is an essential part of life in our present world. In fact, most biologists find it difficult to understand how it could be possible to have life without death, since to them death is so essential to the current cycle of life. But the transformation at the Second Coming will not only include humanity but also the entire creation (Rom. 8:19-21). The creation itself is waiting for the sons of God to be revealed so that it, too, will be liberated from its bondage of decay!

**How does it make you feel to know that death, the unintended and unwelcome intruder, will be destroyed forever!**

**TRANSFORMATION OF THE ANIMAL KINGDOM (Gen. 6:11, 12; 9:2).**

**How did the Fall affect the “law of service” and interdependence? Gen. 6:12; 9:2.**

“Under the curse of sin all nature was to witness to man of the character and results of rebellion against God. When God made man He made him ruler over the earth and all living creatures. So long as Adam remained loyal to Heaven, all nature was in subjection to him. But when he rebelled against the divine law, the inferior creatures were in rebellion against his rule.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 59.

“It is because of man’s sin that ‘the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together.’ Romans 8:22. Suffering and death were thus entailed, not only upon the human race, but upon the animals.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 443.

Adam’s relationship to the animals was not too different from that of a king to his people. In a sense, the animals were Adam’s “subjects.” There is a lesson that runs throughout the Bible, especially throughout the books of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, that when kings, or other leaders, are righteous, their people tend to follow them in righteousness. However, when the leaders are wicked, the people follow them in wickedness.

**What hint do we find in Genesis 6:11 that humanity’s rebellion adversely affected the animal kingdom?**

It is significant that the Bible points out that the earth became full of violence because the people on earth had corrupted their ways. In short, the rebellion of humanity spread into the entire creation as noted in the comment of Ellen White above. A hint of that change is found in Genesis 6:11, which tells us that, owing to humanity’s wickedness, the earth had become “corrupt” and “full of violence.” It is often assumed that this violence refers to wicked human deeds. Ellen White adds the following insights about the wickedness of pre-Flood humanity and its influence on the animal kingdom: “They [humans] loved to destroy the lives of animals. They used them for food, and this increased their ferocity and violence, and caused them to look upon the blood of human beings with astonishing indifference.”—*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, pp. 63, 64.

**In what positive or negative ways have some leaders influenced your life? In what ways does your example influence others around you?**

**DEATH IN THE ANIMAL KINGDOM—BEFORE SIN? (Gen. 1: 1-31; 2:17; 3:2-4; Rom. 5:12, 14; 1 Cor. 15:21).**

**What indication is there that animals did not exist for millions of years before Adam and Eve? Gen. 1:1-31.**

As we noted in an earlier lesson, the Bible knows nothing of a creation in this world earlier than that of Genesis 1. The best reading of the Hebrew in that chapter does not allow it. The only Creation dealing with this planet is that recorded in Genesis 1. According to the account given there, plants preceded the creation of humans by three days (Gen. 1:11, 12), while birds and animals were created on the fifth and sixth days (Gen. 1:20-25). There is no evidence in the Bible to support the idea that for millions of years before the Fall dinosaurs lived and died. Such theory would challenge God's Word and misrepresent His character regarding the relationship between His creation and sin, suffering, and death.

It would seem strange that our loving God and Creator would supposedly allow 600 million years of animal suffering, which some Christians, without proof, propose took place prior to the creation of humankind. The explanation the Bible provides about animal suffering is that found in Romans 8:12-22. Creation was subjected to the "bondage of decay" as Romans 8:21 implies.

**What does the Bible say about the origin of death? Gen. 2:17; 3:2-4; Rom. 5:12, 14; 1 Cor. 15:21.**

Evolutionists have long recognized the implications their theory has for the biblical account of Creation. As early as 1840, geologist Edward Hitchcock wrote, "The general interpretation of the Bible has been, that until the fall of man, death did not exist in the world even among the inferior animals. For the Bible asserts that by man came death (1 Cor. 15:21) and by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin (Rom. 5:12). But geology teaches us that myriads of animals lived and died before the creation of man."—*Elementary Geology* (Amherst, Mass.: J. S. and C. Adam, 1840), p. 273. Clearly, as Hitchcock recognized, this particular scientific interpretation of geology and the Bible account of origins are in conflict.

**Suffering and death are connected with the fall of our first parents, and did not take place before. What does this fact tell you about the character of God and the reliability of His Word?**

**FURTHER STUDY:** Review chapters 3 through 7 in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, where the story of the Fall, the plan of redemption, and the Flood are discussed. Reflect especially on the following passage:

“The sacrificial offerings were ordained by God to be to man a perpetual reminder and a penitential acknowledgment of his sin and a confession of his faith in the promised Redeemer. They were intended to impress upon the fallen race the solemn truth that it was sin that caused death. To Adam, the offering of the first sacrifice was a most painful ceremony. His hand must be raised to take life, which only God could give. It was the first time he had ever witnessed death, and he knew that had he been obedient to God, there would have been no death of man or beast.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 68.

Ellen White explicitly denied that the animals found buried in the fossil record represented the existence of animal life for millions of years prior to the Creation week of the Bible. Rather, the origin of these animal remains was to be understood as the result of the biblical Flood. Remains of men, animals, and plants in the earth, i.e., fossils, “are regarded as proving the existence of vegetable and animal life *prior* to the time of the Mosaic record. But concerning these things Bible history furnishes ample explanation. . . . At the Flood the surface of the earth was broken up, marked changes took place, and in the reformation of the earth’s crust were preserved many evidences of the life previously existing.”—*Education*, p. 129.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Are the pains and sufferings of lower life forms a moral issue? How does it reflect on the character of God? Should God be concerned? Do you think He is concerned?
2. Since the age of the earth and the fossils are such controversial subjects in some quarters, what is the best way to handle them? What would Jesus do?

**SUMMARY:** According to the Bible, all life was created by God. Death did not exist in the creation until after the Fall. As a result, the entire creation is subject to death, including the animal kingdom. The creation will be redeemed from its bondage of decay at the same time as the children of God.



## The Criminals' Church, Part 1

J. H. Zachary

Abel Ti's gang was well known in the community around Mt. Hagen, in Papua New Guinea. They had terrorized the region so much that the community nearly became a ghost town.

Finally the police caught Abel and sent him to prison. He was assigned to work six days a week with Sundays off. But Abel noticed that some prisoners did not work on Saturdays or Sundays. He learned that they were Sabbath keepers. Abel was jealous and decided to claim to be a Sabbath keeper so that he too could get Saturdays off. It worked, and he wanted to use his free day to sleep, but he feared that the guards might notice and send him back to work. So he decided to attend the Sabbath worship services instead.

Then Abel escaped from prison. With two of his former gang members, he fled into the jungle. The trio built a bush house for themselves and dug a tunnel under their home as an escape route should police find them.

While they worked, Abel did some serious thinking. One day he told his friends, "We are not living right. We have hurt people; we are always running from the law. We need to change our ways."

"What do you have in mind?" one of his friends asked.

"We should attend church. Let's go to the Protestant church in the village this week," Abel answered.

"Nothing doing!" his friends quickly replied. "We have hurt too many of the people in that village. If we show up in church, they will call the police, and we will be arrested!"

Abel thought for a moment and then said, "We could build our own church right here beside our house."

"What denomination will the church be?" one of the men asked.

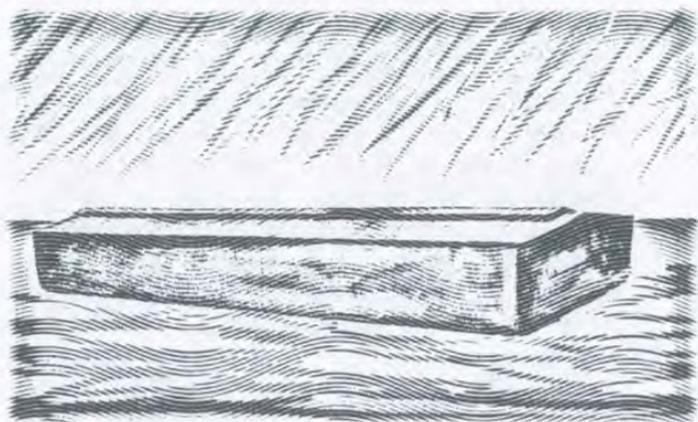
"Seventh-day Adventist," Abel replied. "I went to their meetings in prison." The three men began gathering material to build their own church. In a few days a lovely bush chapel stood beside their home in the jungles of Papua New Guinea.



(continued next week)

**Abel Ti (left). J. H. Zachary is international evangelism coordinator of the Quiet Hour, located in Redlands, California.**

# Creation and the Flood



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Gen. 6-9; Heb. 11:7; 2 Pet. 2:5; 3:3-6.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "For this they [scoffers] willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water" (2 Peter 3:5, 6, NKJV).

**KEY THOUGHT:** The Bible presents the Flood as both a historical event that destroyed the entire world and as a type for the worldwide judgment at the Second Coming. As a historic event, it provides an alternate explanation to the long ages argued for by secular science.

**LOCAL OR WORLDWIDE FLOOD?** Why should a lesson on the Flood be included in series of studies devoted to the Creation? From a literary and thematic perspective, the Flood is closely linked to the Creation story. Indeed, most Old Testament scholars recognize Genesis 1-11 (the Creation-Flood-Babel stories) as a distinctive literary unit. More important, however, is that for creationists who believe in a literal, recent Creation, the Flood is the only event presented in the Bible that is large and destructive enough to provide an alternate explanation for the origin of the geologic column with its layers of fossil-bearing rocks that cover the surface of the earth. In this lesson we will want to look at the Bible to see: (1) whether the story of the Flood was meant to be understood as historical and (2) whether the author meant to depict it as a worldwide event.

### THE EXTENT OF THE FLOOD (Gen. 7:2; 8:9; 6:17; 7:6).

**What words does the author of Genesis use to describe the extent of the Flood? (Gen. 7:2; 8:9).**

While we accept the biblical record that Noah's flood covered the entire earth, yet there are views that suggest that the Flood, in reality, was only a local event. It is true that the Hebrew word for earth or land (*erets*) does not always refer to the entire globe. It can also have a local, geographical, or political meaning, much as it can in English. For example, we talk about the "land of Israel" and recognize that it is a rather small area, geographically speaking. In other cases it can mean the whole world, such as in the expression "heaven and earth," which appears numerous times in Genesis 1–11. The expression "all the earth" (*kol ha'arets*) similarly can have both local and worldwide meanings. The key is the context.

