

The Garden of God

Archetype of the Hope of Mankind

8 And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed.

9 And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

10 A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers.

11 The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold.

12 And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there.

13 The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush.

14 And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

Genesis 2:8-14

A Mountain-Garden Wonder of the World

ONE OF THE SEVEN wonders of the world are the famed “**Hanging Gardens**” of Babylon. Ancient tradition has it that king Nebuchadnezzar built the gardens for his Persian queen to please her, because she had been raised in Media (ancient Iran) and was fond of the “**meadows of her mountains**”

(Diodorus Siculus, *Historical Library* II.10.1).¹ It was not a vegetable garden like you would have in your backyard, but more like a **city works project**—a park. Josephus tells us that Nebuchadnezzar took for himself many temples as the spoils of war. In one of them he erected very high and thick walls (22 ft. thick) supported by stone pillars. There he planted a hanging paradise full of all sorts of trees in order to render it “**an exact resemblance of a mountainous country**” (Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.19.139-141).

It was sloped like a hillside to emulate a **mountain** and had several terraces or tiers to it. It had deeply set pillars with palm trees on top of the pillars. It was said to resemble a theater. It had a roof with beams and many arched vaults [Strabo] and many royal lodgings of every description. There was a great aqueduct system supplying water from the Euphrates river which ran beside the Garden through the middle of the city, though the system was perfectly hidden from sight so that it looked like rivers flowed out from the garden. It contained many different varieties of plants and was filled deep with tilled soil.² One **Philo of Byzantium** called it “**exuberant and fit for a king**” due to the ingenuity and cultivator’s hard work.³ People today would look at it

¹ Diodorus Book II here:

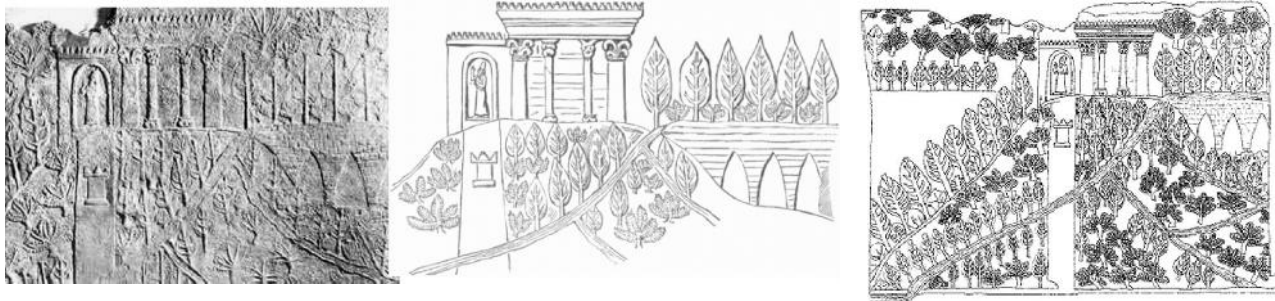
http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Diodorus_Siculus/2A*.html#10

² Diodorus, *Histories* II.1-6; Strabo, *Geography* XVI.1.5.

³ Philo of Byzantium, in Stephanie Dalley, *The Mystery of the Hanging Garden of Babylon* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 40.

and say, “What a wonder!” But that would be about it. And if so, they would be missing the rich world of ideas that went into making it in the first place. There was more going on here than just **a king building a garden for his bride.**

TEMPLE AND HANGING GARDENS AT KOYUNJIK



Bas Relief from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal (669-631 BC) at Nineveh depicts a luxurious garden on a hillock watered by an aqueduct (British Museum)

The Great Themes of the Bible

The Bible begins on in a **mountain**. It ends in a city which is two hundred times the height of Mt. Everest. At the foot of the first mountain there sits a **garden**, planted by God. The garden disappears for a time, but re-emerges at the end of the age in the middle of the same towering city which is so large that it would stretch from Denver to Mexico City to the middle of Cuba to Pittsburgh.

Running through the garden, its headwaters high up on Mt. Eden, there flowed a **river**. It nourished the garden, bringing life and health and happiness. Wherever the waters went, dividing into four different courses, running to the four corners of the earth, there was abundance and wealth: gold, bdellium, and onyx. But the river went underground.

Deserts sprung up full of dust, demons, and all manner of misdeeds. Yet it too springs back to the surface at the end in the garden city where it waters the land, nourishes the people, and gives them the water of life.

Surrounding the first garden like a great wall of giant sentries, ever watchful, ever on guard, there were planted towering **trees** of wonder and delight. Fruit of every kind. Leaves of beauty and wonder. Wood of strength and power. In the middle were two special trees: The **Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil** and the **Tree of Life**. Our first parents who were put into the garden by God were displaced from it after they disobeyed him. It was a punishment, but also an act of grace, so that they would not eat from the Tree of Life, and so live in a fallen, sinful, wretched condition forever. The **gate** to the tree of life was closed and protected by two special guardians, **cherubim** equipped with flaming swords of fire, but not before a promise was given that gave our parents hope. At the end of the Bible, access to the Tree is permitted again, as those to whom God grants healing and health come and sit under its evergreen branches, eat of its life-giving fruit, and listen to the wisdom that sounds from the never dying leaves as they are blown by the spirit in the wind.

The Garden of Eden is one of my absolute favorite things in God's holy word. Many people are still familiar with it

though they have never dawned the doors of a church, because it remains a fundamental pillar of the remnants of a once mighty civilization that that now crumbles before our very eyes—a garden in ruins. But the images here are **ubiquitous**. All nations and all peoples of all times and all places know of them. As the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* puts it, “The human race has always pictured perfection as an enclosed garden, lush with vegetation and suffused with tranquility ... [but] the Garden of Eden is more than a place; it is also a way of life and a state of soul.

