

Genesis 3 Handout

2nd June 2019 – Phill Sacre

Eden and the Temple

“The garden of Eden is not viewed by the author of Genesis simply as a piece of Mesopotamian farmland, but as an archetypal sanctuary, that is a place where God dwells and where man should worship him. Many of the features of the garden may also be found in later sanctuaries particularly the tabernacle or Jerusalem temple. These parallels suggest that the garden itself is understood as a sort of sanctuary.” – Gordon Wenham

Biblical evidence linking the tabernacle / temple and Eden:

- Centred with a mountain (Ezek 28:12-14)
- Gold, onyx and precious stones (Gen 2:11-12; Ezek 28; 1 Chron 29:2)
- God ‘walks about’ the garden (Gen 3:8; Lev 26:12)
- God tells Adam to ‘work’ and ‘keep’ the garden (Gen 2:15) – same words as Numbers 3:7-8 (‘perform duties’ and ‘work’)
- The tree of life symbolised by the lampstand in the tabernacle / temple (Gen 2:17; Exodus 25:31-40)
- A gate in the east – same as tabernacle / temple (Gen 3:24; Num 3:38)
- Solomon’s temple used lots of garden imagery (e.g. flowers - 1 Kings 6:18)
- Guarded by Cherubim (Gen 3:24; 1 Kings 6:27)
- *This is not an exhaustive list!... ‘The Temple and the Church’s Mission’ by G.K. Beale, page 66 onwards*

The Temple and the Fall

Apparently then, man did not die on the day he ate of the tree. But in the closing verses of the chapter, sanctuary symbolism and language reappear (3:21-24). God clothes the human couple and then expels them through the east-facing entrance to the garden where cherubim are stationed to guard the tree of life. These features anticipate the design of the tabernacle and the regulations associated with it. Like the garden of Eden, the tabernacle was a place where God walked with his people. To be expelled from the camp of

Israel or to be rejected by God was to experience a living death; in both situations gestures of mourning were appropriate (Lev 13:45–46; Num 5:2-4; 1 Sam 15:35). The psalmists, too, held that in the house of God men could “drink from the river of the delights, for with thee is the fountain of life” (Ps 36:9-10). Only in the presence of God did man enjoy fullness of life. To choose anything else is to choose death (Prov 8:36). **The expulsion from the garden of delight where God himself lived would therefore have been regarded by the godly men of ancient Israel as yet more catastrophic than physical death.** The latter was the ultimate sign and seal of the spiritual death the human couple experienced on the day they ate from the forbidden tree.

Gen 2–3, then, offers a paradigm of sin, a model of what happens whenever man disobeys God. It is paradigmatic in that it explains through a story what constitutes sin and what sin's consequences are. The essence of man's first sin was his disobedience to the only divine command he had received: not to eat of the tree of knowledge. The consequences of his actions are both physical — toil, pain, and death — and spiritual — alienation from God. The spiritual consequences follow the act of disobedience immediately, but the physical penalties — pain, suffering and death — may take longer to become evident.

Gordon Wenham

Word Biblical Commentary on Genesis 1-15, p. 90

For Further Reflection...

Think about what the following passages say about the temple, Jesus, and us:

- **John 2:19, 21** “Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.’ ... But the temple he had spoken of was his body.”
- **1 Corinthians 6:19-20** “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your bodies.”
- **Revelation 21:22** “I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.”