

The Early Earth



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 2.*

Memory Verse: “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them” (*Genesis 2:1*).

Having dealt with how all of Creation came into being, Moses now focuses on human beings and their immediate environment. While Genesis 1 answered the question How did it all originate? Genesis 2 explains why we are what we are. Without the information provided by Genesis 2, the test of allegiance to God and the subsequent Fall described in Genesis 3 would, to a large extent, be unintelligible.

The intimate world of Adam and Eve surrounded by trees and animals in a garden complements the previous majestic account of Creation. Chapter 2 introduces the reader of the Bible to the social dimensions of humanity and gives some insight on prehistory and the original geography of the world.

Genesis 2 also deals with such divine institutions as Sabbath, work, home, and marriage. Given to the human race before the Fall, these institutions lie at the basis of human existence, conduct, and happiness even today. Though we are, indeed, a long way from Eden, it still presents a model, a template of principles, for we who are on the periphery of Eden restored. What messages are found in this divine account of a prefallen world for the rest of us, we who have known only a fallen existence?

This week we'll take a look at, literally, paradise, one of the few we'll ever see, at least for now.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 21.*

The Sabbath *(Gen. 2:1-3)*

Last week we saw a progression in the Creation account: from darkness to light, from only water to earth and water, to an atmosphere, to vegetation, and so forth, culminating in the creation of human beings, first the man and then the woman. Only after all these things were created do we get the words in Genesis 2:1—“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.” God’s work of Creation, at least as attested to here, was a finished work. This notion is implied in Genesis 2:2, 3, where both verses say that God “rested” from His work. Was God tired, or did He rest because His work was completed?

Read Genesis 2:2, 3 and answer the following questions:

1 Is there anything in the texts that implies that Creation was an ongoing process that continued after the sixth day? What are the implications of your answer?

2 Considering what the Sabbath stands for, the Creation, how do these verses already imply the universality of the Sabbath; that is, its meaning for all humanity?

Although the noun *sabbath* is not mentioned in Genesis 2, the verb for “rested,” from which the term *sabbath* is derived, proves that the Sabbath is meant (*see Exod. 20:8-11*). Just as six literal days came before it, the Sabbath is a literal day, as well.

Notice, too, that the first thing God declared holy was time, the seventh day. Not a hill, not a river, not a shrine, but a segment of time itself was the first thing in God’s new Creation specifically “set apart” (another way of expressing “to be made holy”). Thus, we see the Sabbath as something special, something universal, something not bounded by the limits of place or geography but as something that can reach every human being no matter where they live.

Next time you welcome in the Sabbath, dwell on the fact that you are keeping a day that goes all the way back to Eden, to the first week of human existence. How does that make you feel, linking yourself in such a tangible way to your origins?

Key Text: *Genesis 2:1-4*

Teachers Aims:

1. To discuss life on earth before the Fall.
2. To show that the Sabbath stands as a memorial to Creation.
3. To reveal that the human race forfeited immortality through sin.

Lesson Outline:

I. Life on Earth (*Gen. 1:28-30, 2:3*)

- A. God instituted the Sabbath at Creation; neither time nor space limit it.
- B. God entrusted human beings at Creation with rulership of earth.
- C. God ordained a plant-based diet in Eden for animals and for our first parents.

II. The Living Soul (*Gen. 2:7*)

- A. God created Adam as a living soul, comprised of body and spirit.
- B. Because of sin, humanity no longer has the quality of immortality but is subject to death.

III. Life in the Garden (*Gen. 2:8*)

- A. Eden was a specific place on earth, rather than a mere symbol.
- B. Sin marred the labor of Adam, making it toilsome. God originally intended work to be invigorating and enjoyable.
- C. God created Eve the equal of Adam, for companionship and to share in his work in the Garden.

Summary: God breathed the breath of life into Adam's nostrils, and he became a living soul, made up of body and spirit. After the Fall, the human race lost the right to eat of the tree of life and suffered the grievous consequences of sin.

COMMENTARY

God created the first human beings then rested on the Sabbath. This association of God's people with the Sabbath begins a pattern that continues throughout the rest of the Bible. From the beginning of time down to the end, the Sabbath repeatedly becomes a symbol of God's power to restore His people.

