

# Creation: Genesis *as* Foundation—Part 2



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Job 26:7–10; Genesis 1; Genesis 2; Genesis 5; Genesis 11; 1 Chron. 1:18–27; Matt. 19:4, 5; John 1:1–3.*

**Memory Text:** “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork” (*Psalms 19:1, NKJV*).

Many great thinkers were inspired by Scripture to explore God's created world; as a result, modern science was born. Johannes Kepler, Isaac Newton, John Ray, Robert Boyle, and other early great scientists believed that their work revealed even more about the handiwork of God's creation.

After the French Revolution, however, nineteenth-century science began to move from a theistic worldview to one based on naturalism and materialism, often with no place at all for the supernatural. These philosophical ideas were popularized by Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Since that time, science has increasingly distanced itself from its biblical foundation, resulting in a radical reinterpretation of the Genesis story.

Does the Bible teach an antiquated, unscientific view of cosmology? Was the biblical account simply borrowed from the surrounding pagan nations? Was the Bible culturally conditioned by its place and time, or does its inspired nature elevate us to a view of origins that is complete in its divine framework?

These are some of the issues we will touch on in this week's lesson.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 30.

## A Flat Earth?

It is commonly believed that many in the ancient world thought the earth was flat. Most people, however, for a variety of good reasons, understood that the earth was round. Even to this day, though, some claim that the Bible itself taught that the earth was flat.

**Read Revelation 7:1 and Revelation 20:7, 8. What is the context of these verses? More important, do they teach a flat earth?**

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John, the author of these texts, is writing end-time prophecy describing the four angels of heaven “standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds” (*Rev. 7:1, NASB*). He repeated the word “four” three times to tie the angels to the four compass points.

In short, he’s just using figurative language, as we do today when we say, for example, that “the sun is setting” or that the wind “rose from the east.” To insist on a literal interpretation of these prophetic texts when the context indicates a figurative idea of north, south, east, and west is to take these passages out of context and make them teach something that they are not teaching. After all, when Jesus said, “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (*Matt. 15:19, NKJV; emphasis supplied*), He was not talking about human physiology, or the literal human heart. He was using a figure of speech to make a moral point.

**Read Job 26:7–10 and Isaiah 40:21, 22. What do they teach us about the nature of the earth?**

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In Job 26:7 the earth is depicted as being suspended in space: “He stretches out the north over empty space and hangs the earth on nothing” (*NASB*). The earth is a “‘circle,’” or sphere (*Job 26:10*). Isaiah 40:22 states, “It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain” (*NKJV*).

**Put yourself in the position of someone who lived thousands of years ago. What evidence would you have that the earth moved? Or would you find the evidence that it stood still more convincing? Or what evidence would you find that it is flat, or round?**

## Creation in Ancient Literature

Archaeologists have discovered texts from ancient Egypt and the Near East that contain primeval histories of the Creation and the Flood. This has caused some to wonder whether the Genesis account was borrowed from these cultures or was dependent in some way on them. But is such a thing really the case?

**Read** Genesis 1:1–2:4, and then read these excerpts from the *Atra-Ḫasis* Epic: “When the gods instead of man / Did the work, bore the loads, / The gods’ load was too great, / The work too hard, the trouble too much / . . . ‘Let the womb–goddess create offspring, / And let man bear the load of the gods!’ . . . Geshtu-e, a god who had intelligence, / They slaughtered in their assembly. / Nintu mixed clay / With his flesh and blood. . . .”—Stephanie Dalley, *Myths From Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 9, 14, 15. What differences can you see?

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Although there are similarities between the stories (e.g., the first humans are made of clay), the differences are much more definite.

1. In *Atra-Ḫasis* man works for the gods so that the gods can rest. In Genesis, God creates the earth and everything in it *for* humans as the apex of Creation, and then He rests with them. In Genesis, humans also are placed in a garden and invited to commune with God and care for His creation—a concept not found in *Atra-Ḫasis*.

2. In *Atra-Ḫasis*, a minor god is killed and his blood is mixed with clay to form seven males and females. In Genesis, first Adam is “formed” intimately by God, who breathes life into him, and woman is “made” later to be his “‘helper’ ” (*NKJV*). God didn’t create Adam and Eve from the blood of a slain god.

3. There is no sign of conflict or violence in the Genesis account, as found in the *Atra-Ḫasis* story.

The biblical account is sublime in depicting an omnipotent God who provides humanity with dignified purpose in a perfect world. This radical difference has caused scholars to conclude that, in the end, these are very different creation accounts.

