

STUDY 3

Adam—Priest in the Sanctuary of Eden

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From Genesis 1:26 it is clear that Adam—and humanity—have royal status. They are to ‘rule . . . over all the earth.’ In Genesis 2, with a little exegetical digging, it seems equally clear that Adam also had a priestly role within creation and, in particular, in the garden of Eden. As Gordon Wenham says: ‘The garden of Eden is not viewed by the author of Genesis simply as a piece of farmland, but as an archetypal sanctuary, that is a place where God dwells and where man should worship him’.¹ We consider briefly some of the evidence that points to the garden of Eden being an ‘archetypal sanctuary’.

EDEN AS ARCHETYPAL SANCTUARY

God Walks in the Garden

It would appear from Genesis 3:8 that it was the Lord’s custom to walk in the garden in the *cool* of the day. The Hebrew for ‘cool’ is *ruach*. This is the same word used in 1:2 to designate the Spirit of God. By his Spirit, then, the Lord was present in the garden. And it looks as if he was in the habit of walking and talking with Adam at such times. The very same form of the Hebrew verb as is used here for walking is used elsewhere in the Pentateuch to describe the presence of God walking among his people in the tabernacle. For example, in Leviticus 26:12 the Lord makes this promise to Israel: ‘I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people’ (see also Deut. 23:14; cf. 2 Sam. 7:6–7). The Spirit was present as the God of Adam and, indeed, of all humanity, communing with humanity in Adam.

Tree of Life

The tree of life was probably symbolic of the life which God held out to Man in the garden. Trees as symbols of life are well-known in the Bible, both in Israel and also in

¹ Gordon Wenham, ‘Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden’ in R. S. Hess and D. T. Tsumura (eds), *I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood*, SBTS, vol 4, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lakes, 1994, p. 399.

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pagan religions. This is not least because they remain green throughout the summer drought as their roots go deep into the soil in search of water (e.g. Ps. 1:3; Jer. 17:8). As symbols of life, they were also often associated with places of worship both for pagans, and also for the patriarchs (e.g. Gen. 13:18; Deut. 12:2). That in itself may point to the garden being a sanctuary.

Moreover, some scholars suggest that the lampstand (*menorah*) in the tabernacle was in the form of a seven-branched tree—the tree of life. In the tabernacle the priests had access to that tree-shaped light, just as Adam had access to the tree in the garden. Indeed, it was that light that enabled the priests to do their work in the holy place. I wonder if this is not part of what the psalmist had in mind when he wrote Psalm 36:7–9: ‘How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast in the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.’

The River

The fertility and life of the garden was due to the river mentioned in Genesis 2:10. It was this river that ‘watered’ the garden; that sustained, renewed and refreshed the life of the garden. But verse 10 also tells us that this river ‘flowed from Eden’. The picture that we have here is of the life-giving river of God flowing out from the temple of God into the rest of the world. The river moved out beyond the garden of God, beyond Eden to the territories round about it, bringing its life—the very life of God—with it as it went. And that is a pattern that we find repeated in various places in scripture, and that will be taken up in other studies in this school. Obvious examples are Ezekiel 47:1–12 where the river flows from the temple; and Revelation 22:1ff. where the river flows from the throne of God and the Lamb. But this reality is also found in Psalm 46:4–5: ‘There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day.’ The River is none other than the life-giving presence of the living God—he is the source of all life on earth; in the entire universe—the River of God’s Spirit: that River that still waters the New Testament temple (cf. 1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21–22) and flows from us to give life to the world (cf. John 7:38f.: ‘“Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” By this he meant the Spirit . . .’)

Other significant parallels between Eden and later sanctuaries are found in Genesis 3:24. Once the first human couple were driven from Eden because of their disobedience we are told that God ‘placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life’. This verse raises a number of parallels with later sanctuaries.

Guarded by Cherubim

Cherubim were the traditional guardians of holy places throughout the Ancient Near East. In addition, in Solomon’s temple two cherubim guarded the holy of holies (1 Kings 6:23–28). Also, pictures of cherubim were embroidered into the curtains of

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the tabernacle (cf. Exod. 26:31). In this way the dwelling places of God on earth were designed according to the pattern of his heavenly dwelling place. In the tabernacle and temple the images of the cherubim represented the living cherubim in the presence of God in heaven. There is a sense in which Eden, therefore, was even more like the heavenly dwelling place of God than either the tabernacle or the temple, since the cherubim in Genesis 3 would appear to be living beings.

