

# Eden: The First Temple

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From the opening chapters of Scripture, we learn that God created the heavens and the earth not merely as functional spaces but as a kind of sacred architecture. And at the very center of this creation, God planted a garden. Eden was not an ordinary garden or orchard. It was the original sanctuary, a temple where heaven and earth met, where God dwelt with man.

Many readers overlook this very important and foundational biblical truth. Eden serves as the prototype for every subsequent temple and tabernacle, culminating in the end-time dwelling of God with humanity in the New Jerusalem.

This article briefly explores how Eden functioned as a temple and why that matters for understanding God's redemptive mission.

## God Walked There: Eden as a Dwelling Place

*"They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day..."*  
(Genesis 3:8)

This is the first direct image of God's presence dwelling with humanity. The Hebrew verb translated "walking" (*hithallek*) is used elsewhere to describe God's presence among Israel, centered in the tabernacle (cf. *Leviticus 26:12; Deuteronomy 23:14*).

*"I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people."* (Leviticus 26:12)

This is in the middle of the covenant blessings and curses (Lev 26). The immediately preceding verse (v. 11) says: "I will make My dwelling among you, and My soul will not reject you." Here the word *mishkan* ("dwelling") is used, the same word for tabernacle (literally "dwelling place").

This verse is directly tied to the tabernacle, the physical sanctuary of God in Israel's midst. God promises to "walk among" His people in the same way He "dwells" in His *mishkan*.

*"Since the LORD your God walks in the midst of your camp to deliver you and to defeat your enemies before you, therefore your camp must be holy..."* (Deuteronomy 23:14)

This verse is about holiness regulations in the Israelite military camp (cleanliness, latrines outside the camp, etc.).

God is said to “walk in the midst of your camp”—but notice: in Israel, the camp was always structured around the tabernacle at the center (Numbers 2). The tabernacle = God’s throne-tent. Thus, while the statement is broader than just the tabernacle, it’s about the whole camp being holy, it presupposes that God’s presence is mediated through the tabernacle at the center of the camp.

All said, the implication is profound: Eden was the first holy of holies, a sacred space where God actually lived and dwelt among His people.

### **Priestly Language: Adam the Temple Keeper**

In Genesis 2:15, God placed Adam in the garden “to work it and keep it.” The Hebrew verbs *‘abad* (“to serve”) and *shamar* (“to keep/guard”) appear together elsewhere to refer to the work of the Levites primarily in priestly contexts (cf. *Numbers 3:7–8; 8:26; 18:5–6*). In the same way Adam is described as both serving and guarding Eden, the Levites were tasked to “serve and guard” the tabernacle. This strongly suggests that Adam’s vocation was not primarily agricultural; it was priestly. He was the original guardian-priest, tasked with maintaining God’s sacred space and expanding it.



Adam as a Priest



Cosmic Geography: Eden as the Mountain of God

In my book, *Gospel of the Skull Crusher*, I used a mountain or pyramidal-shaped images to convey a temple in Eden. Many will likely ask what the basis of this choice was in Scripture. The arguments are not conclusive, but very highly suggestive.

- First, Ezekiel 28 refers to Eden as the “holy mountain of God” (Ezekiel 28:13–14).
- Second, ancient temples were often placed on high places, symbolizing proximity to heaven. I recently returned from visiting the seven Churches in Turkey, where the ancient cities of Pergamum, Smyrna, and Sardis were all famous for their massive pagan temples built on high hill-tops.
- Third, it is generally accepted that pyramids throughout the world, from Egypt to Guatemala, reflect this common ancient practice of building temples that resembled mountains.
- Fourth, much later after Eden, the temple in Jerusalem was commanded by God to be built on Mount Moriah.
- Fifth, the towering pyramidal peak of Mount Ararat in eastern Turkey is the most likely location of Eden. Scripture describes Eden as the source of four rivers (Genesis 2:10–14): the Pishon, Gihon, Tigris, and Euphrates. While the identity of the first two is debated, the Tigris and Euphrates clearly originate in the highlands of eastern Turkey and Armenia—precisely where Ararat stands. Mount Ararat is also described in Genesis 8 as the resting place of Noah’s ark after the flood (Genesis 8:4). This strongly implies continuity between the place of new creation after the flood and the original creation geography. Thus, both biblical geography and theological symbolism point to the Ararat region as the most compelling candidate for the ancient site of Eden—the high mountain where heaven met earth, and from which life-giving rivers flowed to water the world.

