

A Walk through the Garden

The Tree of Life and the New Jerusalem

Revelation 22:1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

³ No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.

⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

⁵ And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

⁶ And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place."

¹⁷ The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

(Rev 22:1-6, 17-19)

Luther's Garden

In Spring of 1526, after his marriage to [Katharina von Bora](#) the year before, [Martin Luther](#) wrote a letter to his good friend and fellow Reformer George Spalatin, announcing the birth of his first son Hans. “[When are you](#)

coming to see us again? I have planted a garden and dug a well, and both are doing famously. So come, and we will crown you with garlands of lilies and roses.”¹ In a letter to the same son four years later, Luther would write,

Grace and peace in Christ, my dear little son.

I am very happy indeed to hear that you are so diligently studying and saying your prayers. Continue to do so, my little boy, and when I come home I will bring you something pretty from the Fair.

I know a beautiful garden, where there are crowds of children, all dressed up in golden jackets. They pick up big apples under the trees, also pears, cherries, and purple plums and yellow plums, and they sing and skip about and have a jolly time. They also have pretty ponies with golden reins and silver saddles. I asked the man to whom the garden belonged, whose children they were. He said: “These are the children who love to pray and learn their lessons and are good.” Then I said to him: “Dear man, I, too, have a son, his name is little Jack Luther; mightn’t he also come into the garden, and eat such fine apples and pears, and ride on these pretty ponies, and play with the children?” “If he loves to pray and study, and is good,” said

¹ Martin Luther and Albert T. W. Steinhäuser, *Luther Primer: A Little Book of Goodly Excerpts from the Writings of Martin Luther* (Columbia, SC: Survey Publishing Company, 1917), 124–125.

the man, “he may, and Lippus and Jost, too [the sons of Melanchthon and Justus Jonas, playmates of Hans]; and when they come they shall all have whistles and drums and lutes and every sort of string instrument, and dance, and shoot with little cross-bows.” And he showed me a beautiful lawn in **the garden**, made ready for dancing, with golden whistles and drums and little silver cross-bows hanging all about...

So, dear little Jackie, only learn your lessons and pray, and tell Lippus and Jost to do the same; then **you will all get into the garden together**. Herewith I commend you to the Almighty. Give Auntie Lena my love and a hearty smack for me.

Your loving father,
MARTINUS LUTHER.²

Luther loved gardens. After the birth of his son he wrote that if I might only go on living, he would “**joyfully be a gardener**.”³ Then there’s the famous apocryphal line that in response to a question of what he would do if he knew the world would end tomorrow he supposedly responded, “**I would still plant my apple tree**.”⁴

² Ibif. 125–127.

³ The Garden of Martin Luther, Medieval Histories (4-26, 2017), <https://www.medieval.eu/garden-martin-luther/>.

⁴ Someone comments, “**It sounds just like him**” (Eric W. Gritsch, “Luther on Humor,” in *The Pastoral Luther: Essays on Martin Luther’s Practical Theology*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert

Luther had set up what is to this day called **Luther-House** at a University College where he entertained and taught friends and students, as many as 50 persons at one time. **Käthe** was given the primary duties of catering for the large audiences, and this necessitated **working their garden**. This became the inspiration for Protestant vicarage or parsonage. Luther seemed to take older ideas of **medieval monks gardening away** in their cloisters and wed them to his reforms where now the vicar and his wife would maintain their house, household, and congregation as if in apprenticeship to God. After the birth of his son Luther wrote that if I might only go on living, he would “**joyfully be a gardener**.”⁵

[Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017], 89 n. 12). But the saying is actually a **German proverb** and parallels a saying attributed to **Johanan ben Zakkai** (first century AD): “**If you have a seedling in your hand, and they say to you, ‘Look, here comes the Messiah!’ - go on and plant the seedling first, and then come out to meet him.**” “This saying presupposes that the Messianic age, insofar as it is even recognized, makes no radical change in the normal course of life. But the German proverb enjoins faithfulness to one’s task even when the very end of the world is imminent.” **William Sailer**, J. Creighton Christman, et al., *Religious and Theological Abstracts* (Myerstown, PA: Religious and Theological Abstracts, 2012).

⁵ “The Garden of Martin Luther, Medieval Histories” (4-26, 2017), <https://www.medieval.eu/garden-martin-luther/>. **Going Deeper**. One biographer comments on Luther and his wife in the garden and the innate sensitivity he had to God’s created order, especially as a poet. “**As he and Catherine were walking in the garden, one evening, the stars shone with unusual brilliancy. ‘What a brilliant light!’ said Luther, as he looked upward; ‘But it burns not for us.’ – ‘And why are we to be shut out from the kingdom of heaven’ asked Catherine. ‘Perhaps,’ said Luther, with a sigh, ‘because we left our convents.’ – ‘Shall we return, then?’ – ‘No,’ he replied, ‘it is too late to do that.’**

The sights and sounds of nature all touch him, now with joy, and now with pathetic aspiration. Of all the reformers, we see in him alone this elevated susceptibility to natural grandeur and beauty. In the view of these, his poetic depth and richness of feeling come strongly into play. The flowers, the birds, the “**bounteous thunder, shaking the earth and**

Luther's garden was simple, with elevated beds and winding paths and his well at the center. He raised pigs, cows, goats, had a horse and a dog (which he named "devil"). He grew radishes, figs, oranges, medicinal herbs, flowers, apples, pears, cherries, peaches, mulberries, medlars, and vines, for a vineyard was part of the garden.

