IN THE BEGINNING

The concept of “beginning” is biblical. Apart from the Godhead, everything (animate and inanimate, corporeal and incorporeal, visible and invisible) had a beginning. In short, creation had a beginning. That beginning had a time and a source. While the Bible gives no date for the first act of creation (which would certainly have included the creation of heavenly beings), nor for the creation recorded in Genesis 1, it clearly identifies the source. That source, or beginning, is God! He is the Father of beginnings (except the beginning of sin).

How did God begin the creation of this planet called earth? He began with light on day one. All subsequent creative acts done in the first week were done in the light made on day one. That light was created by the Word. The Word is light!

This has profound implications for the followers of God, who should ask at all times, “Am I following God’s pattern of creation?” In human terms, the creation or building of a life involves aspects of education, romance, marriage, family, finances, career, retirement, and so on. Each should have as its beginning the light of God’s word. This is how the child of God applies the priceless, life-saving wisdom, “In all thy ways acknowledge him” (Prov. 3:6, KJV). Begin with light! It guides, counsels, rebukes, warns, instructs, sanctifies, and saves.

Those who, through Christ, are recreated in the image of God should act like God by beginning all that they do with light . . . the light of God’s word.

The path that begins in light and continues in light will most surely terminate in heaven.
Write out John 1:1–13 from the translation of your choice. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
WITHOUT EXCEPTION

Just as God created light to shine on everyone and vegetation to benefit all, so He created the Sabbath as a gift to all humanity (Gen. 2:1–3). There exists, however, within mainstream Christianity, a groundless belief that the Ten Commandments were restricted to the Jews. This view is most pointedly applied to the fourth commandment, which requires the strict observance of the seventh day as the Sabbath, and is widely used as justification for honoring Sunday as the New Testament Sabbath, or the new covenant Sabbath.

A careful examination of the fourth commandment text quickly lays bare the emptiness of the “Jewish Sabbath” argument. God prohibited work on Sabbath with these words, “In it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gate” (Exod. 20:10).

The inclusion of “the stranger” is critical and deserves a closer look. A stranger was a non-Israelite, a foreigner, an uncircumcised person. He may be among the Israelites, but not of them. He could not participate in the most momentous of Israelite festivals, the Passover. Why? Because he was not an Israeliite. To qualify, he would have to be circumcised (Exod. 12:43–46). The Passover celebration was not a universal requirement. It was strictly for the Israelites. Nor was it timeless; it ended at Calvary (cf. 1 Cor. 5:7).

While the Passover (a ceremony) was for Israeliite people, the Sabbath was for people—many and all people. The Passover was ceremonial, temporary, and narrow in application. The Sabbath commandment is moral, eternal, and universal in application. As Ellen White writes, “The law was not spoken at this time exclusively for the benefit of the Hebrews. God honored them by making them the guardians and keepers of His law, but it was to be held as a sacred trust for the whole world.”

Centuries before the Mount Sinai event, the Creator introduced the Sabbath to Adam and Eve—the world’s total population. As a moral commandment expressive of God’s very righteousness, the Sabbath cannot have an ethnic or cultural restriction. It is central to “the whole duty of man” (Eccles. 12:13, KJV) and of angels (cf. Ps. 103:20).
Anyone familiar with the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20 cannot but hear its echo in Revelation 14:7. The end-time proclamation symbolically carried by the three angels of Revelation 14:6–11 begins with a call to worship the Creator God, whose creatorship is enshrined in the fourth commandment. Thus, at the end of time, the theme of worship is inextricably linked to the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath.

Once again, in the warning of the third angel, a call is made to reject the worship of the beast who would usurp God’s prerogatives (Rev. 14:9–11). Just as the Creator has a sign of loyalty to Him in the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath (cf. Ezek. 20:20), the beast places a mark on the forehead or hand of those who yield to him their loyalty (Rev. 14:9). At the very least, the failure to observe the Creator’s Sabbath is disloyalty to God; at worst, observance of a replacement or counterfeit sabbath is loyalty to the one who instituted the counterfeit.

As earth’s time draws to a close, all of humanity will be called to make a choice between accepting or rejecting God’s sovereignty. A counterfeit alternative will be readily available for those who would choose it. This alternative mark is placed either in the forehead or in the hand, representing the idea that some truly believe they are choosing the correct side (the forehead), while others may, for mere convenience, simply follow along with the beast’s counterfeit (the hand). By contrast, when God seals His people, it is only in the forehead (cf. Ezek. 9:4). God only wants worship that is sincere.

Before Jesus comes again, humanity will be polarized in their worship: those who acknowledge God as Creator in observance of the fourth commandment, and those who reject God. This will be a universal test of loyalty. Buddhists, Sikhs, Muslims, Jains, Hindus, Jews, Bahá’ís, atheists, Christians, and agnostics will pick a side. For God to be fair, the issues involved in their choice to recognize God’s sovereignty in Sabbath worship will have to be so plainly represented to their minds that they will acknowledge God's justice in the final judgment. Any and all misapprehension about the Sabbath must be clarified.

