

THE CREATION – THE FIRST FOUR DAYS

Genesis 1:1-19

In teaching the Creation story we need to keep in mind that this is not only the beginning of the Bible but the foundation of all our further teaching. The thought of the Lord as the beginning of everything, our Heavenly Father, the Creator of everything we see and know, is essential to any spiritual understanding and to any genuinely good life. With all the classes we shall need to point out that our primary business in Sunday School is to learn of the Lord and His purposes for us so that we may truly serve Him, and that the only sure source of such knowledge is His Word which He has given us so that we may know these things. We are studying the Word as the Lord has given it to us and as He has opened it for our deeper understanding. Throughout our year's work we should frequently remind ourselves as well as our pupils that what we are studying is the Lord's Book, which is the Book of Life. We are putting special emphasis on the thought of the first four days in the Creation story, but the seven days should first be covered briefly.

Doctrinal Points

The first thing we need to know about the Lord is that He is the Creator of all things. The Lord's name Jehovah means "I am." The whole Word is a parable written in the language of correspondences.

Faith is the acceptance of something as true, and the better we understand anything the more faith we can have in it.

Truth which does not lead to good deeds is like a plant which bears no fruit.

Notes for Parents

Genesis means "beginning." The first words of the Bible are

“In the beginning God.” This is the first thing we need to know if we are to be true human beings and not mere animals. The real difference between an animal and a human being is that an animal can know nothing beyond physical things, while a human being can know God.

If we stop to think, we should be able to see that God would not be likely to waste time telling us things we can find out for ourselves—things about the world of nature. What He has to tell us are the things about Himself and about our souls, because these we cannot find out in any other way. So this first chapter of the Bible, about which people have disputed so much, really tells us about the creation of the human soul. It is a wonderful parable, a symbol story, taken from an Ancient Word written in the time when men spoke in this symbol language because they saw everything in the world about them to be an expression of something in God and thus in the soul. Throughout His Word the Lord speaks to us in this language and if we study it, we can understand more and more of what He wishes to tell us. The Bible is like Jacob’s ladder with its foot on the ground and its top reaching up to God; God’s thoughts come down to us through it and our thoughts rise up to Him, like the angels on the ladder. Read this story in Genesis 28:10-22. We, as well as our children, need to know the Bible stories well, just as they are given us in the Bible, if we are to find God in them.



Primary

Call the children’s attention to your Bible and see if they know what book it is. Explain to them that it is the Lord’s Book, which He has written so that we may know about Him. Then go on to the first things He tells us about Himself and the world. Tell them that God is our Heavenly Father to whom we pray—the same Person who came into the world as the Lord Jesus—and that He loves us and takes care of us; and that if we try to do what He tells us is right, we shall be happy. Then talk about light and darkness and about what the sun, moon, and stars do for us, reminding them that the Lord made these things for us.

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This is a good opportunity to point out briefly the two parts of the Word—the Old and the New Testaments. Speak of the wonderful opportunity the Lord has given us to learn about Him, of the need of studying the Word all our lives, and of the reverence we should feel for it.

Did you know that God made the light? Some mornings when you wake up the sky is blue and the sun is bright and you can play out-of-doors. Then you are happy. Then some mornings it is raining and you have to play in the house, but still you can see everything. That is because, although the sky is covered with clouds from which the rain is coming, the sun is up above the clouds still, and it gives so much light that it shines right through.

But after you have played all day and had your supper, it is dark outside, and dark in the house too, unless your mother turns on the lights. The sun has not stopped shining, but it is around on the other side of the earth making daytime for little Chinese and Japanese girls and boys.

Have you ever been out-of-doors at night? If you have, you have seen the stars way up in the sky, and perhaps the moon. God made those, too. He made the whole sky and the earth, and He made all the plants and trees, and the birds and fishes and animals, and He made you and me and everybody.

God made all these things because He loves us and wants us to be happy. And we can always be happy if we love Him and each other. When we love people, we try to make them happy. Let us read our lesson from the Bible.

What did God create on the first day?

What did He create on the second day?

What did He create on the third day?

What two great lights did God make on the fourth day?

What little lights did He make?

Can you think of some of the things the sun does for us?