There is, however, a unique phrase that occurs in the Flood story in Genesis 7:2 and 8:9. These verses tell us that the waters of the Flood covered "the face of the whole earth" (NKJV). Aside from the Flood, this phrase is used only in the Creation story (Gen. 1:29) and the Tower of Babel story (Gen. 11:4, 8, 9). The context of these two stories is clearly universal. The use of the same phrase in the Flood story would indicate that the author also intended a universal meaning here.

**After reading the following comment, what do you think is special about the Hebrew word used in Genesis 6:17; 7:6 to designate Noah's flood?**

There is yet another fact that points to a worldwide flood; that is the Hebrew word that the author chose to describe the Flood. While there are several Hebrew words the author could have used to describe a local flood (*sheteph, nachal, nahar, zaram*), he used a special, unique word to distinguish the worldwide Flood, *mabbul*. As C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, in their *Commentaries on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch*, point out, *mabbul* "is an archaic word, coined expressly for the waters of Noah. . . ."—(Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 19—), p. 143. It was a term that the ancients understood as referring specifically to the "floodgates" of heaven that held back the waters that fell from the sky. Gerhard von Rad took the word *mabbul* to imply that "We must understand the Flood, therefore, as a catastrophe involving the . . . destruction of the *entire cosmic system*."—*Genesis* (London: SCM Press, 1961), p. 128 (emphasis supplied).

**THE UNIVERSAL NATURE OF THE FLOOD (Gen. 1–11; 6:5-7, 11-13; 1 Pet. 3:20).**

**Besides the biblical account of a worldwide flood, what other accounts do you see in Genesis 1–11 that are universal in nature?**

A central theme that runs throughout the first eleven chapters of Genesis is their *universal* context. Indeed, a key point in the Creation story is that God (as opposed to the false Mesopotamian gods) made *everything*. There is *nothing* on this earth that God did not make! This universal theme runs to the other issues of these early chapters. Sin and the Fall, for example, were *universal problems*, for all humans have sinned and fallen, not just some! Moreover, the promise of salvation, with the covenant that is offered, is offered to all people, not just some. Genesis 11 describes the origins of all people. It is in the middle of these universal themes that the story of the Flood appears. Clearly, it would be inconsistent and inappropriate to extract the Flood story from the rest of Genesis 1–11 and say that this has only a local meaning. The Flood was a universal judgment to a universal problem of wickedness that had spread throughout the earth.

**Why did God send the Flood? Gen. 6:5-7, 11-13.**

As mentioned earlier, the Hebrew word for violence is *hamas* and conveys the sense of violence that leads to the shedding of blood and loss of life. The text conveys the sense that this was a worldwide problem, for the earth was filled with violence. In *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 92, we learn that “after the Fall, men chose to follow their own sinful desires; and as the result, crime and wretchedness rapidly increased. Neither the marriage relation nor the rights of property were respected. Whoever coveted the wives or the possessions of his neighbor, took them by force, and men exulted in their deeds of violence.”

**How widespread was human wickedness? Gen. 6:12; 1 Pet. 3:20.**

**Think it through:** The enormous size of the ark, the height of the mountains that the Flood waters covered, and the huge collection of animals contradict a local flood theory and affirm the truth of God’s Word.

**How does the belief in a worldwide flood affirm your Christian life?**

**THE FLOOD'S EFFECT ON THE EARTH (Gen. 7:4, 11, 12, 17-23).**

**According to the biblical record, what was the physical impact of the Flood on the earth? Gen. 7:4, 11, 12, 17-23.**

Even for those who accept the biblical teaching that the Flood was a worldwide cataclysmic event, there is a tendency to underestimate the extent of its power and destruction. It is easy to envision the Flood as simply being a situation where lots of rain fell from heaven, the water got very deep, and everything drowned. If the Bible is accurate in its portrayal, however, the forces involved are beyond imagination. No modern comparisons even begin to explain either the processes or the results of what the Bible depicts. "Water appeared to come from the clouds in mighty cataracts. Rivers broke away from their boundaries, and overflowed the valleys. Jets of water burst from the earth with indescribable force, throwing massive rocks hundreds of feet into the air, and these, in falling, buried themselves deep in the ground."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 99.

**How did the Flood's destruction affect humans and land animals? Was marine life affected? Gen. 7:21-23.**

"The entire surface of the earth was changed at the Flood. A third dreadful curse rested upon it in consequence of sin. As the water began to subside, the hills and mountains were surrounded by a vast, turbid sea. Everywhere were strewn the dead bodies of men and beasts. . . . The earth presented an appearance of confusion and desolation impossible to describe. The mountains, once so beautiful in their perfect symmetry, had become broken and irregular. Stones, ledges, and ragged rocks were now scattered upon the surface of the earth."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 107, 108.

Today, not surprisingly, most scientists, leaning on their belief in the "laws of nature," would deny the possibility of a worldwide flood. Even within the community of believers the idea of a worldwide flood has been increasingly questioned. In Noah's day, "philosophers declared that it was impossible for the world to be destroyed by water; so now there are men of science who endeavor to show that the world cannot be destroyed by fire—that this would be inconsistent with the laws of nature."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 103.

**Believing that the coming flood of fire is as certain as was the Flood of water, how should you prepare yourself and others for that climactic event?**

**THE BIBLICAL FLOOD AND MODERN GEOLOGY (John 1:1-4, 14; Rom. 5:12-14; 8:19-22; 2 Pet. 3:3-7).**

**How important is the universal Flood for shedding light on the fossil record, which, according to most evolutionists, represents millions of years before humans first appeared on the earth? John 1:1-4, 14; Rom. 5:12-14; 8:19-22; 2 Pet. 3:3-7.**

Probably one of the most controversial subjects being debated within many Christian denominations is how to relate to the claim that the fossils and rocks found in the earth represent millions of years of life (and death) prior to the first appearance of humans on the planet. This claim contradicts three basic biblical claims that: (1) All life on earth, not just humans, originated by God's spoken word (Gen. 1:31-2:1, 2; John 1:1-3) together within the original six-day week of Creation (Gen. 1:1-31). (2) There was no death anywhere in the world before Adam and Eve's fall (Rom. 5:12-14; Rom. 8:19-22). (3) There was a worldwide Flood that killed all nonmarine life forms, except those preserved in the ark (Gen. 7:21-23; 2 Pet. 3:3-7), an event that would be expected to leave some record in nature. In addition it also contradicts the implicit suggestion in the Bible that Creation was a relatively recent event in earth's history.

"In the history of the Flood, inspiration has explained that which geology alone could never fathom. In the days of Noah, men, animals, and trees, many times larger than now exist, were buried, and thus preserved as an evidence to later generations that the antediluvians perished by a flood. God designed that the discovery of these things should establish faith in inspired history; but men, with their vain reasoning, fall into the same error as did the people before the Flood—the things which God gave them as a benefit, they turn into a curse by making a wrong use of them."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 112.

Creationists do not have all the answers to the questions and challenges posed by evolutionary scientists. Numerous things have been found in nature that seem to defy explanation at present. The real question for believers is In what authority are we going to place our trust? Do we follow the conclusions of secular science, which frequently change, or do we place our trust in God's Word? Trusting God's Word involves the use of sound principles of interpretation that are faithful to the inspired writer's intentions, as well as the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

**What did you learn in today's lesson about the history of the Flood, as it relates to the fossil record embedded in the earth, that serves to fortify your trust in God's Word? How does this help in your witness?**

**A WAY OF ESCAPE (Matt. 24:38, 39; 2 Pet. 2:4-9; 3:5-7; Luke 17:26, 30; Pss. 91:9, 10; 27:5; 91:14).**

**How did Jesus and New Testament writers relate the Flood to the final judgment? What does this imply about the extent of the Flood? Matt. 24:38, 39; 2 Pet. 2:4-9; 3:5-7.**

Peter, for example, invokes the judgment of Noah's universal flood as a "type" (example) for the judgment at the end of time. He envisioned a worldwide, universal flood by fire (2 Pet. 3:5-7). While the main point of Jesus is that the judgment overtook people by surprise, there also is the implied emphasis of the universal aspect of the judgment that none will escape. If some escaped the first judgment, then the threat of the second judgment is certainly diminished (Matt. 24:38, 39).

**What danger lies in denying the reality of the Flood as a worldwide judgment in terms of understanding the final judgment? Luke 17:26, 30; 2 Pet. 3:6, 7.**

"When great and wise men had proved to their satisfaction that it was impossible for the world to be destroyed by water, when the fears of the people were quieted, when all regarded Noah's prophecy as a delusion, and looked upon him as a fanatic—then it was that God's time had come. . . . When the reasoning of philosophy has banished the fear of God's judgments; when religious teachers are pointing forward to long ages of peace and prosperity, and the world are absorbed in their rounds of business and pleasure, planting and building, feasting and merrymaking . . . then it is that sudden destruction cometh upon them, and they shall not escape. 1 Thessalonians 5:3." —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 103, 104.

**While the utter destruction of the earth, both past and future, is a terrifying concept, what promise does God leave for His followers? Pss. 91:9, 10; 27:5; 91:14.**

"But the righteous will be preserved in the midst of these commotions, as Noah was preserved in the ark. God will be their refuge, and under His wings shall they trust."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 110.

**How can these texts in Isaiah 8:20, Colossians 2:8, 1 Timothy 6:20, and Romans 1:20-22 help you deal with the claims of secular science?**

**FURTHER STUDY:** Read the following chapters in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, “The Flood,” pp. 90-104; “After the Flood,” pp.105-110.

According to 1 Peter 3:20, 21, the Flood serves as a “type” for a special experience that all of God’s followers must go through. What is it that the Flood symbolizes for God’s followers?

One of the aspects of biblical typology is that the reality of that to which it pointed (antitype) guarantees the reality of the type itself. In this case the reality of the biblical Flood enables it to serve as a type of experience that all God’s followers must go through: dying to self and being born again into a new life in Christ, an experience symbolized by baptism.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is an appropriate attitude to assume when discussing sensitive and controversial subjects such as origins? Is it possible to admit that we might not have the answers to everything and yet build up confidence in God’s Word?
2. What possible evidences have you read or heard about that may possibly support the idea of a worldwide Flood? What is a good way to deal with scientific evidence we hear about, but may not fully understand?
3. “Satan himself, who was compelled to remain in the midst of the warring elements, feared for his own existence.” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 99. How does the fact that Satan feared for his very existence during the Flood provide additional evidence of its massive and universal extent?
4. What does the fact that God chose not to destroy Satan in the Flood tell us about God’s character?