They know of them for two reasons. First, they still hear the echoes of our dim past. Their holy men taught them the story, even if it was perverted. But why wouldn't they know the story? We all come from the same parents. Second, the images in the story have come to transcend the actual events themselves. The images almost have a life of their own, and the Bible takes full advantage of those images in order to set the mind straight once more, to tell the story as it really was and as it must be to anyone who wishes to get back to the Garden. It is vital to be aware of how the biblical story departs from the others, it alone can teach you how God intended human life to be lived and how, thanks to amazing grace, it may be lived today.

The Mountain-Garden of Eden

Like Genesis 1 which tells of *real* history from a *real* God who made *real* water and *real* land and *real* birds and *real* animals and *real* people, but does so through an image of the heaven and earth as a temple, so also Genesis 2 tells of *real* history of a *real* place, a *real* garden with *real* rivers and *real* people that were put into it to it to work and till the ground. In fact, as we will see a little today **and more next week**, this place is, like the heavens and earth that it finds itself in the center of, a **temple**—a holy place, a sanctuary built for many to have true fellowship with his God. In a chapter that we will come back to later this morning, **Ezekiel 28:18** refers to the **mountain-garden as a sanctuary**.

A Garden

What I want to do is go through the description of the garden (**Gen 2:8-14**), so that we can see and understand the different images that describe this paradise. The first image is the most familiar, and the one I started off with today. It is the image of a **garden**. The nursery rhyme asks, “**Mary, Mary, quite contrary, how does your garden grow?**” This is the first question to ask here, because it is the first to be answered. **Gen 2:8** says, “**The LORD God planted a garden.**” How did the garden of Eden grow? God planted it. This seems to be the purpose of the raincloud from **vs. 6** that came

over the land to water the bushes. There is now ample water, and so God plants a garden.

Taking a cue from Nebuchadnezzar, the image is one of [the king building a garden paradise for someone](#). In this case, it is for the man (and the woman seems also intended, though she is not here yet). Song of Solomon will expand on this image, of course, and apply it to the King of Israel and his beloved bride ([SS 4:12-5:1](#)). [How did God plant the Garden?](#) Who can say? It is like asking how God created water or earth or man. However he did it, it was *he* who did it. But surely, we can say that [Jesus](#) (the word) and the [Spirit](#) (the breath) [superintended](#) even as they did in Ch. 1. Perhaps Jesus did so in the form of the Angel of the LORD, for it is this same Jesus whom I believe we see walking in the same garden just as he later walks with Abraham and Hagar and Jacob in the same book.

It calls the place a garden ([gan](#)). The word refers to something very much like Nebuchadnezzar built. It is an enclosed or walled place, full of trees and birds and plants and fruits and water, each of which are here in Genesis 2.⁴ Today we might think of some kind of [botanical garden](#) combined with something like [zoo](#), especially the atrium with birds and

⁴ “A garden () is an enclosed area containing a variety of plants, water sources (streams and ponds), and animals. It was protected (vb.) by a wall or hedge/fence and entered by way of a gate.” Willem VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 876.

plants. Of course, those are man-made and very small, and it is apparent that no overhead enclosure was needed for this garden. But it was probably walled in some way, because later in the story, there is a gate that keeps them out. The LXX uses the word *paradeisos*, from which we, of course, get “[paradise](#).” The word means the same thing in both languages.

Importantly, the garden is [a place where the king resides](#). I want to stress this to you, because it is very important. For example, in [2 Kgs 21:18](#) we read, “[And Manasseh slept with his fathers and was buried in the garden of his house, in the garden of Uzza, and Amon his son reigned in his place](#)” (also [2 Kgs 25:4](#); [Jer 39:4](#); [52:7](#); [Neh 3:15](#)). Solomon tells us all about this saying, “[I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees”](#) ([Ecc 2:4-6](#)). He adds that he also had slaves to work them, herds and flocks, silver and gold, women and love ([vv. 7-9](#)), all garden themes in Genesis 2, though perversely so with Solomon (slaves, many lovers, etc). And Esther says that the king gave for all the people a feast lasting [seven](#) days in the court of the [garden](#) of the [king's palace](#) ([Est 1:5](#)). Therefore, The Hanging Gardens of Babylon would more properly be called the Hanging Gardens of Nebuchadnezzar.

In the same way, the Bible refers to the Garden of Eden as “the garden of God” (Ezek 28:13; Ezek 31:9). This is where God lives. Please do not forget this, because it has tremendous interpretive significance throughout the story.

Mt. Eden

The next thing it says is that God planted this garden *in Eden*. This fixes the garden in a certain geographical location, but it is not known exactly where it is. The key to its location and the rooting of this ancient story⁵ in real history and geography are the rivers that are described in vv. 11-14. Four rivers are named, two with certainty. Those two are the Tigris and the Euphrates. The headwaters of the Euphrates is near Mt. Ararat, close to Mt Tendürek and Lake Van in Turkey, north, but also east, of Israel. The Tigris’ source is not far from there either.



Tigris and Euphrates River Systems



Mount Tendürek, 11758 ft
Headwaters of the Euphrates

⁵ Indeed, “myth” as we have discussed it throughout Genesis 1 where “myth” refers to a creation story or a story of origins that may or may not be true. In the case of the Bible, it is the Myth that is True, as C.S. Lewis called it.

