

Restoring Dominion



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Gen. 1:26–28, Ps. 8:3–8, Gen. 2:15, Rom. 8:20–22, Exod. 20:1–17, Rom. 1:25, 2 Thess. 3:10.*

Memory Text: “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth’ ” (*Genesis 1:26, NKJV*).

At the Fall, our first parents lost more than just their original image of God.

“Not only man but the earth also had by sin come under the control of the wicked one, and was to be restored by the plan of Redemption. At his creation, Adam was placed in dominion over the earth. But by yielding to temptation, he was brought under the power of Satan, and the dominion which he held passed to his conqueror. Thus Satan became ‘the god of this world.’ He had usurped that dominion over the earth which had been originally given to Adam. But Christ, by His sacrifice paying the penalty of sin, would not only redeem man, but recover the dominion which he had forfeited. All that was lost by the first Adam will be restored by the second.”—Ellen G. White, in *Signs of the Times*, November 4, 1908.

No question, after the Fall, human beings lost very much, including the “dominion” that we originally had been given.

What was this lost dominion? Though the idea of “dominion” often has negative connotations today, it certainly didn’t back in Eden. What did it mean when humans were first given dominion over the earth? And what can the church do to help people regain some of what was lost after the tragic fall of our first parents in Eden?

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 9.

Created for Dominion

Someone recently wrote the following about a friend, an avowed atheist who said that she sometimes “wakes in the middle of the night, stressing over a bunch of deep questions: ‘Is this world truly the result of an accidental cosmic big bang? How could there be no design, no grand purpose to our existence and to the universe as a whole? Can it be that every life—including my own, my husband’s, my two children’s—is totally irrelevant and meaningless? Does my life have no meaning and purpose?’”

After the Fall, humanity lost very much. As the story of the Fall showed, we became alienated not only from God but from each other. Even our relationship toward the earth itself changed. And as the questions asked by the woman above show, we also struggle with knowing who we are and what the purpose of our life is, problems that for many are made much worse by the prevailing idea that our existence resulted only from chance, with no foresight or purpose built in by a Creator God.

What do the following texts teach about the purposes for humanity’s creation? *Gen. 1:26–28; Ps. 8:3–8; Isa. 43:6, 7. What does “created for My glory” (Isa. 43:7, NKJV) mean? How does “My [God’s] glory” relate to dominion?*

As we can see in the verses in Genesis, whatever other reasons God had for creating Adam and Eve, they were also created in order to have dominion over the earth (*Gen. 1:26–28*). Together, reflecting God’s glory and character, the first couple were to be channels through whom He, the One with ultimate glory and dominion (*Rev. 1:5, 6*), would nurture, care for, and administer the rest of His earthly creation. Who knows how God’s glory would have been revealed through them and their dominion over the world were it not for the rise of sin?

Now, though, through faith in Jesus, through surrendering our lives to Him in faith and obedience and cooperation, we can say with David: “The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me” (*Ps. 138:8, ESV*). Knowing that God has a purpose for each of us is a cause for confidence and rejoicing, especially when we are surrendered to Him so that His will can be fulfilled in us.

If someone were to ask you, “OK, as a Christian, what do you say that the purpose of your life is?” how would you respond, and why?

The Privilege of Dominion

What is the “dominion” that humans were to have over the earth, as expressed in Genesis 1:26–28?

The biblical word *dominion* comes from the Hebrew verb *radah*. This word indicates a right and responsibility to rule. It implies, in this context, a hierarchy of power and authority in which the human race is positioned above the rest of the natural world. While the verb *radah*, as used in the rest of the Old Testament, does not itself define how this dominion is to be exercised, whether benevolently or malevolently, the context of a sinless and unfallen creation shows that the intent must have been benevolent in nature.