When can we see the moon and stars?

You know that at night sailors can steer their ships by the stars.

Don't you think we should all thank the Lord for making such a beautiful world for us to live in?

He made it because He loves us. When we love people, we want to make them

happy. Selfishness is the opposite of love. It makes everybody unhappy, even the selfish people themselves. So we must try not to be selfish.

Junior

Note the suggestions made above in regard to the Lord and the Word, and be sure the pupils are familiar with these thoughts. Then go on to the Creation story, calling attention to its true meaning. The Juniors should be introduced to the idea that the Word has an internal meaning relating to our souls, which is its important meaning, and told that no one can learn this meaning unless he knows the literal story well and reads it regularly. Our effort is to give them glimpses of the internal sense which will show them how much is in store for them as they grow older, and will form a basis for more detailed study in the intermediate class. This can be done very well in connection with the creation of light and of the sun, moon, and stars. The teacher will find the answer to the last question suggested in their notes by reading the notes for the older classes. But see if any of the class can figure out the answer before you give it.

What book do we study in Sunday School?

Who is its Author?

By what other names is it called?

What is the name of the first book in the Bible?

Genesis means “beginning.” This book tells us about the beginning of everything in the world. The first chapter seems to be about the creation of the earth and all the plants and animals and people on it, but this is only the outside meaning.

How many days did this creation take?

What happened on the seventh day?

At the end of this lesson you will find a list of questions. Look up the answers in your Bible and write them after the questions. This will help you to remember the “order of creation.” We can also remember that it is because of this story of creation that we and other people all over the world find it good to work six days and on the seventh day to rest and worship the Lord. In your Bible look up Exodus 20:8-11.

Scientists are finding out more and more about the earth all the time. One of the things they have found out is that it took many

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thousands of years to form the earth. This makes some people doubt the Bible. But we need not be troubled by this, for we know that the whole Word is a parable. A *parable* is a story which has a deeper meaning within it. When you are a little older, you will study the deeper meaning of this story of creation. It is a wonderful study.

Even now you may be able to see a little of the deeper meaning, which tells us how our souls are made by the Lord. What does the first verse say? “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” The Lord did create the sky and the earth, but in each one of us—in our souls—there are also “the heaven and the earth,” a higher and a lower nature. When you want very much to do something which your father or mother has told you not to do, there is a battle within you between your higher and your lower nature. Your higher nature tells you to do what is right, but your lower nature wants the thing which looks pleasant. When you were a little baby, you did not know enough even to think about right and wrong. Read the second verse and see how it tells about that time when your soul was empty and ignorant.

Did you ever, when your father or your mother was explaining something to you, say all of a sudden, “Oh, I see”? You did not mean that you saw something with your eyes, did you? You saw something with your mind. Read verses 3, 4, and 5. When you were a little child and first began to see things with your mind, it was like the coming of light. This was the first day in your soul. Now perhaps you can see that *day* in this story of creation does not mean a day like Sunday or Monday or Tuesday. It means a new state of thinking and feeling. And it may mean a long period of time, too. Did you ever hear an old person say, “In my day everybody did so and so”?

So each day in this chapter really describes a new step in our growing up. When you get into the Intermediate class, you will study more of these steps, but for now it is enough to remember that light pictures the understanding of truth, and darkness pictures ignorance. With this knowledge, see if you can figure out

why in our chapter it always says “the evening and the morning” instead of “the morning and the evening.”

- What did God create on the first day?
- What did God create on the second day?
- What did God create on the third day?
- What did God create on the fourth day?
- What did God create on the fifth day?
- What did God create on the sixth day?
- What did God do on the seventh day?

Intermediate

For this class the teacher will need to study the Senior and Adult notes as well as the Intermediate notes, in order that he may have more to add to what is given in the pupils' notes; but in developing the lesson he should follow the general outline of the pupils' notes. Do not neglect the introduction given at the beginning of this lesson. Try to cover the lesson rapidly enough to leave time for questions and discussion.

The first chapter of the Bible, like all the rest of the Word, is a parable. It seems to tell us about the creation of the natural world; and of course it is true that God created everything in the natural world, including our physical bodies. But men can find out about nature for themselves, and the Lord wrote the Word to tell us things which we cannot find out in this way. That means things about our souls.