The other two rivers are not known today, nor are their translations even certain. The first is called the **Pishon**. It is connected to the land of **Havilah**, where there is gold, aromatic resin called bdellium, and onyx stones, all precious. These all came from souther Arabia in ancient times, so perhaps this was the land of Havilah. But we talking about places that are truly ancient, and no one knows for certain. One of the few ancient references to Havilah is found in *Pseudo-Philo* (1st cent A.D.) where it talks about the days of Kenaz (Caleb's father) when the Amorite (giants) brought up from this land “precious stones ... crystal and prase,” some of which “shone ... as if it revealed the water of the deep lying beneath it,” and put them in their sanctuaries. These stones were of too much value to estimate. They were lamps without artificial light, so bright that “even if one of the Amorites [i.e. giants] was blind, he would go and put his eyes on it and recover sight” (*Pseudo-Philo* 25:11-12). The stones were also said to have been found laying upon seven “sacred nymphs [idols]”⁶ who “when called upon, showed the Amorites (including Nimrod) what to do every hour.” Pretty strange, isn't it? The other river is called the **Gihon**, and is

⁶ In Scandinavian and Greek mythology, the nymphs hung out by the World Tree and were teachers of wisdom, see below.

associated with Cush. Today we think of Cush as being Ethiopia in Africa.

One other key to its location is also important for a theological reason. **Gen 2:8** says that the garden was “**in the east.**” To a Jew, this would probably have been east of the Promised Land, though I suppose it would be east of Egypt too, as Moses had come from there. The east would include anything east, even if it is northeast or southeast, as long as it is east. Thus, speculation for the area of Eden has ranged from the northern tip of the **Persian Gulf** in southern Iraq and Kuwait to northern **Iran/Turkey** (perhaps near or under Lake Van or Lake Urmia) all the way down into **Israel** and even into **Western Africa**. As we all know, this is also called the cradle of civilization even by secular scholars today, so they all may be possible.

East is also significant in that this is the prominent direction of the **entrance to almost every sanctuary** in the Bible. The tabernacle’s door faced east, as did the temple. An east wind blew the Red Sea open so that Israel could approach Sinai. East of the Garden is where God places the cherubim to guard its gate. At the tower of Babel they go east. The sun rises in the east, as the earth is God’s temple too. So this signals in a minor key that Eden is a sanctuary.

The origin of the word “Eden” is also not known. It may be related to an Akkadian word *edinu*, which is based on the Sumerian word *eden*, meaning “plain, steppe” (*TWOT* #1568). A steppe is generally a huge grassland like those found in Mongolia or western Russia, not unlike the prairies we have here. Or, it may be related to a West Semitic stem *dn* occurring in several languages, having to do with “luxury, abundance, delight, or lushness.”⁷ Hence, paradise.

Of more importance is the fact that the garden is not Eden. The garden is “in” Eden. It is Eden’s garden. Eden is larger than the garden. There are two important features of Eden that the Bible makes reference to. The first is implicit in Genesis 2 and explicit in Ezekiel 28 where it is called “The mountain of God” (*Ezek 28:14-16*). It is very important to understand this and its significance. There are other mountains of God in the Bible: Horeb/Sinai (*Ex 3:1; 24:13*), Bashan (*Ps 68:15*), and Zion (*Isa 2:3*) all come to mind. This idea of a mountain of God is critical to understand, as it is a theme that plays throughout Scripture.

Basically, the mountain of God is the place where God and/or God and angels meet with special people: Moses on Mt. Sinai, Noah on Mt. Ararat, Elijah on Mt. Carmel, and so on. In the NT, Jesus meets with people on the Mt. of Beatitudes, the Mt. of Transfiguration, the Mt. of Olives, and

⁷ Howard N. Wallace, “Eden, Garden of (Place),” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 281.

Mt. Calvary. At Sinai, we are told several times that **angels** were there with God and Moses (**Deut 33:2; Ps 68:17; Acts 7:53; Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2**). This is very relevant too.

Isaiah 14:13 calls this the “**Mt. of Assembly**” or *har mo’ed* in the Hebrew. This is the place where a fellow named **Helel ben Shachar** tries to usurp God’s throne and exalt himself above the “**stars of God.**” Helel means “**Shining One son of Dawn**” and he plays a big role in Genesis 3. His Latin name is **Lucifer**. Curiously, *har mo’ed* turns into the Greek word (h)Armageddon.⁸

This idea is also **ubiquitous**, as virtually every ancient culture has a Mount of Assembly⁹ that plays prominently in its origin stories: Greeks—**Mt. Olympus**; Canaanites—**Mt. Saphon** (which also happens to be the particular mountain in Isaiah 14:12-13); Babylon—**Mt. Khursag**; Western American Indian tribes—**Mt. Shasta**, China—**Tu-shuo**; Egypt—**Tatenen**; India—**Mt. Meru**; Scandinavia—**Himinbjörg**, and many more. Always residing at the top is a small group of

⁸ See Meredith G. Kline, *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 49-53.

⁹ Scholars refer to this Mt. of Assembly idea as the Cosmic Mountain. A Cosmic Mountain has been defined this way, “In the ancient civilizations from Egypt to India and beyond, the mountain can be a center of fertility, the primeval hillock of creation, the meeting place of the gods, the dwelling place of the high god, the meeting place of heaven and earth, the monument effectively upholding the order of creation, the place where god meets man, a place of theophany.” **Richard J. Clifford**, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 5. I have written about this in the unpublished book *Michael vs. the Dragon*.

heavenly beings who make decisions over the affairs of mankind (cf. **Gen 1:26**).

These mountains are **links between heaven and earth**, places of intersection, and we will find them in more than one story in Genesis alone. I believe that ancient obsession with pyramids and ziggurats reflects this worldview, as both were religious buildings meant to replicate and even bring down the gods so that they might meet with man. Believe me when I tell you, though **we are not prepared to talk about it today**, that this idea play the pivotal part in helping you understand what is happening in the biblical story of the Garden of Eden.

PYRAMIDS, ZIGGURATS, AND COSMIC MOUNTAINS OF THE WORLD



Iaram-Sin at the foot of K/ 23rd cent. B.C.



