

From Wilderness to Garden and Back to Wilderness

Genesis 1:1-2, 2:4-15, 3:22-24

- The Bible begins with a movement from chaos to order, from wilderness to garden.
- But, when Adam and Eve ignore God's instruction and do what's right in their own eyes, a reverse movement exiles humanity from the garden back into the wilderness, where life returns to dust.

Genesis 1:1-2 NASB

¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² And the earth was a formless and desolate emptiness, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.

Consider how it all started:

- The Bible opens with an image of the earth as a watery wilderness.
- Genesis 1:2 describes the world's initial state using a Hebrew term meaning “wild and waste”, which biblical authors also use to describe the wilderness (Deut. 32:10, Jer. 4:23-26).
- This language links the formless world at the beginning of creation to the image of a lifeless desert.
- But then, God turns chaos to order, forming a cosmos of beauty and purpose.
- And he fills it with light, vegetation, and living creatures—signs of fruitfulness and flourishing.

Genesis 2:4-15 NASB

⁴ This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made earth and heaven. ⁵ Now no shrub of the field was yet on the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the LORD God had not sent rain upon the earth, and there was no man to cultivate the ground. ⁶ But a mist used to rise from the earth and water the whole surface of the ground. ⁷ Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living person.

⁸ The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed. ⁹ Out of the ground the LORD God caused every tree to grow that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰ Now a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it divided and became four rivers. ¹¹ The name of the first is Pishon; it flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. ¹² The gold of that land is good; the bdellium and the onyx stone are there as well.

¹³ The name of the second river is Gihon; it flows around the whole land of Cush. ¹⁴ The name of the third river is Tigris; it flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵ Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and tend it.

Consider how God continued creation:

- Genesis 2 repeats this pattern but begins with a different image: a dry, barren wasteland without rain and with no one to cultivate the ground.
- From this desolate land, God forms Adam from the dust and plants the garden of Eden—an abundant place of life and provision (Gen. 2:5-9).
- God then places the man in the garden “to work and to keep it” in partnership with him (Gen. 2:15).

Genesis 3:22-24NASB

- ²² Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out with his hand, and take fruit also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever” — ²³ therefore the LORD God sent him out of the Garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴ So He drove the man out; and at the east of the Garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.

Consider all the implications:

- After eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, humans now understand moral good and evil in a way that parallels divine awareness.
- To prevent access to the tree of life, God sends Adam and Eve out of the garden.
- Cherubim and a flaming sword symbolize the sacredness of God's presence and the boundary now established.

Reflect

- God transforms a barren wilderness into a fruitful garden, but Adam and Eve choose to grasp at wisdom on their own terms, resulting in wilderness exile.
- How do the opening chapters of Genesis invite us to see creation not as something to control or exploit, but as a gift to be received through trust and partnership with God?

Next week:

Hagar's Exile and Wilderness Encounter With God

- Genesis 16:1-13, 21:14-21

Study considerations:

- Abram and Sarai use their own wisdom
- Hagar flees into the wilderness
- Even in the wilderness God hears and has future plans for Hagar and the boy