**SUMMARY:** The Bible teaches that the entire world was destroyed by Noah’s flood—this flood not only was historical but serves as a type for the reality of the judgment to come. The certainty of the first judgment is a confirmation of the final one. While the impending judgment of the world is serious and near, God has again graciously provided a way of escape. God wants us to proclaim the imminence of both this judgment and the way of salvation.



## The Criminals' Church, Part 2

J. H. Zachary

Abel Ti and his gang had committed nearly every crime imaginable. After escaping from prison, he and two former gang members fled into the jungle. As Abel thought about his past, he decided that they needed to change their lives. It was not safe to visit the church in the valley, so the men built their own church.

"What do we do now that we have a church?" one man asked.

"We will hold services on Saturday, as the Adventists in prison did," Abel answered. What a scene the angels must have beheld—three hardened criminals worshipping God; two men sat in the pew while the third led the service.

A few weeks later Abel saw some young people approaching the bush chapel on Saturday morning. "Who are you?" Abel demanded.

"We are Adventists, students at the government school in the valley," they answered. "We heard about a church up here and decided to visit." Abel asked the young people to lead the service that day. After worship he invited the youth to come every week. They happily agreed.

The following Sabbath, when the students had not arrived by 11:00, Abel was worried. He asked a man walking along the path, "Did you see the Adventist young people who are supposed to come today?"

The man answered, "They aren't coming. The school principal won't let them leave the campus."

Angry, Abel picked up his rifle and headed for the school. He fired shots into the air, frightening the villagers who ran for cover. When Abel arrived at the school, the gate was padlocked. He shot open the lock and walked in, demanding to see the principal. When he found the man, Abel aimed his rifle at the man's head.

"What do you want?" the principal stammered.

"Let the Adventist young people come to my church!" Abel ordered. The principal agreed, and the youth again worshiped with the three men in the jungle chapel. The Holy Spirit softened their hearts, and the three men surrendered their lives to God.

Soon the little bush chapel was too small to hold all the people who wanted to worship there. Abel and his friends have built a larger church. One of the former convicts serves as head elder, and Abel leads the Pathfinders. His face now radiates kindness and love, miraculously transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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# The Master Designer



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Gen. 1:26; 1 Cor. 12:18; Pss. 119:73; 139.

**MEMORY TEXT:** “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20, NKJV).

**KEY THOUGHT:** The tremendous amount of order in nature and the evidence of design infers that there must have been a Designer. The Bible identifies that Master Designer as God.

**IF YOU WERE** to walk into a room and see a pen lying on the floor, you would probably not think much about it. However, if you saw three pens neatly lined up end to end, you would immediately think that someone had been in the room before you, playing with the pens. Pens do not simply line themselves up. The order of the pens would suggest to you that some intelligent person (perhaps a child) saw those pens, thought about them, conceived of the idea of lining them up, and then did so.

On a much more sophisticated level, many scientists have marveled at the evidence for design they see in nature. The human eye, the wing of a bird, the symmetry of a jellyfish or a snowflake all testify to a Master Designer. This week we will take a look at the Bible's description of God as the Master Designer, and we will also look at some of the evidence we see for that design in nature.

**IN THE IMAGE OF THE MASTER DESIGNER (Gen. 1:26; 2:7, 21-25; Ps. 104:24; 1 Cor. 12:18).**

**How does Genesis 1:26 address the question whether humans originated from intelligent divine intention or from blind chance?**

In their original sin-free Eden home Adam and Eve could read the imprint of the Master Designer on all things. "On every leaf of the forest or stone of the mountains, in every shining star, in earth and air and sky, God's name was written. The order and harmony of creation spoke to them of infinite wisdom and power. They were ever discovering some attraction that filled their hearts with deeper love and called forth fresh expressions of gratitude."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 51.

**Looking again at Genesis 1:26, what striking difference exists between human beings and all other earth creatures? What do you think are the most important implications that follow from this difference? (see also Ps. 8:5).**

Harvard University scholar Krister Stendahl offers the following insightful comment: "As the crowning feature of that world it was God's beautiful dream—and risky—that there be a type of creature that would serve God in perfect freedom, not out of nature's necessity. And human beings were made in God's image—male and female God created them."—*Meanings* (Philadelphia, Penn.: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 234. The dream of God was to have us love Him freely, an act far transcending the devotion of animals to humans stemming from "nature's necessity." "His [man's] nature was in harmony with the will of God. His mind was capable of comprehending divine things. His affections were pure; his appetites and passions were under the control of reason."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 45.

**What other ideas concerning our origin are suggested by the special ways in which God fashioned Adam and Eve? Gen. 2:7, 21-25.**

Reflect on 1 Corinthians 12:18 and Psalm 104:24 in connection with what Crystal Earnhardt said: "My brain works far better than a man-made computer. My brain can store a lifetime of information. . . . My eyes work far better than a man-made camera. . . . My designer invented automatic windshield wipers (blink) and tear glands to clean out dust. . . . I am designed. So are you."—"Why I Believe in Creation," *Insight* (November 10, 1990), p. 5.

## THE ORDINANCES OF THE HEAVENS AND THE GLORY OF GOD (Job 38:31-33; Pss. 8:3, 4; 19:1-6; 136:5).

**What is David teaching when he says “The heavens declare the glory of God; the firmament showeth his handiwork”? Pss. 19:1; 136:5.**

One major point is that “God as creator has established a reality which is distinguished from himself, that he is active in it (Psalm 104) and preserves it. God is not the creation, he is the creator.”—Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 36. This means that the sun and moon and stars declare the glory of God and not their own divinity as Israel’s neighbors may have mistakenly imagined.

Concerning this point Titus Matemavi, of Zimbabwe, writes: “The beautiful universe was created by God but not out of God. The cosmos is not made out of God-stuff. This is why it is a grievous sin to worship and serve the ‘creature rather than the Creator’ (Rom. 1:25, NKJV). It is for this reason that idolatry is condemned so strongly in the Scriptures (Exod. 20:4). . . . The material universe is not made out of God, but it is a declaration about God (Rom 1:20).”

**What is God suggesting in Job 38:32, 33 about His relation to the heavens? What are the “ordinances of the heavens”?**

Ellen White writes: “The hand of infinite power is perpetually at work guiding this planet. It is God’s power momentarily exercised that keeps it in position in its rotations. . . . It is not as the result of a mechanism, that, once set in motion, continues its work, that the pulse beats and breath follows breath. In God we live and move and have our being. . . . Although the Lord has ceased His work in creating, He is constantly employed in upholding and using as His servants the things which He has made.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1062.

John Polkinghorne explains that the intrinsic earth forces such as gravity, nuclear forces, electromagnetism must be strikingly fine-tuned or life could not exist on our planet. “I believe,” he writes, “that in the delicate fine-tuning of physical law. . . we receive a . . . hint from science that there is a divine meaning and purpose behind cosmic history.”—John Polkinghorne, *Beyond Science: The Wider Human Context* (Cambridge, Mass.: University Press, 1996), pp. 81-85, 92.

**Share with your class a moving experience of contemplating the starry heavens as the work of God’s mind and power.**

**FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE (Pss. 8:4; 139:14).**

**What led David to exclaim, “What is man . . .”? Ps. 8:4.**

“Psalm 8:4 sets the tone for all other passages in the Psalms regarding the creation of humankind, and they should be interpreted in this light. The context suggests that the words ‘What is man’ should really be followed by an exclamation point, not by a question mark, expressing limitless astonishment. In heaven and earth the creation bears witness to God’s greatness and majesty. Through this, the psalmist becomes aware of the value of his own humanity.”—*Theology of the Psalms* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 148.

**What do you think David meant when he wrote that “we are fearfully and wonderfully made”? Ps. 139:14.**

Michael Behe’s recent book, *Darwin’s Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*, shows that a human being is composed of numerous genetically controlled systems, which are very complex and so could have no evolutionary physical precursors. He uses the figure of a mousetrap to illustrate his point. If just one working part of the mousetrap is removed, the trap system would not work.—(New York, N.Y.: The Free Press, 1996), pp. 42, 43.

The human body is composed of infinitely much more complex and interdependent systems such as the blood-clotting system, immune system, circulatory system. This indicates the biological impossibility of forming these systems by countless, small, slow accumulative steps according to the Darwinian theory of evolution. Nonfunctioning intermediate steps would have no selective value, and so would not be preserved by natural selection. Function requires an initial level of sufficient system organization. Unorganized, unguided matter cannot satisfy this necessity. (See John T. Baldwin, “God and the World: William Paley’s Argument From Perfection Tradition,” *The Harvard Theological Review* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Divinity School, 1992], vol. 85:1, pp. 109-120.)

**To where does John 5:17 point as the ultimate source of the active energy displayed in us and in nature?**

**We are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” Think of some wonder in the way God made you. How does this help you praise God for His wondrous design?**

**GO TO THE ANT (Prov. 6:6-8).**

**Why does God instruct us to observe a specific portion of the insect world? Prov. 6:6.**

William Beebe gives a colorful description of an army ant brigade at work in a hole in the jungle sand of Guiana: "This mob consisted of potential corduroy, rope-bridges, props, hand-rails, lattices, screens, filler, stiles, ladders, and other unnameable adjuncts to the successful scaling of these apparently impregnable cliffs. If a stratum of hard sand appeared, on which no impression could be made, a line of ants strung themselves out, each elaborately fixing himself fast by means of jaws and feet. From that moment his feverish activity left him: he became a fixture, a single unit of a swaying bridge over a chasm; a beam, an organic plank, over which his fellows tramped by hundreds, some empty, some heavily laden. If a sudden ascent had to be made, one ant joined himself to others to form a hanging ladder, up which the columns climbed, partly braced against the sandy wall."—*Jungle Peace* (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1920), p. 222.

The ultimate origin of such remarkable intelligent behavior in insects can be found only in the mind of a loving Creator God, whose wisdom is infinite and whose "tender mercies are over all His works" (Ps. 145:9). Perhaps similar examples caused David to exclaim: "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord" (Ps. 150:6). While we recognize that all good things proceed from our loving God, evil still exists in this world. We await the day when God will eradicate all evil and restore all things to perfection.

**What valuable lessons can we learn from observing the ant? Prov. 6:6-8.**

Beebe watched the ants assist one another. On page 223 of his book he writes: "An over-burdened brother would be given a helping jaw and assisted for some distance to the end of his beat. I was especially interested in seeing, again and again, this willingness to help bear the burdens." No wonder God instructs us to go to the ant to learn lessons of social interaction divinely imprinted into the ant genome. With us sinful human beings it is different. Laws for human interaction must be written on our willing hearts by the Holy Spirit (Jer. 31:33).