Pyramids surrounding Xi'an, China



Pyramids of Giza Egypt



Pyramid of the Sun, Visoko City, Bosnia



Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site, Collinsville, Illinois



Artistic Rendition: Tower of Babel



Ur-Nammu (2,100 B.C.?) in Ur, Iraq
Oldest Reconstructed Ziggurat in the World



Pyramid of the Moon Teotihuacán, Mexico

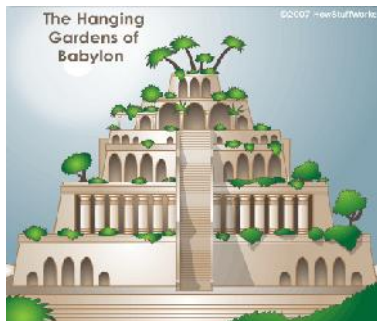


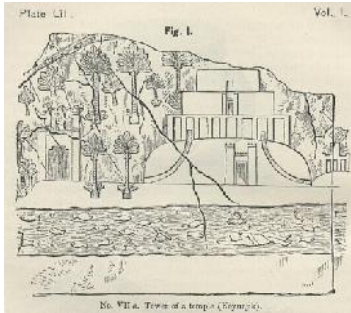
Temple of Kukulcan, Chichen Itza, Yucatan



Goguryeo's Pyramid Korea, 500 A.D.

MODERN ARTISTIC RENDITIONS OF HANGING TOWERS OF BABYLON





125. Tower of a temple, Koyunjik
SEVEN GREAT MONARCHIES OF THE ANCIENT EASTERN WORLD
[p://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/rawlinson/2assyria/r2c](http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/rawlinson/2assyria/r2c)



135: Garden of Sargon II at Dur-Sharrukin (Khorsabad). Two Phoenician style boats with horse-
prows float on the fish pond in the palace garden. In the background is an Assyrian-styled
building with columns *in antis*, with voluted capitals. To the left are two Assyrians wielding
pork-headed scepters. Compare silver scepter from Tel Dan (Area T). (Drawing adapted by A. M.
after P. E. Botta and E. Flandin, *Monument de Ninive II* [Paris, 1849], pl. 114)
J. Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), p. 222.

The Man, God's Priest-King

We can see that Eden is a meeting place in two particular introductory ways in our passage. It tells us that “there [Yahweh] put the man whom he had formed” (Gen 2:8). This passage implies two distinct but related things. The first is that it helps us see Adam as God's high priest. Remember, this is God's Garden; he lives here. Remember, it is a sanctuary. To be “put” (*sim*) into a holy place like the garden of Eden is, is the language used throughout the Torah of special vessels and instruments that were put into the tabernacle (cf. Ex 24:6; 28:12; 39:19; Lev 8:8-9; Deut 10:2). It is a ceremonial appointing if you will, or to use more theological language, it is God sanctifying Adam, preparing him for his high priestly task.

The second thing it shows us is that Adam is being given a position **as a king**. Not the High King, that role belongs always and forever to God. Perhaps a good illustration for this would be King Arthur's Round Table. Here, around the table, **King Arthur's knights** would all sit, deliberating together of the affairs of Camelot and the realm, each equal, though Arthur was still and always King of kings. But this analogy assumes that there are more here than just Adam and God. Indeed, that is true.

The Trees of Eden and Stones of Fire

As I've said, in the Bible and everywhere else, the mount of assembly is filled with an angelic host of created beings that rule over the cosmos. This is their headquarters if you will. If you've ever seen any movie with Zeus meeting with the gods on Mt. Olympus, you get the idea.¹⁰ At this point, I want to return to Ezekiel 28 one last time. The whole passage is **Ezekiel 28:1-19**. It is a lament of for the king of Tyre, a perfectly human king. However, standing behind the king like a large, menacing shadow is someone else.¹¹ The story reads,

¹⁰ The OT actually uses the term '*elohim*, the same word used of God, to describe angels, and "angel" (*aggelos*) is one of the words that is sometimes used to translate '*elohim*. God is the Elohim of elohim just as he is the King of king. He is uniquely different in his incommunicable attributes.

¹¹ The idea of a supernatural being able to be described at the same time as the human king simply reflects the ancient idea of the princes of heaven being given territories over the earth, so that in Daniel you can have a "prince of Persia" and "prince of Greece" and a "prince of

² ... Thus says the Lord GOD: "Because your heart is proud, and you have said, 'I am a god, I sit in the seat of the gods, in the heart of the seas,'¹² ... ¹² ... Thus says the Lord GOD: "You were the signet¹³ of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. ¹³ You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle; and crafted in gold were your settings and your engravings. On the day that you were created they were prepared. ¹⁴ You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked. (Ezek 28:2-12-14)

I'll stop here, because **we will return to the rest of this passage** when we get to the fall. The most obvious thing to point out here is that in Eden there is a **guardian cherubim**, an angel. Of course, we see two other angels late in the Genesis story that guard the way to the tree of life. This makes a third angel that is said to be in the Garden explicitly (I told you last week, this whole section begins that these are the

Israel," none of whom are human beings. The earthly king was usually thought to have been given his power directly by these princes (whom they called gods), so that he became a veritable god on earth, the one who represented the heavenly beings and carried out their wishes.

¹² This is the imagery of land coming up out of the sea (think Gen 1), forming a holy mountain which becomes a divine council or Mt. of Assembly, a navel of the earth, and an axis mundi (a meeting place of heaven and earth). It is found in the Bible and throughout the ancient world.

