

# The Church Part One: Gardeners and Guardians

Genesis 2:8-10, 15-17; 3:8, 23-24; Ezekiel 28:11-15; Revelation 21:1-3; 22:1-3

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**D**ear Congregation of Christ: By the way churches are named, there seems to be competition as to which one is the first or second or third to be established in a particular city. Which one is the first Baptist church in Yreka? First Baptist Church. In Medford, Oregon, which one is the first Presbyterian church established? It's the First Presbyterian Church. However, in Philadelphia, there is a well-known church called Tenth Presbyterian Church, and as is clear in its name, it's the tenth Presbyterian church established in that city. So, if the pioneers of our church were like these churches, we would have been named the First Christian Reformed Church of Big Springs!

If you asked any Christian who's familiar with the Bible which was the first Christian church established in history, they would probably point to the first church established in Jerusalem after Pentecost Sunday (Acts 2) about 30 A.D. But what does the Bible say when the first church was established? Though not straightforwardly stated, we shall discover this Lord's Day that the first church established by God consisted of gardeners and guardians. Gardeners and guardians? Where did that come from? It comes straight out of our readings in Genesis Chapters 2 and 3, in particular, Genesis 2:15, "*The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.*" How does that make the first church on earth? This is what we will expound and meditate on today as we begin a series on the Biblical, theological and historical aspects of the church.

Therefore, our theme this Lord's Day is, **The Church Part One: Gardeners and Guardians** under three headings: **(1) The Garden is God's Temple; (2) Adam and Eve Failed as Gardeners and Guardians; and (3) Adam and Eve Driven Out of God's Garden-Temple.**

## The Garden is God's Temple

For Adam and Eve's earthly pleasure, God planted a garden in Eden, with "*every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food*" (Gen 2:8). In the middle of the garden, God planted two trees: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life. He was pleased to give them all of this beautiful garden to enjoy. Few people think of the Garden of Eden as God's temple. But many Biblical scholars—I owe them some of these interpretations—have pointed out features of Eden that correspond to the tabernacle in the wilderness and the temple in Jerusalem.

First, "*a river flowed out Eden to water the garden*" (Gen 2:10). Water always flows down, as we see right before our eyes the snowmelt from Mount Shasta and other mountains filling rivers and lakes. Therefore, Eden was situated on top of a mountain, from where water flows to become four rivers flowing in the four cardinal directions. This river system is a feature of the Jerusalem temple that Solomon built, a bronze basin in front of the temple for ceremonial washing by the priests (1 Kgs 7:23). This basin is supported by twelve bulls facing the four directions of the earth. In Ezekiel 47,

a trickle of water flows out of the end-time temple—symbolic of the church—watering the whole earth. And as in the Garden of Eden, God is often pictured as dwelling on top of holy mountains, such as Mount Sinai (Exo 19:18) and later, Mount Zion (Psa 48:1-2).

Second, just as the Eden had a Tree of Life, so will the eternal holy city have a luscious Tree of Life bearing fruit all year (Rev 22:2). The Tree of Life once again appears in “the paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7). Believers who persevere through persecution are also pictured as conquerors who gain the right “*to eat from the tree of life*” (Rev 22:14, 19).

Third, God dwelt with Adam and Eve in the garden: the LORD God “walked” with them (Gen 3:8). In Leviticus 26:12, God promised the Israelites in the wilderness, “*And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people*” (see also Deu 23:14). He “walked” with them in the tabernacle. Even Psalm 23 is a picture of the Garden of Eden where God the Good Shepherd dwelt with Adam, leading him to green pastures, quiet waters, and paths of righteousness.

Fourth, Eden is rich in the construction and features of the tabernacle and the temple. Just as the entrance to the garden faced east (Gen 3:24), so did the entrance of the temple (Ezk 11:1). Just as there was the Tree of Life in Eden, so did the temple; it had a lampstand that looked like an almond tree (Exo 25:31ff; 1 Kgs 7:49). Just as Eden was filled with trees and flowering plants, so the temple had wood carvings of “*palm trees and open flowers*” (1 Kgs 6:18ff). Just as the garden had precious onyx and gold (Gen 2:12), so did the temple’s decorations and priestly garments (Exo 25:7ff; Rev 21:20-21).

Therefore, the Garden of Eden is called “*the garden of God*” and the “*holy mountain of God*” (Ezk 28:13, 14). God dwelt there with his people, Adam and Eve, teaching them, fellowshiping with them, and walking with them. They worshiped God within the beautiful trees and flowers, mountains and rivers, and beasts and birds of the Garden-Temple he created for them; no need for heating, air-conditioning, humidifiers, or air purifiers, because there was never “climate change.” Their hunger and thirst were always satisfied with its perfect, bountiful fruits and plants, where fertilizers and pesticides were never needed. This is why the Belgic Confession Article 27 says that the church “has existed from the beginning of the world.”

Friends, all these images of the Garden of Eden, the tabernacle in the wilderness, and the temple in Jerusalem point forward to our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Living Water and the Tree of Life (John 4:13-14; 7:37-38) who gives eternal life to all who believe and trust in him as the only Savior who willingly sacrificed himself on the cross, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that led all mankind to eternal death. He is the Son of God who walks with us, intercedes for us, and gives us strength in our afflictions through the Holy Spirit. He is the Lampstand, the Light of the world, who lights our dark paths and transforms our evil ways into righteousness (John 8:12). And in the eternal holy city, the paradise of God (Rev 21:2; 2:7), Christ will give us eternal joy (Rev 7:15-17) and abundant life (Psa 1:3).

