

Dwelling with God: Eden and the Tabernacle in Jewish Theology

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Abstract

The Garden of Eden is a garden that God placed in the Eden area. There is a view that says that the Garden of Eden is just a myth or symbol. But the writer of the book of Genesis has recorded emphatically that the Garden of Eden really did exist on Earth. The Garden of Eden was the place where the first humans were created by God, this place was an ideal and perfect place for the first humans, namely Adam and Eve, to continue their lives. This research is qualitative research, namely research in the nature of a literature review. The Garden of Eden is a unique phenomenon in various views of the Ancient Near Eastern era. In the view of the Jews, the Garden of Eden was the first Tabernacle on Earth, where God was present in the lives of Adam and Eve at that time. This study explores the theological and symbolic connections between the Garden of Eden and the Tabernacle (Mishkan) within Jewish thought, emphasizing how both spaces function as loci of divine presence and communion between God and humanity. Drawing upon biblical texts, rabbinic literature, and later Jewish commentaries, the paper argues that Eden serves as a primordial sanctuary—an archetype for sacred space that is later echoed in the construction and function of the Tabernacle. The parallels in language, structure, and ritual—such as the presence of cherubim, the centrality of divine glory (Shekhinah), and the role of priestly mediation—suggest a deliberate theological continuity. By framing the Tabernacle as a symbolic reentry into Eden, the paper highlights the enduring Jewish vision of holiness as a lived, spatial, and relational reality.

Keywords:

dwelling; God; garden of Eden; tabernacle; Jews

INTRODUCTION

Adam was the first man created by God, Adam being the culmination of the entire series of God's perfect creations that God created on the sixth day (Gen. 1:26). God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, a place in the Eden area. Adam and Eve received a mandate from God to multiply and replenish the earth and conquer the earth. The Masora text reveals that God made the garden of Eden (*gan-be eden*; Genesis

2:8), which indicates that the garden did not cover the same land as Eden, but was part of the Eden area (Douglas, 1992, p. 264). It is remarkable that Adam and Eve lived in such an ideal and perfect environment that Adam and Eve were able to enjoy all of God's creation.

Verb "create" (Hebrew: *Bara*; Latin: *Ex Nihilo*) is used only for divine creation, which is done by God (Nggebu, 2003, p. 12). The writer of Genesis wanted to show that God created all things from nothing to existence. Everything that God created from the first day to the sixth day was created from nothing to exist, including when God created the first man, Adam. When Adam was created, God made all the necessary facilities available to him. God placed Adam and Eve in a neatly arranged garden, called the Garden of Eden. The park was a beautiful and ideal place to live for the survival of the first humans at that time. There are four rivers flowing in the Eden area that irrigate the Garden of Eden. The name of the river is the Pison river, the Gihon river, the Tigris river and the Euphrates river. In Genesis 2:6 it says that there was a mist (*ev*) rising up from the earth, which drenched the entire surface of the earth. It is possible that *ev* is the same as the word Akad i.e. *edu*, which is a borrowing word from the Sumerian word *id*, meaning a river that refers to a river that flows or inundates the land and provides natural irrigation (Douglas, 1992, p. 265).

In the Ancient Near East, people viewed nature and its powers as divine beings. Humans and nature are not understood in different ways. Natural phenomena are viewed according to human experience. Humans live in a very personal world where all things are considered soulful (Bush et al., 2006, p. 121). Therefore it was the view that the gods had many persons. Sometimes his personality is organized and balanced, but it can also change to be unstable and scary. This view is corrected by the writer of Genesis by affirming that God created the heavens and the earth in the beginning. Thus, it is affirmed that the universe was created by God's command. It is clear that God existed before the heavens and the earth existed and that His existence was independent of the universe.

Greek philosophers viewed rational and speculative thinking as superior to intuitive. Thus, they exalt reason, that is, the process of human thought. Instead of mythological gods, they are natures that manifest in various realities of the world (Bush et al., 2006, p. 121). As a result, God was completely removed from nature and disappeared from reality altogether. Against this view, the writer of Genesis also

speaks by affirming that God is the creator of the heavens and the earth and their contents. God existed before His creation, and it is on Him that all creation and all His creation will be accountable to Him.