¹³ The word signet is probably a double entendre, signifying at the same time a royal seal-ring and a serpent, as this word can be translated as "serpent."

generations of *heaven* and earth; **Gen 2:4**). Given that it talks about the same thing Isaiah 14 does, it is a safe bet to say that this angel refers once more to Lucifer. So now this gives us four heavenly beings and one human being, soon to be joined by his wife that are present in Eden. It is starting to look more and more like a Mt. of Assembly, a divine council as **Psalm 82:1** puts it.

But there are most likely many more heavenly beings here. The Ezekiel story refers to the “**stones of fire**” and the “**precious stones.**” In **Genesis 2:12** we find this same idea, though much less metaphorically. You find **gold** and **onyx** in the lands where the river flows. It is almost certain that Ezekiel takes these literal stones and uses them metaphorically to refer to other heavenly beings.

Listen to how Ezekiel earlier in his book describes the heavenly beings. He sees the four living creatures and, “**Their appearance was like burning coals of fire,**” “**like the appearance of torches,**” and “**out of the fire went forth lightning” (**Ezek 1:13**). “**Upward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around” (**vs. 27**). Their legs “**sparkled like burnished bronze**” (*nechosheth*)¹⁴” (**vs. 7**; cf. **Dan 10:5-6**). For this and a number of other reasons,¹⁵ one scholar****

¹⁴ *Nechosheth* is related to the word “serpent” in *Gen 3:1*—*nachash*. Compare: *nchoshth* and *nchsh*.

¹⁵ I will put as an appendix my section on the stones of fire from my Michael vs. the Dragon at the end of this sermon.

concludes, “In the case of the ‘stones of fire’ in whose midst he dwells, the reference [likely] is to his fellow inhabitants—who are thus thought of as creatures of light [i.e. angels].”¹⁶

A second image is picked up by Ezekiel in **ch. 31**. It tells the same thing. This time, the Assyrian king is the target of God’s arrows. The Assyrian is likened to a **Great Tree** (cedar). It has beautiful branches, forest shade, a towering height, and its top among the clouds (**31:3**). Daniel 4 uses the exact same image to refer to King Nebuchadnezzar.

What is being depicted by Ezekiel and Daniel is yet another **ubiquitous** image of creation, found in the Bible, the Middle East, India, China, Scandinavia, Germany, North and South America, Africa, everywhere. Scholars call it the **World Tree**. The World Tree is usually described as a colossal tree that connects the various sections of creation: heaven, earth, underground. Sometimes it is related to the Tree of Life, though in the Bible, we do not get a description of how tall the Tree of Life is. Other times it seems to be

¹⁶ **Walther Zimmerli**, *Ezekiel 2: A Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 93. Notice also that in the High Priest’s ephod (Ex 28:15-21), there was fastened 12 stones of fire. Yes, they represent the tribes, but they also may represent something higher up as well. Like the rest of the tabernacle, this too is a marker that Israel’s priest is being given access to the heavenly mountain and garden sanctuary where the intersection of heaven and earth takes place. This is what happens even this very moment for us, through Christ. Can you see it? Look and believe what the Scripture teaches, for we have become the stones embedded in the new temple of God, which is coming down out of heaven. This is the meaning of the images given in Revelation 21.

separate from it (the Tree of Knowledge?). Some World Trees are aligned to the cardinal points (N, S, E, W) and act like conduits between heaven and earth. This is the image of Ezekiel and Daniel.

World Trees grow **on top of holy hillocks**, have roots deep into the underworld, and often have lights and stars in the crown. Like the mountain, they are also said to be the dwelling place of the gods. Transmitters of wisdom regularly originate from the World Tree. Quite frequently a serpent can be found near the base or coiled up around the trunk. The World Tree is linked to creation, and some World Trees play a part in the eschatological conclusion of the world.

The World Tree has never left our consciousness, as this is exactly what the **Christmas Tree** represents (it comes especially from German and Scandinavian folk lore).¹⁷ It is also making its way back into our land through games like **World of Warcraft** and movies such as **Lord of the Rings**, **Avatar**, **Captain America**, and even kids movies such as **Kung Fu Panda** or teen TV shows like **One Tree Hill**. It is important to be aware of what you are being taught by pop-culture.

¹⁷ See the fascinating article by **Robert N. St. Clair**, “The World Ash Tree: the Mythical Origins of the Christmas Tree,” at: <http://structural-communication.com/Articles/world-ash-tree-stclair.html>. It is easy to read the Christmas Tree into Jeremiah 10:2ff. However, Jeremiah is not depicting a Christmas Tree, but rather an idol that is shaped (he mockingly likens it to a scarecrow) and gilded with gold and silver as idols were. The much better parallel of the Christmas tree is the Daniel 4 and Ezekiel 31 chapters.

THE WORLD TREE IN POPULAR CULTURE



World Tree in Hyjal,
World of Warcraft



The Mighty Mellym of
Caras Galadon



Trees of Lothlórien



"Hometree," in the movie *Avatar*
20th Century Fox



Nodrassil,
WoW: Cataclysm Expansion



The World Tree of Asgard, the means of travelling to other realms
Captain America: The First Avenger



Peach Tree of Heavenly Wisdom on Peach Tree Hill,
Kung Fu Panda

THE WORLD TREE IN ANCIENT TREE AND CHRISTMAS TREE



Yggdrasil
Scandanavia



Irmisul
Germany



Aztec World Tree
with serpents, shamans, and water



Mayan World Tree
Serpents, shamans



Cosmic Tree and serpent
Ica, Peru



Ashvattha
India



Christmas Tree on Water
Rio
Note the angels, lights, and star

At any rate, Ezekiel call the predecessors of the king—previous great civilizations—“the trees of Eden.” That is a strange metaphor, since no people were around in Eden, except for Adam and Eve. He says “all the trees of Eden, which were in the garden of God, were jealous” of this king’s greatness ([Ezek 31:9](#)). And God destroys this great tree in part, “in order that all the trees by the waters may not be

exalted in their stature, nor set their top among the clouds, nor their well-watered mighty ones stand erect in their height. He concludes, “To which among the trees of Eden are you thus equal in glory and greatness?” (vs. 18). Again, we will return to this chapter in Genesis 3 when we come to Satan, but for now it is enough to see that Ezekiel is personifying the Trees of Eden, and doing so in the same way that the stones of fire were personified.¹⁸

