

## *Eden and the Essence of Sacred Space*

### **I. The Concept of Sacred Space**

1. *Sacred Space* refers, not to God's dwelling as such, but to the place of **encounter**.

*There is no "sacred space" without a creation; there is only God and His self-existence.*

2. Sacred space is concerned with **how** God is in relation to His creation, not *where* He is.
  - a. Sacred space, then, speaks to God's **intent** behind His work of creation – *specifically, the relationship He intended to establish with the created order in and through man.*
  - b. This is the perspective for understanding how all things exist for God's "glory."

### **II. Sacred Space and the Scriptural Creation Narrative**

The creation account introduces the concept of sacred space, and from that point forward it serves as the Scripture's central and unifying theme. \*\* Note again the Scripture's bookends.

1. The creation narrative is constructed so as to emphasize two primary themes: the creation as a **kingdom** and a **sanctuary**, and so the place of Creator/creature encounter and relationship.

- a. The creation days are partitioned into two parallel sets depicting the creation of *realms* of dominion (days 1-3) and the corresponding *lords* of those realms (days 4-6).

*This pattern reflects the creation's initial condition of **tohu** (uninhabitable) and **bohu** (without inhabitants) (Gen. 1:2) and God's intent to order and fill it.*

- b. God created creaturely "lords" to rule over their respective domains, and then lastly and climactically He created a supreme "lord" to rule over all of the other creaturely lords.

*God created this supreme "lord" – **man** – in His own image and likeness, with the intent that this ruler would administer His own presence and rule over His creation.*

- Hence the human function of **priest-king** – mediator between Creator and creation.
- This also implied by man's identity as **divine image** situated in God's dwelling, evoking the idea of a temple with its physical image as the point of encounter.

2. The creation narrative, then, emphasizes the *nature* and *purpose* of the created order with man at the center, not the mechanics or process of its origination.

- a. In the ancient world – including the Israelite world – the truth (reality) of a thing resides in its *function*, not its material makeup. *This reflects the fact that form follows function.*
- b. Hence the creation account addresses the question of the *meaning* of the creation in terms of its created purpose in relation to God, not questions of *material origin*.

### III. Eden as Sacred Space

The Scripture assigns two descriptors to Eden that identify it as the divine habitation: the *mountain of God* and the *garden of God*. These depictions are foundational to the Bible's development of the concept of sacred space.

1. The title, *mountain of God*, is most often associated with *Mount Horeb* (Mount Sinai).  
\* Exodus 3:1-2, 24:1-13; cf. 1 Kings 19:1-8

*In this usage the emphasis isn't on God's habitation as such, but rather the place where God meets with men – the place where the divine and human are brought together.*

- a. This same connotation is carried forward and further developed in the Bible's treatment of *Mount Zion* as the site of the temple. \* Isaiah 66:20; Jeremiah 3:17; Micah 4:1-2

*Jerusalem is so closely linked with the "mount of God" that the terms are sometimes used synonymously.* \* Isaiah 2:2-3, 66:20; Daniel 9:16; Joel 2:32, 3:17; Zech. 8:3

- b. Ezekiel, however, uses the phrase "mountain of God" in relation to *Eden*. \* 28:11-16

*Associating God's dwelling with a mountain follows ancient thought in which deities were encountered in high places.* \* Isaiah 57:15; cf. also 2:1-3, 11:9-10; Daniel 2:24ff

2. As the *mountain of God* speaks to divine/human encounter, the *garden of God* introduces the complementary ideas of profusion, perfection, beauty, blessing, fullness and satisfaction.

- a. Thus the creation narrative's description of Eden – with the *tree of life* at its center. This "life" is that which inheres in God and which He gives to His image-bearers. *Hence alienation from God is severance from His life.* \* Genesis 3:22-24; Ephesians 4:17-19

- b. This imagery of perfection, fullness and satisfaction in divine/human encounter is all the more significant when Eden is recognized as a *sanctuary* – the *garden of God*; the garden where God dwells. \* Genesis 3:8; cf. Ezekiel 28:11-19; cf. also 31:1-9 and Isaiah 51:3

- c. Eden is depicted in the creation account as *sacred space* – the place where God dwells and encounters His creation, and from which His glory and rule are to fill the earth.

*Thus the Scripture employs the language and imagery of Eden to describe other manifestations of sacred space: **Canaan** (Exodus 3:8, 15:17, 25:1-8), **the Temple** (1 Kings 6-7), **restored Zion** (Isaiah 4:2-6, 51:3, 65:13-25, 66:18ff; Jeremiah 31:1-12; Ezekiel 36:33-36; Hosea 2:14-23; Amos 9:11-15; cf. Revelation 21:1-3 with 22:1-19).*

*In all of these themes and images, we see glimpses into the incarnate Messiah, to whom all of them pointed and in whom they find their ultimate meaning. He is the fulfillment of sacred space – the dwelling of God in relation to His creation, and so it is with His people, who are His fullness.*