

The Significance and Effect of the Fall on Sacred Space

I. The Fall and the Two Trees

Genesis 2 identifies man's function as image-bearer. It shows God placing His human creature, made complete as male and female, in His garden-sanctuary to preserve it and serve its good. Thus man's function is *regal* and *priestly*, as he mediates the relationship between the creation and its Creator. This is the context for understanding the two trees in the midst of the garden.

A. The Tree of Life

1. This tree's presence in the midst of the garden suggests its importance to sacred space and the divine-human relationship. *Somehow, man's intimacy with God - and so his own fulfillment as image-son - is connected with the principle of "life" introduced here.*
2. This is reinforced by God's instruction to "eat freely" from this tree. Man was created for perpetual, perfect intimacy with God, and this requires that he participate in God's own life. But man was created "dust from the ground" - i.e., *mortal*, (cf. Genesis 3:19 with Job 4:18-19, 17:16; Psalm 103:14-15, 104:29; Ecclesiastes 3:20, 12:7), thus he must eat of the tree of life to fulfill his created design. Thus the text indicates that man as created was *non-ultimate*; he was destined to become man indeed by sharing in God's life - image-son of the Living One (cf. Romans 2:6-7; 1 Corinthians 15:42-53; 1 Timothy 1:17, 6:13-16; 2 Timothy 1:8-10).
3. The tree of life, then, represents human *shalomic* life in the context of sacred space. And God prepared this life for man in order that he would fulfill his created identity and function. And so it is not surprising that this symbolism recurs in the Scripture in connection with the *sanctuary theme* and *man's knowledge of and communion with God*.

B. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

1. The narrative presents this second tree as also standing in the garden, but God's prohibition regarding it introduces a sense of foreboding that the creation's shalomic state was tenuous. Most importantly, *it provides the crucial textual material for understanding the nature of sin and death and their implications for sacred space.*
2. This tree threatened the condition symbolized by the tree of life; eating of it would incur the sentence of *death* - i.e., perpetual mortality, and so exclusion from the tree of life. More than mere obedience to commandment, this choice would determine human destiny.
3. Conformity to his nature and role is man's *righteousness*. This second tree represented a threat to this righteousness, *but in the sense that man would fall short of God's intent that he share in His life. And failing to attain this life would be the doom of man's true humanity.*
4. This tree promised the knowledge of good and evil, to be understood as *wisdom* (Genesis 3:6). This knowledge/wisdom isn't *itself* evil, for God possesses it (3:22). Indeed, God intended His image-bearers to possess it; how could they share in His life and not His insight and understanding? *This tree represents autonomous wisdom - wisdom as a purely human construct and attainment apart from sharing in God's life.*
5. Man's judgment - to be consistent with himself as image-bearer - must be God's judgment. *Judging independently violates man's identity and purpose and so forfeits his humanity.*

II. The Devastation of Sacred Space

A. The Protoevangelium

Adam's disobedience introduced death to the created order, but that was not to be the end; *in the midst of the curse God promised the recovery of life.* * Genesis 3:15

1. The serpent had instigated the rebellion that resulted in death, so God set His promise of restoration and life in the midst of His pronouncement against the serpent.
2. The Fall established a state of enmity between the serpent and Eve, and that enmity would be manifested in the perpetual hostility between her seed and his. *And yet, from this line of descendents one offspring of Eve would bring this enmity to a head.*
3. This enmity would bring mutual "bruising," and, while God didn't explicitly state that Eve's seed would triumph in this conflict, the contrast between *head* and *heel* suggests this. This, then, is God's first indication of His intention to address and reverse the calamity of the Fall.
4. Adam perceived the significance of this promise and embraced it, naming the woman *Eve*. She would give birth to the Seed who Himself is the "Living One"; the One whose triumph over death would recover life for all men, reconciling them to their Creator-Father.