Similar conclusions may be drawn about subduing the earth in Genesis 1:28. The verb *subdue*, from the Hebrew *kavash*, also depicts a hierarchical relationship in which humans are positioned above the earth and are granted power and control over it. Elsewhere in the Old Testament the verb *kavash* is even more forceful than *radah*, describing the actual act of subjugation, of forcing another into a subordinate position (*Num. 32:22, 29; Jer. 34:11, 16; Esther 7:8; Neh. 5:5*). In many of these cases, the abuse of power is obvious and God’s displeasure expressed. But again, taking into consideration the context within the Creation story of a sinless couple created in the image of God to administer the earth, this subduing of the earth can be characterized only as benevolent *service* to creation on behalf of the Creator. It certainly was not exploitation.

We find an additional dimension to this concept of dominion in Genesis 2:15, where God places Adam in the garden to dress (*abad*—to work, to serve, to till) and to keep (*shamar*—to hedge about, guard, protect, attend to, look narrowly, observe, preserve, regard, reserve).

Keeping this in mind, we discover that dominion is caring and loving stewardship or management. Within their relationship with God, our first parents were to have all the resources and authority that they needed to execute their dominion, which would have reflected God’s divine love of His creation.

Though the word *dominion* today can, and often does, have negative connotations, it certainly didn’t when first expressed in the Bible. What are some principles that we can take from this pre-Fall use of the term and apply to how we relate to whatever or whomever we have “dominion” over?

Boundaries

Does humanity’s dominion over “all the earth” (*Gen. 1:26*) indicate that there are no boundaries to our dominion? Biblical history indicates that dominion (which can also be understood as “stewardship”) must have boundaries.

For example, God told Adam that the tree of knowledge of good and evil was off-limits (*see Gen. 2:15–17*). The first sin was, then, in the context of stewardship. Adam and Eve overstepped the boundaries that God had set on their dominion. Creation is still suffering from that overstepping of boundaries (*see Rom. 8:20–22*).

Read Exodus 20:1–17. What kinds of “boundaries” are set there for us in God’s law? What does the law tell us about the limits of human dominion?

Throughout human history (for example, Pharaoh in Exodus 1–14; Herod in Matthew 2) to the end of time (*see Revelation 13*), domineering people controlled by Satan are notorious for attempting to dominate that over which they have no rightful control. They imitate Satan, who seized power and made himself “the prince of this world” (*John 12:31*). Dominion gone awry becomes domination.

On the other hand, there are those who refuse to accept control of that over which they need to have dominion (*see Matt. 25:14–30, Luke 19:12–27*).

Even though sin caused humanity to lose the level of dominion given at Creation, our original dominion was not entirely lost because of sin. There is plenty that is within our current boundaries of responsibility: for example, Christ-enabled self-mastery in our personal lives (*see 1 Cor. 9:25–27; Gal. 5:22, 23*), and the care of the earth and its creatures and of all that has been given to us by God (*see James 1:17, Matt. 25:14–30*). We need, as Christians, to understand what our boundaries are and then work to be faithful stewards within those boundaries.

What are some specific boundaries that you need to respect in regard to others, such as family, friends, coworkers? What principles can we use to help us know what those boundaries are (*see, for instance, Matt. 7:1, 12*)?

Care of the Earth

“Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it” (*Gen. 2:15, NKJV*).

What principles, if any, can we take from this text that should influence how we relate to our planet in terms of taking care of it?

Before sin, Adam and Eve had been delegated stewardship over all that God had entrusted to them. They had mastery over plant and animal life. Yet, after sin, all of nature seemed to rebel against them to the same extent that they had rebelled against God. Human beings began to see themselves as powerless in the face of the elements (weather, agriculture, the animal kingdom).

“Among the lower creatures Adam had stood as king, and so long as he remained loyal to God, all nature acknowledged his rule; but when he transgressed, this dominion was forfeited. The spirit of rebellion, to which he himself had given entrance, extended throughout the animal creation. Thus not only the life of man, but the nature of the beasts, the trees of the forest, the grass of the field, the very air he breathed, all told the sad lesson of the knowledge of evil.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, pp. 26, 27.

