

## Eden As a Temple

In their book *Kingdom Through Covenant*, Wellum and Gentry summarize 10 key ways that Eden is represented as a temple:

- (1) The garden in Eden is characterized by the presence of God. There God comes to meet man at the cool of the day. The verb *halak* in the *hithpael* stem ('to walk to and fro,' Gen 3:8) is the same term employed to describe the divine presence in the later tent sanctuaries (Lev. 26:12; Deut. 23:15 (23:14 EV); 2 Sam. 7:6-7).
- (2) When humans were cast out of the garden in Eden, kerubim ('cherubim,' i.e. guardian creatures) were stationed east of the garden to guard the way to the tree of life (Gen 3:24). This clearly indicates that the entrance to the garden was in the east. Like the garden in Eden, the entrances to the later tabernacle and temple were also in the east and were guarded by kerubim (1 Kings 6:23-28; Ex. 25:18-22; 26:31; 1 Kings 6:29). Two guarded the inner sanctuary of Solomon's temple and two more the mercy seat of the ark in the inner sanctuary. Pictures of kerubim decorated the curtains of the tabernacle and the walls of the temple (Ex. 26:31; 1 Kings 6:29).
- (3) In the center of the garden of Eden is the tree of life. Similarly, in the center of the tabernacle and temple is the menorah (i.e., the branching lampstand), which, as Carol Meyers has shown, is a stylized tree of life. The idea that fulness of life can be found in the sanctuary is basic to the instructions for the sacrifices in the Torah and is a recurrent theme in the Psalms.
- (4) The responsibility and task given to Adam in the garden is *le'obdah ulesomora* (to serve/work it and to keep it). The only other passages in the Torah where the same two verbs occur together are Numbers 3:7-8; 8:26; 18:5-6, which describes the duties of the Levites in guarding and ministering in the sanctuary. These words are also commonly used in the Old Testament for worship. Thus Adam is portrayed as a kind of Levite who fulfills his role or task by maintaining the priority of worship.
- (5) According to Genesis 2:10, 'A river flows out of Eden to water the garden.' This river brings fertility and life to the entire world, as we see in verses 11-14. Similarly, in Psalm 46:5 (46:4 EV) we read of 'a river whose streams make glad the city of God,' and Ezekiel 47 describes a great river flowing out of the temple in the new Jerusalem to sweeten the Dead Sea. Such a source of fertility and life is an indication that the divine presence is there. One of these rivers was called the Gihon, which was also the name for the spring under the Jerusalem temple (1 Kings 1:33, 38, 45).
- (6) The river giving life to the garden divides into four as it issues from Eden. Since water flows downhill, this fact clearly indicates that Eden was an elevated place. In the ancient Near East, temples were situated on mountains because that is where the heavens meet earth. In Ezekiel 28:13-14, Eden is also described and portrayed as a mountain sanctuary. Interestingly, there are passages in the Old Testament which portray Canaan, the Promised Land given to Israel, as a new Eden. These texts speak of the 'new Eden' as a mountain sanctuary, the dwelling place of God (Ex. 15:17; Psalm 78:54). After divine judgment brings devastation to the land of Israel, God's plan of renewal involves restoring the desert so that it is like Eden (Isa. 51:3; Ezek. 36:35). The future new Jerusalem/Zion is likewise a mountain sanctuary (Isa. 2:2-4; 4:5; 11:9; 25:6-8; 56:7; 57:13; 65:11, 25).
- (7) The garden is the place of divine decrees. After placing the Man whom he had formed in the garden (Gen. 2:8, 15), God gave commands to the Man there. The Lord daily met the man there, and as Judge and King he called to account for his sin in one of these daily meetings. Similarly, the purpose of the tabernacle (and later Solomon's temple) is the place from which God rules as King: 'then make for me a sanctuary so that I may dwell among them' (Ex. 25:8). The ark in the center of the inner

room of the sanctuary is a kind of footstool of God's throne: 'the Lord sits enthroned above the cherubim' (1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2 = 1 Chron. 13:6; 2 Kings 19:15; Ps. 99:1).

- (8) The tree of knowledge in the garden in Eden was recognized as 'pleasant to the sight, good for food and to be desired to make one wise' (Gen. 3:6). These characteristics are echoed by Psalm 19, where the covenant/Torah/law is described as 'making wise the simple, rejoicing the heart, and enlightening the eyes.' Referred to as the 'testimony,' the covenant/Torah was kept in the ark in the holy of holies, the inner sanctuary (Ex. 25:16; De. 31:26). Touching the ark brought death just as eating from the tree of knowledge did (2 Sam. 6:7; Num. 4:20).
- (9) Genesis 3:21 records that 'the Lord God made tunics of skin for them and clothed them.' In the accounts of the ordination of the priests, Moses clothed them (Ex. 28:40-41; 29:8; 40:14; Lev. 8:13).
- (10) The first branch of the river coming forth from Eden goes round the land of Havilah (Gen. 2:11) and perhaps is reminiscent of the gold in the tabernacle and the temple. There were soham (onyx?) stones in the sanctuary (Ex. 25:7; 28:9, 20; 1 Chron. 29:2). Two such stones were engraved with the names of the twelve tribes and worn by the high priest on his ephod (Ex. 28:9-14). The substance called bedolah in Hebrew (= bdellium, a kind of special gum or resin from a tree) was also found in the Land of Havilah. The only other occurrence of bedolah is Numbers 11:7, where the appearance of manna is compared to this substance. Some manna was kept in the tabernacle (Ex. 16:33-34).

Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenant* (Crossway: Wheaton Books, 2012)