Next to *Lutherhaus* in Wittenberg stood the house of Melancthon. The three-story building had its own garden, which connected with Luther's. There, under the shade of the trees, the two great Reformers would often exchange ideas, discuss theology, talk about current events, and make plans around the many conflicts they were facing.⁶

In 1569, 23 years after Luther's death, Lucas Cranach the Younger was commissioned to paint an epitaph for

rousing it, that its fruits may come forth and spread a perfume;" the troubled sky, and the dark and heaving clouds poised overhead, and guided by the swift and invisible hand of God; the quiet loveliness of the harvest-fields, on his return home from Leipzig; the little bird perched at sunset in his garden, and folding its wings trustfully under the care of the Almighty Father; the first song of the nightingale, --all touch him with emotion, and awaken his tender or solemn interest. The sprouting branches of his garden trees," strong and beautiful, and big with the fruit that they shall bring forth," make him think of the resurrection and of the awakening of the soul after the wintry sleep of death. Luther was, in truth, a poet, gifted not only with the keen appreciation and life of feeling that constitute poetic sensibility, but, moreover, with that mastery of melodious expression which makes the fulness of the "gift of faculty divine." His love of music, his love of nature and liberty, and, above all, his heroic faith, inspire his hymns with a rapture of lyrical feeling and excellence rarely reached." John Tulloch, *Leaders of the Reformation* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1860), 80-81. https://www.google.com/books/edition/Leaders_of_the_Reformation_Luther_Calvin/y4EJAwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=reformation+luther+garden&pg=PA80&printsec=frontcover.

⁶ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church 6: Modern Christianity and the German Reformation* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), 191.

the recently deceased Paul Eber. Cranach used that occasion to depict **the Reformation as a garden-vineyard** on a small mountain. Scripture often depicts the church as both a garden and a vineyard, and perhaps Cranach was most inspired by Pope Leo X who had first responded to Luther's 95 Thesis by exclaiming, **"The wild boar from the forest seeks to destroy the vineyard."** He divided his mountain-garden in half by a wall:

On the left side, the vineyard has withered from neglect and mismanagement. The pope, cardinals, bishops, priests and monks are hard at work ... ripping out the vines and throwing rocks into the well. They are destroying the Good News of Jesus Christ with their false doctrines of the worship of Mary and the saints, purgatory, penance, indulgence, etc. They have ripped out the true salvation story contained in the words and person of Jesus Christ, who is the Vine to whom we are connected by faith (John 15:5). They have thrown rocks down the well of he who is the Water of life (John 4:13) ... On the right, the vineyard is flourishing under Lutheran cultivation. [Curiously] **Twelve reformers** [with Luther in the center] ... clear the land and prune and irrigate the new, healthy plants.⁷

⁷ **Michael Zarling**, "In the Vineyard of the Lord," *Bread For Beggars* (Act 15, 2014), <https://www.breadforbeggars.com/2014/10/in-the-vineyard-of-the-lord/>. See also **Wilhelm**



The Vineyard of the Lord
Lucas Cranach the Younger, 1569



Altar in Salzwedel
Lucas Cranach the Younger (1582)

Given that today is **Reformation Day**, I thought this would be an appropriate way to introduce our subject as Revelation draws to a close. Here at the end of God's word—which, as the poet says is itself "like a garden ... **With flowers bright and fair; And ev'ry one who seeks may pluck, A lovely cluster there,**"⁸ here there is **a river surrounded by precious stones and metals.** The river waters a central **tree here that bears fruit.** The scene is taken from Genesis 2, the origin story of our first parents being put

Weber, "Working in the Lord's Vineyard," Wilhelm's Space (Feb 2, 2020), <https://kwaweber.org/2020/02/03/working-in-the-lords-vineyard/>.

⁸ Edwin Hodder, "They Word is Like a Garden, Lord" (1863).

into the **Garden of Eden**. Given that the garden is perhaps the most significant them at the beginning and end of the Bible, and given its theological importance the rest of the way through, I thought I would tell us the story of **six Gardens**, as they take us through history from the beginning to end. Each stop along the way will teach us something new and important and help us to understand why it is that the Garden reappears at the very end of the Bible, in its very last chapter.