Entrance on the East Side

In Genesis 3:24 we are told that the cherubim were positioned at the east side of the garden. Why was this? Presumably, because that's where the entrance to the garden was. This was the case also with the tabernacle and the Jerusalem temple at a later time. The one entrance to the garden was in exactly the same position as the one entrance to Israel's later temples.

Guarded by a Flaming Sword

There is little doubt that this symbolised the judgement of God falling on anyone who would seek entrance to the garden. Now, at a later time in the tabernacle, the first item of furniture that the Israelites met on entering the tabernacle courtyard was the altar of sacrifice. In other words, no-one could get beyond the entrance without blood being shed; without death occurring; without the judgement of God falling; without the wrath of God burning. Only, in Israel, God made provision for a substitute animal to fall beneath the sacrificial knife, in the place of its owner.

In these and others ways, the garden of Eden, which Ezekiel 28:14 teaches us was on the 'holy mount of God', can be considered as an archetypal sanctuary, like the temple that later stood on the 'mountain of the Lord' in Jerusalem.

ADAM AS PRIEST IN THE SANCTUARY OF EDEN

But for our purposes in this session, I want us to focus on the vocabulary used to describe the activity of Adam in the garden. In Genesis 2:15 we learn that he was 'to work it and take care of it'. Now the Hebrew verb for 'work' used here ('*abhad*/'*avad*) can be used of cultivating the soil. And there is no doubt that that was part of Adam's task. He was to be a gardener or farmer, thus imaging his Father who had planted the garden (cf. Gen. 2:8). However, this word ('*abhad*/'*avad*) is also the normal Hebrew word meaning 'to serve'. From that we can say that Man was placed in the garden not to be served but to serve. He had a servant role—even though, as we see from chapter 1, he was a king. This is a reminder to us that all true leadership is servant leadership. The Hebrew word '*abhad*/'*avad* is also used often in the religious sense of serving God (cf. Deut. 4:19). In particular it is used especially of the tabernacle duties of the Levites (cf. Num. 3:7–8), so already points in the direction of priestly activity.

The other Hebrew verb for 'take care of' (*shamar*) is most commonly used for *observing/keeping* religious commands and duties (e.g. Gen. 17:9: 'you must keep my

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covenant'; Lev. 18:5: 'Keep my decrees and laws'). It is clear from this that one of the principal ways in which Adam was to 'care for' the garden was by ensuring that he himself kept the laws of God. In particular he was to keep the command highlighted in Genesis 2:17: 'you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you shall surely die'. Not only so, but it looks as if he was to teach this law to the rest of humanity. In Genesis 3 it becomes clear that he fulfilled this function as far as Eve was concerned. And this would certainly be in line with one of the main tasks of the priesthood in Israel—the teaching of the torah/law.

This second word in Hebrew (*shamar*) can also mean 'guard'. Interestingly, it is used in this sense in 3:24 where the cherubim guard the way to the tree of life. The cherubim guard the garden against intruders. It looks very much as if that had been part of Adam's role too, as it was the task of the priests and Levites at a later stage (e.g. *shamar* is used in 1 Chron. 9 of the priests and Levites who acted as 'gatekeepers', ensuring that nothing and no-one unclean would enter the courts of the temple). Adam, then, was to guard the garden against infiltration by anything false/counterfeit/untrue. He was to guard against anything that would draw humanity away from true worship and service. He was to guard the garden against the perversion of the Father's word/law. He was to guard against anything that would draw humanity away from the path of obedience to the words the Father had spoken. As such it was Adam's duty to guard the garden against the entrance of that which would bring 'death'.

Now in the rest of the Pentateuch, the only place where these two Hebrew words are found together is in descriptions of the work of the priests and the Levites in and around the tabernacle. For example, in Numbers 3:5–10 the Levites are given the task of 'doing the *work* of the tabernacle' and '*tak[ing] care* of all the furnishings of the Tent of Meeting'. That suggests strongly that we are right to think of Adam in Genesis 2 in a priestly role.

