

Creation, Again



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 21:1–5, Gen 3:19, 1 Cor. 15:52–58, Gen. 6:11–13, Isa. 11:6–9, John 14:1–3.*

Memory Text: “But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13, NIV).

In 2 Peter 3:10–13, Peter describes the fate of heaven and earth. Both, along with all that they contain, will be destroyed. But that’s not the end of the story, not by a long shot, because a new heaven and a new earth will be created in their stead.

Look at the contrast between the two existences. Sin has dominion in the old one; righteousness dwells in the new. Death rules in the old one; life in the new. The contrast couldn’t be more striking or absolute.

As we can see in these promises, too, God’s role as Creator didn’t end with the first Creation of the earth. It doesn’t end with the work that He does in us, to make us new creatures in Christ, either. No, it continues. The same Lord who, through the supernatural power of His Word created the world once, will create it again, and with His supernatural power too.

Indeed, without this last act of creation, all the previous ones would come to nothing. The new heavens and the new earth are the culmination of God’s promises to us.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 30.*

A New Beginning

One thing that science and the Bible do have in common is the belief that this earth, as we know it now, is not going to last forever. For science (at least some versions of it), the same cold and mindless forces of chance that brought the earth and life on it into existence are the same cold and mindless forces of chance that are going to, eventually, destroy it. The Bible, too, teaches that this earth isn't going to last forever but will, indeed, be destroyed. In the scenario that science offers, however, that destruction is the end of everything forever; in contrast, in the biblical scenario, it's the start of something brand new and wonderful and that lasts forever, as well.

Read Revelation 21:1–5. What picture of the future is presented here? What wonderful promises await us? Why is this something that only God can do for us?

No question, one of the best promises of our new existence is that death and suffering will be gone forever. It is clear that God does not regard these experiences as positive. They were not in the Creation that God pronounced “very good” (*Gen. 1:31*). They are alien intruders; they were never meant to be part of the original Creation, and they won't be part of the new one either. Jesus came to destroy these things, and we will never have to experience them again.

The new creation brings a new beginning. This wretched experiment with sin will be over. The results are in, and they are clear: sin brings death and suffering, and God's law is the law of life.

As God created the heavens and the earth in the beginning, He will create a new heaven and a new earth, and with them we are all offered a new beginning. Only God, only the Creator, could do this for us. And it all comes to us through the work of Jesus in our behalf. Without the plan of salvation, we'd have no hope for anything beyond that which this life now offers, a pretty dismal thought.

Why are these promises of a new existence so crucial to us? What would our faith be without them?

From Dust to Life

Read Genesis 2:7 and 3:19. From what was Adam made, and what was the result of his sin?

God created Adam from the dust, and he became a living being. As long as he maintained his relationship with God, his life would continue. When Adam sinned, he became separated from the Source of life. As a result, he died and returned to dust.

Read Isaiah 26:19 and Daniel 12:2. What will happen to those who sleep in the dust?

The promise of the resurrection provides hope for the Christian. Job expressed this hope, saying, “And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God” (*Job 19:26, NKJV*). For the faithful, death is only temporary. The God who formed Adam from the dust and breathed life into him has not forgotten how to create humans from dust. The resurrection will be an act of creation just as much as was the original creation of Adam.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:52–58. What is taught here that is so inextricably linked to the Genesis Creation account?

The resurrection of the righteous at the second coming of Jesus is going to happen instantaneously. As with the first creation of humankind, it will be a supernatural event in which God does everything. All this is in blatant contradiction to theistic evolution. After all, if God isn’t going to use millions of years of evolution to re-create us, but does so in an instant, then He certainly could have created us without evolution in the first round. Thus, as with everything else in the Bible, the hope of the resurrection is more biblical evidence that refutes theistic evolution.

What should it tell us about the limits of science that, regarding something as crucial and fundamental as the resurrection, science offers us little light?

Restoration of Human Dominion

Compare Genesis 1:28 with John 12:31. What was the status of Adam and Eve in the newly created world? Who seized power and became the ruler of this world?

Adam was given the responsibility to be ruler of the world. When he sinned, Adam's dominion was compromised. Satan now exercised his power in the creation, causing the corruption and violence that we see everywhere.