Garden in Scripture

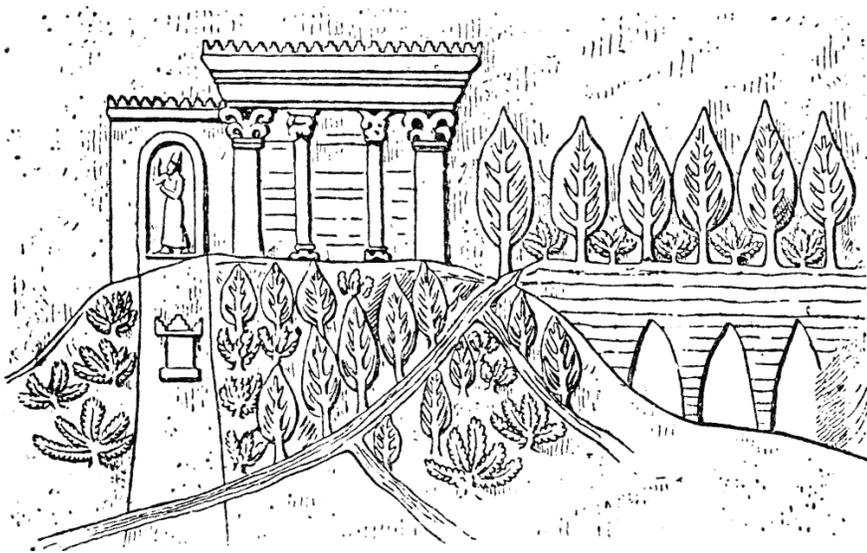
It's Description and Purpose

Before coming to actual biblical gardens, let's do some preliminary work by asking **what is a biblical garden and what is its purpose?** On a literal level, “A garden (גַּן) is an enclosed area containing a variety of plants, water sources (streams and ponds), and animals. It was protected (vb. נִצְּרָה) by a wall or hedge/fence and entered by way of a gate.”⁹ This is **not that 10 x 10 ft. plot** in your backyard where you grow vegetables. It is more like a city parks project, a

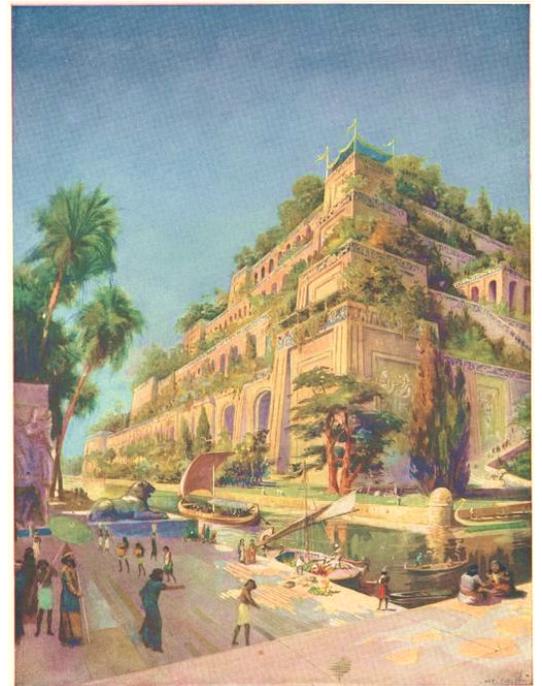
⁹ **Willem VanGemeren**, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 876.

botanical garden combined with something like zoo, especially the atrium with birds and plants; and you grow food here.

In the ancient world, **kings built gardens, often for their wives**. Nebuchadnezzar is a prime example. One of the seven ancient wonders of the world was the **Hanging Gardens of Babylon** built by Nebuchadnezzar for his Persian queen, because he had taken her from her home and she was fond of the “**meadows of her mountains**” (**Diodorus Siculus**, *Historical Library* II.10.1).



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) Zénaïde Alexeïevna Ragozin, Wikimedia Commons. *Note: The gardens are built on top of a hillock*



Beautiful Reconstruction of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon Charles M. Sheldon, 1924. New York Public Library, public domain

Gardens like these were not just for physical relaxation or even food. They were also **temples**. Nebuchadnezzar's garden was built on a ziggurat, a mountain-looking structure which amazingly made it emulate the Garden of Eden at the foot of Mt. Eden (**Ezek 38:13-16**). Likewise, Moses's tabernacle and Solomon's temple had all kinds of Garden of Eden motifs built into them, from pomegranates to animals to angels to water to even a duplication of the trees, God designed his sanctuaries like Eden.¹⁰

The *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* has an excellent entry on "garden." It summarizes the purpose beautifully, "The human race has always pictured perfection as an enclosed garden, lush with vegetation and suffused with tranquility ... It is an image of the ideal that heightens whatever activity occurs within it. It signals *nature* at its best, *romantic love* at its best, *human well-being* at its best, *spiritual reality* at its best. The garden of bliss is a moral and spiritual norm against which fallen experience is judged and toward which the human spirit aspires ... The Garden of Eden is more than a place; it is also a way of life and a state of soul [italics mine]."¹¹

¹⁰ For much more see my sermon "Genesis 2:8-14: The Garden of God." <https://uploads.documents.cimpress.io/v1/uploads/1d242466-e097-4655-9eaa-25a7bcec3528~110/original?tenant=vbu-digital>.