So the Creation story really tells us how our souls were and are developed by the Lord. When we are born, we have a physical nature—not just a body, but a mind capable of growing into a knowledge of all the things we need for life in this world. This is “the earth” of our souls. And animals have this earth, too. But we have another nature which the animals do not have: a spiritual nature capable of learning about God and heavenly things. This is “the heaven.”

In a little baby both of these natures are just in their beginnings. The state each of us is in as a baby is described in verse 2. The “darkness” is ignorance. Do you know that people of every

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language all over the world say “I see” when they mean “I understand”? This is what is called the language of *correspondence*—the correspondence of natural or physical things with spiritual or heavenly things. In the beginning everyone understood this correspondence and spoke in its language, and many of the expressions—like “I see”—have come down to us, although the general principle was lost. If you keep this in mind, you will soon notice some of these expressions in our common speech. All of the Word of God is written in this language of correspondence.

The first instance of this which we shall consider in this lesson is the word *darkness*. It is the opposite of *light*. If darkness signifies *ignorance*, what does *light* mean? So when the Word tells us (verse 3), “and God said, Let there be light: and there was light,” it is speaking of the time in our earliest childhood when we first begin to “see” or understand things. The next step—the second day—is when we begin to be able to understand more than just the physical things like eating and walking and handling; we learn that we must obey our parents or be called naughty, that we should be gentle and kind to others, etc. *Water* corresponds to *truth*, and the waters above the firmament are truths about spiritual or heavenly things, while those *under* the firmament are truths about natural or earthly things.

The dry land which appears on the third day is the character which we develop as we choose to do right or wrong, and this character is the ground out of which grow all kinds of thoughts, just as all sorts of grass and herbs and plants grow out of the earth. The actions to which these thoughts lead are the fruits.

The fourth day or state is the time when we are old enough to think about God and come to love Him and believe in Him, and want to know more and more about Him and about what we can do to please Him. This love is the sun which warms our hearts and lights our minds; our belief in God is the moon which shows us our way even when we cannot understand the “why” of things—the nighttime. And the stars are all knowledges which our minds gather about heavenly things, which often seem far away from our

present life and not very helpful, and yet gradually form patterns in our minds by which we may be guided, just as wise sailors can find their location and direction from the stars.

The living things which come on the fifth and sixth days are the affections or tastes we develop as our characters become fully formed, until finally we are grown-up men and women, ready to govern our own lives and put all our knowledges to use—to “have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (verse 28).

Psalm 118 begins, “O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; because his mercy endureth forever,” and verses 23 and 24 of the same Psalm suggest the feeling we ought to have when we reach the seventh day of rest:

“This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.
This is the day which the Lord hath made;
we will rejoice and be glad in it.”

Basic Correspondences

- earth = the natural mind
- plants = truths developing in our minds
- fruit = good works
- birds = thoughts
- animals = affections
- heaven = the spiritual mind

Senior

With this class the introductory material may well be given as a statement of the difference between the New Church teaching concerning the Lord and the Word and the teachings of all other churches. It is good for young people at this age to know that their church has clear and definite knowledge concerning many points which trouble people, and that even if they themselves may not yet be ready to discuss these points with others, there are reasonable answers to all of people’s religious questions. Young people discuss religion and argue about it among themselves much more frequently than we are likely to think, and we should take every opportunity to give them a sense of the wonderful things available to them in the writings of the New Church.

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Try to save time each week to read and discuss with the class the quotations from these writings found at the end of their notes and, if possible, inspire them to begin reading for themselves. The Creation story, being one most often challenged, is the best possible beginning for developing this sense of the unique opportunity offered us by the Lord in His Second Coming.

One of the questions which sooner or later arise in anyone's mind is, "How did the world as we know it start?" Scientists, including Swedenborg, have spent years in studying the rocks and the various remains preserved in their strata, in the effort to answer this question; and different theories of the origin of the universe have been developed. Yet no human investigations or man-made theories can really answer it. The only answer is given us in the first verse of the Bible: "In the beginning God . . ." God is the beginning of everything we are and everything we know. His name, as He gave it to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:13-14), is Jehovah—"I Am"—Life Itself, from Whom everything in the world receives its life from moment to moment.