**Some have argued that, through the ages, creation and flood stories were handed down, loosely based on what really had happened (hence some of the similarities), but distorted over time. In contrast, Moses, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, revealed what had really taken place. Why does this explanation work better in accounting for the few similarities than does the idea that Moses borrowed from these pagan stories?**

## Genesis Versus Paganism

Far from being dependent upon ancient pagan creation myths, Genesis seems to have been written in a way that refutes those myths and distances God as Creator from them.

**Read** Genesis 1:14–19. How are the entities that appear on the fourth day described, and what are their functions?

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The terms “sun” and “moon” were surely avoided because their names in Hebrew were the names (or closely related to the names) of the sun and moon gods of the ancient Near East and Egypt. The use of the terms “greater light” and “lesser light” showed that they were created for specific functions, “for signs and seasons, and for days and years” and to “give light on the earth” (*Gen. 1:14, 15, NKJV*). That is, the text shows very clearly that the sun and moon were not gods but created objects with specific natural functions, much as we understand them today.

**Read** Genesis 2:7, 18–24. How is God intimately involved in the creation of Adam and Eve?

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The ancient Near Eastern myths unanimously depict man’s creation as an afterthought, resulting from an attempt to relieve the gods of hard labor. This mythical notion is contradicted by the biblical idea that man is to rule the world as God’s vice-regent. Nothing in the creation of humans was an afterthought. If anything, the text points to them as the climax of the Creation account, showing even more starkly how different the pagan and biblical accounts really are.

Genesis, thus, presents a corrective against the myths of the ancient world. Moses used certain terms and ideas incompatible with pagan concepts. And he did this by simply expressing the biblical understanding of reality, and of God’s role and purpose in Creation.

**Thousands of years ago, the biblical Creation story was at odds with the prevailing culture. Today, the biblical Creation story is at odds with the prevailing culture. Why shouldn’t we be surprised?**

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## Creation and Time

**Read** Genesis 5 and Genesis 11. How does the Bible trace the history of humanity from Adam to Noah—and from Noah to Abraham?

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There is one element that makes these genealogies unique in the Bible: they contain the element of time, causing some scholars to correctly call them “chronogenealogies.” They contain an interlocking mechanism of descent information coupled with spans of time, so that “when *Person 1* had lived  $x$  years, he fathered *Person 2*. And *Person 1*, after he fathered *Person 2*, lived  $y$  years, and he fathered other sons and daughters.” Genesis 5 adds the formula phrase, “And all the days of *Person 1* were  $z$  years.” This interlocking system would have precluded deleting certain generations or adding them. Genesis 5 and Genesis 11 contain a continuous line of descent, as corroborated by 1 Chronicles 1:18–27, in which there are no added or missing generations. In this way the Bible interprets itself.

For nearly 2,000 years, Jewish and Christian expositors have interpreted these texts to represent history and an accurate way to determine the date of the Flood and the age of the earth, at least from the seven days of Creation as depicted in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2.

In recent decades, there have been attempts to reinterpret Genesis 5 and Genesis 11 to accommodate longer ages, as some archaeological and historical data are interpreted (by fallible human beings) to suggest. This raises serious questions about the reliability of the Bible record.

But if we are to understand God’s concept of time and its progression through history, we must recognize that these two chapters are “both historical and theological, linking Adam with the rest of humankind and God with man in the realm of the reaches of space and time. Genesis 5 and 11:10–26 provide the time framework and human chain that link God’s people with the man whom God created as the climax of the six-day creation event of this planet.”—Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Meaning of the Chronogenealogies of Genesis 5 and 11,” *Origins* 7/2 (1980), p. 69.

**Though these texts in the Old Testament are there for good and important reasons, what does Paul say in 1 Timothy 1:4 and Titus 3:9 that we need to heed when talking about such texts?**

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## Creation in Scripture

**Read** the following texts and write down how each writer referenced Genesis 1–11:

*Matt. 19:4, 5* \_\_\_\_\_

*Mark 10:6–9* \_\_\_\_\_

*Luke 11:50, 51* \_\_\_\_\_

*John 1:1–3* \_\_\_\_\_

*Acts 14:15* \_\_\_\_\_

*Rom. 1:20* \_\_\_\_\_

*2 Cor. 4:6* \_\_\_\_\_

*Eph. 3:9* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 Tim. 2:12–15* \_\_\_\_\_

*James 3:9* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 Pet. 3:20* \_\_\_\_\_

*Jude 11, 14* \_\_\_\_\_

*Rev. 2:7; Rev. 3:14; Rev. 22:2, 3* \_\_\_\_\_

Jesus and *all* of the New Testament writers refer to Genesis 1–11 as reliable history. Jesus refers to Moses’ writings and the creation of male and female (*Matt. 19:4*). Paul often uses the Creation account to substantiate the theological points he makes in his epistles. He declared to the learned men of Athens, “The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands” (*Acts 17:24, NASB*). In these ways, the New Testament writers built on the foundational nature of Genesis to show the modern reader the significance of this literal event.