The Sabbath and God's People

Though humanity rebelled from Eden onward, God still sought a people for Himself. After the Flood He called Abram to begin that people. Eventually His people went into Egypt, where slavery almost destroyed them. The Lord had to instill in them a sense of identity as His people. As He led them through the wilderness, He assured them that He would care for them through the gift of manna (*Exod. 16:13-36*). Their obedience during the manna cycle and their rest on the Sabbath became a test of their acceptance of God as their

Nephesh Hayyah

In Genesis 2, the scene shifts from the Creation of the world to a local garden. Rather than being a second and different Creation narrative, Genesis 2 complements Genesis 1. Human beings are the pinnacle of the pyramid in Genesis 1. In Genesis 2 they become the center of the circle. The spotlight falls on the human race, and everything else is relegated to the background.

Back in Genesis, it wasn't until the fifth day that God created "living creatures," from the Hebrew *nephesh hayyah*. *Hayyah* here means "life," and *nephesh* means "creature." Interestingly enough, that same phrase appears in 2:7.

Read Genesis 2:7. What phrase seems most likely in the text to have been translated from *nephesh hayyah*?

Most people are surprised to learn that the phrase often translated "living soul" (*Gen. 2:7*) in the creation of humanity is the same one used to describe fish and birds and other creeping things. Though unlike these other creatures, humanity was made in the "image of God" (*Gen. 1:27*); in a purely physical sense humanity is tied to other life on earth. And, of course, we see this in the sense that, like other life on earth, we need certain physical things in order to stay alive.

How does this use of the word *nephesh* in Genesis 2:7 (often translated "soul") help us understand why the soul isn't immortal? (*Ezek. 18:4, Matt. 10:28*).

Though the Bible uses the word *nephesh* in numerous ways, denoting a variety of ideas ("person," "self," "life," or "being"), it never means in the Old Testament the popular notion of some separate conscious immortal entity that can exist apart from the body. That's a pagan Greek idea that has filtered into almost all monotheistic religions today.

Make a list of the common popular deceptions that arise from belief in an immortal soul. Why should one who understands the truth about the soul be so grateful that he or she does understand? What does that knowledge protect you from?

Lord and of themselves as His people.

At Sinai God declared them a “holy nation” (*Exod. 19:6*). They now existed only because He delivered them from bondage (*Exod. 20:2, Deut. 5:15*), and He created them as a people. There, He proclaimed the Ten Commandments, including the Sabbath one. Observance of the Sabbath became a symbol of their acknowledgment of their peoplehood.

Not only was the Sabbath prominent in the formation of God’s people, it also surfaces in Scripture whenever they face the threat of destruction, assimilation, or dispersion. For example, 2 Kings 11 tells how Athaliah, the queen mother of Judah’s king Ahaziah and daughter of Ahab and Jezebel of Israel, usurped control of Judah after her son’s death. She tried to destroy all members of the royal family. But Ahaziah’s sister, Jehosheba, managed to save Ahaziah’s son, Joash, and hide him in the temple precincts for six years. In the seventh year Jehoiada, the high priest, staged a coup to remove Athaliah from power and place Joash on the throne. The coup took place on the Sabbath (*2 Kings 11:5-9*). After the execution of Athaliah, Jehoiada made “a covenant between the Lord, the king, and the people, that they should be the Lord’s people” (*vs. 17, NKJV*).

The regular changing of the guard on Sabbath allowed Jehoiada to assemble all of the temple forces without attracting immediate suspicion, and one could dismiss the reference to the Sabbath as just that. The Bible rarely goes into great detail about anything, especially without reason. Its literary style is extremely terse and includes only what the author considers vital. Thus, when Scripture does mention what at first might seem to be a minor point, we must pay special attention to it. The author of 2 Kings could have described the coup without stating on what day it took place. Scripture seldom states what day something happened. By mentioning the Sabbath along with the making of a covenant, the author directs our attention back to the Sinai experience. The people whom Athaliah had almost destroyed through her pagan activities are now reconstituted and brought back into relationship with God.

