

**Can Eden Be Regained?**  
**Genesis 2:4–25**  
**October 7, 2012**

Our imaginations may run wild when it comes to the Garden of Eden. Here we find the first trace of civilization, the first development of culture, and the beginning of all things human. Yet our imaginations can only take wild stabs at what Eden would have been like before sin entered into the world.

Was it the perfect garden that needed no work? We've never seen that kind of garden!

And did it have ready-made paths and roads for access and walking? So, no bending, stooping, digging, and scraping to produce them.

Did a house spring up from the ground like the trees?

And did food just readily fall from the trees without any effort at harvesting, with tables automatically prepared?

Were our first parents living in ease, with no care in the world, nothing to do but to open their mouths wide and be filled?

Did music sing in the trees with birds chirping in harmony?

Do you suppose there were no need to cut grass or trim trees or bushes?

The tendency may be to make Eden whatever we want it to be without input from Scripture. Many things about it we just cannot know for certain because the Scripture is silent—yet not silent on everything, as we shall see.

Bigger than what was in the Garden of Eden, for sure, is the question of why the story of man begins with the Garden of Eden? If Genesis one is the story of God creating the world crowned by the creation of man, Genesis two is the story of man's God-given place in the creation under the Lord God's authority. In it are hints of what will ultimately come to be through Christ.

We have a marker in the phrase in verse 4, “**This is the account of . . .**,” that begins a series of ten such phrases, each indicating a shift in Moses' narration and serving as a division between the sections in the book.<sup>1</sup> The first *toledot*, as they are called, takes us from Adam and his rebellion to Cain and his murder of Abel to the polygamist Lamech to the godly line of Seth. So groundwork is laid for us in Genesis two that helps us to understand the drastic effects of the fall in Genesis 3 and consequent issues ahead.

The story in Eden connects us to chapters 3–4. Why did the Lord God place man in the pristine setting of the Garden of Eden? Does Eden have only that brief appearance in Genesis 2, only to be vacated in the next chapter, and never heard from again?

Eden does not serve as just a clever way to introduce human history. Eden has purpose. It describes human existence apart from the influence and effects of sin. It describes life as it *should have been*. But even more, as we see Eden against the backdrop of the rest of Scripture, it tells us something of what life *will be like through Jesus Christ when He restores all things*. So what we discover proves important in grasping the rest of Scripture. *Eden introduces believers to what is ultimate for redeemed humanity*. Therefore we ask, why did the Lord God place man in Eden, and in doing so, what does

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<sup>1</sup> See Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 11–17, who identifies this as the structural framework for Genesis, noted by the Hebrew term *toledot*. This can be found in Gen 2:4–4:26 Heaven and Earth; 5:1–6:8 Adam; 6:9–9:29 Noah; 10:1–11:19 Noah's Sons; 11:10–26 Shem; 11:27–25:11 Terah; 25:12–18 Ishmael; 25:19–35:29 Isaac; 36:1–37:1 Esau; 37:2–50:26 Jacob.

that have to do with each of us today? Let's investigate this in four observations on this chapter's story of Eden.

### 1. Eden was the Garden of God

We may search in vain to find that phrase, "the Garden of God," in chapter 2. We do find that **"the Lord God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden,"** but not "the Garden of God." However, we do find Isaiah calling it "the garden of the Lord," (Isa 51:3) and Ezekiel referring to it as "the garden of God" (Eze 28:13). In other words, this was no ordinary garden!

The location is much debated. The only markers we have are two rivers still known today, the Tigris and the Euphrates, and two unknown rivers, the Pishon and the Gihon. This has led to speculation of Eden originating in Armenia, eastern Turkey, Iraq, or Iran. Fact is, we don't know. We just know that it was **"toward the east"** from those originally receiving the book of Genesis.

What we do know, focuses on the Lord's ownership of the Garden, noted by His creativity and His covenant name. Chapter one uses the divine title *Elohim*, translated "God." But chapter 2 uses the double title, **"the Lord God,"** or *Yahweh Elohim*, with the covenant name signifying *divine relationship*. Yahweh is not used without purpose but rather to call our attention to God establishing personal relationship with man, as man lives under His Lordship and for His glory. It's the same title by which the Lord revealed Himself to Moses when Moses asked who He was who was sending him to Egypt.