All of this reinforces the idea that Eden was the first cosmic sanctuary, elevated as the meeting point between heaven and earth.

Mount Ararat, the most likely location of Eden

### River of Life: Eden's Flowing Waters

A river flowed out from Eden and branched into four headwaters (Genesis 2:10–14). Not only does this imply elevation, but this river imagery is echoed in the millennium, after the renewal of all things:

- *Ezekiel 47*: Water flows from the temple, bringing life to the nations.
- *Revelation 22:1*: The river of life flows from the throne of God in the New Jerusalem.

The pattern is clear: Eden's waters symbolize life flowing from God's presence, a recurring motif in later temple visions.

### Garden Imagery in Later Temples

After sin exiled humanity from Eden, God's plan to dwell among His people did not change. At Sinai, God gave Moses instructions for the tabernacle:

*"Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, so that I may dwell among them."* (Exodus 25:8)

- Both the tabernacle and temple were adorned with palm trees, pomegranates, flowers, and cherubim (cf. *Exodus 25–27*; *1 Kings 6*), recalling the verdant beauty and sanctity of Eden.
- The cherubim guarding the entrance to Eden (Genesis 3:24) reappear in the Holy of Holies, guarding access to God's presence (Exodus 25:18–22).

This continuity indicates that later sanctuaries were modeled on the Edenic pattern; they were micro-Edens, temporary placeholders that pointed to the restoration of the first temple of Eden.



## Cherubim Guarding God's Presence

### Eden's Mission: Expansion of Sacred Space

Adam and Eve were not to remain stationary in Eden forever. They were to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the whole earth (Genesis 1:28)—bringing God's image and presence beyond the garden to the ends of the earth. The garden was a model and starting point. From there, the temple, the place where God dwelt with man, was to be extended throughout the whole earth.

While sin interrupted that mission, it did not end it. Christ, the Second Adam, has resumed the task of building a global temple made of living stones, filled with God's Spirit, awaiting the final day when the whole earth will once again become His eternal sanctuary.

### Christ as the Dwelling of God

The temple theme reaches its climax in Christ:

*"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt [literally, tabernacled] among us, and we saw His glory."* (John 1:14)

Jesus is Immanuel, "God with us" (Matthew 1:23). The glory of God that once filled Eden and the temple is revealed bodily in Him (Colossians 2:9). He is both the true temple (John 2:19–21) and the high priest who mediates God's presence.

Through His Spirit, the *ecclesia* of faithful believers becomes a corporate "dwelling of God in the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:22). Through the Spirit, God's presence expands outward, not confined to a mountain or building, but filling His people worldwide.

### The New Jerusalem: Eden and the Cosmic Mountain Restored

The Bible's story concludes with Eden restored and magnified. John describes the New Jerusalem descending from heaven:

*"Behold, the tabernacle of God is among the people, and He will dwell among them."*  
(Revelation 21:3)

This city is situated on a high mountain (Revelation 21:10), echoing Eden as the cosmic mountain. From the throne flows the river of life, and on either side grows the tree of life, bearing fruit for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:1–2). The curse is gone; God dwells with His people face-to-face.

This final vision is the consummation of the temple-expansion that began in Eden. What was lost at the first mountain-sanctuary is fully restored in the last. New Jerusalem is depicted as a garden city with temple dimensions, flowing rivers, a tree of life, and open access to God. What was lost in Eden is not only restored but also amplified—both new and improved.

## Conclusion

From Eden as temple and cosmic mountain, to the tabernacle and temple, to Christ's incarnation, to the Spirit's presence within His people, and finally to the New Jerusalem, the Bible tells one story: God's purpose has always been to dwell among man. Eden was not merely the setting of our fall. It was the pattern for our future. Understanding Eden as a temple reminds us of God's ultimate goal. It is not to escape from earth, but the reestablishment of His dwelling on earth—in fullness, forever. The rebellion of the serpent and the exile from Eden were not the end. Jesus the Messiah has come. Soon, He will restore paradise and establish God's presence among man forever.



The Tree of Life in the Temple Garden Paradise

## Recommended Resources

G.K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004)

Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015)