**What are some marvels in the insect world you have observed? Challenge yourself to find ways that a butterfly or a wasp building its nest could reflect or illustrate an aspect of God's love. Share one example with your Sabbath School class.**

**THE WINGED WORLD AND GOD'S ASTONISHING DESIGN (Jer. 8:7).**

**In what way does God teach profound spiritual lessons by reference to the winged world? Jer. 8:7.**

In their book, *God's Wonderful World*, George Vandeman and Asa Thoresen discuss the miracle of bird flight. Because the bones of birds are hollow, the wing bones of the man-o'-war, with a wingspan of about seven feet, weigh only four or five ounces. The breast muscles that operate the wings represent up to 30 percent of the total body weight in some birds, while in human beings the breast muscles compose less than one percent of body weight. Rapid energy can be delivered to the breast muscles of birds because they have a higher blood pressure than humans, and their blood-sugar concentration is about twice that of mammals.

Golden plovers are such efficient fliers that they can migrate thousands of miles across the ocean, from Labrador to the midpoint of South America, and lose only about two ounces of body weight. A plane doing as well would get 160 miles to the gallon of fuel instead of the 20 miles to the gallon it does now. Under a microscope, a flight feather is extremely complex. There are veins, barbs, barbules, flanges, and tiny hooks. All work together to form a zipper. When it becomes unzipped, it can be zipped up again by preening. These remarkable natural realities indicate that God's designs outshine anything humans can invent.

**The argument from perfection and the development of the bird lungs according to the Darwinian theory.** Michel Denton addresses the question of whether the imperfect, intermediate or missing links presented in the Darwinian theory are truly tenable. He applies the argument from perfection to the evolutionary claim that bird lungs developed from reptile lungs.

Denton shows that in all vertebrates except birds, air is moved in and out through the same passage in a bellows fashion. Evolutionary theory claims that the bird lung has been adapted from the reptilian lung. Is this adaptation biologically possible? "No," says Denton for the following reasons: Birds have an utterly different respiratory system from that of reptiles. In birds, air flow in one direction is maintained during both inspiration and expiration by a complex system of interconnected air sacs in the bird's body. These air sacs expand and contract in such a way as to ensure a continuous delivery of air through the parabronchi. Denton says that there can be no intermediate link between reptile lungs and bird lungs because of how they function.—*Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* (Bethesda, Md.: Adler & Adler, 1985), p. 212.

**FURTHER STUDY:** Read *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 114-116.

“As commonly used, the term ‘laws of nature’ comprises what men have been able to discover with regard to the laws that govern the physical world; but how limited is their knowledge, and how vast the field in which the Creator can work in harmony with His own laws and yet wholly beyond the comprehension of finite beings!

“Many teach that matter possesses vital power—that certain properties are imparted to matter, and it is then left to act through its own inherent energy; and that the operations of nature are conducted in harmony with fixed laws, with which God Himself cannot interfere. This is false science, and is not sustained by the word of God. Nature is the servant of her Creator. God does not annul His laws or work contrary to them but He is continually using them as His instruments. Nature testifies of an intelligence, a presence, an active energy, that works in and through her laws. There is in nature the continual working of the Father and the Son. Christ says, ‘My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.’ John 5:17.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 114.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Referring to Michel Denton’s argument in yesterday’s lesson, in your opinion, how does his conclusion about the lack of useful intermediate forms between reptile lungs and bird lungs respond to the following admission by Darwin? “If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed, which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down. But I can find out no such case.”—Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, Penguin Classics edition, (London: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 219
2. What different examples of the argument from perfection can you think of that convincingly answer Darwin’s admission presented above? Share these with your class.

**SUMMARY:** All around us in nature there is evidence of complex design. The evidence of design points to a Master Designer—God. It is comforting to know that the God who designed us also knows how to restore us.



## In Search of Peace

Félix Vert-Pré

I led an evangelistic series in the area near my home in central Martinique. The young people from my church helped me contact the people and invite them to the meetings.

Not far from the meeting place stood the home of a single mother named Gigi. She supports her seven children by working in the nearby fields, carrying heavy bunches of bananas and loads of pineapple to market. This was back-breaking work for Gigi, but she could not let her children go hungry.

For several days Gigi and her children had been kept awake at night by strange noises. From midnight until sunrise it sounded as if someone were throwing rocks onto her tin roof. In the morning the family was too tired to go to work or school.

Desperate for some rest, Gigi consulted a local medium. The man told her that her former husband had cast a spell on her home. The man gave Gigi some bottles filled with liquid and told her to sprinkle the liquid in and around her house. He also told her to write the names Melkior, Gaspar, and Balthazar above each door and window.

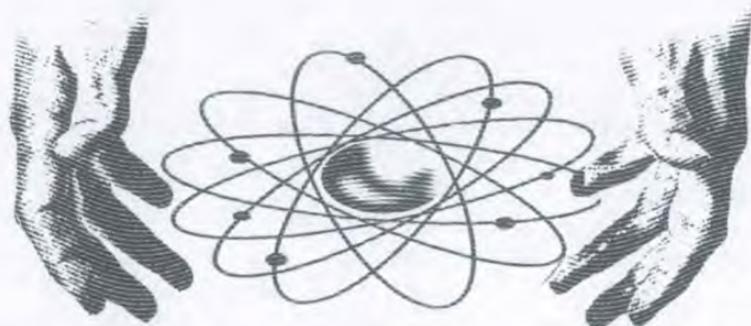
Gigi did as the medium had instructed her, but the night was as noisy as ever. She returned to the medium and complained that his "cure" had not worked. Several times she visited him, hoping that he could cast out the demons who were making her life unbearable, but nothing helped. In the end, Gigi had spent every cent she had for nothing.

About this time Gigi received an invitation to the evangelistic meetings. She and her children attended the meetings, hoping to find a measure of peace from the demonic noises in the night. The family listened to the messages. Soon they began to believe. Gigi had come to find physical rest and peace, but she found rest in Jesus and peace of heart. She learned to worship and pray and trust in the power of Jesus Christ over the spirits.

Following the meetings Gigi and five of her children were baptized. Today Gigi serves as a deaconess in the church. One of her daughters teaches Sabbath School, and another sings in choir and leads children's Sabbath School. Gigi's family enjoys calm nights and sweet rest because they have put their trust in God.

**Félix Vert-Pré is a painter by trade and a lay evangelist on the island of Martinique in the Caribbean.**

# God's Power in Nature



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Pss. 33:6; 104; Heb. 1:3; 11:3; Matt. 6:25, 26; Luke 12:22-24.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork" (Psalm 19:1, NKJV).

**KEY THOUGHT:** Through nature we see not only the power of God in His creative acts and His sustaining power, we also learn about His love, wisdom, and mercy. Being in nature brings us close to God and restores us both physically and spiritually.

**MEETING GOD IN NATURE.** Through the centuries many philosophers have confused God with His creation (see Rom. 1:18-25). In some cases, such as pantheistic philosophy, God is even equated with nature! In spite of this, we can learn much about God through His creation. Who hasn't experienced a sense of awe and felt the presence of a greater Power when driving or, better, hiking through majestic mountains or watching the crashing of mighty waves upon a rocky coastline? Who hasn't felt the relaxing peace that comes over us when resting beside a bubbling brook or listening to the singing of the birds in branches just overhead?

At times like these we witness the power of the Creator and feel a soothing of our souls. There is much we can learn and benefit from nature, especially when we recognize the Creator behind the scenes. Jesus, the Creator of all, often drew lessons from nature. In this lesson we want to look at some of the benefits we can draw from nature.

**THE MIGHTY POWER OF GOD—HIS CREATIVE WORD (Ps. 33:6; Heb. 11:3, 1:3).**

**By what means did God bring into existence all that is? Ps. 33:6. What does this tell us about Him?**

The truth stated in Psalm 33:6 is one of the most simple and yet profound statements about God and His power in the Scriptures. We see this divine process in operation, without explanation, in Genesis, chapter 1. Each of the first days is introduced by the expression “And God said . . .”

**What material did God use when He created the universe, this world, humankind? Heb. 11:3.**

The account of the creation of the first humans in Genesis 2:7, 20-22 clearly depicts God making Adam from clay; Eve, in turn, was created from Adam’s rib. In these cases, God did use matter that was already in existence. However, the question remains: Where did that matter, the clay, for example, ultimately come from? According to Hebrews 11:3, we understand by faith “that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible”(NIV). This was the best way that the author of Hebrews could say that God made the universe out of nothing. Scholars describe this type of creation, of making something out of nothing by divine fiat (a command that creates something), as *ex nihilo* (“out of nothing”) creation. What the Bible is teaching here is that ultimately all matter in the universe was created by God. Conversely, the Bible is saying that God preceded everything else in the universe, including matter and energy, that He is eternal and the eternal Originator of everything.

In this one simple statement the author of Hebrews staked out God’s claim as the only true God of the universe. He has no rivals or peers, either animate or inanimate. Another way of making this point, which was particularly significant in biblical times (but no less so today), is that there are no other gods but the Lord (1 Chron. 16:24-27; Ps. 96:5, 6; Isa. 40:18-26; 42:5-9; 44).

**Think it through: God did not simply create this world or wind it up like a clock and then abandon it. God is not an aloof deity who has turned His back on His creation, leaving them to their own devices. He continues “upholding all things by the word of His power” (Heb. 1:3, NKJV). Let us praise Him now for every breath we take and every pulsation of the heart.**

**CARING FOR GOD'S CREATION (Rev. 11:18; Ps. 104:20, 21, 27, 28; 147:9; Exod. 23:4, 5; Deut. 22:6, 7; Prov. 12:10).**

**How does Revelation 11:18 show that God takes seriously how people treat His creation? What responsibility do Christians have toward the environment?**

A challenge that faces us Seventh-day Adventists, who believe the Lord is coming soon, is our responsibility to care for the earth. To put it bluntly, if the Lord is going to come soon and destroy this planet anyway, why should we bother to take care of it? There are several things in the Christian life that, while on the surface may look unfruitful, God asks us to do because they are right to do. Take prayer, for example. If God knows everything, why pray? Doesn't He already know who needs help? Or, why care for our bodies if God is going to give us new ones anyway?

It is important to remember that just as God has placed value on our bodies, He has also placed value on the rest of His creation. He even gave humankind the responsibility of being good stewards of His creation from the very beginning.