¹¹ **Leland Ryken**, Jim Wilhoit, et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 315, 17.

Garden of Eden: Place of Creation

So what are our six gardens?. The **first** is obligatory: **The Garden of Eden**. We learn that **God planted a garden in Eden (Gen 2:8)**. It's very interesting that *God* planted this Garden. He made it and only later did he “**put**” the man in it. He later put the woman in it. Here they were naked, knew no shame, and God married them in a ceremony in the midst of the beautiful garden.

Why did God do it? Because right here, at creation, the Garden was set forth as that ideal, the goal to which the image-bearer is always to strive. This was **utopia**. The LXX translates it as “**paradise**.” The word “Eden” may be related to a West Semitic stem ‘*dn* which has to do with “**luxury, abundance, delight, or lushness**.”¹² God wanted us to see that such a thing was his original design for the created order and mankind was to preside over its accomplishment and here's how you do it.

We see that “**a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden**” (**Gen 2:10**). This **river** became four rivers, two of which we remember by name today: the Tigris and Euphrates (**14**). **Precious stones and metals** like gold,

¹² **Howard N. Wallace**, “Eden, Garden of (Place),” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 281.

bdellium, and onyx are directly related to the river (11-12). God also brought many animals to this garden to see what Adam would name them. This is all how it should have been.

We learn that out of the ground the LORD God made every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food to spring up (9). Two trees are especially mentioned, because they were in its center. **The Tree of Life** and the **Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil**. The Tree of Life held out the promise to our first parents that if they would obey God, they would live forever. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is essentially a tree whereby they would make judicial decisions or right and wrong. Several OT passages use “**discerning good and evil**” as the job of **the king** in a court of law (cf. **2Sam 14:17**; **1Kgs 3:9**; etc.).¹³ To put it differently, both are closely related to the Law of God and covenants.

Why would God do this? Because he was making his servants—man and woman—to be his **vassal kings on earth**. They were going to be carrying out kingly duties, and chief among those is upholding God’s law. However,

¹³ A good article on this is **William N. Wilder**, “Illumination And Investiture: The Royal Significance Of The Tree Of Wisdom in Genesis 3,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 68:1 (2006): 50-69.

they were also going to be God's priests. This comes through in the specific duty he gives them "to work it and keep it" (Gen 2:15). "Work" ('abad) and "keep" (shamar) are also translated as "culture" or cultivate" or "dress" or "tend" or "care for" and "till" or "maintain." In fact, like Adam, God is said to "put" the priests in this position in the tabernacle. Obviously, the idea of gardening is close to the surface, and this goes back to carrying out dominion and subduing the earth, making it all like the Garden of Eden. However, these Hebrew words really convey two things simultaneously.

When these words appear in places like Leviticus or Numbers, without exception they are always translated as "guarding" and "serving" or "obeying" (cf. Num 3:7-8; 8:25-26; 18:5-6; 1 Chr 23:32; Ezek 44:14). The job of the priests was to care for, maintain, and carry out all the duties of the tabernacle. They were to protect it, to keep it pure, to make sure that it remained holy, and so on. In other words, God is giving Adam and Eve this same task in the Garden of Eden temple.

*AND God did plant his Garden trees
East-ward in Eden full of these:
All that was pleasant to the sight,*

*And good for food or for delight.
And into Eden thus adorn'd
He brought the man whom he had form'd;
And made all Paradise his seat
To dress it and to keep it neat.
The tree of Life, of greatest price,
Was in the midst of Paradise.
And there the Tree of Knowledge stood,
Knowledge of evil and of good.
And God did bring each Bird and Beast
(Even from the greatest to the least)
For Man to name, and by his Word
Was named every Beast and Bird.
Let Israel's God be prais'd therefore
From first to last for evermore:
And let all sorts of people then,
Say cheerfully Amen, Amen.¹⁴*

The King: The Garden as Place of the Bride

A **second garden** takes us back to this idea of a king and his bride. Solomon said, “**I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees**” (**Ecc 2:5**). Again, “**The language of this verse implies that the Teacher is trying to recreate the conditions of paradise—that is,**

¹⁴ Unknown, though perhaps Ambrose or Augustine. Trans. **William Barton**, “Hymn 4: Paradise,” *Six Centuries of Select Hymns and Spiritual Songs Collected out of the Holy Bible Together with a Catechism, the Canticles, and a Catalogue of Vertuous Women / by William Barton*, Early English Books Online (London: J. Heptinstall for William Cooper .., 1688), viii–ix.