Professed Sabbath-keepers must fully grasp its significance so as to clearly represent it to the world. Sabbath-keepers must encounter its true meaning in order to reflect its blessing to those living at the end of time. Worshipers of the true God will need a deeper experience in worshiping Him on the Sabbath day, that their lives may present a compelling argument in favor of choosing God over the counterfeit.
What relationship do the following verses have with the background of the letter to the Hebrews?

Revelation 14:6–11
Genesis 2:1–3
Ezekiel 9:4
Isaiah 66:23
Daniel 7:23–25
Revelation 13:1–9

What other verses come to mind in connection with John 1?

The fourth commandment is generally regarded among Seventh-day Adventists as the cornerstone of God’s creatorship; however, other biblical texts enhance one’s understanding of this divine status. One example is the expression “all things,” used four times in two Pauline verses (Col. 1:16, 17). “Visible and invisible” lie within “all things.”

Responding to the invitation, “Come now, and let us reason together” (Isa. 1:18), one may safely conclude that (apart from sin and its consequences) everything that exists naturally exists by the creative power of God, whether it be physical, non-physical, animate, inanimate, visible, invisible, or any other term that describes reality (time and space). God is the origin of them all—including the very concept of “being.”

As the source of “all things,” God must predate “all things.” But who is this God who predated and created? The eternal Father Himself answered this question when He said to the Son, “And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands” (Heb. 1:10, KJV). This God/Creator status of the Son, Jesus, marks the beginning of the sublime gospel of John (John 1:1–3).

The creation account that opens the Bible presents Jesus as the pre-existent God from whom flow life and existence, time and eternity. The nagging question sounds again: What, then, has this to do with the Sabbath commandment? Much in every way!

The celebration of the Sabbath is a celebration of the eternity of Jesus Christ. It is more than this: it is a celebration of Him who is the very source of eternity. This is why His name is “the everlasting Father” (Isa. 9:6, KJV), or, as one translation puts it, the “Father of Eternity” (Young’s Literal Translation).

To remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy is to remember that Jesus, from everlasting to everlasting, from eternity to eternity, is God Almighty! This glorious celebration will continue throughout eternity (Isa. 66:23).
AN END-TIME TRUTH

The last message of warning to the world is to lead men to see the importance that God attaches to His law. So plainly is the truth to be presented that no transgressor, hearing it, shall be excusable in failing to discern the importance of obedience to God's commands. (Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1946), 225, 226.)

The light concerning the binding claims of the law of God is to be presented everywhere. This is to be a deciding question. It will test and prove the world. (White, *Evangelism*, 226.)

Satan has devised a state of things whereby the proclamation of the third angel's message shall be bound about. We must beware of his plans and methods. There must be no toning down of the truth, no muffling of the message for this time. The third angel's message must be strengthened and confirmed. The eighteenth chapter of Revelation reveals the importance of presenting the truth in no measured terms but with boldness and power. . . . There has been too much beating about the bush in the proclamation of the third angel's message. The message has not been given as clearly and distinctly as it should have been. (White, 230.)

The days in which we live are times that call for constant vigilance, times in which God's people should be awake to do a great work in presenting the light on the Sabbath question. . . . This last warning to the inhabitants of the earth is to make men see the importance God attaches to His holy law. So plainly is the truth to be presented that no transgressor, hearing it, shall fail to discern the importance of obedience to the Sabbath commandment. (White, 232.)

We are to give to the world a manifestation of the pure, noble, holy principles that are to distinguish the people of God from the world. Instead of the people of God becoming less and less definitely distinguished from those who do not keep the seventh-day Sabbath, they are to make the observance of the Sabbath so prominent that the world cannot fail to recognize them as Seventh-day Adventists. . . .

The Lord has been pleased to give His people the third angel's message as a testing message to bear to the world. John beholds a people distinct and separate from the world, who refuse to worship the beast or his image, who bear God's sign, keeping holy His Sabbath—the seventh-day to be kept holy as a memorial of the living God, the Creator of heaven and earth. Of them the apostle writes, “Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.” (White, 233.)

No one has yet received the mark of the beast. The testing time has not yet come. There are true Christians in every church, not excepting the Roman Catholic communion. None are condemned until they have had the light and have seen the obligation of the fourth commandment. But when the decree shall go forth enforcing the counterfeit sabbath, and the loud cry of the third angel shall warn men against the worship of the beast and his image, the line will be clearly drawn between the false and the true. Then those who still continue in transgression will receive the mark of the beast. (White, 234, 235.)
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

What are areas in your life that need to begin with light?

What are the ramifications of a universal Sabbath?

How can you better incorporate the virtues of loyalty, duty, commitment, and faithfulness in your devotions, worship, and spirituality?

What were the past barriers to Sabbath-keeping that are different from present-day barriers?

How do all these barriers look from the perspective of eternity?

How can we experience more of the power of God through the seventh-day Sabbath?

Why is the celebration of the Sabbath the celebration of the eternity of Jesus Christ? If this isn’t so for you, why isn’t it yet?