**How does God provide for His creatures? Pss. 104:20, 21, 27, 28; 147:9.**

A consistent picture that emerges from both the Old and New Testaments is God's awareness of and provision for the needs of His creatures. If the great God of the universe cares even about a sparrow, surely He cares about us! Indeed, God does know and care about all aspects of His creation. If He does, shouldn't we also?

**How does God want us to treat His creatures? Exod. 23:4, 5; Deut. 22:6, 7; Prov. 12:10.**

**Reflect on the following statement as you contemplate a variety of ways to alleviate the abuse and suffering of animals that, unfortunately, is all too prevalent today: "Few realize as they should the sinfulness of abusing animals or leaving them to suffer from neglect. . . . A record goes up to heaven, and a day is coming when judgment will be pronounced against those who abuse God's creatures."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 443.**

**INTERDEPENDENCE—BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF ECOLOGY (Ps. 104:10-23; Deut. 20:19, 20; 2 Kings 3:25).**

**How does the Bible remind us that all things are interdependent? Ps. 104:10-23.**

Ecological concerns are a rather modern phenomenon. They emerged when some perceptive scientists realized that our modern technology was destroying our earth. Studies of ecology showed that all life is interdependent. One cannot destroy or disrupt one component in the environment without its having repercussions elsewhere in the entire ecosystem. Still, the principles of ecology—how things are interdependent—can be found in the Bible.

“All things both in heaven and in earth declare that the great law of life is a law of service. The infinite Father ministers to the life of every living thing. . . . The same law of service is written upon all things in nature. The birds of the air, the beasts of the field, the trees of the forest, the leaves, the grass, and the flowers, the sun in the heavens and the stars of light—all have their ministry. Lake and ocean, river and water-spring—each takes to give.”—*Education*, p. 103.

The psalmist paints a beautiful word picture of how the trees provide a home for the birds; even the inanimate objects such as the water, rocks, sun, and moon have mutually beneficial functions. Behind the role of each object is found the design of the Master Creator.

**What hints are there in the Bible against abusing nature? Deut. 20:19, 20; 2 Kings 3:25.**

The injunction in Deuteronomy is primarily against cutting down fruit trees; however, there were consequences even for cutting down nonfruit trees. While the Bible describes the land as productive and full of trees, the continued cutting down of woodlands eventually resulted in the deforestation of nearly the entire country. With the passing of time there were virtually no trees on the hills of Palestine. The absence of trees meant there were no roots to hold the soil in place, and consequently, it eroded off the slopes, leaving the land quite desolate. This process is now being reversed through reforestation.

**All God's creation reveals the great law of service and accountability. In what ways is this law revealed in your life? Think of creative ways to provide a haven for nature and a sanctuary for wildlife in your own surroundings or backyard.**

**LESSONS FROM GOD'S CREATION (Job 38:11; Ps. 104:9; 19:1-6; Luke 8:24, 25; 5:16; John 6:15).**

**What can nature teach us about obedience? Job 38:11; Ps. 104:9; Luke 8:24, 25.**

Nature is obedient to its Creator. Take, for example, how the great waters of the deep keep the boundaries He set for them and how the proud waves of the mighty oceans humble themselves before Him. The raging storms obey His command. "The lessons to be learned from the various objects of the natural world are these: They are obedient to the will of their Creator; they never deny God, never refuse obedience to any intimation of His will."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 333.

**What does nature say about God's glory? Ps. 19:1-6.**

Try to imagine how beautiful nature was when it came forth from its Creator. The most beautiful scene in nature today fades into insignificance in comparison. Yet we still enjoy its magnificence and see His goodness and glory in its mountain peaks, mighty oceans, flowery meadows, and running brooks. In spite of their blighted state, we still can discern the beautiful traces of the Master Designer. If an imperfect nature can bring us such joy and inspire our hearts to glorify God, how much more will nature restored!

**How did Jesus relate to nature, and what does He desire us to learn from it? Luke 5:16; 6:12; John 6:15.**

Jesus was drawn to nature to pray and commune with His Father. He felt the need to be alone with God, away from the throngs. Solitude with the Father prepared Him to serve the crowd. If Christ needed to draw near to His Father in the quietness of nature, we certainly do too!

**As you contemplate this thought about Christ, think of creative ways in which you can commune with God in nature: "Christ loved to gather the people about Him under the blue heavens, on some grassy hillside, or on the beach beside the lake. Here, surrounded by the works of His own creation, He could turn their thoughts from the artificial to the natural. In the growth and development of nature were revealed the principles of His kingdom."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 54.**

**THE HEALING POWER OF GOD'S CREATION (Mark 6:31; Gen. 2:15; 3:23; Ps. 23:1-3).**

**Why did Jesus invite His disciples to be alone with Him in nature? Mark 6:31.**

"It is right that we should choose such places as this grove for seasons of relaxation and recreation. . . . As we behold these works of nature we should let the mind be carried up higher, to nature's God; let it be elevated to the Creator of the universe, and then adore the Creator who has made all these beautiful things for our benefit and happiness."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 589.

When we enjoy rest and recreation in nature, do we also experience spiritual rest? What is the relationship between rest and spiritual restoration? "*Rest and Trust in God go hand in hand. To really rest in God is to truly trust Him. Rest, be it physical, mental or spiritual, is intertwined with trusting in God's providence. . . . Rest is related to restoration. . . . And from a spiritual perspective, for us to be prepared to enter God's heavenly rest we must first enter His rest here.*"—Philip G. Samaan, *Christ's Way to Spiritual Growth* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1995), p. 192.

**As you study Genesis 2:15 and 3:23, why do you think God wanted Adam to work in nature before and after the Fall?**

Work in nature "will continually remind us of our Creator and Redeemer. The thought of God will run like a thread of gold through all our homely cares and occupations. For us the glory of His face will again rest upon the face of nature. We shall ever be learning new lessons of heavenly truth, and growing into the image of His purity."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 27.

How can exposure to nature help us when we are sick? "The sick need to be brought into close touch with nature. An outdoor life amid natural surroundings would work wonders for many a helpless and almost hopeless invalid."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 262. "Pure air and water, cleanliness, a proper diet, purity of life, and a firm trust in God are remedies for the want of which thousands are dying."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 443.

**Take a few moments this week to meditate on Psalm 23:1-3. How does this help you to experience rest and restoration in trusting the divine Shepherd? How do the insights on rest in the psalm heighten the importance and joy of resting on the Sabbath?**

**FURTHER STUDY:** Study 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 to find a parallel between the interdependence of nature and the interdependence of the members of the body of Christ.

Read *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 126-128 and “In Contact With Nature,” pp. 261-268.

“God’s healing power runs all through nature. If a tree is cut, if a human being is wounded or breaks a bone, nature begins at once to repair the injury. Even before the need exists, the healing agencies are in readiness; and as soon as a part is wounded, every energy is bent to the work of restoration. So it is in the spiritual realm. Before sin created the need, God had provided the remedy. Every soul that yields to temptation is wounded, bruised, by the adversary; but wherever there is sin, there is the Saviour. It is Christ’s work ‘to heal the brokenhearted.’”  
—*Education*, p. 113.

“The angels of heaven look upon the distress of God’s family upon the earth, and they are prepared to co-operate with men in relieving oppression and suffering. . . . The merciful provisions of the law extended even to the lower animals, which cannot express in words their want and suffering.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 500.

“Many do not realize that their cruelty will ever be known, because the poor dumb animals cannot reveal it. But could the eyes of these men be opened, as were those of Balaam, they would see an angel of God standing as a witness, to testify against them in the courts above. A record goes up to heaven, and a day is coming when judgment will be pronounced against those who abuse God’s creatures.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 443.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Can you relate any experiences in which being in nature rejuvenated you? What type of outdoor activity do you find most beneficial?
2. How can you distinguish between God’s power in nature and the idea that God is equated with nature (pantheism)?

**SUMMARY:** It is important to spend time with God’s “second book,” nature. While we are in nature, we can draw closer to God by witnessing the magnificence of His creation and allowing His voice to speak to us. Because nature is part of God’s creation and a gift to us, we have an obligation to protect and preserve it.



## Football and Religion

Michael Porter

During a month-long evangelistic series in Ukraine, we told the 600 listeners that in spite of what they had learned all their lives, Jesus Christ cares about them, that trusting in Christ is a viable option. We could see by the look on people's faces that they were struggling to grasp these new truths.

Questions from the audience told us that they were perplexed by the idea of the Sabbath. We wondered how to explain the Sabbath to these people whose calendar began the week on Monday. We found the answer in the Russian language. The word for Sunday literally means "resurrection," and the word for Sabbath is *Subota*, from the Hebrew word Sabbath. Imagine all the effort the communists put into doing away with anything related to God, while the names of the days reminded the people of Christ's Sabbath and His resurrection! The Ukrainian language offered similar help with the weekly cycle.

Other lectures brought interesting responses from the listeners as well. One man who attended the meetings is the editor of a local newspaper called *Football*, referring to the game some countries call soccer. Shortly after the message on healthful living, someone brought a copy of this newspaper to us and pointed out an article the editor had written about our meetings. The article was called "Religion and Football."

In the article the writer said, "Missionaries Paul Kulakov from Moscow and Michael Porter from the United States are giving sermons in the city's culture house in the evening. They have touched upon the question of people's physical health.

"Football is a game in harmony with life and with the physical and spiritual development of humankind. . . . Football gives a person gladness and good physical development. . . . Jesus Christ gave the world everything, including football. He only asks us—do not sin. By choosing football, let us choose this better way. Amen!"

Despite his interesting interpretation of the health message, the editor, along with 175 others, were baptized following the meetings. They formed the nucleus of a new Adventist church in Berdyansk, Ukraine.

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# Sabbath and Redemption in Creation



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Exod. 31:12, 13; 20:11; Gen. 2:2, 3.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, 'Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water'" (Revelation 14:6, 7, NKJV).

**KEY THOUGHT:** Since the Fall, the Sabbath has taken on a new meaning for humanity. While it remains a memorial to God's original Creation, it now also represents a part of the plan of redemption. On the Sabbath we rest from our works and draw closer to the God who saves us.

**ENTERING INTO GOD'S REST.** Among the many teachings of the Bible that are important to Seventh-day Adventists, two have particularly generated much study and discussion: justification and sanctification. They are integral to our understanding of salvation; and they play a part in the new role that the Sabbath has assumed since the Fall. Justification has to do with the fact that Jesus' death has fully paid for our sins and provided us with eternal salvation. Sanctification is the work of a lifetime. It deals with God's gracious imparting of His Holy Spirit to dwell within us and continuously transform us more and more into His image.