However, God placed them on probation with one simple command: Do not eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

## Adam and Eve Failed as Gardeners and Guardians

A fifth feature of the Garden of Eden is God's command to them to "*work it and keep it*" (Gen 2:15). These two words serve as the final evidence that the Garden of Eden was God's first temple. They are used to refer to the responsibilities of Levitical priests in the Tabernacle: "serve" in Numbers 4:23, and "keep" in Numbers 18:7.

In "working" the garden, he is to till and cultivate the land for a bountiful harvest, increasing the resources that God gave them. They were stewards of God's garden-temple where there were no weeds, drought, pests, and climate change. The garden was truly a paradise for gardeners and farmers. Work before sin entered the world was never toil, but joy in the Lord. And in "keeping" the garden, he is responsible for making sure that everything in God's sanctuary is according to God's instructions. To accomplish this task, he must guard and protect Eden from all outsiders, such as when Satan the evil serpent (Rev 12:9) entered the garden.

But in both of these tasks of working and keeping the garden-temple, Adam and Eve failed, forfeiting his blessedness, and plunging the whole human race into sin and death. In believing Satan's lie rather than God, he in effect served and worshiped the ancient serpent. His joy in working and tending God's garden-paradise vanished into toilsome work of sweat, pain, and fighting the "thorns and thistles" of the God-cursed land (Gen 3:17-18; Ecc 2:20). Lastly, Adam forfeited God's promise of eternal life and return to dust in death from where he came (Gen 3:19).

Adam's bane existence after the Fall is also the woeful existence of all his unrepentant and rebellious children. The world believes the lies of Satan instead of the truth of God's word, in effect, becoming idolaters. In fact, the rebellious world hates God. Unbelievers do not worship God with God's people in the church, so they are outside of God's heavenly dwelling-place on earth. They work without joy, but only work to enjoy the sinful pleasures of this world, "working for the weekend," so to speak. Their toilsome work is marred by corruption, natural calamities, economic disasters, and even violence. Finally, in death, their bodies return to dust, but their souls return to God for judgment against their wickedness (Dan 12:2). All of these afflictions are the result of Adam's disobedience to God's one commandment.

In Romans 5:12-21, the Apostle Paul contrasts the first Adam in the garden-temple and Jesus Christ the second Adam in a sinful world. Adam brought the judgment of sin and death into the whole world, while Christ brought the gift of righteousness and eternal life to all who believe in him. Adam's one trespass led to condemnation for all mankind, while Christ's perfect obedience all his life on earth brought justification and eternal life to all believers.

Christian friends, do you fulfill God's command to you to work the church so it would grow both in maturity and in numbers? Do you read, study and meditate on God's word not only in church, but also at home? Do you invite family and friends to our worship services? When you soak yourself in God's word, you will learn to know the truth and defend it from false teachers, lovers of money, and those who invade the church and your home through TV, social networks, and books. We are commanded to "*to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints*" (Jud 3) If you are in the church but do not do these things, the church will fall into sin and be

judged by God, and driven out of God's garden-temple. Our Lord will take away our church's "lampstand"—a symbol of the church in the temple—just as he warned the ancient church in Ephesus if they did not repent (Rev 1:20; 2:5).

### **Adam and Eve Driven Out of God's Garden-Temple**

Because Adam and Eve did not keep the evil serpent out of the garden, they were driven out of paradise because they had violated its holy ground with their sin. And to keep them out of Eden, God placed cherubim with a flaming sword to guard its entrance. This is a sixth feature of the garden-paradise that we find in the tabernacle and the temple. The ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place, symbolizing the dwelling-place of God, was guarded by two golden cherubim overshadowing the ark. If anyone opened the ark, he would be consumed by God's glory.

Together with Adam, all unbelieving mankind are now outside God's garden-temple. In Revelation 21, we read of the new heaven and a new earth. This is also the eternal holy city, the new Jerusalem, where God's people will dwell with him in pure and perfect joy and abundance (1-4). But in Revelation 22:15, we see a different picture, a grim picture outside the holy city, "*Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.*" Who are these people? These are those unrepentant violators of God's Ten Commandments—detestable "dogs" they are called—we see everywhere in our culture: the sexually immoral, murderers, idolaters, and liars. It is striking that in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, the Apostle Paul has the same list of hardened people who will not inherit the kingdom of God, the eternal garden-temple: the sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, and swindlers. Sound familiar? Of course, we see them every day and in every place.

And what is this place outside the holy city? It is the eternal "*lake of fire and sulfur*" where "*the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars*" are cast (Rev 21:8).

**B**eloved friends, in Hebrews 9:27 we read, "*And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.*" This is a terrifying statement to unrepentant people, those who like Adam, are driven outside of God's garden-temple into eternal hell. But the next verse is our blessed hope and comfort, "*so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.*" Are you one of those who are eagerly waiting for his return from heaven to take you to you to your eternal garden-paradise? As the church, are you diligently "working and keeping" God's garden-temple as "gardeners and guardians"?

In Psalm 1:1-3, we find images of both Adam and the Garden of Eden. Before Adam fell, he was blessed, and he delighted in and meditated on the law of the Lord day and night. He was a fruitful tree planted by streams of water, prospering in all his work. Pre-fall Adam was a picture of Jesus who delighted in and meditated on his Father's word day and night. His life bore all kinds of good fruits. He himself is the Living Water and the Bread of Life. And the work of his Father prospered in his hand. The only way to the eternal garden-temple is faith alone in Christ alone as your Savior. Repent and believe today, for today and not any other day is the day of salvation.