Now, Genesis 2 is supernaturally charged, but not nearly to the level as Ezekiel is. In Genesis, the image of a physical garden is prominent. These trees are given for food (Gen 2:9). God’s goodness shines through to our first parents. He loves them and blesses them and provides for their every need by supplying them with a lush paradise where all the delights the eye could desire are to be found. This ought to cause us to pause, for indeed, when we think about the love of God for mankind, our thoughts must start here, in the Garden, before the Fall, with us. He loves humanity for who we are and what he made us to be. And he shows his love in the action of planting for us a garden. Any doctrine of the love of God must start here and not with the fall. There is something intrinsic about us that God loves. Even if he also hates our sin and even us when we sin, he also loves us with a

¹⁸ The idea of heavenly princes ruling over each territory is behind the Trees of Eden metaphor in Ezekiel.

love of benevolence, which is on magnificent display in the garden of Eden.

But as the story continues, it becomes increasingly necessary to see these supernatural things here, as any Israelite would have, having come out of Egypt or gone into Babylon or been taken over by Greece or Rome. We have to get into their world if we want to truly understand the depths of the story. This is why it is so important to use the Reformation of interpreting Scripture with other Scripture. There are strange things that go on in our story, very strange indeed. All of this will come to a head when we finally see Satan enter the picture and the resulting scene of judgment and curse.

Two Special Trees

For now, I want to point out the **last two features** of the garden that we will see today. There are other features, such as animals that will come up later, as well as a marriage ceremony, both of which relate to the imagery of the garden, **but we will look at those another time**. The first of these are the **two great trees of Eden**. One is called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The other is called the Tree of Life. **We will into these more next week**.

For now, the Tree of Life is another **ubiquitous** image, as is wisdom that is found at the bottom of the world tree, near serpents of wisdom. In the Bible, these two trees play as kind of sacramental counterparts: a positive sacrament, will Adam

eat from the Tree of Life? And an anti-sacrament, the all important test.

TREES OF LIFE



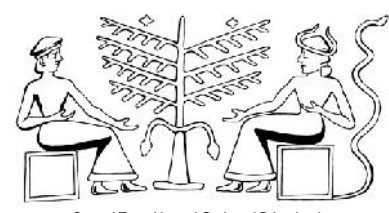
Egyptian Tree of Life
Thoth and Seshat



Urartu, Tree of Life, 1,200 B.C.



Babylonian Tree of Life
Ninilil and her Consort



Sacred Tree, Horned God, and Priest(ess).
Cylinder seal impression, 2330-2150 B.C.



China: Zhongli Quan
under the Peach Tree



Reproduction of Seal of Mushezib-Ninurta
Syria 883



Nordic Tree of Life: *Mimameidr*



Greek: Garden of Hesperides
Ca. 400 B.C., London E 224, British Museum

The River of Eden

The second feature is one that we spoke about with regard to its geography. This is the **river of Eden**. **There is a river that flows out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divides and becomes four rivers (Gen 2:9)**. The river probably demonstrates by itself that Eden has a great mountain, for it is the source of the mighty river. It is true that rivers like the Mississippi can begin in a lake in fairly flat country. But most, like the Colorado or Missouri or Nile or Amazon or Rhine or Tigris or Euphrates and probably Eden's river begin in the high country. As with Nebuchadnezzar's garden, the waters here keep the place fertile and lush.

Between the Mountains, the Garden, the River, and the Tree ...

Summing up some of what we have seen, one Bible Dictionary says, “Many of the motifs of Eden are also those of the divine dwelling ... the unmediated presence of the deity, the council of the heavenly beings, the issuing of divine decrees, the source of subterranean life-giving waters which supply the whole earth, abundant fertility, and trees of supernatural qualities and great beauty.”¹⁹ Another says, “At a literal, physical level the garden is a place of life richly nourished, well attended to and appointed for the enjoyment of its human owners or residents. As such, it is a touchstone of such motifs as provision, beauty, abundance and the satisfaction of human need. Next to heaven, it is the preeminent image of human longing.”²⁰

We have now seen the image of a garden, of a mountain, of trees, of a great river and other things. We began by thinking about how they crop up again at the very end of the

¹⁹ Howard N. Wallace, “Eden, Garden of (Place),” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 282. Eden is the source of the waters and the residence of God. The text describes a situation that was well known in the ancient world: a sacred spot featuring a spring with an adjoining, well-watered park, stocked with specimens of trees and animals. Also J. Walton, “Eden, Garden of,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. D. Alexander and D. Baker (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 202–7.

²⁰ Leland Ryken, Jim Wilhoit, et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 315.

Bible. But how can it be that such a thing could take place? This is how I want to leave us today. Why does the Garden matter?

There is a prophecy in Ezekiel that explains a coming third temple. It tells us that here, “The whole territory on the top of the mountain all around shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the temple” (Ezek 43:12). Like the previous tabernacle and temple of Solomon, it is filled with various trees, in this case palms (Ezek 40:16, 22, 26, 31, 34, 37, etc.). Right beside these trees there are cherubim (Ezek 41:18, 20, 25; cf. 1 Kgs 6:29, 32, 35, 7:36). Flowing out from this temple is a most miraculous river (Ezek 47:1ff). Everywhere it goes, the dead come to life. And it says, “As I went back, I saw on the bank of the river very many trees on the one side and on the other ... And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing” (Ezek 47:7, 12).