Eden itself ... [the kings'] ability to tame 'raw nature' ... goes with their ability to wage war and to control society.”¹⁵ This became a primary inspiration for Solomon's famous love poem: *Song of Songs*. He likens his bride to a garden:

Song 4:12-5:1	Same Put to English Meter
<p style="text-align: center;">He</p> <p>A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a spring locked, a fountain sealed. nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all choice spices--</p> <p>a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams from Lebanon. Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden, let its spices flow.</p>	<p><i>My sister spouse, a garden close-locked; A locked spring, a fountain fast-sealed. Thy plants are of pomegranates an ortyard; With fruit of precious things: Cypress with Nard. Nard, saffron, calamus, and cinnamon, The trees of Frankincense every-one:</i></p> <p><i>Myrrh Aloes, with all spices that surmount O though that art the gardens welling-fount, The well of waters that doe lively-spring: And that from Lebanon the streams-do-bring. Stir up thou North, & come thou South wind, Upon my garden that her spice may flow:</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;">She</p> <p>Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits.</p>	<p><i>Into his garden my beloved repair, And eat his fruit of things that precious are.</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;">He</p> <p>I came to my garden, my sister, my bride, I gathered my myrrh with my spice,</p>	<p><i>My sister, O my spouse, I am entered Into my garden: I have gathered</i></p>

¹⁵ August H. Konkel and Tremper Longman III, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Vol 6: Job, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2006), 268.

I ate my honeycomb with my honey,
I drank my wine with my milk.

Others

Eat, friends, drink, and be drunk with
love!

*My Myrrh together with my spices-sweet,
My honey-comb did with my honey eat,*

*I drunk my wine, with my milk: friends eat ye,
Drink, o beloved, and drink-plenteously.¹⁶*

Someone writes, “This garden is unreal, in the sense that no garden in the ancient Near East would have nourished such a wide variety of plants and trees. [It has rightly been called a] “utopian, fantasy-garden.”¹⁷ If the garden was the place of the original wedding, in the Song, “The ‘garden’ and ‘vineyard’ metaphors for the woman convey a sense of her blossoming sexuality.” “The Song sings of the ideal Israelite man—son of David, king in Jerusalem, ‘radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand’ (5:10)—with his

¹⁶ Henry Ainsworth, *Solomon’s Song of Songs, In English Metre: With Annotations and References to other Scriptures, for the easier understanding of it* (London?, 1623). Spelling modernized. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A11649.0001.001/1:29?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>. See also William Baldwin (1518-1563), *The Canticles or Balades of Salomon, Phraselyke Declared in Englysh Meters* (London: William Baldwin, 1549), <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A15987.0001.001?rgn=subject;view=toc;q1=Bible.+++O.T.+++Song+of+Solomon+---+Paraphrases%2C+English+---+Early+works+to+1800>. I found two others also putting the Song into English Meter, however both spiritualize the Song as Christ and the Church explicitly. See John Lloyd, *The Song of Songs; Being a Paraphrase Upon the Most Excellent Canticles of Solomon in a Pindarick Poem* (London: H. H., 1682, Google Books); William Barton, *Six Centuries of Select Hymns and Spiritual Songs Collected out of the Holy Bible Together with a Catechism, the Canticles, and a Catalogue of Vertuous Women / by William Barton*, Early English Books Online (London: J. Heptinstall for William Cooper, 1688, in Logos). For a link to more see <https://reformedbooksonline.com/poetry/the-song-of-solomon-in-poetry/>.

¹⁷ Roland Edmund Murphy, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs*, ed. S. Dean McBride, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 73, 160-61.

ideal wife (1:8; 4:7, 12; 6:8–9), and the two of them are reversing the effects of the fall as they recapture the intimacy of marriage in a lush garden.”¹⁸ The point is, the garden is a way of depicting the greatest joys God gave to humanity, though marriage and sex within it is but a type church, as we will see later.

Sodom and Gomorrah: Garden as Place to Return

For the **third garden**, we shift gears rather dramatically. Let us remember that **our parents gave into the temptation**. They were deceived, negligent, and disobedient. They plunged humanity into sin and death from which it cannot escape on its own. For their treachery, **God kicked them out** of the Garden and put two cherubim with flaming swords to guard the gates so that they might not enter and eat of the tree of life.

At first, they did not go far. In fact, the story of Cain and Abel seems to take place right there at the gates of Eden. When the two boys come to offer a sacrifice, and Cain’s sacrifice is not accepted, God tells him, “**Sin is crouching at the door**” (**Gen 4:7**). The door of what? I

¹⁸ James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 307.

propose it is **the door of the Garden of Eden**, the very place where those cherubim were put.

After Cain's great sin, **God cast him away** from Eden and he became a wanderer. But ever since, mankind has tried his own way on his own terms with his own laws by his own means **to return** to Eden. Though Babel has many of the hallmarks of this with its mountain and humanity climbing up to God, I want to turn to a most unexpected Garden: Sodom and Gomorrah to see how this has worked itself out in history.