After the Cross, however, Jesus won back the earth from Satan's dominion (see *Matt. 28:18, Rev. 12:10, John 12:31*). And even though Satan is still allowed to operate on the earth and do damage, we can rejoice in the knowledge that Satan's days are numbered: Christ's victory on the cross guarantees that.

Read 2 Timothy 2:11, 12 and Revelation 5:10. What truths can we glean from these texts? See also 1 Cor. 6:2, 3.

Those who are saved will be given authority as kings and priests. The idea of kingship implies some kind of authority; the idea of priests carries with it the implication of acting in communication between God and other creatures, perhaps even with those from other created worlds, those who have never known the experience of sin and the woe that it brings.

“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—worlds that thrilled with sorrow at the spectacle of human woe and rang with songs of gladness at the tidings of a ransomed soul. With unutterable delight the children of earth enter into the joy and the wisdom of unfallen beings.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 677. What do you think it means to “enter into the joy and the wisdom of unfallen beings”? What could we learn from unfallen beings? And they from us?

More Restoration

In the world that we know, predation is a common way of life among the animals. The term “food chain” is a familiar reminder of the importance of predation in our ecology, and we have difficulty imagining a world without it. But in the beginning, all land creatures ate green plants (*Gen. 1:30*). No animals fed on other animals. Genesis 1:30 does not mention the food of the sea creatures, but the same principles would likely apply so that God could review the entire Creation and declare it “very good.”

Read Genesis 6:11–13, 9:2–4. **By the time of the Flood, what changes had occurred in nature? What further deterioration occurred in the relationship between humankind and beast after the Flood?**

What had started as a peaceful kingdom had become filled with corruption, violence, and evil. These are the results of sin. The world that once was “very good” had become so bad that it called for its own destruction.

After the Flood, the animals became afraid of humans. This included the creatures of land, air, and sea. This is obviously in contrast to the previous situation. It appears that the dominion of humans over the animals was reduced at this time.

Read Isaiah 65:25, 11:6–9. **How are the relationships among the creatures in our present world different from those promised by God in the future?**

Through the beauty of this poetic language, Isaiah shows us that there will be no violence in the new world. Corruption and violence, those characteristics of the pre-Flood world that called for their destruction, will both be absent from the new one. It will be a world of harmony and cooperation, a peaceable kingdom. We are so used to violence, predation, and death that it’s hard for us to imagine anything else.

As we can see, the gospel is so much about restoration. Though, of course, God alone can do the final restoration, what choices can we make that can help to bring about some needed restoration now?

The Restoration of Relationship With God

“Before the entrance of sin, Adam enjoyed open communion with his Maker.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 7. After the Fall, however, that close relationship was radically altered in many ways.

Read Genesis 3:24, Exodus 33:20, and Deuteronomy 5:24–26. What did sin do to the close relationship that existed between humanity and God?

Sin had broken the relationship between God and humanity. God sent the couple away from His presence for their own protection. Humans could no longer see God’s face and live.

The Lord, though, of His own initiative, brought in the plan of salvation, through which the broken relationship could be healed, even at a terrible cost to Himself.

Read John 14:1–3 and Revelation 22:3–5. What promise did Jesus extend to His disciples just before He went to the cross, and what will be the result?

God and humanity are to be reunited, at peace, and meeting face to face. The earth will be without any curse, and all that has been lost will be restored. The redeemed will be given a new environment, a new life, a new dominion, a new peace with the rest of the creation, and a new relationship with God. The original purpose behind the creation of humans will now be fulfilled. God, the human race, and the creation will be in harmony, and that harmony will last forever.

Even now, before the re-creation of heaven and earth, how can we learn to enjoy a close communion with God? What choices do we make that affect our relationship with God, either in positive or negative ways?

Further Study: “And the years of eternity, as they roll, will bring richer and still more glorious revelations of God and of Christ. As knowledge is progressive, so will love, reverence, and happiness increase. The more men learn of God, the greater will be their admiration of His character. As Jesus opens before them the riches of redemption and the amazing achievements in the great controversy with Satan, the hearts of the ransomed thrill with more fervent devotion, and with more rapturous joy they sweep the harps of gold; and ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of voices unite to swell the mighty chorus of praise. . . .