Today we are still ravaged by natural disasters and our deteriorating ecosystem, at least in some places. Thus, we make great efforts to use technology and industry to protect ourselves. However, though technology and industry may help us protect ourselves, sometimes the same technology can damage our planet. Ecology is a moral, ethical, and theological issue, especially when exploitation of the earth can lead to great hardship for others.

“Seventh-day Adventists advocate a simple, wholesome lifestyle, where people do not step on the treadmill of unbridled consumerism, goods-getting, and production of waste. We call for respect of creation, restraint in the use of the world’s resources, reevaluation of one’s needs, and reaffirmation of the dignity of created life.”—In “Official Statement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on Environment,” 1995.

How do we strike the right balance in our attitude toward the earth: being good stewards of the home we have been given while at the same time avoiding the danger of making the earth and the environment gods whom we all but worship? What warning might Romans 1:25 have for us here?

Restoring “Dominion”

Through the Fall we as humans have lost very much, including the kind of dominion that our first parents were privileged to have in Eden. Christ came in order to restore to us what we lost.

And because of what Christ has done for us, we, too, have been called by God to reach out to others, helping them regain in Christ the salvation and dominion lost at the Fall that He has given back to us. Though this process will not be complete until the second coming of Jesus and beyond, there’s much that we can do now in reaching out to those who are needy, lost, and overwhelmed by the world. We can be used by God to help start that restoration even now, as we reach out and help those in need.

What do the following texts each say that can be applied to helping others regain some of the “dominion” lost through sin?

Deut. 15:7–12 _____

Luke 14:12–14 _____

1 Pet. 3:15 _____

James 1:27 _____

Isa. 58:7 _____

2 Thess. 3:10 _____

As a church body there’s much that we can do, that we must do, that we have been called to do, to reach out to those in need. Sometimes it’s as basic as providing food, clothes, or shelter to someone in *urgent* need. Even though giving relief is necessary, something beyond giving relief is needed to help people restore dominion in their lives.

Though we must always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in us, we must, when and where we can, meet their physical needs and point them to a better way of life.

Though each situation is different and the needs are different, we have been called by God to be a light and a source of healing and hope in our communities. This is an essential part of what it means to be a witness to the world of the loving and saving God whom we serve. We must do all that we can, in the Lord’s strength, to be a beacon of light and hope to those in need. As Christians, we can’t do less. As we fulfill this role of service, we are helping them learn what God is like. And, too, by ministering to their physical needs, we are paving the way for their hearts to be reached by the Holy Spirit. This is what Jesus did, and this is what we are called to do as well.

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Temperance and Dietetics,” pp. 202–206; “Discipline,” pp. 287–290, in *Education*; “Need for Self-Mastery,” pp. 73, 74, in *Counsels on Diet and Foods*; “The Principles of Stewardship,” pp. 111–113; “Sharing in the Joys of the Redeemed,” pp. 348–350, in *Counsels on Stewardship*.

It’s so hard from our perspective today, immersed as we are in a greatly fallen world, to imagine what we have lost through the Fall. This evil world is all that we know, and were it not for the Word of God and how it reveals to us our origins and the origins of sin and death and evil, we’d simply take them for granted, as just part of life itself. Yet the story of the Fall shows us that, indeed, this is not how things were to be. Genesis said that Adam and Eve were to have dominion over the world; then, right after they sinned, suddenly their relationship to the world changed because they changed, and the physical world itself changed as well. Suddenly the dominion they had enjoyed was lost, and the consequences became enormous. “The thorn and the thistle (Gen. 3:17, 18), the aftermath of the Flood (Gen. 7:12), the desert and the wilderness, the groaning of the earth for deliverance (Rom. 8:19–22) are some of the word pictures the Bible uses to describe the effect of sin upon the world.”—*Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Pub. Assn.), vol. 12, p. 254. How thankful we should be for the plan of salvation, which will restore all that was lost and which offers us the promise of a future so much better than the past or the present.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Though the immediate context of these texts (*Exod. 23:10–12; Deut. 11:11, 12; 20:19, 20*) doesn’t have to do with ecology as understood today, what principles could one take from them that could help us understand our need to be good stewards of the environment? Also, how do we know if and when we have crossed the line from being a steward of the environment to being a worshiper of it?
- 2 Think about the natural world as we know it now. Is it a friend or a foe, and how can you justify your answer?
- 3 Discuss the question asked at the end of Sunday’s study about the meaning and purpose of human life. What answer would you give to someone who asked you that question? How should our answers differ from those who don’t believe in God or salvation?
- 4 How can we reclaim the word *dominion* in a way that helps restore its original meaning? That is, how was *dominion* at first a good thing? How can it be today as well?

