

Chapter 6

Gardens and Mountains

... TWO HOUSEHOLD-FAMILIES of God, ... were created as **God’s representatives** to serve him in different realms.

Eden’s primary status.... **Eden was God’s home on earth.** It was his residence. And **where the King lives, his council meets.** ... **Ancient readers couldn’t miss it.**

THE ANCIENT CONTEXT

... Israel, the people of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, ... believed in an unseen spiritual world ... met for governing the affairs of the human world—were portrayed in several ways. Two of the most common were **gardens and mountains. Eden is described as both....**

Ancient people thought of their **gods living in luxuriant gardens** or....

The ancient Near East was ... where most people subsisted day-to-day, hand-to-mouth.... Life depended on finding water and harnessing its power. That’s why the world’s first civilizations were founded along rivers (e.g., the Nile, the Tigris, and the Euphrates). **Surely the gods lived in a place where ... there was no conceivable lack. Paradise.**

Mountain peaks were the domain of gods because no humans lived there. ...

Egypt’s temples are carved and painted with the imagery of luscious gardens, or why pyramids and ziggurats were built. These structures were mountains made by human hands which served as gateways to the spiritual world, the realm of the gods, in life or in death. They were **metaphors** in stone.

ANCIENT UGARIT

Ugarit, a city-state in ancient Syria, just to the north of Israel.

The site of Ugarit was discovered in 1928 One of the major finds was a library containing thousands of clay tablets, roughly 1400 of which were in an alphabetic language (now called Ugaritic) that was closer to biblical Hebrew than any other ancient language... in many instances virtually identical.

The chief deity of Ugarit was El.... El had a divine council whose members were “the sons of El,” and he had a coruler, Baal.

At Ugarit the divine council had three levels: the highest authority (El, who did most of his ruling through a co-ruling vizier, Baal), the “sons of El,” and messenger gods (*mal’akim*).

The council of El met on a **mountain** or **lush garden** The abode of El had an **abundant water** supply, as it was situated at the “source of the two rivers” in the “midst of the fountains of the double-deep.” The divine council met in a place called **Tsapanu**, the remote **heights of the north** (*tsapanu* means “north”).

Council meetings were held in “the **tents** of El” or El’s “**tent shrine**,” whence divine decrees were issued. At times Baal’s palace was in view, with ... his house “the **clearness of lapis lazuli**.”

YAHWEH’S ABODE

The Hebrew Bible uses these same descriptions for the abode and throne room of Yahweh. ... The Old Testament has a **three-tiered council structure** like that at Ugarit. Yahweh is at the top. His family-household (“sons of God”) are next in hierarchy. The lowest level is reserved for *elohim* messengers—*mal’akim* (the word translated “angels”).

The **Tabernacle tent structure** and the **Tent of Meeting**, ... are clear parallels to places where God dwells and hands down his decrees. In [Psalm 48:1–2](#), Jerusalem, the city of God, is said to be located in the “heights of the north” (*tsaphon* in Hebrew). Mount Zion is the “**mountain of assembly**,” again located in the “**heights of the north**” ([Isa 14:13](#)). At Sinai, Moses and others saw the seated God of Israel, under whose feet was a pavement “like **sapphire** tile work and like the very heavens for **clearness**” ([Exod 24:9–10](#)).

The garden of Eden, is a lush, **well-watered habitation** ([Gen 2:5–14](#)). [Ezekiel 28:13](#) adds the description that the garden of God is “**God’s holy mountain**” ([Ezek 28:14](#)).⁴ We naturally think of Mount Sinai or Mount Zion. **Whether Sinai or Zion, the mountain of God is, in effect, his temple.**

IMPLICATIONS

An ancient Israelite would have thought of Eden as the dwelling of God and the place from which God and his council direct the affairs of humanity.

(But) the biblical version of the divine council at the divine abode includes a human presence. The theological message is that **Yahweh desires a kingdom rule on this new Earth, ... both family-households should function together.** Had the fall not occurred, humanity would have been glorified and made part of the council.

This is not speculation. Both of these theological threads wind through the Old Testament and create the context from which New Testament writers will talk about **the kingdom and the glorification of believers.**

Eden is described in [Ezekiel 28:2](#) as the “**seat of the gods.**” The phrase should be familiar to modern readers. It speaks of governing authority (“county seat”; “Congressional seat”). Ezekiel’s words draw attention to **Eden as a seat of authority and action. There was work to be done. God had plans for the whole planet, not just Eden.**

CHAPTER 7

Eden—Like No Place on Earth

God delighted in creating proxies to represent him and carry out his wishes. His decisions in that regard have ramifications.