Furthermore, the Lord's rule is found in (1) His designing and fashioning Eden and everything in it, (2) His ensuring that the man with whom He had established relationship would not be socially alone so that He designs marriage, and (3) His discharge of duties to the man to cultivate and keep the garden as a steward. The Lord set the example of ruling over the creation so that the man, now appointed as vice-regent under the Creator, might subdue the earth and rule over it following the wise example of the Lord God. We also find His rule in that the Lord God establishes both promise and command in Eden. Promise is found in the tree of life and command in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As Lord, He provides food from the trees of the garden (2:16) and as Lord, He warns against trying to find wisdom and satisfaction outside following and submitting to the word of the Lord (2:17).

Was Eden a garden prison that intended to hold man captive so that he could not explore beyond it? Not at all for the command of God in Gen 1:26, 28 calls for humanity as vice-regents to "be fruitful and multiply, and *fill the earth*, and subdue it." In other words, Eden would expand as human beings, under the gracious Lordship of Yahweh, reproduced, subdued more and more of the earth, and established rule over it." Eden's borders, in that sense, were elastic and sufficiently flexible to fill the whole earth as a display of the wise, gracious reign of God under the glad submission of His vice-regents. So, Eden was a *microcosm* of what would eventually happen to the entire earth as Adam and Eve, along with their descendants spread over the earth as glad stewards of creation. But was the Garden of Eden just about plants, trees, and animals?

### 2. Eden was the sanctuary of communion with God

The Lord God met with the man and woman in the Garden of Eden! They communed together face to face. As we learn from Genesis 3:8, the Lord God walked in the garden

in the cool of the day, to meet with the man and woman made in His image. Until the events of Genesis 3, there was never a need to hide in fear or shame but rather a rushing to delight to be in the presence of the Lord. Later, when the Lord appears on the mountain the people of Israel tremble in fear, Isaiah cries “Woe is me!” and John falls at His feet as a dead man. But not so for Adam and Eve! For them, Eden meant meeting with the Lord in the joy of relationship and fellowship with Him.

The fall changed that face-to-face encounter with the Lord God. Man was driven from the garden away from the presence of the Lord (3:24; 4:16). Would that fellowship ever be restored? Would the Lord God ever make His presence known among His people?

Remember that Genesis is not written in isolation. It is part of the Pentateuch, the “five books of Moses.” What is central in those books? It’s the story of God delivering Israel who had been in bondage to Egypt for 400 years, leading them across the Red Sea and into the wilderness, where God gave them the codified Law (Exod 20) and then meticulous details of a tabernacle. The rest of their days centered on the story of that tabernacle among them as the place where God dwelled in their midst. Eden was gone but the work of God recovering a people for Himself has its witness in the tabernacle in the wilderness. There, Yahweh appeared; there Israel found refuge; there, in the holy of holies between the cherubim, blood was offered to propitiate God concerning their sins; there forgiveness and reconciliation with God was mediated. The cherubim, as with post-fall Eden, guarded the entry into God’s presence (Gen 3:24; Exod 37:7–9). Whereas in Eden the cherubim kept Adam and Eve from returning, guarding the way into the presence of the Lord, the golden cherubim above the mercy seat symbolized that one can come into the Lord’s presence *only* by the blood of atonement. The thick curtain kept everyone out but the mediator—the high priest, *until* 1500 years later in Jerusalem, when the Lamb of God propitiated God by offering Himself on our behalf, entered into the heavenly tabernacle. The Jerusalem temple’s curtain split from top to bottom—Jesus Christ opened the way to God and His presence (Heb 9:11–10:22). The cherubim no longer stand guard for the blood of Jesus has answered those sentries to the Presence.

Later, when Solomon built the temple, the intricate carvings on its walls gave resemblance to a *garden* (2 Chron 3–4). In both tabernacle and temple, the biblical narrative makes much of the Lord descending in His glory and filling the place with His presence. God dwelled among His people in the tabernacle and temple *just as He dwelled with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden*.

But we no longer have a temple in Jerusalem—and we no longer need one. For Jesus Christ *is the temple* that was destroyed and three days later rose from the dead (John 2:18–22)! And now He dwells in His people, the church, that He calls a temple (1 Cor 3:17; Eph 2:19–22). Yet even this dwelling points to one fuller, richer, and eternal, the dwelling with the Lord in the New Heaven and New Earth (Rev 21:1–22:5). The scene painted in Revelation 22:1–5 takes us back to pre-fall Eden with the river, the tree of life, the fruit trees, and no longer any curse! “There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; and they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 170, for a fuller treatment of this amazing subject. I’ve been greatly helped by his thoughts which are reflected in this sermon. See also T. D. Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 20–22, for helpful treatment.