Dismissed but Determined: Part 2

by ISAIAH MALEK GARANG, South Sudan

The question about the Sabbath and Sunday came up again. Was the Sabbath still valid? If so, why did most of Christianity worship on Sunday instead?

I was not allowed to enter the church I had once pastored, so on Sundays I prayed at home. Others—some who had been dismissed and some who thought the church had made a grave mistake—joined me for worship. Eight other groups began meeting in homes throughout my former district.

The Sabbath question was constantly on my mind. I knew that some people worshiped on Friday, some on Saturday, and others on Sunday. As I studied the Bible, I found many references to Sabbath, but no mention of Friday or Sunday as a day of worship. I asked our small-group members to study and pray about this issue. Eventually, we agreed that God had never changed the day of worship from Saturday to another day. We immediately began meeting on Saturday instead of Sunday. We also found the admonition to avoid eating unclean meat. Some people outside of our small groups who learned of our decisions labeled us “Jews.”

Solomon saw the changes in my life and invited me to study the doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist faith. I wondered what difference there might be between what we had discovered and what the Adventists teach. I set out to find some Adventist leaders to learn more about what they believe. I found an Adventist church in a village some distance from my home. I introduced myself to the pastor and explained that I wanted to know what his denomination taught.

I stayed in that village for three months studying the Bible, the writings of Ellen G. White, and understanding the church’s fundamental beliefs. What I learned was so amazing! It became clear that I’d found what my soul was looking for. I asked to be baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

During the week before my baptism, I continually reconsidered my decision. My brother urged me to leave the country. I was invited to join a nondenominational church, and my former church sent a message requesting that I return to my priestly position.

To be continued in next week’s Inside Story.

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Psalm 8:3–8*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Acknowledge the proper place of human beings in God’s creation and the importance of giving God His proper place as Creator and Master of the universe.

Feel: Humble himself or herself before the Creator and sense the responsibility to the care of other human beings and created creatures with love and kindness.

Do: Reflect God’s care and stewardship in the way that he or she interacts and cares for other human beings and the rest of God’s creation.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Putting Our Role in Perspective

A What principles can we learn from the way God exercises dominion over us? How can we apply those principles in our interaction with other people and our treatment of nature?

B What role should worship play in our understanding of our role and place in the universe?

C If God will one day destroy and restore the earth, why does it matter how we treat the environment now?

II. Feel: The Joy of Stewardship

A How can we better foster a sense of humility as created beings? How do we balance that humility with the assurance that we are sons and daughters of God?

B When did we last express gratitude to God for His creation?

III. Do: The Responsibility of Dominion

A How does my behavior show that I have accepted responsibility for helping care for God’s creation? Are there things I need to change in my behavior?

B As Seventh-day Adventists, we know that we should worship God as Creator and not worship created things. But what are the “idols” in my life that I should prayerfully work to remove?

► **Summary:** The psalmist reminds us of our proper place in God’s created order. When we try to adjust that order, everything else falls out of alignment. Our task is to reflect God’s image in the way we interact with others and the way we care for His creation.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Psalm 8:3–8*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: To understand correctly the dominion we have been given as human beings, we must see it in the context of our precise place in the universe—above the animals but under subjection to God.