There is a very important thing in the process of creating the world contained in the book of Genesis, namely the affirmation by Allah that the world that God created is good. The world has great value because the one who created it is God himself, then the highest peak of God's creation is man. Before man's fall into sin, everything was in a harmonious and intimate state. However, because of one transgression committed by Adam and Eve, they as inhabitants of the Garden of Eden received punishment from God. The impact on the lives of Adam and Eve arose shame over their nakedness and fled from God's presence in fear. The fellowship of man is the fellowship of Adam and Eve with God who created them to experience destruction. The new sin togetherness that Adam and Eve committed in the Garden of Eden did not unite but had the effect of divisiveness.

In Eden man lived in a Garden full of different types of trees that flourished. Everything is in harmony, from the highest form of life to the lowest life. Humans and animals only use plants as food (Bush et al., 2006, p. 127). So animals had not been allowed by God to be human food in the garden of Eden. Although there are tasks that must be carried out, there is no struggle or suffering to obtain sustenance from the earth they are striving for. The Garden of Eden depicted a perfect world that reflected the spiritual state of man living in peace, that is, living in fellowship with God. There is nothing bad and destructive in the Garden of Eden, life is only filled with fun and sinless things (Brill, 2004, p. 193). The Garden of Eden is the most significant. The biblical author of Genesis 2 tells us that the Lord God creates a garden in Eden (Gen 2:8). In Genesis 2:9–17, he also describes this garden (Ruiten, 1996).

The purpose of this paper is to explore the theological relationship between the Garden of Eden and the Tabernacle (*Mishkan*) in Jewish thought, with the aim of uncovering how these two sacred spaces function as expressions of divine presence and human-divine relationship. The paper intends to show how this conceptual linkage reflects a broader Jewish theological narrative of exile and return, presence and absence, and the human aspiration to dwell once again in the nearness of God. Ultimately, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of sacred space in Jewish theology and the enduring significance of Eden as a symbol of divine intimacy.

RESEARCH METHODS

By analyzing biblical texts, rabbinic interpretations, and classical Jewish commentaries, the study seeks to demonstrate that the Tabernacle is not an isolated innovation, but a deliberate recapitulation of Edenic themes and imagery. This paper employs library research as its primary methodological approach, utilizing both classical and contemporary sources within Jewish theology, biblical studies, and literary analysis. In addition to classical sources, the research draws on modern academic scholarship to frame the theological and symbolic parallels between Eden and the Tabernacle. Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and encyclopedic entries accessed through academic libraries form the basis of secondary source material.

DISCUSSION

The Garden of Eden

Eden, with its beautiful garden (Gen 2:8), serves as the literary setting for this essay. The story's emphasis extends beyond the emergence of the human race to encompass the "beginnings of life." The story of the latter begins in 1:1, where God is identified as the creator of everything. Liroy mentions that the sacred points of touch between the God of glory and His creation are found in Scripture. To put it another way, each of these sanctums is a physical location of the global nexus, also known as the axis mundi, which creates a connection between heaven and earth (Liroy, 2010).

Since humans were stewards, the Creator welcomed them to enjoy and tend to His garden rather than creating Eden "just for human habitation." The fundamental idea is that the world has been God's refuge from the beginning of time. Isaiah 66:1 confirms the previous reality when the Almighty states that the earth is His footstool, and the heavens are His throne (Liroy, 2010). The worship that people offered in these sanctuaries was an attempt to recreate creation, based on the idea that they were "somehow a replica of the divine heavenly abode" (Wenham, 1985).

Davidson argues that while Genesis 1:1–2:4a and other parallel creation passages seem to depict the entire creation (at least this earth and its immediate surrounding heavenly spheres) as a cosmic temple, Genesis 2–3 (which parallels Ezek. 28 and other biblical passages) focuses on the Garden of Eden as the earthly equivalent of the heavenly temple (Davidson, 2015). According to an ANE viewpoint, a location's holiness is based on the presumptive relationship between the location and the divine presence

there, as well as a link between the location and a cult, and from there the concepts of purity and impurity. Given that God is present in the Garden of Eden, the Garden may have some degree of holiness, as was previously mentioned (ten Hoopen, 2020). This could imply that the tree has some sort of holiness, at least in Eve's opinion (see Num 4:15). Second, the garden is purposefully isolated from other areas, as seen by its enclosure and need for security. This separation might also indicate a certain level of holiness in the eyes of the ancient Israelites.

