

The Garden Temple

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

Genesis 2:15

For centuries, people have studied the Bible's description of the Garden of Eden in order to discover where it might be located. Their speculations have differed wildly, ranging from somewhere in China to Jackson County, Missouri! There certainly is a real location somewhere on earth (probably in the region of Mesopotamia) where God placed the first humans (Genesis 2:8). But God did not give us this description to send us looking for Eden.

Instead, God gave us this description to tell us something about the home he wants for humans—and eventually, the home he will give to humans.

When you take a closer look at the description of the Garden of Eden in view of the unfolding story of the Bible, you'll see that *this garden home is also a temple*—a place where God *and* humans dwell together, where heaven and earth meet. Consider the following connections between the Garden of Eden and the later tabernacle (the precursor to the temple) and the temple itself.

Both the Garden of Eden *and* the Temple/Tabernacle:¹

1. are places where God “walked around” (Genesis 3:8; Leviticus 26:12)
2. are places people were to “work [or cultivate] and keep” (Genesis 2:15; Num. 3:7-8; 8:25-26; 18:5-6; 1 Chron. 23:32; Ezek. 44:14)
3. are on a mountain (elevation of Eden implied by the flow of the rivers, Genesis 2:10; see Ezekiel 28:14-16; Isaiah 2:2; Micah 4:1)
4. face the east (Genesis 2:8; Ezekiel 43:1-4; 1 Kings 8:22-23)
5. have gardenlike features (The temple and tabernacle had carvings to give the impression of a garden: almond blossoms (Exodus 25:31-40) palm trees, pomegranates, and flowers (1 Kings 6:29))
6. have a tree (or a tree-shaped object, the *menorah*) near the middle (Genesis 2:9; Exodus 40:24-25)
7. have gold (Genesis 2:11-12; Exodus 25:10-22, many other places)
8. have onyx (a precious stone, Genesis 2:12; Exodus 28:9-21, 31:1-11; 36:36; 38:19)
9. have rivers flowing from and within them (Psalm 46:4-5; Ezekiel 47:1-12; Revelation 22:1-2)
10. were guarded by cherubim (that is, angelic guardians, Genesis 3:24; on top of the Ark of the Covenant, Exodus 25:18-20; embroidered into the curtain that veiled off the Holy of Holies, Exodus 26:31-33)

Clearly, then, the Garden of Eden is a kind of temple, and by putting humans into this garden-temple, God is teaching us that *our true home is on earth with him*. But what does God mean to stir within us by telling us this?

1. Beauty

The Garden of Eden was a place of *beauty*: “Out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is *pleasant to the sight*” (Genesis 2:9).

When God shows us our true home, we see a beauty that attracts us.

¹ For more on this, see G. K. Beale's [article](#): “Eden, the Temple, and the Church's Mission in the New Creation”

2. Bounty

The Garden of Eden was a place of *bounty*: “Out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is . . . good for food” (Genesis 2:9). “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden” (Genesis 2:16). This is often how the Bible depicts what it means to dwell with God (Psalm 23:5; Luke 14:15-24; Revelation 19:1-14).

When God shows us our true home, we see a bounty that satisfies us.

3. Banishment

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve’s enjoyment of this beauty and bounty was *voluntary*, which means that they had the choice to reject it all. And reject it they did, by seeking bounty and beauty *outside* God instead of within God. They were banished from the Garden of Eden, which God then guarded by placing *cherubim* at the entrance. The barrier between God and humans was later symbolized by the embroidering of cherubim into the fabric curtains that hung around the most sacred part of the tabernacle and temple.

When God shows us our true home, we see a banishment that horrifies us.

4. Breakthrough

When Jesus came to earth, he called himself the true “temple” (John 2:19-21; 4:21-24; Matthew 12:6), the place where heaven and earth meet, where God and man dwell together. But instead of experiencing God’s beauty and bounty, in his death, he was deprived of both: “He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him” (Isaiah 53:1). In fact, he was banished from God’s presence. Why? Because he was opening up a way for *us* who were banished to be welcomed home. Matthew tells us that when Jesus died on the cross, something happened in the temple: the cherubim-embroidered curtain that sealed people off from God’s presence was torn from top to bottom.

When God shows us our true home, we see a breakthrough that rescues us.

The tree of death has become the tree of life. A way home has opened up to us—not because we found our way, but because Jesus has broken through to us. But this was more than a way *back to Eden*: it was a way *forward* to a new heavens and earth.

Discussion

1. *Take some time to talk about home.* When have you felt most happy and at home? Most far from home (or unhappy within your home)? What kinds of things have given you this sense of comfort and belonging—or the sense of being unwelcome and distant?
2. *Now think about how this world does or doesn’t feel like home.* What aspects of this world make it feel like a place of exile? What aspects of this world make it feel like a place of home?
3. Christ is our home in the sense that he is the temple where we can enjoy fellowship with God now. But we also look forward to a future, permanent home—the new heavens and new earth. Does this make us live contentedly or discontentedly in the world as it is now?
4. What do you find beautiful, and what bounty do you tend to most appreciate in this world? How can this appreciation help you better understand God and the home he wants for us?
5. In what ways are we moved by Christ’s work of being exiled in order to bring us to God?
6. Many people find themselves literally without homes, or in homes that are lonely, sad or unsafe. How can our experience as exiles who have been welcomed into God’s home shape the way we view people who need housing or homes that are safer and joyful?