

"The Gardens of the Bible"

Introduction: Someone has said, "The Bible begins in a garden in Genesis and ends in a city in Revelation." That is an accurate observation, nevertheless there are some important events in both testaments that occur in gardens. Gardens were and are special places of rest and reflection now and in biblical times.

1. The Garden of Eden ~ After the creation of the world we find Adam and Eve in a garden.

We learn: And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. The Lord God took the man and put him the garden to till it and keep it (2:8,15).

2. The Gardens of Exile: Psalm 137 is a lament written either in the time of the exile in Babylon or shortly thereafter.

*By the rivers of Babylon—there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion.
On the willows there we hung up our harps.
For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth saying,
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"
How could we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?*

The city of Babylon was famous for its hanging gardens and intricate irrigation systems. The Jews living in exile there longed for their release and return to Jerusalem. We can hear the sadness in their hearts as the psalmist asks, "How could we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"

3. The Garden of Gethsemane - the betrayal of Jesus. The Gospel of Luke has the most vivid account of Jesus praying in the garden. He describes the scene where Jesus takes his disciples after the Last Supper. He tells them, "Pray that you may not come into the time of trial." He separates from them and kneels to pray. Luke tells us that "he prays more earnestly and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling on the ground" (22:44).

During his prayer, a crowd arrives led by Judas Iscariot who betrays him. We know that Jesus is immediately arrested and taken for trial in the court of the Sanhedrin. Judas betrays Jesus, but Peter denies that ever knew him.

4. The Garden Tomb - we learn that Jesus is crucified outside the city walls of Jerusalem in the Gospel of John we learn:

Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden, there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the day of preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there (20:41-42).

The garden is also the sight of Jesus' resurrection.

On the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb (v. 1)

When Jesus appears, Mary thinks that he is the gardener who has taken the body. "Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."

At that point Jesus calls Mary by name. She recognizes him. She runs back to tell the disciples, "I have seen the Lord!" (20:1-18)

5. The Garden of Revelation and the city:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth have passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (21:2)

John gives us the vision of a new Jerusalem as a glorious city. But in this city, there is a garden:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing

of the nations. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads (22:1-4).

I could say much more about each of these gardens, but I will leave it to our guest speakers to go much deeper into these stories to explore their symbolism and meaning. We hope that you will find a fresh appreciation for the gardens of the Bible, but also that we have our own gardens where we till, plan and sow. We learn about God's nature through our gardens and the wonder of organic growth.

Let's turn attention to the Garden of Eden. I've already mentioned that God "planted a garden in Eden, in the east and he put the man whom he had formed." (v. 8) Notice that in verse 15 that again we hear that God put him in the garden of Eden, but now we learn he had to "till and keep it." He had work to do. We also hear about the creation of Eve to be a helper (partner) for him. This may sound as if Eve is inferior to Adam, however, there is one reference in the Psalms that God is referred to as the "helper" of Israel.

The pattern of their relationship is established in a poetic couplet:

*This is at last bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;
This one shall be called woman, for out of man this one was taken (23).*

Then we hear a strange summary:

Therefore, a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed (24).

Some commentators have called this a 'creation ordinance' because it happens before Adam and Eve disobey God and depart from the Garden of Eden.

We all know what happens? God has told Adam that he "may freely eat of any fruit of the trees in the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in that day you shall die."

Enter the serpent. It is hard for us today to imagine what this story really about. Is it really about the Fall of humanity describing how sin and death entered the world?

As the story unfolds there is a consequence for Adam and Eve's disobedience. When God discovers that they have eat the forbidden fruit he says:

See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever (22).

What is this fruit from the tree of life? Is it an apple or a pomegranate? There was a missionary to the aborigines in Australia telling this story to a tribe. They all looked puzzled and so the missionary asked them if they had a question. They asked him, "Why didn't Adam and Eve eat the snake and not the fruit?"

We learn that God expels Adam and Eve from the garden and sets cherubim (angelic beings) to guard the entrance. They can never return.

What does this story teach us? How literally do we have to take it? First of all, it is a story. Some would call it a myth a fable. It's set in the biblical narrative as if it really happens, but it is not located in time, only a place somewhere in the East. In Chapter 2 we learn about the rivers which are like the Tigris and Euphrates in Mesopotamia with the local Gihon that flowed from Mount Zion. Cush is generally either Ethiopia or Arabia. (Hebrew Bible notes: OASB, p. 13).

We may never be able to answer all of the questions surrounding this story, but we know that Paul understands Adam to be the type of humanity whereby sin has entered the world. Jesus, as the Messiah is the new Adam by which we are saved.

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned—sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is the type of the one to come (Romans 5:12-14).

And in his first letter to the church in Corinth he writes:

For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ (15:21,22).

For Paul, Adam is the type for humanity by which sin, suffering and death have entered the world. Jesus is the new Adam (man) through whom sin is forgiven and life is restored through his death and resurrection.

Paul also writes about Abraham who is justified by his faith and not by works.

Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness (Romans 4:3).

Paul also has to deal with the purpose of the law given through Moses, but he carefully explains that righteousness does not come through obedience to the law, but through faith. The law had its purpose but we are not saved by obedience to it. The law only reveals our own sinfulness and inability to obey it completely.

Questions?