## A PALACE IN TIME (Gen. 2:2-4; Exod. 20:11; 31:17).

How did God commemorate the completion of six days of creative activity? (Gen. 2:2, 3).

As Richard Davidson in his book *A Love Song for the Sabbath* has pointed out, God did not construct an elaborate shrine in some location as a memorial of His created work. Rather than a physical palace, God constructed a “palace in time.”—(Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1988), p. 27.

What are the three steps God took in constructing His “palace in time”? See Gen. 2:3, 4. What does it mean to “rest” on the Sabbath? Exod. 20:11.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_

Scripture says God “does not grow faint or grow weary” (Isa. 40:28, RSV). Why then would He rest? The answer is given in Exodus 20:8-11, which suggests that God’s rest was to set a pattern for us. Davidson directs our attention to the Hebrew words for rest in Exodus 20:11 and 31:17. The words are different, suggesting the author’s attempt to give a broader understanding of rest. In 20:11 the word is *nuach*, which conveys the idea of tranquility, serenity, peace, and repose. In 31:17 the word is *naphash*, which suggests the idea of taking on new life, breathing freely, and being refreshed. Combined, these words for rest suggest much more than just a physical rest. Rather, they point toward a rejuvenation and refreshing that come from intimate fellowship with God. Adapted from Davidson, pp. 27, 28.

We know that the Sabbath day is holy. But what makes it so? It is important to realize that the Sabbath does not become holy because we “keep” it. As Abraham Heschel puts it, “Even when men forsake the Sabbath, its holiness remains.”—*The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), p. 82. It is holy because God has made it so. The essence of its holiness is God’s *presence*. Although He is present with us all week, the Sabbath is the day that God Himself has set aside for special fellowship with us.

**On the Sabbath God gives us many blessings but, most important, He gives us Himself. Have you experienced God giving Himself to you on the Sabbath? Explain. How have you responded in giving yourself to Him?**

**OUR NEED FOR THE PRESENCE OF GOD (Isa. 59:2; Exod. 31:12, 13; 33:19-23; Ezek. 20:12, 20; Heb. 4:9-11).**

**How did the Fall affect the Sabbath relationship that God desires to have with His children? Isa. 59:2; Exod. 31:13; 33:19-23.**

Because of the barrier of sin, God could no longer meet with humanity face to face on the Sabbath. The holiness of God is a consuming fire to sin, making it impossible for us to meet directly with our Creator.

**What does God call His gift of the Sabbath? What special purpose does it serve in our relationship with Him? Exod. 31:12, 13; Ezek. 20:12, 20.**

As a result of humanity's separation from God, our need for the Sabbath is greater than ever. "More than ever man needed a special time to fellowship with God and meditate upon His character and works. Though as sinners human beings could not endure the glory of open encounter with their Creator, God still called for them to come and meet with Him on the Sabbath."—Davidson, p. 33.

As Ellen White explains it, "The Sabbath is a sign of Christ's power to make us holy."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 288.

**In what ways can the Sabbath "re-create" us and "make us holy"? Heb. 4:9-11.**

"The Sabbath thus bears witness both to the creative and to the sanctifying power of God, and its observance is an acknowledgment of faith in His power to create and to re-create, or sanctify, individual lives. Moreover, "the 'rest' that remains (v. 9) is obviously the 'rest' into which the believing Christian of v. 10 enters. The word 'for' of v. 10 makes v. 10 contingent upon, and a conclusion drawn from, v. 9."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 420, 423. That is, it is a rest from the works of sin and any attempt to earn salvation. This understanding of Hebrews 4:9 is supported by Ellen White who noted that the "rest" in this verse referred to the "rest of faith."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessings*, p. 1.

**"By communing with God, we actually partake of His holiness . . . and in that intimate relationship [we] become changed more and more into His likeness."—Davidson, p. 89. What Sabbath activities can help you experience God's power to re-create and sanctify you?**

**SABBATH RE-CREATION** (1 John 3:2; 4:17; Ezek. 11:19, 20; Ps. 51:10-12; Isa. 56:1-7; 58:13, 14).

**What will ultimately happen to us when we spend that special time with our Creator and Redeemer? 1 John 3:2; 4:17.**

The separation from God that sin initially brought upon the human race will be reversed. In this life our sins prevent us from direct communion with our God. However, the time is coming when through God's grace that separation will be no more. For we will once again be able to see His face and commune with Him directly. The process that enables this glorious experience begins here and now through our daily communion with Him, especially when we experience His presence on the Sabbath.

**What happens when the Spirit of God enters into our heart? Ezek. 11:19, 20; Ps. 51:10-12.**

“When the Spirit of God takes possession of the heart, it transforms the life. . . . The blessing comes when by faith the soul surrenders itself to God. Then that power which no human eye can see creates a new being in the image of God.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 173.

**In your own words describe what it truly means to experience the “presence of God.” In what ways can we authentically experience the “presence of God” on the Sabbath in a way that will be a blessing to ourselves and others? Isa. 56:1-7; 58:13, 14.**

Our tendency is to emphasize the turning away from our own pleasure (or business) on the Sabbath and we fail to grasp the importance of calling the Sabbath a “delight” (Isa. 58:13). The Hebrew word *oneg* can be translated “exquisite delight”—a word used elsewhere in the Old Testament only in connection with enjoying the pleasures of royalty. The fact that God has set up “royal” opportunities for intimate fellowship with us indicates how much He loves us and how important such communion is for our restoration. Only by beholding Him and delighting ourselves in His presence can we be transformed into His loving and loyal children and be prepared to see Him when He comes again.

**When it comes to your “royal” appointment with God on the Sabbath, do you focus more on your “duty” or more on your “delight” in fellowship with Him? Why?**

**A THREAT TO GOD'S PLAN TO RE-CREATE US (Rev. 14:6, 7).**

**What role does the Sabbath and the doctrine of Creation play just before Jesus' return? Rev. 14:6, 7.**

Satan, of course, is determined to do anything he can to disrupt our fellowship with our Creator and Redeemer. In modern times, one of his most effective means has been to cast doubt, not only on God's claim to be our Creator but even on whether God exists! No wonder, then, that in the first angel's message of Revelation 14, the world receives a special message to "Fear God and give glory to Him" and to "worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water" (NKJV). That this message is especially for our time is made clear in the text itself: "for the hour of His judgment has come" (verse 7). Seventh-day Adventists have understood this "hour of judgment" as a reference to the investigative judgment, which precedes Christ's second coming. It commenced on October 22, 1844, referred to in Daniel 8:14 as the "cleansing of the sanctuary."

Apparently when the Lord revealed to John this prophecy of Revelation 14, He knew that it was especially important to remind the world just prior to His second coming to "worship the Creator." Many Seventh-day Adventist scholars have found it to be more than a coincidence that at the very time the warning of the first angel was to be issued to the world, Darwin completed the expansion of his work on *The Origin of Species*. This work would offer the world an alternate explanation for the origin of life (see *The Great Controversy*, pp. 436-438).

**What would have happened if humanity had kept the Sabbath as the Lord had intended?**

"Had the Sabbath been universally kept, man's thoughts and affections would have been led to the Creator as the object of reverence and worship, and there would never have been an idolater, an atheist, or an infidel."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 438.

Once Satan casts doubt on the idea that God is our Creator, or worse, doubt that He even exists, the essential connection with God (which the Sabbath provides) is destroyed, and we are left alone and hopeless in our sinful state.

**In these unsettling last days, how has the biblical teaching of the Sabbath helped you withstand Satan's subtle deceptions about Christ your Creator and Redeemer?**

## **OUR DEPENDENCE ON GOD (1 Tim. 6:20; Ps. 119:10; James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:6-10; Isa. 66:22, 23).**

**What are some ways in which Satan attempts to break the believer's connection with God? 1 Tim. 6:20.**

"To many, scientific research has become a curse. . . . Many accept mere theories and speculations as scientific facts, and they think that God's word is to be tested by the teachings of 'science falsely so called.' 1 Timothy 6:20. The Creator and His works are beyond their comprehension; and because they cannot explain these by natural laws, Bible history is regarded as unreliable. Those who doubt the reliability of the records of the Old and New Testaments too often go a step further and doubt the existence of God and attribute infinite power to nature. Having let go their anchor, they are left to beat about upon the rocks of infidelity."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 522.

**What is the ultimate purpose of Satan's distracting deceptions, and how do we resist them? 1 Pet. 5:6-10.**

"Satan well knows that all whom he can lead to neglect prayer and the searching of the Scriptures, will be overcome by his attacks. Therefore he invents every possible device to engross the mind."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 519.

**What is our best safeguard? Ps. 119:10, 11; James 4:7.**

"Satan is well aware that the weakest soul who abides in Christ is more than a match for the hosts of darkness, and that, should he reveal himself openly, he would be met and resisted. . . . Only in humble reliance upon God, and obedience to all His commandments, can we be secure.

"No man is safe for a day or an hour without prayer. Especially should we entreat the Lord for wisdom to understand His word. . . . We should study the Bible with humility of heart, never losing sight of our dependence upon God."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 530.

This is a remarkable and powerful statement to help in our spiritual warfare, for it contains all the ingredients of that special fellowship with our Creator and our Redeemer. Prayer, feeding on His Word, humble dependence upon Him, and obedience—all may be summed up in what it means to abide in Christ.

**FURTHER STUDY:** Read the following passages on the relationship of the Sabbath to nature: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 47; *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 281, 282; *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 136, 137.

“Since the Sabbath is the memorial of creative power, it is the day above all others when we should acquaint ourselves with God through His works. In the minds of the children the very thought of the Sabbath should be bound up with the beauty of natural things. Happy is the family who can go to the place of worship on the Sabbath as Jesus and His disciples went to the synagogue—across the fields, along the shores of the lake, or through the groves. Happy the father and mother . . . who can gather under the green trees, in the fresh, pure air, to study the word and to sing the praise of the Father above.”—*Education*, p. 251.

“We behold the image of God reflected, as in a mirror, in the works of nature and in His dealings with men; but then we shall see Him face to face, without a dimming veil between. We shall stand in His presence and behold the glory of His countenance.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 677.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In what ways does the popular media undermine the idea that God is the Creator? What are some positive ways of counteracting their influence?
2. What are some ways in which we can help fulfill the challenge in Revelation 14 to encourage people again to “worship the Creator”?
3. Evolution teaches that “there is no Creator, for all things evolved.” (Theistic evolution: “There is a Creator who used and guided the evolutionary process.”) Pantheism tends to equate the Creator God with all things of creation. It rejects the distinction between the Creator and the creation and teaches that He is in everything. What implications do these theories have for Seventh-day Adventists who keep the Sabbath and await the soon coming of Jesus?