“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.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 678.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Gather as many texts as you can (especially from the book of Revelation) that talk about what the restored earth will be like. Discuss in class what these texts are saying. What aspects of the restored earth do you find the most appealing? What aspects are hardest to understand?
- 2 How is the doctrine of Creation as revealed in Genesis 1 and 2 related to the doctrine of the re-creation of the heavens and the earth? How are we supposed to understand this re-creation if theistic evolution were true?
- 3 Read Romans 8:18 and 2 Corinthians 4:16, 17. What is Paul saying here, and how can we draw comfort from these words for ourselves?
- 4 Dwell more on this whole concept of the gospel as “restoration.” What does the word imply? What is restored? How is it restored? And what role do we have, if any, in the whole process?
- 5 What does the promise of a new heaven and a new earth reveal to us about the character of God?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Revelation 20:1–5*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Discover why the new earth is important to biblical theology and his or her experience.

Feel: Appreciate the key role that Creation plays in closing the great controversy.

Do: Choose to trust God that the new heaven and new earth are desirable, even though he or she cannot really understand what they will be like.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Creation and the Great Controversy

A What role does Creation play in the closing of the great controversy?

B In light of the millennium, what is the theological and spiritual significance of a new creation?

II. Feel: Anticipating Paradise

A How can I foster desire for the new creation when I cannot understand what it really will be like?

B What joys do you especially look forward to experiencing in the new heaven and the new earth?

III. Do: Heaven on Earth

A What things will we be able to do in the earth made new that are impossible to do here now?

B It has been said that if we want to live in heaven, Heaven must first live in us. How can we let Heaven live in us now?

► **Summary:** For the redeemed, the new creation takes what they have had to accept by faith—that God indeed is best qualified to rule—and makes it sight. The best part of the new creation is not the reduction of our limitations but the unrestricted communion with God.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1**—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The new heaven and new earth are the culmination of a grand, redemptive process launched in Eden.

Just for Teachers: This week, try to push beyond run-of-the-mill imaginings of what heaven will be like and why we should desire to be there. Lead the class to deeper conceptions of heaven, such as the meaning of having unfettered, unbroken communion with God.

Many of us can still remember being in Kindergarten Sabbath School and dreaming of things to do in heaven, such as climbing a giraffe's neck, hugging a lion's mane, and so forth. As adults, our desires have matured and become more sophisticated. Perhaps we wanted to dive with whales, get the answer to quantum mechanics, and more. Certainly, there is much to look forward to about heaven; and, yet, it must be acknowledged that we cannot fully conceive why we should desire it. Heaven is well beyond our frame of reference. Thus, John was forced to tell us about the new heaven and new earth by telling us what it doesn't have. There is no death, no sorrow, no crying, no pain.

Aside from imagining vague visions of what heaven may be like, we can find meaning in the promise of a new heaven and new earth. John affirms that, in the new cosmos, we will have unbroken communion with God. No more barriers between us! In light of the great controversy, however, there is a grand spiritual purpose for God first to destroy, then re-create, this earth. The next step of the learning cycle will explore that very point.

Opening Activity for Discussion: What is it like to anticipate a surprise when you know that you do not fully understand what it is? What role does fear of not liking the unknown elements play in your anticipation? How confident are you that the ones giving the surprise will have done a good job preparing it? How does this analogy help you to anticipate and prepare for the surprise of a new heaven and a new earth?

► STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: The new heaven and new earth are more than a warm, pleasant promise. They will affirm that God deserves to be God, especially to the saved.

Bible Commentary

I. The End of All Evil (*Read Revelation 21:1–5 with the class.*)

In Revelation 21:1–5 John saw a new heaven and new earth. Why is this significant?

The new heaven and earth come in the context of finishing the 1,000 years of Revelation 20. John notes that during the 1,000 years, Satan, “the ancient serpent” (*NIV*), is cast into the bottomless pit (*vss. 1–3*). Two elements in the text connect back to Genesis 1 and 3. The ancient serpent is a clear reference to the snake in Genesis 3, while the bottomless pit ties us to Genesis 1. But how?