Read Romans 5. More than half a dozen times, Paul makes a link from Adam to Jesus (*see Rom. 5:12, 14–19*). That is, he assumes the literal existence of a historical Adam, a position that becomes fatally compromised when an evolutionary model of origins replaces a literal reading of the texts.

**If the New Testament writers, inspired by the Holy Spirit and Jesus Himself, viewed the Creation account as reliable history, why would it be foolish for us—based on the claims of fallen, fallible human beings—not to do the same?**

**Further Thought:** Read Gerald A. Klingbeil, ed., *The Genesis Creation Account and Its Reverberations in the Old Testament* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2015).

“The Bible is the most comprehensive and the most instructive history which men possess. It came fresh from the fountain of eternal truth, and a divine hand has preserved its purity through all the ages. . . . Here only can we find a history of our race, unsullied by human prejudice or human pride.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 25.

“I have been shown that without Bible history, geology can prove nothing. Relics found in the earth do give evidence of a state of things differing in many respects from the present. But 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. It may be innocent to conjecture beyond Bible history, if our suppositions do not contradict the facts found in the sacred Scriptures. But when men leave the word of God in regard to the history of creation, and seek to account for God’s creative works upon natural principles, they are upon a boundless ocean of uncertainty. Just how God accomplished the work of creation in six literal days he has never revealed to mortals. His creative works are just as incomprehensible as his existence.”—Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, book 3, p. 93.

### Discussion Questions:

- ① When scientific explanations about present reality—what can be handled, heard, seen, tested and retested—are filled with debate and controversy, why do so many people unquestionably accept every scientific proclamation about events that supposedly occurred millions or even billions of years ago?
- ② Modern science works on the assumption (a reasonable one on the face of it) that you cannot use supernatural means to explain natural events. That is, you can’t try to explain, for instance, a famine by claiming that a witch put a curse on the land. However, what are the limitations of this approach when it comes to the Creation account as depicted in Genesis? In other words, the Genesis account was a purely supernatural event. If, however, you automatically rule out the supernatural as the means of creation, then why will any other model you come up with, of necessity, be wrong?

## Missionary Asks, “Why?”

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Leif Hongisto couldn't understand why he was heading home to Finland after serving for nine years as president of Middle East University in Beirut, Lebanon. He loved the Seventh-day Adventist university, the Mediterranean climate, and freshly made hummus. Most important, he felt that he hadn't realized his full vision for the university, and the decision to go home caught him by surprise. “I was rather confused about why God was leading my life away from something that had become my whole life and was very close to my heart,” he said.

With many prayers and heavy hearts, he and his wife packed their suitcases, filled up boxes, and flew to Finland. As part of the process for missionaries returning home, Hongisto had to undergo a medical examination at the hospital. During the routine procedure, the doctor detected slightly raised PSA levels in Hongisto's blood, a possible sign of prostate cancer.

“Have you had any health complications?” the doctor asked.

Hongisto shook his head. “I feel great,” he said.

However, the doctor ordered a follow-up test. A couple months later, the PSA levels had risen even more, and the now-worried doctor called for additional tests and a biopsy. Soon, Hongisto was whisked away for a five-hour surgery, and the doctor removed a 3.5-ounce (100-gram) tumor. “It turned out that a routine medical checkup detected an aggressive cancer growth,” Hongisto said. “I began to understand why God led me back to Finland, where I would get very professional, up-to-date technology for treatment.”

Hongisto, 62, remains a missionary. He is in good health and serving as rector of Finland Junior College, a boarding academy and day school with about 185 students ages 6 to 18 in Piikkiö, a town in southwestern Finland. Many students at the school, founded in 1918, come from non-Adventist families. Finland itself is a highly secular country and has only 4,800 Adventists in a population of 5.5 million.

Reflecting on his 2018 move back to Finland, Hongisto has taken to heart the words of a speech that he gave at his first graduation ceremony at Finland Junior College in May 2018. He told the graduates, “You think life is in front of you and you have a vision of what it will look like. None of that will come true. Life will turn out very differently. But when you give it to God, a life lived in faith will always be more exciting, significant, and substantial than what you ever could have imagined.”



*“That is true in my life,” said HONGISTO, pictured. “Life definitely surprises me positively each new day and is definitely better than what I could have imagined.” Finland is part of the Trans-European Division, which will receive the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter.*