**SUMMARY:** One important purpose of the Sabbath since the Fall is to provide special fellowship with our Creator by which He makes us holy. Satan is especially determined to prevent people from participating in this communion, hence his attacks on the Sabbath, which reminds us that God is our Creator and Redeemer.



## Called From Tibet

Manohar Karnard

Passang Tsering (pah-song TSEH-ring] is a soft-spoken, 23-year-old student at Spicer Memorial College in Pune, India. He is one of several students from Tibet, "the roof of the world." Tibet lies north of India on the world's highest plateau.

Passang's mother died when he was quite young; his father raised cattle and farmed a small plot of land to feed his eight children.

When communists overran Tibet, Passang's father watched as soldiers mistreated the people. The family had never been rich, but now they were poor beyond imagination. He urged Passang and his two youngest daughters to flee to India.

The three young people followed secret routes through Nepal to India. They knew that if the soldiers caught them, they would be severely punished and imprisoned for trying to escape. The fortunate refugees rejoiced when they reached the Indian border. Passang fought tears as he said, "I have not seen my father since we left Tibet."

Passang completed his secondary education in a Tibetan children's village in northern India. He was given the choice of two schools to attend. He knew little about either school, but he remembers something told him to choose Spicer Memorial College.

The Adventist lifestyle at Spicer attracted Passang and other young Tibetan Buddhists studying there. Soon he will finish his studies and graduate. But he will take more than a degree in geography with him from Spicer. "I have learned to feel the presence of the Infinite [God] everywhere I go," he says.

His heart aches for the plight of his family who remain in Tibet. "Sometimes I feel as if I am alone in this world. It is hard to see others return to their homes during vacations, for we have no homes on this earth." But Passang has learned that he is not truly alone; he has a Brother, a Friend, who will never leave him and who has promised him a home forever.

His eyes fill with tears as he recalls his escape from Tibet. He dreams of returning to his homeland and teaching his people about God. "I believe God wants me to introduce my Saviour to my people," says Passang. He knows that if he returns to Tibet, he may never be able to leave. "God has made a difference in my life, I must share that knowledge with others and work to hasten His coming."

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# God's Re-creation: The Earth Made New



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Isa. 65:17-25; 1 Cor. 15:12-26, 35-55; Phil. 3:20, 21; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1-27; 22:1-6, 12-21.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:1, 2, NKJV).

**KEY THOUGHT:** God intends to restore both the human race and the earth to their pre-Fall glory. While the nature of this existence is beyond our comprehension now, yet it is real, and God wants us to look forward to His glorious rewards for us.

**THE REALITY OF THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH.** We have spent most of this quarter studying about the original creation of this earth. While we recognize the importance of acknowledging God as our Creator, it is also important that we look forward to a new restored creation. There are those who do not like to talk about heaven and the new earth. Influenced by the scientific age, some may harbor secret doubts about the reality of the future existence presented in the Bible. Others may feel that to talk of such things is to reveal a selfish motive for wanting to go to heaven. But the motive is loving God and desiring to be with Him in the midst of His perfect creation.

This week we will study how God desires us to be with Him in the heavenly home He has prepared for us.

**LOOKING FORWARD TO THE NEW WORLD** (1 Cor. 3:14; 2 Cor. 4:17; Matt. 5:12; Rev. 21:1-7, 10-21; 22:1-3, 17).

**What does the Bible say about the reality of our eternal reward?** 1 Cor. 3:14; 2 Cor. 4:17; Rev. 21:1-7.

It is impossible for our finite minds to comprehend what our infinite God has prepared for us. How can the perfection of the new heaven and earth be adequately described! "Language is altogether too feeble to attempt a description of heaven. As the scene rises before me, I am lost in amazement. Carried away with the surpassing splendor and excellent glory, I lay down the pen, and exclaim, 'Oh, what love! what wondrous love!' The most exalted language fails to describe the glory of heaven or the matchless depths of a Saviour's love."—*Early Writings*, p. 289.

**Considering that the glory of our eternal reward is impossible to comprehend, how does Jesus desire for us to view it?** Matt. 5:12; Rev. 22:17.

Actually, every evidence from the Bible seems to indicate that God is quite eager to share the joy of our future life with Him. He gives us attractive hints, that which we can understand, to help us look forward to it. "Jesus comes to present the advantages and beautiful imagery of the heavenly, that the attractions of heaven shall become familiar to the thoughts, and memory's hall be hung with pictures of celestial and eternal loveliness. . . .

"The great Teacher gives man a view of the future world. He brings it, with its attractive possessions, within the range of his vision. . . . If He can fasten the mind upon the future life and its blessedness, in comparison with the temporal concerns of this world, the striking contrast is deeply impressed upon the mind, absorbing the heart and soul and the whole being."—*Our High Calling*, p. 286.

**What views of the new heaven and new earth does inspiration provide for us?** Rev. 21:1, 2, 10-21; 22:1-3.

As the above texts demonstrate, the imagery of what God has in store for us in heaven and in the earth made new is quite dazzling. How does the anticipation of such a glorious reward make an impact on your everyday life? What impact does your experience have on others around you?

**NATURE RESTORED** (Isa. 55:13; 65:25; 11:6-9; 35:1-10; Hos. 2:16-20; Rev. 21:23, 25).

**How is nature described in the new earth?** Isa. 55:13; 65:25; Rev. 21:23, 25.

Besides the brief descriptions provided in Isaiah and Revelation, Ellen White provides some beautiful insights into what the new heaven and earth will be like: "I saw another field full of all kinds of flowers, and as I plucked them, I cried out, 'They will never fade.' Next I saw a field of tall grass, most glorious to behold; it was living green and had a reflection of silver and gold, as it waved proudly to the glory of King Jesus. . . . Then we entered a wood, not like the dark woods we have here; no, no; but light, and all over glorious; the branches of the trees moved to and fro, and we all cried out, 'We will dwell safely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods.' We passed through the woods, for we were on our way to Mount Zion."—*Early Writings*, p. 18.

"Mount Zion was just before us, and on the mount was a glorious temple, and about it were seven other mountains, on which grew roses and lilies. And I saw the little ones climb, or, if they chose, use their little wings and fly, to the top of the mountains and pluck the never-fading flowers. There were all kinds of trees around the temple to beautify the place: the box, the pine, the fir, the oil, the myrtle, the pomegranate, and the fig tree bowed down with the weight of its timely figs—these made the place all over glorious."—*Early Writings*, p. 19.

**What will the animals be like in the new heaven and the new earth?** Hos. 2:16-20; Isa. 11:6-9; 35:1-10; 65:25.

The prophet Isaiah's descriptions of the lot of the redeemed clearly depicts the overturning of the present fallen order. Further, the prophet Hosea includes the animals in a covenant of peace with God's redeemed people.

"There man will be restored to his lost kingship, and the lower order of beings will again recognize his sway; the fierce will become gentle, and the timid trustful."—*Education*, p. 304.

**As you compare this world and the glorious world to come, do you feel homesick for heaven? How is it that we can call heaven home and feel "homesick" for it, even though we have never been there? What are some things that can keep you from going there? When traveling to a foreign land, you need a passport or visa. If heaven is our destination, then what is our "heavenly passport"?**

**HUMANS RESTORED (Mal. 4:1, 2; Hos. 13:14; 1 Cor. 15:22-25; 15:42-44, 54, 55; Rev. 21:4).**

**How will humans appear at their restoration? Mal. 4:1, 2.**

Malachi describes the redeemed as having the vigor of a “young calf” restored to them! In the full vigor of eternal youth they will leap for joy in their glorious home. “Restored to the tree of life in the long-lost Eden, the redeemed will ‘grow up’ to the full stature of the race in its primeval glory.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 645.

“If Adam, at his creation, had not been endowed with twenty times as much vital force as men now have, the race, with their present habits of living in violation of natural law, would have become extinct.”—*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 23.

“None will need or desire repose. There will be no weariness in doing the will of God and offering praise to His name. We shall ever feel the freshness of the morning and shall ever be far from its close.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 676.

**What will happen to pain, suffering, and death in God’s new order? Can you imagine life without them! Hos. 13:14; 1 Cor. 15:22-26; 15:42-44, 54, 55; Rev. 21:4.**

This is the wonder of the new life of the redeemed—a real physical existence, but one without pain, suffering, and death. This calls for a different type of existence from what we know in our present world, a different ecosystem, a different biology. As Paul says, it is a mystery, but we know that the perishable will become imperishable, and the mortal will put on immortality, and there will be no more death.

“Pain cannot exist in the atmosphere of heaven. There will be no more tears, no funeral trains, no badges of mourning.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 676.

The question many ask is Will we recognize our loved ones whom we have lost in this life? “As Jesus arose from the dead, so those who sleep in Him are to rise again. We shall know our friends, even as the disciples knew Jesus. They may have been deformed, diseased, or disfigured, in this mortal life, and they rise in perfect health and symmetry; yet in the glorified body their identity will be perfectly preserved.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 804.

**Do you have loved ones who died? If yes, how does it make you feel that you will see and recognize them in perfection at Jesus’ return?**

**EYE HAS NOT SEEN . . . (Matt. 22:23-30; 1 Cor. 2:9; Ps. 16:11).**

**How did Jesus answer the Sadducees' question about marriage in the afterlife? Matt. 22:23-30.**

Among the errors of the Sadducees was that they did not believe in the power of the Spirit of God acting in human affairs. In their skepticism they denied the existence of angels, the resurrection, and eternal life. So, thinking to embarrass Jesus, they asked a speculative question about the consequences of the levirate marriage law (Deut. 25:5, 6) in the resurrection.

But, to Jesus, their big problem was that they did not know the power of God or His Word. They “forgot that a God powerful enough to raise men from the dead also had the wisdom and power to set up anew a perfect order of society in the perfect new earth. Furthermore, all who are saved will be contented and happy with the glorious new order of things, even though they cannot fully realize in this life what the future will bring forth. . . . Evidently there will be no need for marriage, because a different order of life will prevail.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 483.

According to Jesus, then, in the future life marriage such as we have known it will not continue. There is still much we do not know. During the early days of the Adventist Church, some were so concerned about this issue that Ellen White was compelled to write: “Workers for God should not spend time speculating as to what conditions will prevail in the new earth. It is presumption to indulge in suppositions and theories regarding matters that the Lord has not revealed. He has made every provision for our happiness in the future life, and we are not to speculate regarding His plans for us. Neither are we to measure the conditions of the future life by the conditions of this life.”—*Gospel Workers*, p. 314.