### 3. Eden was the center from which civilization, culture, and primarily, God’s glory, would radiate.

We still live under something of a Platonic influence that, as demonstrated later in Gnosticism, considered the material, visible world as evil and only the invisible world as spiritual and good. Obviously, we don’t take it that far in our day philosophically but we often do so practically. Here’s what I mean.

If someone comes to faith in Christ and evidences intensesness in his faith then immediately, he’s told that he must enter the ministry. Now, that may be what he needs to do but the rationale is that other occupations are *secular* and so deficient when it comes to truly being spiritual. The same shows up in conversations I’ve had many times. “Oh, I only do *such and such* work, I’m not a preacher like you.” While I appreciate the intent, the reality of such talk is that it fails to see that *all of life is spiritual for those in Christ!* All of life is to be lived to the glory of God. All of life, every occupation, every endeavor we enter into is to be in dependence upon the Lord, a demonstration of His indwelling life, and for His glory. So, there are no secular occupations, in that sense, for the believer. Whatever we do, we do for the glory of God (Col 3:23).

Keep in mind Adam’s occupation: **“Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.”** “Put” literally means, “caused to rest,” which indicates an intense satisfaction in knowing he was right where the Lord put him. To *cultivate* is variously translated as “to work,” “to labor” or “to serve” another. Sometime the same word is used for Levitical duties or priestly service in the worship conducted in tabernacle and temple. That is no accidental use of language! It indicates something of responsibility that Adam had before the Lord. As one working to cultivate the garden, he did so knowing that it was the Lord’s garden. So his work unto the Lord took on priestly dimensions, for his work unto the Lord became an act of worship as he had constant reason to glory in the Lord.<sup>3</sup>

Is this kind of work merely dirt-digging (not to minimize its importance)? Cultivation, on the contrary, involves artistry. This was no overgrown, red clay, kudzu covered dirt bank! This was God’s garden! He designed it and now entrusted Adam to continue to further its beauty and usefulness. We find that this garden was **“pleasing to the sight and good for food,”** so aesthetically delightful and filled with tasty food. Everything that Adam did with the raw materials that God had made—to use modern terms—*made culture*. One cultural critic explains, “*Culture is what we make of the world.*”<sup>4</sup> While many others add to that explanation, that really puts culture making into a tight framework. What Adam did was to make something of what God had put in the world. And, as those made in God’s image, we’re called to do the same. We’re to find joy in the stretching of the minds and abilities given to us by our Lord when we use them to make something of what the Lord has entrusted to us in this world. What we must see is that such acts of culture making *are* spiritual in that we do them from God’s provision, in dependence upon Him, and for His glory.

So Bach made culture by writing amazing music. He understood this as he signed each piece, *SDG—soli Deo Gloria*, to the glory of God alone. William Carey did this when he

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Matthews, *NAC: Genesis 1:1–11:26* (Nashville: B&H, 1996), 208–210.

<sup>4</sup> Ken Myers, quoted by Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 23, italics original.

developed a polyglot dictionary, new methods for developing dye, and improved agricultural techniques in India—along with proclaiming the good news. William Wilberforce made culture when he spent his life laboring to end slave trading in Britain. John Piper, Joel Beeke, Mark Dever, and Jerry Bridges make culture by writing books that influence the way we think and live. Members of Sojourn Church in Louisville make culture by artwork that they do to the glory of God and as a means to draw attention to the good news.

From Eden, culture making would radiate to the rest of the earth, displaying the beauty, wisdom, symmetry, artistry, creativity, and sheer joy found in making the most of what God had entrusted to the man and the woman. The fall interrupted this work! It distorted it in multiple ways down through the centuries so that culture making is not always a reflection of the Creator. Culture making by film and painting is distorted by pornography. Culture making by music is distorted by vulgarity and sensuality. Culture making in writing is distorted by lies, lewdness, and cruelty.

This is why Christians, passionate about the gospel and the glory of God, must lead the way in culture making. We must not leave to others that hold no view of God's glory the opportunity to make something with the raw materials physically and intellectually that God has entrusted to us. Culture making to the glory of God spreads a little hint of Edenic life.

