

THE CREATION

The Story

The Lord in his teaching often pointed his hearers to the world about them, to the light and darkness, to the sea and its fishes, to the birds and flowers, to the sheep and lambs, to learn lessons of his love and care for his children and of their duty to him. In the ancient days people were wiser in parables, and understood better the spiritual things that things of the earth represent. The story of creation is one of the divine stories they enjoyed. Remember that these first chapters are from the Ancient Word. We can learn something of the wisdom that they learned from the story. At least we all can learn that God made us and the world in which we live; he makes the world beautiful, and wishes to make us beautiful, too.

Primary

In the summer we are out in the air and sunshine and see a great deal of the beautiful world. Have any of you been into the woods or the fields this summer? Then you have seen the trees, and the little vines and berries and ferns and mosses that grow on the ground; and you have seen and listened to the birds. Have you worked in the garden? What have you seen there that was beautiful? Has anyone been to the mountains? You have seen grand cliffs and old forests, and wide views over the country. If you have been to the sea, you have seen the waves and the surf, and the strange plants and creatures in the pools when the tide is low. Have you seen them? What have you seen in the sky, in the evening, and at night? All these help to make up the beautiful world.

The Lord made us, and the world for us to live in. It is the very first thing that the Bible tells us. The thought comes nearer home to us when we know that creation was not finished long ago, but that it is still going on. The Lord who made the first light makes the sun rise and shine for us. The Lord who made the first flowers and birds and animals is making now all the things that make the world beautiful and comfortable for us. How great, how wonderful the creating power seems in the spring when it bursts out in buds and flowers on every bush and tree and spot of ground! And all seem to say, "If God so clothe the grass of the field, . . . shall he not much more clothe you?" (Matthew 6:30).

Let us see how many of the things we know that the chapter speaks of the Lord as making. The light, making day and night. The "firmament" means the clear air between the waters below and the clouds above. The seas and the dry land. The little plants and the fruit trees. The sun and moon and stars. Fishes small and great in the waters, and birds of the air. Animals small and large. And people, to use and enjoy the other things made for them and put in their care.

What a beautiful, happy world this will be if we do our part with the Lord to make it so!

And what is this beautiful world for? To be the home of people while they are learning to live in heaven. Everything in the world in one way or another is for people, to make them happy now, and to help them to prepare for heaven.

Did the Lord make the world all at once, in a moment? He has been making it gradually through long ages. The substances of which the world is made came out from the sun, very thin and vapory, and they gradually grew more solid. Then there was a time when a great sea covered the whole earth, and clouds were wrapped around it, so thick that no light could get through. But already the Lord was working to make the world ready to be a home for people. Then the clouds grew thin, and some light came through. The clouds then lifted from the water, and there was clear air between. The earth grew uneven; high parts rose above the ocean, and the water lay in the lower places. Plants began to grow on the land; first lichens and mosses and little plants, and afterward larger plants, and trees that bore fruit. At last the clouds broke away and the glorious sun shone out in a clear sky, and the beautiful moon at night. Then the Lord made living creatures: fishes in the sea, birds, and animals.

The world at last was ready to be the home of people. The Lord made them in his own image, and gave them the earth and the plants and animals to love and use and take care of. The world seems more beautiful when we remember that the Lord made, it and still keeps it, to be our home. The beautiful things that we saw in the summer, the Lord made for us. How great his power must be, and how near he is to us! Now listen to the story of how the Lord created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1).

Junior

“In the beginning God created.” These are words to keep in mind as we look out into the sunshine or into the skies at night. And they are words to keep in mind in all our study of science—of geology and botany and astronomy. In all the sciences we are studying the Lord’s creation, and the ways in which the Lord works. There is a danger that we may become so much interested in the ways of working that we forget the Lord who is doing it. You learn in school of “evolution.” The word is used in many meanings. It is all right if it means the gradual and wonderful ways in which the Lord works in developing the plants and animals. But remember always that this development is not by chance; the chief factor in the case is always the force of life from within, from the Lord, pressing to express itself more fully and perfectly in the world of nature.

It is no doubt right to see in the story of creation a general picture of the steps by which the world was brought by the Lord from a mass of fluid and vapors into a habitable world. First a condensing of the vapors till some light could penetrate. Then the coming of clear air between the waters below and the clouds above. The wrinkling of the earth’s surface as it cooled, raising land above the waters, and gathering the waters into seas. The development of vegetable life from simple to highly organized forms. The breaking of the clouds so that sun and moon and stars shone in upon the earth. The development of animal life: fishes, birds, and higher animals. The creation of man in the image and likeness of God.

But the ancient people to whom this story was given were not interested in science. To them it was a beautiful parable telling—like the Lord’s parables of seeds and birds—of the steps by which a heavenly spirit is developed in a man, till he comes to the measure of a true man and angel, into the image of God. This process of becoming heavenly is called a man’s rebirth or regeneration. It is pictured by natural birth in the Lord’s words to Nicodemus. It is pictured by the birth of a seed in some of the Lord’s parables; and here, in this magnificent parable, by the birth of the world. The six days of creation picture the stages

of effort in becoming heavenly. It is not accomplished in a moment, but gradually by the Lord, as we do our part with him. The plants, the beasts and birds, are the faculties of our own minds that the Lord develops. And he gives us dominion over them, to rule them and to use them well.