Just for Teachers: *Dominion* is something of an old-fashioned word, rarely used today. It suggests ownership, power, and control, but sometimes we forget that dominion also implies stewardship, care, and responsibility. Explore what this word means for us as Seventh-day Adventists today as we seek to be faithful to what God has asked us to do.

Opening Discussion: In Psalm 8, David clearly describes the order of the universe. At the top, God reigns supreme, with dominion over all: “How excellent is Your name in all the earth, Who have set Your glory above the heavens” (*Ps. 8:1, NKJV*).

Beneath God are the angels—the “heavenly beings”—and under them are human beings (*Ps. 8:3–5*).

Finally, below human beings is the animal kingdom (*Ps. 8:6–8*).

The order of the universe is clear: God is above all, angels are just beneath Him, we follow next, and under us is the animal kingdom, over which we have been given dominion.

Throughout history we’ve seen examples of those who have tried to rearrange God’s order to suit their own preferences. Some have tried to place themselves above God—with disastrous consequences. And in recent times we’ve seen efforts in biotechnology to remove the distinction between humans and animals. But the Bible teaches we are created “in God’s image.” Whatever the genetic and physical similarities between animals and us, God has established human beings as a separate moral order. An important part of our purpose is to care for the rest of creation, but it doesn’t involve being identical to animals.

Consider This: How is our self-perception distorted if we attempt to elevate ourselves within God’s order of creation? On the other hand, what are the effects of seeing ourselves as less than what God intended? What practical consequences can flow from either distortion of reality?

■ *What does a true understanding of our ranking within God’s order of creation add to our relationships with other people?*

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: In today’s class, focus on the practical aspects of exercising true dominion. How should this God-given responsibility manifest itself in our everyday life and decision making? How can an inaccurate understanding of “dominion” distort our thinking?

Bible Commentary

I. Let God Have Dominion. (Review with your class Genesis 1:26–28, 3:1–7.)

We can be effective in exercising our God-given dominion only if we acknowledge the limits of that dominion. After God created Adam and Eve, He gave them dominion over the animals. Likewise, He gave them full dominion over the earth and the freedom to eat anything they liked in the garden—fruit, nuts, grains—except for the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. But the serpent told them that God was trying to limit their power. He provided the first recorded example of a technique that in today’s political world would be called “spin”—in which the truth is twisted to convey a wrong or incomplete impression. Spin makes the real unreal, and the unreal real.

The talking serpent, the “shrewdest” of all the creatures God had made (*Gen. 3:1, NLT*), puts his spin on God’s injunction. He expresses disbelief that God would command Adam and Eve not to eat any fruit from the entire garden (a command he knew God didn’t give). “Can it really be that God has said, You shall not eat from every tree of the garden?” (*Gen. 3:1, AMP*).

Eve answers, “We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’” (*Gen. 3:2, 3, NKJV*).

Immediately the snake contradicts, “You will not surely die” (*Gen. 3:4, NKJV*)! Eve was convinced. Not only was the snake’s spin attractive—it would “make [her] wise”—but the fruit also was “good for food . . . pleasant to the eye” (*Gen. 3:6, NKJV*). Ever since then, humans have been confronted with a variety of attractive “fruit” that promises many things—wisdom, peace, power, happiness, health, satisfaction, fulfillment. But the promise is empty; it’s not real. True fulfillment comes only when we realize that God has total dominion over everything and that our right to dominion over the earth is valid only to the extent that we acknowledge that He is Ruler over all.

Consider This: In democratic societies, political power is said to derive its legitimacy from “the people.” Thus, elected leaders wield power on behalf of those they represent and are, ultimately, answerable to them. How is this a good analogy for the responsibility God has given us over the earth? In what

ways could this idea of “delegated dominion”—of being answerable to God for our actions—influence how we treat other people and the world’s resources?