Likewise, the book of Isaiah speaks much about the Sabbath. It shows how resident aliens and eunuchs—both outsiders or at least second-class citizens—can, through observance of the Sabbath, become part of God’s people (*Isaiah 56*). Sabbath observance also forms part of the prophet’s discussion of true worship (*Isaiah 58*), and true worship consists of a proper relationship with God and with fellow humanity. Isaiah also declares that God’s people will go into exile because of their national rebellion, but when He restores them with the rest of humanity in a new earth, they will from Sabbath to Sabbath worship the Lord (*Isa. 66:22, 23*).

Just before the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon, the prophet Jeremiah also emphasized the Sabbath (*Jer. 17:19-27*). Judah faced extinction as a nation and even as a people. If they would honor the

The Garden Home *(Gen. 2:8-17)*

The specific geographical details presented in verses 10 through 14 indicate that, in the mind of the Bible writer, Eden was a specific locality rather than merely being a symbol or a metaphor. Several of the names mentioned in verses 11 through 14 are later applied to post-Flood localities and rivers. However, the Flood changed the surface features of our planet so radically that identification of pre-Flood geography with places and rivers known to us is impossible.

What elements mentioned in verses 8 through 17 indicate that the garden home was an ideal model? (Note particularly the setting and the attention given to humanity's physical, mental, aesthetic, and moral needs.)

Even today, with a world ravaged by six thousand years of sin, we can get hints of what the original beauty must have been like. Traces remain, and they speak to us of God's wonderful creative power (*Job 12:7-9; Rom. 1:19, 20*). It's hard to imagine what Eden must have looked like and what a paradise it must have been.

What's the closest thing to paradise that you've ever seen? What made it like paradise? In what ways does it parallel what Eden, or the earth as a whole, must have been like?

Read Genesis 2:15. How interesting that Adam, even in this earthly paradise, with everything he could possibly need, was given the task of working in the garden. The Hebrew word translated "dress" is a common term meaning to "work" or to "serve." Thus, even before the Fall, even before sin, humanity wasn't to sit idle but to work. This alone should get rid of the notion that work itself is somehow bad.

Though we're a long way from Eden, what practical things could you do now to make your environment more like Eden for yourself and those around you? What changes would need to be made?

Sabbath, however, Jerusalem would be inhabited forever (*vss. 24-26*). But they refused to listen to the prophet.

References to the Sabbath also appear during the Exile and afterward. Ezekiel sketches the history of God's people before announcing that He will restore Israel, bringing them back from exile (*Ezekiel 20*). Twice Ezekiel mentions that the Sabbath was a sign or symbol of God's relationship to them as a people (*vss. 12, 20*).

When some of the exiles did return from Babylon, the Sabbath again made its appearance in Scripture. As Nehemiah works to restore the identity of religious life in Jerusalem, he finds that its inhabitants, in league with the pagan people around them, have turned the Sabbath into just another market day (*Neh. 13:15-22*). The passage specifically

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Genesis 2:3; 9:1-7; Ecclesiastes 3:20, 21; Isaiah 65:17-23; 1 Timothy 2:13, 14*

- 1 What does the seventh day, the Sabbath, tell us about God and the role of Creation? In what sense was His work complete? What does God's consecration of the Sabbath tell us about His regard for that day and what our attitude should be toward it?
- 2 The Hebrew phrase *nephesh hayyah* is translated as "living soul" in most versions of the Bible. What popular misconceptions are attached to the word *soul*? In light of these misconceptions, do you think that the use of the word is misleading? What word, if any, would you use in its place? What does the Bible really teach about the soul?
- 3 Citing Genesis 3:19, many argue that work is a curse arising from the Fall from Eden. Perhaps, in one sense, it is. Yet, before the Fall, Adam is told in Genesis 2:15 to work in the Garden. Why is work in one instance a curse but in the other a blessing? Can work be a blessing today? Explain.
- 4 Why do you think Genesis emphasizes that woman, Eve, came from man, Adam? Could it be used to justify belief in female inferiority? Why, or why not? What was God really trying to say?
- 5 In some ways, the world of Eden was quite different from ours yet in other ways quite recognizable. What things do we still share with the original couple? Can Eden still serve as a model for the ways in which we live our lives as Christians, and if so, to what extent?