The first chapter of Genesis is a wonderful parable in which God Himself tells us the order of our creation. The world of nature, about which the chapter seems to speak, is only a picture of the real world of spirit. The six days of creation are six stages of development, not only in the world of nature in a general way, but in the human race as a whole and in every individual, including you and me.

Let us think of the story particularly as it applies to our individual development. We start with two natures, a higher and a lower, "the heaven and the earth." When we are born, these are only potential, "without form and void," and we are in "darkness" as to the mind; but God is at work in us, and presently our consciousness of the world about us begins to develop—the light comes. Very soon—surprisingly soon—we begin to realize that life is more than eating and sleeping and play: there are such things as right and wrong about which we must learn; the truths or "waters" of the spiritual nature are separated from those concerned only with our physical well-being. Then, as we choose the higher or

the lower, the solid ground of our individual character begins to be formed, and from it develop our own ideas and reasonings, at first simple and fleeting like the grass, and then more and more strong and lasting. The permanent affections—our various tastes and loves—are last to develop, but finally we become full-grown men and women and can know the peace and rest of established character.

But in our brief sketch we have left out one day—the fourth—the central one of the seven. On it, according to the story, God created the sun, moon, and stars. Psalm 84:11 tells us “The Lord God is a sun and shield,” and in prophecy (Malachi 4:2) the Lord Jesus Christ is called “the Sun of righteousness.” Somewhere in our development, if it is normal and sound, there comes a time when we really see that the *Lord is*, and that all our life—the light of our minds and the warmth of our hearts—comes from Him. The sun has burst forth through our clouds of ignorance. From then on the Sun rules our daytimes—the states in which we see our way clearly and love to do as the Lord wishes us to do. But these states are not constant. We have nighttimes too, when doubts and fears arise and we do not see our way. In such states our sun—our love for the Lord—seems to disappear. But we still have the belief that the Lord’s way is right whether we understand it or not. This is a reflected light like that of the moon. And we still have our knowledges of the Lord’s truth which, like the stars, even though small and scattered and apparently far from our immediate purpose, still form patterns which can give us direction.

One of the criticisms which has been made of the Creation story is that light appears before the creation of the sun; but we can see how, in the inner meaning, this is an orderly and beautiful development. The Lord is at work in our souls from the beginning, bringing us gradually out of darkness into full sunlight. This order is seen also in the repeated expression, “and the evening and the morning were” So the Psalmist writes:

“The heavens declare the glory of God;
and the firmament sheweth his handiwork.

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Day unto day uttereth speech,
and night unto night sheweth knowledge.”

–Psalm 19:1-2

Adult

It is suggested that in taking up the Creation story, the teacher refer to the attack which has been made upon its authenticity, point out that the Bible is the Lord’s revelation to us and is not concerned with things we can find out for ourselves; and go on from there to the general meaning of the six steps of creation in their relation to the development of the race and of the individual, with particular emphasis on the reason why light appears in the story before the creation of the sun, moon, and stars, and why each day is said to go from evening to morning.

In Revelation 20:12 we read, “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God, and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.” It would be difficult for anyone to read this verse and fail to understand that by “the books” are meant the record of the lives of those who are being judged, and that by “the book of life” is meant the Bible. Throughout the history of the Christian Church, therefore, the pressing problem of salvation has been tied inseparably to that of the nature and interpretation of the Bible. Before the development of natural science, Christians were for the most part content to accept the Bible as literally true and to leave its interpretation to the priesthood, living in the simple belief that if they did what their priests told them to do, they were obeying the Lord and would be saved. With the invention of printing, however, and the consequent wide distribution of the Bible, men began to read it for themselves and to develop differences of opinion as to its interpretation, and inevitably differences of opinion as to what constituted conduct in accordance with the Bible teaching. And these differences were aggravated as the findings of natural science began to cast doubt upon the literal accuracy of the Bible narrative. Actually the unique character of

the Bible should be evident from the very volume and persistence of the study which it has produced, to say nothing of the literature that has been influenced by it. It is significant that even those today who believe that the Bible is the product of human minds often confess to feeling its strange power and try in various ways to account for this power.