1. What new thing have you seen in the beautiful world this summer?
2. Who made the world? What is the world made for?
3. Was the world made in a moment, or gradually step by step, through long ages? How do you know?
4. Does the Lord give dominion to each of us? Over what?

Spiritual Study: *Intermediate*

The spiritual study of this chapter will be a development of the thought last suggested to the junior scholars. Spiritually, this divine story of creation tells of regeneration—of the development of a heavenly nature. Specifically, it tells of the process by which the Lord brought the most ancient people into a beautiful celestial state (pictured in the garden of Eden). And in general, it tells of the development of a heavenly nature in every man. I assume that you will have Swedenborg's *Arcana Coelestia* open before you as you study details of the story.

The days of creation represent successive steps of the process, which should at least be begun in this world, and then it can continue in the other world. Each day has its evening, its feebler beginning; and its morning, its full development. Before studying the separate days, notice that they divide into two groups: the first three days, and the next three days. In the first three days we read of light, of waters, and of the vegetable kingdom. You recognize these as symbols of truth and of intellectual powers. In the next three days we read of the sun and of the animal kingdom. These are symbols of love and of the affections in human hearts. Evidently, the first three days describe the formation of a heavenly understanding, as we learn the Lord's truth and do it; and the next three days describe the formation of a heavenly will, as we come to love the good ways. Each of these has steps from lesser to fuller developments. The formation of these two faculties in a heavenly way is the Lord's work in us, and makes us in a little way like him who is divinely loving and divinely wise.

Dwell a little on the picture of mastery over all our powers given in verse 28. Compare the pictures of dominion in Genesis 9:2, and in Psalm 8:6–8. (Can you account for the differences?) It is an ideal for a young man or a young woman to admire, and one worth working for.

Every part of the Bible teaches about heavenly things: about heavenly life and character, and how they can be formed in us. But these lessons are often given in parables. The story of creation is a parable. It tells how the Lord creates a heavenly nature in us, and makes it grow and become more beautiful and perfect step by step. We cannot become heavenly in a moment, but gradually, patiently, little by little, and only by the Lord's power. The "evening" and "morning" of each day suggest that each stage begins obscure, and advances to greater brightness. The later stages of development also are the best. Notice that the creation of each earlier day is pronounced "good," but the creation of the sixth day "very good" (*Arcana Coelestia* #6–13, 22).

“Without form and void” describes the mind before it awakens to care for heavenly things; yet the Lord is tenderly moving or brooding over every one. It is beautiful to think of this care of the Lord over a little child whose life is unformed, and over those who are as yet careless of heavenly things, and over every unformed possibility of heavenly life in ourselves (*Arcana Coelestia* #19).

Light is given on the first day, and later the sun and moon. When is there light in the mind on any subject? There is a little heavenly light when we begin to see that there are such things as heaven and heavenly life; something higher to live for than the body and this world. It is at first like dim light through the clouds. But when from experience we come to a real living consciousness of the Lord and his love, the sun shines clearly out. This consciousness will not be always felt; there will be darker times when we must hold to what we know of the Lord. This faith will keep us safe; it is the moon that the Lord gives to rule the night (*Arcana Coelestia* #37, 4797; *Apocalypse Explained* #275, 401, 527).

The plants and animals represent two great classes of faculties and activities in our minds. The warm, sensitive animals represent the affections, and plants the living, growing, but less sensitive intellectual powers. The creation of the herbs and trees describes a stage of heavenly development when we learn what is right, and faithfully bring forth the fruits of good deeds. The creation of the animals describes the more full and perfect stage of development when good deeds are done joyfully from affection. Which were created first, plants or animals? (*Arcana Coelestia* #9, 12, 3218, 3220; *Heaven and Hell* #110, 111).

What words in our lesson teach us that the human form is the divine form, and that we ought to think of God as a divine man?

The Lord gave man dominion over fish and fowl and every living thing that he had made. It suggests our responsibility to make good use of this beautiful world and all things in it. What does it mean in the deeper sense, when all the created things represent faculties and developments in a man’s own life? That the Lord gives to us, as our supreme human gift, the faculty of looking down upon our own feelings and thoughts and actions, controlling them and choosing among them, and making them useful servants. This is a wonderful trust from the Lord. Each one may be master of himself, even of his thoughts and feelings, in the Lord’s strength. Compare Psalm 8:6–8 (*Arcana Coelestia* #52, 10609; *Apocalypse Explained* #650).

What followed the six days of creation? What will follow if we are faithful through all the stages of effort and trial by which a heavenly character is formed in us by the Lord? The Sabbath of heavenly peace and rest when it is easy and delightful to do right. The mention of the six days of labor in the commandments is a reminder of the states of effort in which we must be faithful and patient, for the sake of the heavenly Sabbath (*Arcana Coelestia* #85, 87).