The Woman in Adam's Life *(Gen. 2:18-25)*

Here's Adam, in a garden paradise, with rulership over the animals, with everything at his disposal except one tree (*see Gen. 2:16, 17*). And yet, still God has more for him.

What was God's purpose in giving woman to man? *Gen. 2:18, 20.*

The woman was to be a "help meet for him" (the Hebrew suggests a "helper over against him," "a help equal to him," "his counterpart"). The Genesis record places value on woman as an equal, a counterpart, a partner, or a complement in whose company man finds his fullest satisfaction and with whom he shares God's image and likeness.

Read Genesis 1:27, 28. How do these two verses together show the important role the woman was to have in life on earth?

Considering the basic physical makeup of Adam, he couldn't fulfill the command given in Genesis 1:28 without a woman, could he? Though the woman was to be his companion, wife, and co-worker in subduing and having dominion over nature, she was to be so much more, as well (*see Gen. 2:24*).

How was Eve created? *Gen. 2:21, 22.* What distinguished her creation from that of all other living things?

Everything else, including man, came out of the dirt; Eve came out of man. Though the Bible doesn't explain just what that difference means, it certainly shows that she wasn't to be treated as an inferior to him. Sadly, in so many societies, women are treated almost as slaves, afforded little dignity and few rights, a powerful example of what sin has done to the human race.

Have you, either as a man or woman, acquired from your culture (maybe even subconsciously) some of the wrong attitudes about women? How could what's taught in Genesis 2 help change these attitudes?

mentions non-Israelites—Tyrians—who are bringing in fish and other merchandise and are using the Sabbath as their business day (*vs. 16*).

The context of the incident is the danger of assimilation that threatens the people of Jerusalem. Non-Israelites were moving into the city and even the temple precincts (*vss. 1-9*). Many of God's people, including one of the sons of the high priest, had non-Israelite wives (*vss. 23-30*). The children could not even speak their fathers' language. God's people were vanishing as an identifiable group. To stop the destructive process, Nehemiah stressed the Sabbath as a symbol of their identity as God's people and of their allegiance to Him.

In the New Testament God's people swung to the other extreme. The rigid Sabbath observance of many turned it into a barrier that isolated their witness to the other nations. Jesus in His Sabbath miracles

Witnessing

The Sabbath . . . a day like any other? Hardly.

What would you say the Sabbath is made for? Do you see it as precious hours set aside for reflection, a result of God's deep understanding of our need for wind-down time? An opportunity to "stop and smell the roses"? Quality time to be spent with family and friends? Twenty-four hours in which to lay aside everyday hassles and free the mind and spirit to commune with our heavenly Father? An occasion to draw strength from our personal communion with Him in order to better face the week to come?

One thing that we can all agree on is what a special and unique day it is, created specifically to address the spiritual and temporal needs of human beings. The Bible tells us, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (*Mark 2:27*). It is a day of rest made to bring us pleasure and, at the same time, is good for us.

Equally important, how we spend the hours of the Sabbath is noticed by those around us. We silently witness to others by what we do and, most notably, what we fail to do. Each person may have definite ideas on what is and is not an appropriate Sabbath activity. When contemplating a Sabbath-day activity, ask the question, "Would Jesus do this with me?" If the answer is no, save it for another day. If the answer is yes, invite others to share it with you. Individuals who know little to nothing about the sacredness of the Sabbath can learn a great deal from your observance. If they see you mowing your lawn, washing your car, or hanging out your laundry, their impression will be that Saturday, the Sabbath, is a day like any other. If, on the other hand, you invite them to join you in worship, in taking a long nature walk, or in spending time searching the Scriptures for answers, they will come to understand that the seventh day is unlike any of the other six. They will understand that it is special, a genuine gift to be treasured.

Eve Becomes Adam's Wife *(Gen. 2:23, 24)*

In Genesis 2:23, Adam was so rapt that he expressed his triumphant welcome of his wife in poetry (verse 23 is the first poetic couplet in Scripture). The creation of Eve and her and Adam's subsequent marriage were designed to be a great blessing. One man, with one woman, were to form the foundation of the home, the basic unit out of which all human life was to spring and then exist. This model was how they were, indeed, to "be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (*Gen. 1:28*).