EARTH WAS NOT EDEN

Not all the world was Eden. ...only a tiny part of it.

the Ugaritic council met in a garden where two rivers intersected.... Eden is described with four water sources:

In Genesis 1:26–27 God made humankind as his imagers, his representatives in this new domain. **This functional view of the image becomes clear in the commands of verse 28:**

And God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and **subdue it, and rule** over the fish of the sea and the birds of heaven, and over every animal that moves upon the earth.”

Notice that verse 28 says that the **earth needed filling**. This does not refer to Eden. **Eden has not even appeared yet in the Genesis story**. Its first mention comes in Genesis 2:8:

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

Genesis 2:15: “And Yahweh God took the man and set him in the garden of Eden to **cultivate it and to keep it.**” ... **Cultivation of the garden and subduing the earth are not the same tasks.**

Genesis 1 and 2 aren't intended to be chronological in their relationship. What they reveal is that the man's original task was to care for the garden, where he lived (Gen 2). After he gets a partner (Gen 1), God says to both of them (the commands are plural in Hebrew) to **be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, subdue it, and rule over its creatures.**

... It makes no sense to subdue the garden of God. It's already what God wants it to be. ... God was happy with the whole creation. He pronounced it “very good” (Gen 1:31). But **“very good” is not perfect.**

Observing this distinction ... helps us see that **the original task of humanity was to make the entire Earth like Eden.**

The whole world needs to be like God's home. He could do the job himself, but he chose to create human imagers to do it for him.

Eden is where the idea of the kingdom of God begins. And it's no coincidence that the Bible ends with the vision of a new Edenic Earth (Rev 21–22).

CHAPTER 8

Only God Is Perfect

Eden was both the divine abode and the nerve center for God's plan for Earth. The worldview of the biblical writer was: Where Yahweh is, so is his council.

The council members heard that these humans, new members in Yahweh's family, would be tasked with overspreading the earth, advancing God's kingdom rule. They were Yahweh's choice to be steward-kings over a global Eden under his authority.

... **one divine being dissented.**

THE BACKDROP

(Job 1:6). I use the phrase **“the *satan*”** deliberately. The **Hebrew (*satan*) means something like “adversary,” “prosecutor,” or “challenger.”** It speaks of an **official legal function within ... Yahweh's council.**

The *satan* in Job 1–2 is not a villain. He’s doing the job assigned to him by God. The book of Job does not identify the *satan* in this scene as the serpent of Genesis 3.... **The Old Testament never uses the word *saṭan* of the serpent figure from Genesis 3.** In fact, **the word *saṭan* is not a proper personal noun in the Old Testament.**

The *satan* described in these passages is not the devil. ... he’s an anonymous prosecutor, fulfilling a role in Yahweh’s council—bringing an accusatory report.

The *function* of the office of the *satan* is why later Jewish writings began to adopt it as a proper name for the serpent figure from Genesis 3 who brought ruin to Eden.... The dark figure of Genesis 3 was eventually thought of as the “mother of all adversaries,” and so the label *satan* got stuck to him. The point here is only that **the Old Testament doesn’t use that term for the divine criminal of Eden.**

(Job 1:8). Eliphaz says at one point:

¹⁷ Can a human being be more righteous than God,
or can a man be more pure than his Maker?

¹⁸ **Look, he does not trust in his servants
and he charges his angels with error.**

¹⁹ **How much more dwellers in clay houses,
whose foundation is in the dust?**

They are crushed like a moth (Job 4:17–19).

Who do you think you are, Job! A man isn’t more righteous than his Maker! ... he doesn’t even look at his heavenly messengers that way? Job 15:14–15:

¹⁴ What is a human being, that he can be clean,
Or that one born of a woman can be righteous?

¹⁵ **Look, he does not trust his holy ones,
and the heavens are not clean in his eyes.**

What Eliphaz says is significant. Here are two scriptural statements that ***God’s heavenly council members are corruptible; they are not perfect.***

FREE IMAGERS

God knows that none of his imagers, divine or human, can be completely trusted. The reason is straightforward. Though imagers are like God, they aren’t God. That’s a truth we know all too well from our own struggles and experiences in a fallen world.

Without genuine free will, imagers cannot truly represent God. We saw earlier that the image of God is not an attribute or ability. Rather, it is a status conferred by God on all humans, that of representing God. **The goal was to care for the earth and harness its gifts for the betterment of fellow human imagers, all the while enjoying the presence of God.**

How all that happens in our postfall world varies from person to person. Regardless of ability or stage, human life is sacred precisely because we are the creatures God put on earth to represent him.