Adam's Priestly Service

But what did Adam's priestly service consist of in the garden of Eden? I think we can readily say that it included every aspect of his work in the garden. That included his maintenance of the garden, his protection of the garden, etc. Until the moment of his disobedience, his whole life and activity in the garden could be regarded as priestly. In the words of Romans 12:1, he offered his body as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. That was his 'spiritual act of worship'. Every moment, every day, he tested and approved the Father's will. And for Adam, as for Paul so much later, it was 'his good, pleasing and perfect will'.

His whole life was his worship. He dug the garden to the glory of God; he studied the animal and plant life to the glory of God; he ate from the trees and drank from the river God provided—all to the glory of God; he looked for a wife to the glory of God; and when God provided him with that wife, Adam then went on to sing love songs to Eve to the glory of God; he enjoyed God's Sabbath to the glory of God; etc. All his work and service in the garden; all his activity and Sabbath rests; all his maintenance; etc.—it was all priestly activity and all as the Lord had intended it to be.

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And I think that these are truths that we need to learn afresh and grasp afresh in the Christian Church today. For there is a very real sense in which Paul in Romans 12:1f. exhorts us to be priests, and a priestly community in everything we do. Now that doesn't mean that we are only to have Christian friends and only to be involved in church activities. Rather, everything we do is to be done in the presence of God, as unto God, and for the glory of God. And that includes all the otherwise 'boring' routines of life at home or at work. We are to be priestly not just on Sundays. We are to be priestly at the kitchen sink, at the office desk, in the classroom, at the football match, etc.

If I understand what Paul is saying in Romans 12:1 properly, what he's calling for is a whole mind-set that sees that everything we do in life is worship; everything we do in life is our Christian service: in church, at home, in school, at work, in the neighbourhood, etc. etc. In everything that our bodies and minds engage in day by day, we are to be priestly, living for the glory of God. In other words there is no distinction between the sacred and the secular. To the pure, all things are pure. For the Christian, the whole of life is 'sacred', lived out in the great temple of creation.

Adam's Failure

Adam's priestly service consisted of every aspect of his work in the garden, but sadly we are all aware of the tragic story of how Adam failed in this priestly service. He failed to 'care for' the garden. In particular, he failed to 'keep' the law of God revealed in the garden, and ended up being 'served' the fruit of the forbidden tree by his wife, rather than 'serving' the garden by not eating it. He also failed to 'guard' the garden against infiltration by the serpent, the 'father of lies', and all the falsehood that he brought with him. In particular, he failed to correct Eve's re-interpretation of God's law.

This is a failure Adam shared with the priestly nation of Israel, and with the priesthood within Israel, with the result that another Priest needed to come, Jesus Christ. He fulfilled the priestly office perfectly. He served the Lord faithfully unto death, by keeping the law in all its fullness himself and bearing the sanctions of the law broken by his people; and also by teaching the full meaning of the law. He also 'guarded' his own soul and the new creation against infiltration by the evil one.

And I believe that this is a major part of the background against which we must understand the story of Jesus in Gethsemane. There the Second Adam found himself in a fruitful garden on the Mount of Olives. For Jesus it was clearly a place of temptation; a place where he needed to be on his guard, lest he succumb to the strong temptations he faced, in particular the temptation to listen to the lie and to the father of lies.

How did Jesus seek to cope under this temptation? One of the main things he did was to pray. He covered his situation in prayer. He watched and prayed. Prayer was one of the main spiritual weapons which he used. He prayed with earnestness, with perseverance and in a spirit of submissiveness: 'not as I will, but as you will' and 'your will be done' (Matt. 26:39, 42). And so the Second Adam succeeded where the first failed. He proved himself to be the King—Priest of creation in his submissiveness to the Father's will and word.

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How different were the disciples. They showed themselves to be no different from Adam. Christ had warned them to ‘watch and pray’ that they might ‘not enter into temptation’. Sadly, they did not watch—their weak flesh was so tired and exhausted that they just hadn’t got the strength to watch. They did not guard themselves in preparation for the temptation ahead of them. They did not even pray (‘lead us not into temptation’). With the result that when the temptation came they were afraid; they fell; they denied the Saviour; they ran; they were scattered.

YET in Gethsemane I think we have to understand that what Christ did was representative of all his people. He watched for us as well as for himself. How different he was from Cain. Remember how Cain somewhat angrily asked, ‘Am I my brother’s keeper?’ Christ was and is our keeper. He watched for Peter, as Luke (22:31–32, *ESV*) reminds us: ‘Satan demanded to have you . . . but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.’ So he watched/guarded for us too.