What has sin done to this ideal? What common things occur now that deviate from it? What have been the results?

What steps in marriage are outlined in the words of God, and in what order are these steps to occur? *Gen. 2:24*.

God's ideal for marriage is expounded in this verse. When the time came to leave those closest to him, his parents, man's first earthly loyalty was to be to his wife. She was to occupy the foremost place in his affections. In God's order the union of bodies between husband and wife is to follow their commitment in marriage. The biblical order "*leave . . . cleave . . . and they shall be one flesh*" tragically and defiantly has been turned upside down, with tragic results.

What kind of intimate relationship between husband and wife does Scripture uphold long after the Fall? *1 Cor. 7:2-5, Eph. 5:21-29, Heb. 13:4*. What principles do you find in these verses that reflect what marriage was like before the Fall? And, most important, if married, what can you do to better reveal these principles in your own home?

sought to remove all trappings that would discourage others from joining God's people. When God makes His final plea for those who want to be His people, the Sabbath will again play the role it has had from the beginning in restoring and strengthening their identity.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: Think back on a significant project you have undertaken and completed. If you took pictures as the house or sculpture or academic degree progressed, what are your feelings now when you see them? What did you do when you were finished with the project? What kind of celebration did you have when you were done? God undertook an amazing, God-sized project. “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished.” And God rested, blessed, and sanctified (*Gen. 2:1-3*). How does what He did when the world and its inhabitants were created affect and bless your life?

Thought Questions:

1 A working prototype of an automobile requires a functional power train, as well as an attractive exterior design. Genesis 2:7 reveals so much about humanity's design. “God formed . . . a living being” (*NKJV*) or “living soul” by combining dust and “the breath of life.” Bring modeling clay to class and invite the class members to shape a model of a human. Discuss the difference between your sculpture and God's creation. Why are you thankful for a Creator God?

2 How do you feel about rules? Read Genesis 2:15-25. Imagine Adam and Eve walking in the Garden for the first time, discovering its wonders as God gave them a guided tour. Discuss what you imagine they must have felt when God said, “‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die’” (*Gen. 2:16, 17, NKJV*). How do you think their response to this new rule differs from our response to rules? As a class, invite God to help you view His commands as blessings that protect and give purpose to your life.

Application Question:

What do you think of when someone says “garden”? Are your thoughts of dirt and weeds or flowers and produce? Share the life experiences that provided the foundation for your response. Consider Genesis 2:4-15. What did God offer humankind when He gave them a garden home? In what ways can we recapture Eden's environment for our families, even in a sinful world? Ask your family to join you in designing a haven of peace and interaction.

Further Study: Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 46–51; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, comments on Genesis 2.

“The home of our first parents was to be a pattern for other homes as their children should go forth to occupy the earth. That home, beautified by the hand of God Himself, was not a gorgeous palace. . . . God placed Adam in a garden. . . . In the surroundings of the holy pair was a lesson for all time—that true happiness is found, not in the indulgence of pride and luxury, but in communion with God through His created works. . . . Pride and ambition are never satisfied, but those who are truly wise will find substantial and elevating pleasure in the sources of enjoyment that God has placed within the reach of all.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 49, 50.

“Eve was created from a rib taken from the side of Adam, signifying that she was not to control him as the head, nor to be trampled under his feet as an inferior, but to stand by his side as an equal, to be loved and protected by him. A part of man, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, she was his second self, showing the close union and the affectionate attachment that should exist in this *relation*.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 46, emphasis supplied.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How are we today to understand the words in Genesis 1:27, 28 about the man and woman subduing and dominating the earth? What might that have meant then, before sin, and now, after sin? What message does that have for us today in how we relate to our environment?
- 2 How does your society treat women? What practical things can you do, if necessary, to help women who are being mistreated? What can and should your local church be doing that it's not doing now?
- 3 Are there some marriages in trouble in your church? What can you do, as a class, in a very practical manner, to help support those going through this painful turmoil?