Humans ... represent God ... by means of a spectrum of abilities ... we share with God, such as intelligence and creativity. **The attributes God shared with us are the *means* to imaging, not the image status itself. Imaging status and our attributes are related but not identical concepts.**

One of these attributes is **freedom**—free will that reveals itself in decision making. **If humanity had not been created with genuine freedom, representation of God would have been impossible. Humans would not mirror their Maker. They could not accurately *image* him.** God is no robot. We are reflections of a free Being, not a cosmic automaton.

Since the lesser *elohim* were also created as God’s imagers, they too must have free will. The only perfect Being is God. *This is why things could, and did, go wrong in Eden.*

If that was true even in Eden—then *being in the presence of God is no guarantee that free-will beings will never stray or act out of self-will.* Only God is perfect. The potential for error and disobedience is by definition possible. Trouble *could* happen in paradise, and of course it did.

God does not delight in evil and suffering. Nor does he need it for his sovereign plan.

CHAPTER 9

Peril and Providence

GOD’S GIFT

... why God doesn’t do away with evil and suffering on earth. ... because that would require elimination of all his imagers. ... God knew the risk of Eden, he deemed the existence of humankind preferable to our eternal absence.

Despite the risk of evil, free will is a wonderful gift. God’s decision was a loving one. Understanding that requires only a consideration of the two alternatives: (1) not having life at all, and (2) being a mindless robot, capable only of obeying commands and responding to programming.

.... For a decision to be real, it must be made against an alternative that could be chosen.

.... Free will is a gift, despite the risk.

KNOWING GOOD AND EVIL

In Genesis 3:5 the serpent (Hebrew: *nachash*) says to Eve: “For God (*elohim*) knows that on the day you *both* eat from it, then your eyes will be opened and you *both* shall be like **gods (*elohim*)**, knowing good and evil.” God is speaking to his council members—the *elohim*. This tells us clearly that the second instance of *elohim* in Genesis 3:5 should be plural.

In Genesis 3:5, Eve is being told that if she violates God’s command, she and Adam will become as *elohim*, knowing good and evil.

Prior to knowing good and evil, Adam and Eve were innocent. They had never made a willing, conscious decision to disobey God. They had never seen an act of disobedience, either. When they fell, that changed.

EVIL AND FOREKNOWLEDGE

Since we aren't told much in Genesis about how human freedom works in relation to divine attributes like foreknowledge, predestination, and omniscience, we need to look elsewhere in Scripture for some clarification. 1 Samuel 23:1–13.

In the second section (23:6–13), David asks the Lord two questions: (1) will his nemesis Saul come to Keilah and threaten the city on account of David's presence? And (2) will the people of Keilah turn him over to Saul to avoid Saul's wrath? Again, God answers both questions affirmatively: "He will come down," and "They will deliver you."

Neither of these events that God foresaw ever actually happened.

Why is this significant? *This passage clearly establishes that divine foreknowledge does not necessitate divine predestination.* God foreknew a *possibility*—but this foreknowledge did not mandate that the possibility was actually predestined to happen. Predestination and foreknowledge are *separable*.

That which never happens can be foreknown by God, but it is not predestined, since it never happened.

But what about things that *do* happen?

Since foreknowledge doesn't require predestination, foreknown events that happen may or may not have been predestined.

.... **foreknowledge does not necessitate predestination.**

God may foreknow an event and predestine that event, but such predestination does not necessarily include decisions that lead up to that event. ... God may know and predestine the end—that something is ultimately going to happen—without predestining the means to that end.

The passages in 1 Kings 22:13–23 and Daniel 4 informed us that God can decree something and then leave the means up to the decisions of other free-will agents. The end is sovereignly ordained; the means to that end may or may not be.

IMPLICATIONS

An ancient Israelite would have embraced this parsing of foreknowledge, predestination, sovereignty, and free will. He would ... have understood that *this is the way God himself has decided his rule over human affairs will work*.

This has significant implications for not only the fall, but the presence of evil in our world in general. **God is not evil.** There is no biblical reason to argue that God predestined the fall, though he foreknew it. There is no biblical reason to assert that God predestined all the evil events throughout human history simply because he foreknew them.

There is also no biblical coherence to the idea that God factored all evil acts into his grand plan for the ages. **It unknowingly implies that God’s “perfect” plan *needed* to incorporate evil acts.....**

God does not *need* the rape of a child to happen so that good may come. His foreknowledge didn’t require the holocaust as part of a plan that would give us the kingdom on earth. ***God does not need evil as a means to accomplish anything.***

God foreknew the fall. That foreknowledge did not propel the event. God also foreknew a solution to the fall that he himself would guarantee, a solution that entered his mind long before he laid the foundations of the earth. The risk was awful, but he loved the notion of humanity too much to call the whole thing off.