After Genesis 3, the next time the word "garden" appears in **Genesis 13:10**. **Abram and Lot** are sojourning together in the Promised Land, but they are becoming too rich and powerful to stay together. So Abram, I believe foolishly, offers Lot the choice of the land. "**And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the LORD.**" It then adds the parenthetical, "**This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.**" Hence, Lot chose for himself all the Jordan Valley and journeyed east (never a good direction to head in the Bible).

In other words, **Sodom and Gomorrah are pictured as Eden** and Lot wants to go there! So what did men do with

Utopia. The same thing the Catholics did to it. (Remember the painting?) The same thing many Protestants have done to it. The same thing the Communists do with it. The same thing many Americans have done with it. The same thing fallen men do with it! They trounce and tread upon it. They ruin it. They Pillage and plunder it. They destroy it. It became a den of adultery, lying, strengthening the hands of evildoers (Jer 23:14); oppressing the poor (Amos 4:1-22); pride, gluttony, idleness (Ezek 16:49-50), inhospitality, homosexuality, and even sexually sinning with angels (Gen 19:1ff). Remember Mos Eisley Spaceport? Obi Wan said, “You will never find a more wretched hive of scum and villainy.” These people made Mos Eisley look like ... the Garden of Eden. That’s what we do when we try to make Eden ourselves, returning to the pristine garden on our own terms in our own ways by our own laws and inventions. Look around America and the whole world right now and you will see how fast it happens. And it has happened time and again since the beginning.

And we do it even when we try not to. Old Man Luedeche laments his own gardening in a metaphor that for the longest time I thought was about sin, then I figured out it really is about gardening:

*I've gripped a darken noon
And I've torn myself in two
I've scraped my shovel through the fledgling seeds
and turned my gaze on you*

*Now I've shaken with the darkest powers
That'll reduce life to sand
Where the little plats of hope and peace
lie poisoned by my hand*

*Well the garden of my dreams
Is all filled up with weeds
And the little tears I don't pull out
will surely pull out me¹⁹*

Garden of Gethsemane: Garden as Place of Temptation

We might therefore call Sodom, like Eden before it, a **place of temptation**. Lot seems to have given into it, though he did his best to withstand, eventually however succumbing just as Adam did before, as he **offered his daughters to be raped** by the men of the city. But there is another Garden that embodies temptation in a profoundly redemptive way, which is what we need to hear, if in fact this is what our response is in gardens.

¹⁹ **Old Man Luedeche**, "Wake Up Hill," *Proof of Love*, CD Baby (2008).

At the bottom of the **Mt. of Olives**, less than .2 mile east of the walls of the ancient city of Jerusalem, there is a garden (**John 18:1**). In this garden stand a grove of olive trees in which it is said a couple still survive from the time of Christ.²⁰ If so, then they are **living witnesses** to the night when the greatest temptation of all presented itself to a human being.

Jesus had called his closest disciples to him, took them over the Kidron river, and into the **Garden of Gethsemane** (meaning “olive press”). There he bade them, “**Sit here, while I go over there and pray**” (**Matt 26:36**). He told Peter, James, and John, “**My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me**” (**38**). He knew what was imminent and he wanted them to watch.

Just one hour later, he came to his disciples later and found them **asleep!** (**40**). Adam couldn't have been more negligent. Jesus had been praying to his Father in heaven. “**If it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will**” (**39**). He left them a second time and went alone and prayed again, “**My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done**” (**42**). When he came

²⁰ Recent tests were only able to prove about 900 years of age, however the oldest parts of the trees are long gone and an olive tree can grow back entirely from one that has been cut down, meaning that this story is not improbable.

back, his closest friends and followers were **sleeping yet again** (43). He left them a third time and prayed, repeating the same lamentation (44). He returned and they slept yet again. So he roused them and said, “**Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners**” (45). Satan had entered Judas, one of the twelve, and tempted him to betray the God of Glory. A few hours later, after being viciously beaten, flogged, and mocked in a monkey trial, he was hanging on a cross just a few hundred yards away.

Gethsemane is **the ultimate picture of temptation**. In it, the sons of Adam all gave into it, refused to watch, did not pray, did not warn, did not speak truth, did not guard, did not serve, did nothing but fall into a stupor of both body and spirit. At the very last possible moment, some fallen human was still given a chance. All three failed. At that very same moment, even in sweating drops as it were like blood (**Luke 22:44**), the Son of Man passed **alone passed through** his fiery trial and was ushered into eternal glory as a human sacrifice for their and all of our sin. Without this Garden, the reality of temptations both lost and conquered are made crystal clear.