Finally, in a passage predicting the same time it tells us, “Thus says the Lord GOD: On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited,

and the waste places shall be rebuilt. And the land that was desolate shall be tilled, instead of being the desolation that it was in the sight of all who passed by. And they will say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden'” (Ezek 36:33-35).²¹ So how is this prophecy fulfilled, and when?

Yes, the Bible begins on in a mountain. It ends in a city which is two hundred times the height of Mt. Everest. But between the mountain of Eden and the towering city of the new Jerusalem, right there in the middle, at the very beginning of your New Testament, near the end of the Gospel stories, there stands a lowly, unassuming hill, upon which events would take place that would change the world forever.

²¹ On eschatology, one dictionary shows how important the garden is to the future throughout the bible, not just in Ezekiel: *Eschatology*. When the Lord brings Israel back () to their land, the cities will be rebuilt, vineyards will be planted, and *gardens* will be made providing fruit (Amos 9:14). The restoration of Israel and her people is described in garden terms (Isa 51:3 [parallelism with Eden]; 58:11; 61:11; Jer 31:12). The garden will be well watered (Isa 58:11; Jer 31:12; note the contrast with Isa 1:29–30) like the garden of Gen 2, but in it will be found righteousness (), joy (), gladness (), thanksgiving (), praise (), and singing (Isa 51:3; 58:11). Yahweh has laid Israel waste like a garden (Lam 2:6), but in the future there will be no more sorrow (Jer 31:12). Hos 14:7 [8] could be read , “like a garden,” instead of (cf. Cornelius, *JNSL* 14, 1988, 46, n. 25), referring to the restored Israel. I. Cornelius, “ / (gan / gannâ),” in Willem VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 877.

At the foot of the first mountain there sits a garden, planted by God. The garden disappears for a time only to re-emerge at the end of the story in the middle of the enormous city. Between them are planted two more gardens. One is full of sorrow and of tears. Its name is [Gethsemane](#). Here, the Lord Jesus went to pray and to weep, while those who kept guard outside ... slept, as poor at guarding as Adam was. The other garden is one of great joys and delight. Is the [garden where they lay the body of Jesus](#), where he rose three days after dying to the great joy of Peter and Mary and the others who saw him that morning. This is the mountain-garden that that brought newness of life.

But for access to be gained once more to the tree of life, a way had to be made whereby man could eat of the tree and live forever ... *in a holy and blameless condition*. Thus, [another tree had to be planted](#). Two thousand years ago, on that unassuming hillock across the valley from the Garden of Sorrow, on the way to the garden of the resurrection, the Romans erected a crooked splintery wooden cross.

To get there, Jesus had to cross the river [Kidron](#)—the dark, black, dry wadi. Once through, they lifted up the son of man high for all to see. Cursed are all who are hung on a tree. You can't make this stuff up. Only God could write such a history play as this. Many mocked and scorned him that dreadful day, and to them the only garden that remains is

that of sorrow and tears, thorns and cactus, sweat and hard labor and never ending distress. There is no rest found in an eternal Gethsemane, but only soldiers come to carry you away.

But those who fall under the shadow of the crooked tree, who look up at the dying son of man, these are promised that they will have life abundantly. The Trees of Eden bow their heads at the son of God, hung on that tree. For they have been put to shame by him who conquered them in death. But his tree of death opens the way for us to go come the tree of life. The cherubim sheath their swords when any and all enter through the Gate, which is Jesus Christ. All one need do is thirst and hunger and recognize their ineligibility to go enter through Adam through repentance and godly sorrow. Then, all that is left is belief and trust. Those who believe, come. That's the call now. Come to the tree of life. The Spirit and the bride say come. Come you who are weary and heavy laden, and you will find your rest, and hope, and happiness, and strength, and sustenance, and life.

Appendix--Stones of Fire

From the references above, you can also see the relationship between the stones and the trees. This deserves a slight detour. We have already seen Ezekiel 28 and its reference to Mt. Eden. In the same passage the prophet refers to the “stones of fire” through which “guardian cherub” walked on the mountain of God which is Eden (Ezek 28:14, 16). The reference to stones probably originates in Genesis 2:11-12, where it says that in the land of Havilah, there is gold, bdellium and onyx. Earlier in Ezekiel 28:13 the “stones of fire” are called “precious stones” such as sardius, topaz, and diamond. The scene actually recalls high priests breast piece that was made of precious stones (Ex 28:17-21). At any rate, the punishment was to be cast out, *away from* the stones of fire. Was this a punishment of keeping Satan from getting rich with gold and gems? I don't think so.

One of the few ancient references to Havilah is found in *Pseudo-Philo* (1st cent A.D.). It is fascinating. It talks about the days of Kenaz (Caleb's father) when the Amorite (giants) brought up from this land “precious stones. . . crystal and prase,” some of which “shone. . . as if it revealed the water of the deep lying beneath it,” and put them in their sanctuaries. These stones were of too much value to estimate. They were lamps without artificial light, so bright that “even if one of the Amorites [giants] was blind, he would go and put his eyes on it and recover sight.”²² The stones were also said to have been found laying upon seven “sacred nymphs [idols]” (in Scandinavian and Greek mythology, for instance, the nymphs hung out by the World Tree and

²² [Pseudo-Philo 25:11-12.](#)

were teachers of wisdom) who “when called upon, showed the Amorites (including Nimrod) what to do every hour.”

The relationship between shining stones and nymphs is more than coincidental. Ezekiel is using the language of Eden and other ancients to describe the heavenly beings of the divine mountain. It is a metaphor, but one that directly relates heaven to earth. A fragment of the Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic describes the original garden this way,

He went directly to the [] of the garden of the gods in order to admire it, as its fruit it carries carnelians, vines are climbing there—beautiful to look at—with a foliage made of lapis lazuli. The fruits—a pleasure to behold—are made of ... stones.