Evil is the perversion of God’s good gift of free will. It arises from the choices made by imperfect imagers, not from God’s prompting or predestination. God does not need evil, but he has the power to take the evil that flows from free-will decisions—human or otherwise—and use it to produce good and his glory through the obedience of his loyal imagers, who are his hands and feet on the ground *now*.

God has decreed the ends to which all things will come. As believers, we are prompted by his Spirit to be the good means to those decreed ends.

Loyal members of God’s “congregation” (council), sent to minister to us (Heb 1:14), have embraced God’s Edenic vision—we are brothers and sisters (Heb 2:10–18).

The concept of Eden described as a cosmic mountain-temple would not be unfamiliar to ancient readers. The great pyramids of Egypt, ziggurats of Babylon, and ancient palace gardens all pay homage to these concepts. They were sacred spaces where humans and their gods could meet. The design plan of Eden is a prototype of the tabernacle and the temple.

VIDEO COURSE - The Cosmic Mountain: Intersection of Heaven and Earth:

Starting Off with the Ancient Near East

Cosmic Mountain = Divine abode

Mountains & Temples

Mesopotamian ziggurats = center piece of temple complex

To meet with deity and do business and issue decrees

Egyptian pyramids

Egyptian Temples a long causeway that sloped up, to meet the deity, decorated with lotus flowers representing the lush garden idea. The mountain rising out of the waters, and oriented Eastward.

Common ancient worldview

Eastern orientation so sun could shine into the temple at daybreak.

Sun would fall on the deity, the gold covered idol and would illuminate it and shine.
The Tabernacle & the Temple reflect these ideas.

The Earth Was God's Dwelling after Creation (Eden): Part 1

Ezek 28 The Garden of God; the Mountain of God

Gen 1:6 expanse (raqia)

The Earth from God's Perspective

God is above the expanse w/ waters above land and below it.

God's view of creation

Round earth surrounded by water

The circle of the water has boundaries

Multiple seas in one place

Earth as a Mountain – it rises out of the waters

The primeval mound is the divine abode

All leads to the Tabernacle, Temple, Zion, Messiah, the Body of Christ

The Earth Was God's Dwelling after Creation (Eden): Part 2

Garden = Paradise

The gods create and live in the best places

Food, water, peace, abundance

Contrast with ancient Near East

Kings and priests get to live in the temples

God's Purpose in Coming to Earth

Canaanite God: El

Mountain

Garden

Tent

God's Plan – Create a physical abode, as his home to live there.

God's human family – be fruitful, multiply, subdue & transform the earth to be like this place Eden. We're his co-workers, family members, not servants/slaves.

God puts humanity in his cosmic mountain dwelling and he wants all the earth to be like this place for him and all his imagers to enjoy.

Fall of humanity

Divine & Human rebellion(s)

Restoration of Eden

God meets people in gardens and on mountains and shares meals.

God loves us and chooses to have us as part of his family.

God is about bringing heaven back to earth in a global form

Vocabulary of the Garden of Eden

Water Gen 2:5

Trees Gen 2:9 God meets w/ people at trees or trees are planted to commemorate God's presence - God is there physically, visibly, with Adam & Eve.

Reminders of God's original home -

Trees and mountains, gardens appearances take us back to Eden

Take us back to the original ideal, what we were made for

God's presence and original purpose

Eden – of course this is where God would live,

The rest of the Earth should be transformed to be like this

Very Good is not perfect.

TOV = good

Tamim = perfect

God wanted humans to participate with him to make the Earth like Eden, co-workers

Cosmic Mountain: Summary

Divine presence, where he lives

Water, lush gardens,

We belong there by creation, we're not visitors

The Fall mars that

God is working to restore that.

Trees and Oasis – encounters with God – remind us of Eden

Temple & Tabernacle decorations are to remind us of what was lost

Jesus Christ as the Temple – the place where God resides.

After Pentecost, we become the Temple of God

The new Heavens has no Temple because God is there and we are there.

Divine Encounters Marked by Trees

Trees emblematic of the garden

The pattern is important

Gen 12:6-7 Oak of Moreh Oak of the teacher Shechem

Gen 18:1-4 Oaks of Mamre

Gen 21:33 Tamarisk tree

Josh 24:25-26 Shechem the terebinth (sanctuary)

Judg 6:11 the terebinth at Ophrah

The patterning is a divine encounter at these locations – back to the garden, oasis

1 Sam 31:8, 12-13 Buried Saul & sons bones under the tararsik tree in Jabesh

You bury them there to be with of God of Israel.

Trees mark God's presence --