*Oh! might I visit thee
Precious Gethsemane;
Might I my Saviour see,
Weeping for me.*

*Garden where Jesus trod,
Bowed 'neath the iron rod,
Knelt on thy dewy sod,
Fain would I see.*

*Oh! to my wand'ring feet,
No place is half so sweet
As thy divine retreat
Gethsemane.²¹*

Garden Tomb: Garden as Place to Resurrection

Along with this garden, a second garden (our [fifth](#)) appears in parallel between Revelation 21-22 and John's Gospel. Constructed over multiple centuries in the middle of the cement city that is old town Jerusalem, the [Church of the Holy Sepulcher](#) sits on top what most scholars to this day believe to be the sight of [Jesus' crucifixion and burial](#). In fact, just five years ago, *National Geographic* reported that they may have uncovered Jesus' actual tomb. Many

²¹ [Anne Elizabeth Lee](#), "Gethsemane," *The Fruits of the Valley* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1855), 46.

Protestants think that the tomb is actually far outside the Old City in what is now called [The Garden Tomb](#), though the place itself says this probably wasn't where Jesus was buried. Nevertheless, it does serve a much better spot to contemplate what the tomb would have looked like with its surrounding gardens and quiet spaces.

This is what John says about it. “[Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there](#)” ([John 19:41](#)). [Three days later](#), in this same spot, early on the first day of the new week while it was still dark, the stone was removed by a miracle even as it was guarded by Roman soldiers whose lives depended upon actually doing their duty—guarding the tomb in the garden. That stone was removed by God himself, probably by the risen Christ, who [came out of the tomb alive](#) after his beaten broken body lay three days cold and stiff in the grave.

[Like a seed that is planted](#) in the ground and watered with water to spark new life, the Lord Jesus conquered sin, death, and the devil and rose from the dead. There, in the garden, after refusing to be overcome by temptation in

another garden, the Lord became the firstfruits of new life and a new creation. In this way, resurrection is another theme of the garden. Resurrected, bodily life, capable of walking, talking, and eating. Its continuity is shown by the marks in his hands, feet, and side. Its discontinuity by the fact that he walked through walls. Who can

*One day they left him alone in the garden,
One day he rested, from suffering free;
Angels came down o'er his tomb to keep vigil;
Hope of the hopeless, my Saviour is he!*

*One day the grave could conceal him no longer,
One day the stone rolled away from the door;
Then he arose, over death he had conquered;
Now is ascended, my Lord evermore!²²*

The Church: Garden as Place to Future Utopia Inaugurated Today

Finally, then, we come to Revelation 21. The last garden of the Bible sends our thoughts to a future utopia inaugurated even today. **The Garden of God** in the New Jerusalem. This vision is as follows. “**Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal,**

²² J. Wilbur Chapman, “One Day,” (1910).

flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. And he said to me, ‘These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place’” (Rev 22:1-6).

The setting is the city, which is **the new Jerusalem**. That city is bedecked with **brilliant gems and gleaming metal**, a perfect created reflection of the Glory of God to describe his Bride, which is what we saw this new city is. So the **bride** is here and she is being taken to a garden. Sound familiar?

The **river of the water of life** is here. We’ve seen a couple of times how this parallels the Samaritan Woman in John’s Gospel where Jesus said, “**I would have given you**

living water” (John 4:10). While the river pictures Eden, it also pictures the new covenant temple as depicted in Ezekiel.

¹ Then he brought me back to the door of the temple, and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar.

² Then he brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east; and behold, the water was trickling out on the south side.

³ Going on eastward with a measuring line in his hand, the man measured a thousand cubits, and then led me through the water, and it was ankle-deep.

⁴ Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was knee-deep. Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was waist-deep.

⁵ Again he measured a thousand, and it was a river that I could not pass through, for the water had risen. It was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be passed through.

⁶ And he said to me, "Son of man, have you seen this?" Then he led me back to the bank of the river.

⁷ As I went back, I saw on the bank of the river very many trees on the one side and on the other.

⁸ And he said to me, "This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, and enters the sea; when the water flows into the sea, the water will become fresh.

⁹ And wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish. For this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes ...

¹² 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.

(Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12)

But what Ezekiel saw began to come true on that new creation week in John 1-2 when in six days the Lord called his disciples and rested on the seventh with a wedding feast. The first day describes John baptizing “in Bethany across the Jordan [river]” (John 1:28). Then, as he called his disciples one by one, he saw Nathanael (Bartholomew?) under the tree (48). With his irresistible call, the disciple followed the Savior.

With this call, Jesus began his work of healing many, for Nathanael was a man bitter, angry, and perhaps even a bit of a racist who mockingly told Philip, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (46). But Jesus knew his

heart even from afar and responded sarcastically yet gently, “Here is a man in whom there is no deceit” (48). The Tree of Life, Christ himself, came to the man who was under the fig tree and changed his heart.