It is not the Lord's fault that men refuse to recognize His Word as a revelation from Him; the refusal is in the individual will. The Lord has always told men all they needed to know about Himself. To the two on the way to Emmaus He said: " 'O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken' . . . And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:25, 27). And just before He allowed Himself to be taken He said, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now" (John 16:12). This further revelation foretold to the disciples was given to the world through Emanuel Swedenborg just as soon as men's minds were ready to receive it, and in time to meet the humanistic and scientific attacks upon the Bible. As we read the *Arcana Coelestia*, we are constantly coming upon statements which show that Swedenborg, who was one of the most noted scientists of his day, was fully aware of all the facts which are brought forward to prove that the Bible is the work of men. This is indicated by many statements like the following from *Arcana Coelestia*, n. 2674 concerning the sending away of Hagar and Ishmael: "Every one can see that these historic statements involve arcana, from the fact that Abraham, who was rich in flock and herd, and also in gold and silver, sent away in this manner his handmaid by whom he had a son, and the boy Ishmael whom he much loved, giving them only bread and water." And he says repeatedly that only a knowledge of the internal sense can account for the peculiarities of the letter of Scripture, and that the Lord revealed the internal sense for the specific purpose of saving good men from losing their faith in the Word. It is therefore of supreme importance that we, and our children as soon as they are old enough, study the internal

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sense as well as the letter of the Word.

The Creation story is an outstanding example of this necessity. Science makes it obvious that it cannot be literally true. Archaeology turns up similar stories in other ancient literatures. As Swedenborg says, men ask “How can this be Divine?” Yet the Creation story is the foundation of the Word and the basis of all our understanding of the Lord’s purpose in our creation and of the working of His Divine providence in our lives. We are told through Swedenborg that the literal sense of the first eleven chapters is not history in the sense in which the rest of the Word is history. These eleven chapters were copied by Moses from the Ancient Word—the Word which existed before our Word and which was still in existence in the time of Moses. All the stories of Creation, of the Garden of Eden, and of the Flood found in literatures other than the Hebrew had their source in this same account in the Ancient Word, but they came down in the form of tradition and so are not in themselves verbally inspired. The Ancient Word was written in the language of pure symbol, the language in which the people of the Ancient Church thought and wrote. No one in that day misunderstood the Creation story or took it for an account of the creation of the physical universe. There are quotations in other parts of our Bible from other books of the Ancient Word, and some of these books are mentioned by name (See Numbers 21:14-16, 27-28; Joshua 10:13; II Samuel 1:18). Swedenborg also tells us that the book of Job—a book which has puzzled scholars because it has the language characteristics of a very old Hebrew book and yet manifests highly developed philosophical concepts—is “a book of the Ancient Church,” lacking an inner sense but written in the “forms of expression in common use in the Ancient Church” (*Arcana Coelestia*, n. 2682).

The Creation story, like the rest of the inspired Word, coming down as it does from the Lord through the heavens, has within it several levels of meaning. For us it is primarily the story of the creation of a human soul. We may see it in its relation to our development from infancy to adult life, or, as Swedenborg especially

interprets it in the *Arcana*, as the process of regeneration. In every individual there are two natures: a higher or spiritual, and a lower or natural—the heavens and the earth. So long as he remains, whether innocently or willfully, in ignorance of spiritual things, his soul is actually in darkness and undeveloped; but the Lord is constantly seeking to awaken him. The first response is like the coming of light, and after that he is able to see that some knowledges relate to spiritual and others to natural things—the waters above and below the firmament. All life is from the Lord, and man does not begin really to live until he recognizes God and tries to learn of Him. At first his knowledge of God is derived from others and is like a diffused light in his mind, but as he begins to think and act from the principle of doing what is right in the Lord's sight instead of what is pleasing to himself, living things begin to appear in his soul and he comes to know from his own experience what it is to love the Lord and to believe in Him and trust His guidance—the sun, moon, and stars appear clearly in the sky. The sun is love to the Lord shining in our states of clear understanding; the moon is faith and trust showing us our way even when everything seems dark and incomprehensible. The stars are all the knowledges of spiritual things which, as we relate them to each other, gradually form patterns in our minds and help to direct us. Living thoughts and affections—the birds, fish, and animals—are then possible, and one is formed into a true man, in the image and likeness of his Creator. Only then can one find rest and peace.