[Break of about 23 lines]

[] cedar [] its [... are made of] white stones ... The sea [its ... are made of] *sâsu*-stones. Instead of thistles and thorny shrubs [their ... are made of] red stones, and the thorns are made of *abarummu*-stones. *Sabû*-stones and haematite are, []-*ri-e* and pearls (?) [are]. Instead of [are made of] agate (?), of the [] sea [].²³

This “garden of the gods” reminds me of a famous state park in Colorado Springs called The Garden of the Gods. It is made up of fiery red stones that jut out of the ground as if pushed upward by some incredible force from below and left as memorials of an ancient

²³ Daniel Isaac Block, *The Book of Ezekiel. Chapters 25-48*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997-), 115. Smoothed over from a translation by A. L. Oppenheim, “Mesopotamian Mythology II,” *Or* 17 (1948) 47-48, cited in James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament: ANET* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 89.

cataclysm. The very name of the place is quite curious in light of these ancient texts.

As mentioned above, [Ezekiel 28:13](#) describes the stones as nine precious and shining stones (sardius, topaz, diamond, beryl, onyx, jasper, sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle, along with gold) that covered the guardian cherub. The church fathers understood exactly what this meant. For example, [Gregory the Great](#) (c. 540–604) wrote, “He gave the names of nine stones, since there are nine ranks of angels. The first angel was adorned and covered with these nine since when it was set ahead of the whole multitude of angels, it was more illustrious in comparison with them.”²⁴

This passage in Ezekiel also has a parallel in [1 Enoch 18:6-9](#),

I passed by and I saw a place *burning* night and day, where there were seven mountains of expensive stones, three toward the east and three laying toward the south. And, indeed, those toward the east were from a stone of color, but one was from a stone of pearl, the other a stone of healing; but the one to the south was from a fiery red stone; And the one in their midst was into heaven, as the throne of God was made from the stone of alabaster, and the top of the throne was made from the stone of sapphire; And I saw a consuming fire and things within these mountains.

Enoch’s stone throne likewise has a parallel in a Babylonian text where the [Amesha Spentas](#) (“Immortal Holy Ones”) are seated near the throne of Ahura Mazda where they serve him as ministering angels.²⁵ Three of

²⁴ Gregory the Great, “Forty Gospel Homilies 34,” cited in Kenneth Stevenson and Michael Gluerup, *Ezekiel, Daniel*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture OT 13 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 95.

²⁵ [Bundabishn 2.4](#). The thrones are specifically referenced in [Venidad 19.32](#).

this divine council sit to the right of Mazda, three sit to the left.²⁶ Back in Enoch, six archangels are referred to (Uriel, Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Sariel, and Gabriel; [1 En 20:1-7](#)) as a parallel idea. Thus, scholars conclude that the six mountains of Enoch “represent the thrones of the chiefs of God’s heavenly entourage,” and that the flame-colored stones of the mountains correspond to Ezekiel’s stones of fire.²⁷ So writes one, “In the case of the ‘stones of fire’ in whose midst he dwells, the reference [likely] is to his fellow inhabitants—who are thus thought of as creatures of light [i.e. angels].”²⁸ This is in line with [Psalm 104:4](#), “He makes his angels flaming fire.”

This is reminiscent of something Ezekiel sees at the very beginning of his book ([Ezekiel 1](#)).²⁹ While some people think the giant fiery wheel in the sky is a flying saucer, Ezekiel is actually describing something else. He describes beings whose appearance was “like burning coals of fire,” “like the appearance of torches,” and “lightning” ([Ezek 1:13](#)). Later he

²⁶ [A. V. Williams Jackson](#) (*A Brief Note on the Amshaspands* [Freiburg: Mohr, 1898], 364) reproduces the arrangement with Mazda at the head and other archangels to his left and right:

Ahura Mazda	
Vohu Manah (“Good Purpose”)	Spenta Armaiti (“Holy Devotion”)
Asha Vahishta (“Best Truth/Righteousness”)	Haurvatat (“Holiness”)
Khshathra Vairya (“Desirable Dominion”)	Ameretat (“Immortality”)

²⁷ [George W. E. Nickelsburg](#) and [Klaus Baltzer](#), *1 Enoch: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 286. Others who take this view include, [Richard Clifford](#), *The Cosmic Mountain*, 173; [Kelley Coblenz Bautch](#), *A Study of the Geography of 1 Enoch 17-19* (Boston: Brill, 2003), 114-20; [Millard C. Lind](#), *Ezekiel*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1996), 237; [Walther Zimmerli](#), *Ezekiel 2: A Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 93. Zimmerli notes other non-English speaking commentators who view them as angels or stars.

²⁸ Zimmerli, 93.

²⁹ A very similar description of another being see [Daniel 10:5-6](#).

describes this: “Upward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around” (Ezek 1:27). This includes legs which “sparkled like burnished bronze (*nechosheth*)” (1:7). (We will look in more detail at this word for “bronze” in the next chapter).

That trees and stones are symbolically or sacramentally linked to the heavenly beings in the ancient mind is clear also in Ugarit when Baal says, “For a message I have, and I will tell you, a word, and I will recount to you. *The word of tree and the whisper of stone, the converse of Heaven with Hell, of Deeps with Stars. . . Come and I will reveal it. In the midst of my mountain, Divine Sapan, In the holy mount of my heritage, In the beautiful hill of my might.*”³⁰ The trees and stones “speak,” because they are viewed as the embodiment of the gods. That’s precisely why they made their idols out of these substances.

³⁰ KTU 1.3.iii:20-25, 28-31.