**What does God's Word say about His wondrous plan for our future happiness? 1 Cor. 2:9; Ps. 16:11; 84:11.**

Our loving, powerful, and wise God will employ all His creative energies to surpass infinitely all our expectations of happiness and satisfaction. Doesn't it fill us with wonder and amazement as we look forward to what our gracious God is preparing for our eternal happiness!

**“Friends long separated by death are united, . . . and . . . ascend together to the City of God.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 645.**

## WHAT WILL WE DO THERE? (Isa. 65:21, 22; 66:22, 23).

What do the following texts tell us about some of the things that we will be doing in the new earth?

Isa. 65:21, 22 \_\_\_\_\_

Isa. 66:22, 23 \_\_\_\_\_

In the inspired writings of Ellen White we read of a number of activities we shall be engaged in: worship, music, research, building, fellowship, to name just a few. As we come to the end of this quarter's study, it is fitting that we reflect on a few choice statements to boost our courage as we look forward to our eternal reward.

"In the earth made new, the redeemed will engage in the occupations and pleasures that brought happiness to Adam and Eve in the beginning. The Eden life will be lived, the life in garden and field."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 730.

"In the same manner [bringing the glorious crowns] the angels brought the harps, and Jesus presented them also to the saints. The commanding angels first struck the note, and then every voice was raised in grateful, happy praise, and every hand skillfully swept over the strings of the harp, sending forth melodious music in rich and perfect strains."—*Early Writings*, p. 288.

"Then will be opened before him [the student] the course of the great conflict that had its birth before time began, and that ends only when time shall cease. . . . The veil that interposes between the visible and the invisible world will be drawn aside, and wonderful things will be revealed."—*Education*, p. 304.

"All the perplexities of life's experience will then be made plain. Where to us have appeared only confusion and disappointment, broken purposes and thwarted plans, will be seen a grand, overruling, victorious purpose, a divine harmony."—*Education*, p. 305.

"Then we began to look at the glorious things outside of the city. There I saw most glorious houses, that had the appearance of silver, supported by four pillars set with pearls most glorious to behold. These were to be inhabited by the saints."—*Early Writings*, p. 18.

"As they [the saints] learn more and more of the wisdom, the love, and the power of God, their minds will be constantly expanding, and their joy will continually increase."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 702, 703.

"All the treasures of the universe will be open to the study of God's redeemed. Unfettered by mortality, they wing their tireless flight to worlds afar."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 677.

**FURTHER STUDY:** Read the chapter entitled “The School of the Hereafter” in *Education*, pp. 301-309 to learn about all the fascinating subjects we will be engaged in studying. Read the statement under the heading “Speculation Regarding the Future Life” in *Medical Ministry*, pp. 99, 100, for a specific comment on Jesus’ words on marriage in heaven.

“There are ever-flowing streams, clear as crystal, and beside them waving trees cast their shadows upon the paths prepared for the ransomed of the Lord. There the wide-spreading plains swell into hills of beauty, and the mountains of God rear their lofty summits. On those peaceful plains, beside those living streams, God’s people, so long pilgrims and wanderers, shall find a home.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 675.

While some did not initially recognize Jesus after His resurrection, ultimately His friends did recognize Him. Mary recognized Jesus’ voice (John 20:11-16), Thomas, His physical appearance (John 20:27, 28), and the disciples from Emmaus recognized Jesus’ mannerisms (Luke 24:30, 31, 35). In *The Desire of Ages*, p. 804, we read that “The resurrection of Jesus was a type of the final resurrection of all who sleep in Him. The countenance of the risen Saviour, His manner, His speech, were all familiar to His disciples.”

She also writes this touching passage in *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 260: “As the little infants come forth immortal from their dusty beds, they immediately wing their way to their mother’s arms. They meet again nevermore to part.”

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How does the original pre-Fall earth compare with the new earth? What are some similarities and differences?
2. A happy Sabbath exercise for Adventist families is to discuss what they look forward to most in the new earth. What do you look forward to that you think will bring you the greatest joy?

**SUMMARY:** “The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 678.



## Lest We Forget

J. H. Zachary

As I travel from country to country I have been touched by the conditions in which many of our believers live and work. Recently I sat in a church filled with worshippers. But three of the church workers were not present; they were imprisoned for their faith. The Bibles the members so reverently held were smuggled into the country, for the government does not permit the publishing of religious literature.

In another country I visited a little house on the edge of a city. Each Sabbath members secretly entered the house to worship; they sang in whispers to prevent detection. Then one day police raided the house and arrested the pastor. He remains in prison.

In another country I met an elderly man sitting alone in church. When he had refused to send his children to school on Sabbath, the authorities took his children and sent them to a Communist boarding school. Today the children are atheists. Only God knows the depth of this man's sorrow.

I visited an ADRA leader who cannot preach in a church or even make a comment during Sabbath School class, for religion is monitored where he serves.

In yet another country an Adventist pastor's home was bombed by a radical religious group. In spite of fear for his family, he continues to preach the gospel.

A teenager came to evangelistic meetings, her face and arms covered with bruises. Her father had beaten her to discourage her from accepting Jesus. One night as she returned from the meeting, her father met her and tried to drag her to the barn for another whipping. She clung to a water pipe. Her father gave a violent yank, and the water pipe broke. He forgot the whipping as he repaired the broken pipe. Today this young woman rejoices in the Lord in spite of persecution.

I stepped into a pastor's one-room apartment in one country. A bare lightbulb hung in the center of the room. The pastor kneels on the floor beside his bed, preparing a Bible study. I prayed that the police had not seen me enter the apartment. It would have been far too dangerous to visit the secret house church. Yet this godly pastor and his family serve the Lord.

Unsung heroes live and work in many dark and dangerous places around the world. They are determined to serve God at any cost. We must pray for those who are suffering for the Lord, and we must never take our religious freedom for granted.

**J. H. Zachary is international evangelism coordinator at The Quiet Hour in Redlands, California.**

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## Bible Study Guide for Fourth Quarter, 1999

The fourth quarter Sabbath School Bible Study Guide, entitled *The Church in Today's World*, centers on the study of the blessing of belonging to God's family.

### Lesson 1: We Are a Family

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Jer. 31:1; Matt. 12:49, 50; Pss. 34:8; 27:10; Jer. 31:3; John 3:16; Rom. 5:15; Ps. 68:5, 6; Isa. 41:10; 1 Pet. 2:9.

**MEMORY TEXT:** Matthew 12:49, 50.

**KEY THOUGHT:** It is a privilege to belong to God's earthly family, in which we have a loving Father and good brothers and sisters.

#### OUTLINE:

More Than a Congregation, a Family (Matt. 12:49, 50; Jer. 31:1).

God Sets the Tone (Pss. 34:8; 27:10; 94:14; Isa. 49:15, 16).

We Are Members of One Family (1 John 3:14; 4:21; John 13:34; Matt. 6:9).

We Are Not Alone (Ps. 68:5; Matt. 28:20; Isa. 41:10).

A Family With a Purpose (Gen. 12:2, 3; 1 Pet. 2:9; John 4:34; Isa. 60:1-3).

### Lesson 2: New Persons in Christ

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Isa. 55:6, 7; Luke 15:11-24; Eph. 2; 4:22-32; 1 Cor. 2:16; Rom. 8:9, 14.

**MEMORY TEXT:** Ephesians 4:22, 23.

**KEY THOUGHT:** It is God's desire to change and renew our lives.

#### OUTLINE:

B.C.—Before Christ! (Eph. 2:1-3, 12; 4:18, 19; Rom. 1:28-32).

A.C.—After Christ! (Isa. 55:6, 7; Eph. 1:7, 8; 2:8, 9; 1 John 1:9, 10).

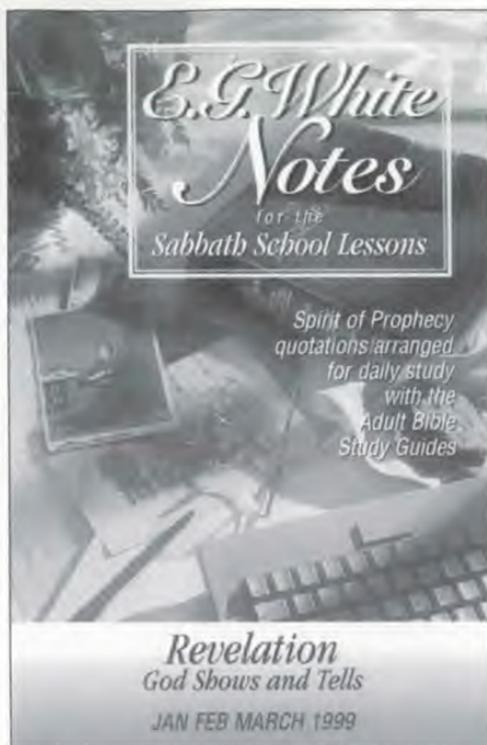
A New Creation (Eph. 2:12, 13; 5:8; Ezek. 36:36, 27).

The Holy Spirit in Action (Rom. 8:9, 14; Eph. 4:22-32).

Like Jesus (1 Cor. 2:16; 1 Pet. 2:21; Heb. 8:10).

### Lessons in Braille

The regular adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide is available free each month in Braille and 16 2/3 rpm records to blind and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, old age, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact the Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506.



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# AFRICA-INDIAN OCEAN DIVISION



## Mission Projects:

1. Rebuild Konola Academy, damaged during Liberian civil war.
2. Build hospital in Tamale, Ghana.
3. Construct secondary school, N'Djamena, Chad.
4. Build maternity block and surgical unit in Buea, Cameroon.
5. Construct library at Universite Adventiste, Wallace Campus, East Congo.
6. Construct two evangelistic centers in East Congo.



Unions	Churches	Companies	Membership	Population
Central African	739	324	90,445	28,400,000
East Congo	830	1,591	186,668	22,828,000
Indian Ocean	289	605	54,994	16,755,000
Nigeria	600	625	142,887	107,100,000
Rwanda	865	482	342,664	7,700,000
Sahel	91	249	15,761	76,400,000
West African	626	1,335	220,416	25,906,000
West Congo	253	461	133,635	24,572,000
Burundi Assn.	123	143	48,672	6,100,000
<b>Totals</b> (December 31, 1997)	<b>4,416</b>	<b>5,815</b>	<b>1,236,142</b>	<b>315,761,000</b>