“And the evening and the morning were the first day.” In this lesson we are centering our thought on the first four days of Creation. The outstanding characteristic of this part of the story is the appearance, effect, and increase of light. In the letter of the inspired Word there is nothing accidental. In our natural activities we think of a day as beginning with the morning and ending with the evening, but when we stop to think, we may realize that from morning to evening there is a decline—a decline in strength, in vitality, in mental keenness, in endurance—until we reach the point when we must stop and wait for the renewal which comes with

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sleep. In the writings of Swedenborg we are told that it is during our periods of sleep that the Lord can do most for us, because then our concentration on our own affairs and on the natural world about us is in temporary abeyance, and our souls are open to heavenly influences. This is why it is provided that children shall have such long periods of sleep, and why sleep has such curative value. The physical rebuilding is the least of the values of sleep. If we are inclined to boast that we do not need so much sleep as the average person, it is time for us to take serious thought as to our spiritual state. Actually progress is from evening to morning—from a state of ignorance to one of understanding—and this is the work of the Creator, not of ourselves. Day by day we must seek continually to learn in order that we may progress.



From the Writings of Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia, n. 22: “What is meant by ‘evening’ and what by ‘morning’ can now be discerned. ‘Evening’ means every preceding state, because it is a state of shade, or of falsity and of no faith; ‘morning’ is every subsequent state, being one of light, or of truth and of the knowledges of faith. ‘Evening,’ in a general sense, signifies all things that are of man’s own; but ‘morning’ whatever is of the Lord, as is said through David: ‘The spirit of Jehovah spake in me, and His word was on my tongue; the God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me; He is as the light of the morning, when the sun ariseth, even a morning without clouds, when from brightness, from rain, the tender herb springeth out of the earth’ (II Samuel 23:2-4). As it is ‘evening’ when there is no faith, and ‘morning’ when there is faith, therefore the coming of the Lord into the world is called ‘morning’; and the time when He comes, because then there is no faith, is called ‘evening’ . . . In like manner ‘morning’ is used in the Word to denote every coming of the Lord; consequently it is an expression of new creation.”

Arcana Coelestia, n. 29¹: “When the ‘earth,’ or man, has been thus prepared to receive celestial seeds from the Lord, and to produce something of what is good and true, then the Lord first causes some tender thing to spring forth, which is called the ‘tender herb’; then something more useful, which again bears seeds in itself, and is called the ‘herb yielding seed’; and at length something good which becomes fruitful, and is called the ‘tree bearing fruit, whose seed is in itself,’ each according to its own kind. The man who is being regen-

erated is at first of such a quality that he supposes the good which he does, and the truth which he speaks, to be from himself, when in reality all good and all truth are from the Lord, so that whosoever supposes them to be from himself has not as yet the life of true faith, which nevertheless he may afterwards receive; for he cannot as yet believe that they are from the Lord, because he is only in a state of preparation for the reception of the life of faith. This state is here represented by things inanimate, and the succeeding one of the life of faith, by animate things.”

True Christian Religion, n. 73²: “The laws of order prescribed for man, are that man should acquire for himself truths from the Word, and think of them naturally, and so far as he can, rationally, and thus procure for himself natural faith. The laws of order on the part of God then are, that He should approach, fill the truths with His Divine Light, and thus fill with the Divine Essence man’s natural faith, which is only knowledge and persuasion. Thus, and not otherwise, is saving faith produced.”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. Who made the world? *God*
- P. What book tells us about God? *the Bible*
- J. What does light do for us? *lets us see*
- P. What special lights did the Lord make for us? *sun, moon, stars*
- P. In how many days does the Bible say the world was created? *six*
- J. What happened on the seventh day? *God rested*
- I. In relation to our souls what are meant by the heaven and the earth?
higher and lower nature
- J. To what does light correspond? *truth*
- I. With what is the Creation story really concerned?
how God develops our souls
- S. Why did the Lord create the world and man? *heaven from human race*
- S. What spiritually is the rest on the sabbath day? *regeneration, completed character*