#### *Eden was to be cultivated and kept*

Cultivation further develops what God has created and planted. The Lord God is the originator but, as divine image-bearers, we have the privilege of cultivating what He has given. How do we cultivate? We do so by making the most of all that God has entrusted to us, showing creativity, beauty, ingenuity, intelligence, and delight. We do so by finding satisfaction in being instruments in God's hands that display His glory among the nations and that reflect His image as redeemed people among those not recreated in Christ Jesus.

We see hints of this in verses 10–15. Notice that we're told of a river flowing from Eden that branched into four rivers. Later in Ezekiel's temple, there's a river flowing from out of the temple, first as a trickle, then ankle deep, then up to the knees, then the waist, and then a mighty river flowing from the presence of God, so that everywhere it went life resulted (Eze 47:1–12). Ezekiel borrows from the river flowing out of Eden. It's the promise that one day the glory of God will cover the earth as water covers the sea. It's the promise of a restored Eden! There are hints that civilization and the spread of culture would follow the meandering of these rivers from Eden as they spread into that part of the world. Cultivation was to continue; the boundaries of Eden were to spread, but, as already noted, the fall interrupted this creation purpose. Yet, as Ezekiel pictures for us, by the grace of God and work of Christ, it has not wrecked the creation purpose!

But look at the mention of gold (good gold!), bdellium (an aromatic resin), and onyx stones *outside* Eden along the river valleys. Why does he mention that? It indicates that the Lord God had entrusted humanity living in His presence to expand beyond the immediate borders of Eden, finding creative usefulness for these things in the process. In other words, as humanity spread from Eden and gradually subdued the earth, they would make culture. We see examples of this later on in Genesis 4:20–22 with early culture makers: Jabal leading the way for tent making and livestock herding; Jubal making

culture by creating musical instruments; and Tubal-cain making culture by inventing metallurgy.

The fall resulted in distortions as culture spread. Yet that's not the original purpose of God. That's why those redeemed by Christ are to submit all of their abilities to the Lord to be used for His glory.

*Service to God as social beings*

On the joyful task of cultivating the garden, Adam experienced something that he had no understanding of how to remove: *aloneness*. But the Lord took action, taking a rib from the side of the man who was made from dust to fashion a woman. Here was his counterpart in every way, the one to complement his life as a fellow divine image-bearer. Man and woman together were to extend Eden's borders. They were to find delight in the relationship that God ordained before sin ever entered the world: the marriage of one man to one woman in covenant relationship, committed to serving God's purpose, and jointly bearing the image of God as they extended the boundaries of Eden into the earth.

But the fall brought the expansion of Eden to a grinding halt. Can Eden be regained?

**4. Eden was to eventually cover the earth as the Garden of God displaying His glory—and it shall yet happen!**

I can only sketch this but as I point to the breadth of Scripture, I think that this recovery of Eden will make good, biblical sense.

(1) Eden's boundaries were to expand. Divine image-bearers were to exercise vice-regency in subduing and ruling the earth as faithful stewards to the Lord God.

(2) But Genesis 3 and the fall interrupted everything. It poisons the human race, turns humanity in rebellion against God, and turns the desire for God's glory to self-glory.

(3) The slow process of restoration begins by the Lord pursuing a people for Himself to restore to the fullness of His image. He calls out Abraham and through his seed, promises to bless the entire world.

(4) The exile in Egypt appears to stop the restoration until God raises up Moses as a type of Christ—a prophet-priest-king for Israel. He leads in establishing the Tabernacle as the dwelling place of God—a miniature return to Eden. Later, under Solomon, the Temple does the same. God's glory was to radiate from the Tabernacle/Temple among the people of Israel as a priestly nation and work outward to the nations.

(5) David's kingship typified this foreshadowing expansion of God's reign to be fulfilled in Jesus. But Israel failed. Moses could not give ultimate deliverance nor could David. They were *types* of which Jesus alone is the *Antitype*.

(6) Jesus fulfilled both temple and Davidic kingship as the Messiah. He *is the image of God* who alone restores God's image in fallen men through His redemptive work.

(7) The Holy Spirit, dwelling in the church as the temple of God, moves toward restoring the presence of God among men. The church's sanctification furthers this by displaying God's glory through His people and extending His kingdom through proclamation and living out the gospel.

(8) Revelation 21–22 declares the restoration and global expansion of Eden forever. Yes, Eden will be regained! That's the promise in the gospel.