In Greek, the word for bottomless pit is *abusson*, from which we get our English word, *abyss*. When Jewish scholars translated the Hebrew text into Greek, what we now call the Septuagint (LXX), they used *abusson* to translate the “deep” of Genesis 1:2. With New Testament writers frequently quoting from the LXX, it is reasonably certain that *abusson* alludes to Genesis 1:2. In so doing, John is depicting the millennial earth as being in a state of formless void similar to the state of the earth in Genesis 1:2. This matches the depictions of the destruction of the cosmos in Revelation 6:14 at the Second Coming. Revelation 6 shows Genesis 1 in reverse!

The millennium serves, in part, as a time-out for Satan to ponder the fruit of his actions (see Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 630). The great controversy is a conflict over leadership. Satan has sought to sell the idea that he is more qualified to govern the universe than God. But there is a problem. God’s right to rule is grounded in His creation of the cosmos (*Rev. 4:11*). Satan, however, is a created being, and by virtue of being created, God has a right to rule over him. However, Satan is confronted with his creaturely limits but refuses to surrender and acknowledge them.

For those ransomed from the earth, the new heaven and new earth will be God’s visual verification of His qualification and right to rule the universe. In service to this divine claim, many of these believers had to trust by faith that God was worthy of sole allegiance, even to the point of martyrdom. What they had taken as a matter of faith will now be made visual.

God deserves to be God, and with the presence of sin eliminated, unbroken communion can resume between this deserving God and the humanity He created.

Consider This: What is the significance of John’s vision of a new heaven and a new earth? What eternal realities do they direct the mind to consider?

■ *How does Revelation 6 show Genesis 1 in reverse?*

■ *What will Satan be confronted with during the millennium, and why is this limitation significant in the context of the great-controversy theme?*

■ *Unbroken communion with God—it is hard for our finite, sin-damaged minds to imagine such a concept. But as much as we are able to grasp it, what will such communion entail?*

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: The new heaven and new earth direct us to the realities of eternal destiny. These realities should impact our priorities and decisions.

Thought Questions:

1 How does the promise of a real new earth impact your current priorities and choices?

2 How should this promise affect your priorities and decisions?

► **STEP 4—Create**

Just for Teachers: Read or tell the following parable in your own words, reinforcing the idea that we are called to desire something that we cannot fully understand.

A Parable: Akiak of the Inupiat people had lived his whole life well above the Arctic Circle. All he knew was tundra, ice, and snow. Akiak had no electricity, no phones, no Internet, and no contact with the outside world. One day, Mike from Jamaica visited Akiak in his village. “Akiak,” Mike said, “I have good news for you! I can take you to Jamaica where life is so much better!”

“Tell me about Jamaica,” Akiak said. “Why is life so much better there?”

“Well,” Mike said, “we have palm trees, and it is always warm so you can enjoy our beaches.”

Akiak pondered Mike’s statement for a moment then asked, “What are palm trees? And what is a beach?”

Mike replied, “Palms are a special type of tree with big leaves that shade you from the hot sun.”

Akiak interrupted, “Why would I want shade from the sun?” Mike was stumped. How could he get his friend to understand the delights of Jamaica?

Upon some reflection, Mike said, “Jamaica is not like the Arctic. Jamaica is so warm that there is no snow, no blizzards, and no ice. You do not need to wear heavy clothing. There are no polar bears to attack you, and there are no killer whales or seals in the ocean.” In short, Mike started to explain what Jamaica was like by describing how it was not like the Arctic.

“If you have no seals and whales, what do you eat?” Akiak asked.

“We eat coconuts and tropical fruits,” Mike replied.

“What are coconuts and fruits?” Akiak asked. Mike was desperate. How could he convince Akiak of Jamaica’s allure when he had no frame of reference for making a comparison to it?

Mike thought about heaven. It is said to have no sorrow, no pain, no death, no crying. We are told how it is not like life on our earth. But what is it really like? Imagine God’s challenge of trying to convince us to desire something that we cannot understand. How does this parable help us to understand our own limitations in imagining all that God has in store for us?