B. The Beginning of Provisional Sacred Space

1. The fall was man's grasp at autonomous wisdom, which fractured the divine-human relationship and left man *dead* – *consigned to his mortality, and dead to the truth of himself.*
2. Thus God expelled Adam and Eve from His garden-sanctuary, thereby destroying the *initial form* of sacred space as the "very good" creational realm of divine-human encounter.
3. Sacred space was now a matter of strained, fearful encounter in the context of estrangement.
 - a. The Fall didn't eradicate either human consciousness of God or the need to engage Him; *it introduced psychological and spiritual **distance** into worship because of the new, determinative reality of alienation between man and God.*
 - b. Human independence had come at great cost: Man's intimate familiarity with God had been replaced by *disquiet*. *God became increasingly foreign, mysterious and even frightening within human consciousness; **The loss of natural, comfortable, personal intimacy meant that worship – knowledge, encounter, and interaction – was now a matter of mediated distance through symbolism and sacrament.***
4. This radical alteration is highlighted in the first post-Fall worship episode (Cain and Abel):
 - a. The differences are usually highlighted, *but the commonalities are crucially important because they show that the curse of estrangement had passed to them from their parents.*
 - b. Both men's worship reflected the reality of distance between them and God – *distance addressed through ritual offerings. **Both were obliged to encounter God the same way.***
 - c. Both brought physical offerings to a certain site, *showing that sacred space had now taken on a temporal and spatial quality; encounter with God was now sacramental.*

5. The distinction in Cain and Abel's worship is the difference between *provisional* and *pseudo* sacred space: *encounter as suited to the post-fall relationship and encounter as reflecting it.*
 - a. Abel's offering was pleasing to God (4:4), yet *his worship, too, assumed the form of symbol and sacrament – worship as a matter of mediated distance.*
 - b. Cain's offering, like Abel's was entirely voluntary. *Their free acts of worship testify that man remains image-son, though estranged from his Creator-Father.*
 - c. Cain and Abel shared the same approach in worship and brought offerings taken from the fruit of their labors. *Nevertheless, God had no regard for Cain's offering (4:5).*

It's unclear how Cain knew that his offering had been rejected; what matters is that God's displeasure was directed toward Cain himself, not the form of offering he brought.

- d. Cain's offering was concerned with *Cain*, evident in his response to God's displeasure. ***Cain's offering is the first example of the pseudo-worship that characterizes man in his estrangement and autonomy. Thus it provides the paradigm for all human religion.***
- e. Cain is the paradigm of pseudo-worship in the context of alienation, *reinforced by the subsequent narrative (4:16ff).*
 - He became a wanderer/scavenger, so that the earth's enmity was multiplied for him.
 - In him, the curse began increasing its fruit (cf. 3:17-19, 4:10-14): *The autonomous wisdom that seduced his parents moved Cain to build a city for himself – a human alternative to sacred space and a tribute to human ingenuity, self-sufficiency.*
 - The Genesis account climactically summarized this autonomous human wisdom and its antithetical and destructive power in the *poem of Lamech (4:23-24).*

Thus Genesis 1-4 provides the answer to why life in this world is as it is. It tells us that all human and creational calamities, evils and woes are the fruit of man *in his own right.*

- 1) Man, being the image of God, is capable of great accomplishment in every arena of life.
- 2) But, severed from God and His life, his accomplishments derive from his own autonomous *pseudo-wisdom*, and therefore reflect and perpetuate the folly, alienation, and corruption of pseudo-human existence. * *So the "law" of unintended consequences and its manifest fruit.*
- 3) Being his own pseudo-god, man's wisdom is "over all his works" (cf. Psalm 104:24), but rather than bringing order out of non-order, human wisdom brings disorder out of order – *it works toward disharmony, disintegration, dissolution, and the triumph of death.*

So the Creator's disposition toward this woeful circumstance was the promise of *renewal*, not repair. The creational curse could only be remedied through a new divine work of ordering – not ordering non-order, but ordering disorder through bringing life out of death.

Man's autonomous wisdom had caused this calamity; so man would remedy it, but as true image-son – as possessing the wisdom of the One whose image he bears; as possessing God's wisdom through living communion in the Spirit: "I in you and you in me." * Luke 2:42, 52; 1 Cor. 1:18ff; Col. 2:1ff