II. Dominion Over Others *(Review with your class Psalm 8:3–8 and Mark 10:35–45.)*

The psalmist clearly outlines the God-ordained order in the universe (Ps. 8:3–8). Sin undermines that order and leads human beings to inappropriate behavior. An example of this can be seen in the worldly ambition of James and John, the “sons of thunder.” Not content with God-given dominion over nature, they want dominion over their fellow human beings. Looking to the future, they ask Jesus: “ ‘Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory’ ” (*Mark 10:37, NKJV*). They weren’t requesting this seating assignment so that they could be more effective servants. They were unashamedly asking for seats of honor and prestige in an earthly kingdom they thought Jesus would set up.

Once again Jesus must have wondered whether any of His disciples had been listening to a word He had been telling them. Things escalated, of course, when the other disciples learned of what James and John had requested.

Kindly, but directly, Jesus told them they were not speaking like disciples—they were speaking like secular power players. This request was the sort of thing Jesus would expect from politicians—from rulers and high officials—but not from His followers. According to Jesus, greatness doesn’t come from power and dominion over others. James and John had yet to learn that He wasn’t interested in an earthly kingdom and the values that came with it. He wasn’t interested in fame, fortune, and power. If His disciples really wanted to be truly great, they should humble themselves as servants and slaves. Jesus Himself, the Creator of the universe, didn’t come to earth to be served, but to serve (*Mark 10:42–45*). It was a humility that took Him all the way to the cross.

Consider This: Ask your class to name people—whether public figures or not—who exhibit the kind of “true greatness” that Jesus demonstrated. What character traits do these people share? Discuss how this concept of true greatness might relate to proper or improper exercise of dominion.

►STEP 3—Apply

Activity: In the following activity, you will present two scenarios to your class that touch on ways human beings relate to animals. Use these as a springboard to discuss and apply the broad principles considered in this week’s lesson.

1. The Bayside Pet Spa in Florida is a luxury spa for dogs that offers, among other things, a “body and soul” service called the “Ultimate Relaxation Package.” According to its Web site: “This Full Day at the Spa includes a

Deluxe Spa Groom, Painted toes (if appropriate), 30 Minute Massage, Aroma Therapy, Gourmet Meal and 2 Activities that fits [*sic*] their personality” (Bayside Pet Spa, “Body & Soul Packages—Full Day,” accessed June 9, 2015, <http://www.baysidepetspa.com>).

2. According to Ingrid Newkirk, co-director of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), “there is no rational basis for saying that a human being has special rights. A rat is a pig is a dog is a boy. They’re all mammals.” She adds, “Even if animal research produced a cure for AIDS, we’d be against it.” Michael Fox of the Humane Society of the United States says, “The life of an ant and the life of my child should be accorded equal respect” (New Jersey Association for Biomedical Research, “Animal Welfare and Animal Rights,” accessed June 9, 2015, <http://njabr.com/education/general-background-on-biomedical-research/animal-welfare-and-animal-rights>).

Thought Questions:

❶ Pets can bring joy, companionship, and even emotional healing to people. But how do these two scenarios underscore the importance of maintaining a biblical perspective of our proper place in creation?

❷ In the light of these two scenarios, why is the biblical teaching of dominion so important?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Remind your class that we are trying to apply biblical principles faithfully to our daily lives—sometimes in difficult situations. As a class, explore the difference between just talking about our beliefs and living them faithfully.

Activity: Depending on the size of your class, break into smaller groups or remain together for this activity. Challenge the groups (or the entire class) to complete one or two of the following exercises:

1. Suggest five things we could each do this week that would make us better stewards of the environment and resources God has entrusted to our care.
2. Compose a short letter to the editor of the local paper, suggesting how the community could better care for its natural resources.
3. Come up with three suggestions for the pastor or church board for weaving the biblical principles of “dominion” into the mission priorities of your church community.