Now look again at our last-days garden. Here, there is the tree of life—the very tree from which we were barred at the Garden of Eden. It was held out in the parallel at the beginning of Revelation, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (Rev 2:7). It is in the middle of the city on either side of the river which runs through the street of the city from the very throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev 22:1-2). That means that this tree of life is in the midst of Christ’s church and that his Bride is the gateway for all who would come.

The tree does something different than it did in Eden. There, it was simply held out as the thing that you eat and live forever. But here, because we live on this side of sin, it has twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month, and its leaves are for the healing of the nations. In this we are reminded of the “twelves” from ch. 21, and how they represented the foundation of the church (the Apostles),

the **seed** of the church (the twelve tribes), and the **heavenly** counterpart of the church (the four living creatures and the zodiac) which gives our earth its twelve **seasons**. But this tree does not grow dormant like our trees in northern latitudes for half the year. Rather, it **produces fruit year-round**. That fruit nourishes and sustains life for anyone who would eat it. That fruit comes directly from the word, as Jesus said, “**What was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundred fold...**” (**Matt 13:23**). Corporately, that fruit grows in the garden of the church, where **the means of grace**—God’s holy word and the sacraments, recovered and brought central in the Reformation, are given out to the people so that they might be sustained by the Word of God himself.

*Christ hath a garden walled around,
A Paradise of fruitful ground,
Chosen by love and fenced by grace
From out the world's wide wilderness.*

*Like trees of spice his servants stand,
There planted by his mighty hand;
By Eden's gracious streams, that flow
To feed their beauty where they grow.²³*

²³ **Isaac Watts**, “Christ Hath a Garden.”

This is why in God's plan **the church** is the focus of the passage. The church is the Bride. She is coming to the Garden. She has access to the Tree. When she dispenses the Word as she is told, even the very nations themselves are healed (**Rev 22:2**). This in turn begins to establish on earth as it is in heaven, the kingdom of God. And it looks forward to the time when there will be **no more curse**, because the **throne of God and the Lamb are in it**, and **is servants all worship him** (3). It looks forward to the day when **“they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads”** (4). It looks forward to the heavenly glory where there is **no more night**, for the the Lord God is their light, and **they will reign like kings forever** (5).

*Oh bliss, beyond conception great! All figures fail me now!
Unutterable thought! To gave upon my Savior's brow;
To realize a glory, ne'er by seraph mind conceived,
And see the crystal streams of life; yea, more than faith believed.*

*There, summer, thou shalt ever bloom, as when our parents stood
In that fair garden made by Him whose works were 'very good;'
Ere [before] sin had breathed its poison dire, among the golden flowers
Whose silken tendrils climb around fair Eden's happy bowers.²⁴*

²⁴ **Anne Elizabeth Lee.**, “Farewell to Summer,” *The Fruits of the Valley* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1855), 106-07.

On this Reformation Day, let us consider again the garden. Brother Luther taught us that it is central to Reformation. We have now seen why. Holy Scripture teaches that **it is the hope and longing of all mankind**. You must not arrive on your own power, in your own strength, by your own laws, through your own means. You must come to Christ through his church. **The Spirit and the Bride** tell us all to “**Come and drink from the water of life without price.**” As Ezekiel said long ago, “**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**).

As the angel told John. “**These words are trust worthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place**” (**Rev 22:6**).

Amen. Come Lord Jesus.

- A. 1:1. Things that must happen quickly (202)
- B. 1:3. Hears the words of this prophecy (200)
- C. 1:8. Alpha/Omega ... beginning/end (195)
 - D. 1:17. When I saw, I fell at his feet (186)
 - E. 1.19. The things which shall take place (184)
 - F. 2:1. In the midst of seven lampstands (182)
 - G. 2:7. the tree of life (176)
 - YY. 12:9. Dragon/serpent/devil/Satan thrown down who deceives world
 - YY¹. 12:10. Salvation/power/kingdom/authority of God and Christ ... accuser is thrown down
 - G¹. 22:2. The tree of life (181)
 - F¹. 22:2. In the midst of its street (181)
 - E¹. 22:6. The things which must take place (185)
 - D¹. 22:8. When I heard and saw, I fell at his feet (187)
 - C¹. 22:13. Alpha/Omega ... beginning/end (192)
 - B¹. 22:18. Hears the words of the prophecy (197)
 - A¹. 22:20. I am coming quickly (199)

Genesis 1-3 – Revelation 21-22 Parallels			
Genesis (Probationary World)		Revelation (Eternal World)	
2:8-9	Man in a prepared garden	Man in a prepared city	21:2ff
2:9	Tree of Life	Tree of Life	22:2
2:10	A river watering the garden	River of the Water of Life in City	22:1
2:12	Gold, bdellium, onyx near Garden	Gold and all kinds of precious stones in City	21:18
2:15	Human service for God	Human service for God	22:3
2:17	You will surely die	The free gift of the Water of Life	22:17
4:4	True worship	True worship	19:10; 22:9

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