There has been a lot of discussion on the exact meaning and etymology of the Hebrew phrase עֵדֶן. The term "steppe" or "plain" has been used to refer to the Akkadian and Sumerian languages. However, academics generally view the term as a toponym. Given how frequently it appears in the book of Genesis, this is not surprising. While the prefixes -בּ (Gen. 2:8, 15), -מִן (Gen. 2:10; 3:23), and -לְ (Gen. 3:24) have a range of meanings and purposes, there appears to be little dispute that they have a spatial sense within the Paradise story: "in", "from", and "to" (Qualifié, 2017). Simply put, the phrase "Eden" appears to be employed with two meanings: the author experiments with the term's two alternative meanings (i.e., implied polysemy). On the one hand Qualifié argues while a historicizing interpretation like attempting to find Eden does not make sense, the author of Genesis 2-3 most likely intended to use the name עֵדֶן as a toponym (Qualifié, 2017).

Unmistakable signs that God's sanctuary was the garden of Eden. First, according to Genesis 3:24, the garden was God's sanctuary because cherubim (plural: cherubim) were present. In the context of the Ancient Near East, from the sanctuary. Later, Cherubim showed up in the Temple as protectors of the Holy of Holies (1 Kings 6:23-28) (Maleachi & Yohanes, 2020). God's regular strolling in the garden is described by the word מְתַהַלֵּךְ. God's presence in the Tabernacle is likewise described by this word (Lev. 26:12; Deut. 23:15; 2 Sam. 7:6-7). In order to be with His people, God was in His sanctuary (Maleachi & Yohanes, 2020).

Schachter argues it is possible to verify that Eden was initially regarded as a sanctuary by looking for evidence in the Bible. The Tabernacle is described as God's dwelling place in a partial listing: And let them create Me a sanctuary so I may dwell among them (Ex. 25:8). The idea that Eden was God's home, where He lived near the first man and woman, is implied in the Garden account. The Temple is referred to as God's abode in Deuteronomy (12:4). The Garden is described as the location where

God's presence resided, albeit this is not the exact wording used in Genesis (Schachter, 2013). She continues that the verb "mithallekh" in Hebrew characterizes both God's "walking about" in the Garden and His movements to safeguard the Israelites in the desert, where they are told to keep their camp holy (Deut. 23:15) (Schachter, 2013).

The Tabernacle

The Bible claims that the Tabernacle, a transportable and elaborate tent shrine, was the terrestrial residence of the god of ancient Israel from the time it was built at Mount Sinai under Moses's direction until Solomon's Temple took its place. For around four hundred years, God's residence was in Jerusalem, where Solomon erected his Temple atop Mount Moriah (Homan, 2007).

The Tabernacle is the Tabernacle which means a sanctuary, portable and movable which is the dwelling place of God in the midst of the Israelites in the wilderness. The Levites had to dismantle and rebuild the tabernacle every time the Israelites moved forward (Browning, 2007, p. 431). Before proceeding to Israel's own holy places in the promised land, we must study a series of other traditions about the first beginnings of the cult of Yahweh. The Bible says that in the wilderness, the Israelites had tents as a sanctuary that has been known in Christian literature through the influence of the Vulgate as the Tabernacle (Tanasyah, 2024, p. 86). As a location of God's presence among His people, the tabernacle is a biblical structure that was not formed overnight, much like God's people themselves (Wonoadi & Tandana, 2022).

The sanctuary and its furnishings were to be built according to God's plan but with special offerings from the Israelites. The tabernacle is a dwelling place of God. The Tabernacle expressed certain truths that symbolized something for the Israelites (Guthrie & Motyer, 2002, p. 175).¹⁰ The tabernacle was well known to the Israelites to describe God's dwelling with His people. The Tabernacle consists of 3 parts, namely: The courtyard, the Holy of Holies, and the Holy of Holies. The entrance to the Court is only one called the Court Gate (Ex. 27:16), and the entrance into the Holy Place is also called the Tent Gate (Ex. 26:36). Meanwhile, the entrance into the Holy of Holies is also one, which is called the Veil (Ex. 26:31) (Baxter, 2004, p. 94).

The Bible says that in the wilderness, the Israelites had tents as holy places, which has been known in Christian literature, through the influence of the Vulgate as the Tabernacle. The camp is called in Hebrew *ohel moed*, a reunion or meeting camp. It was

the place where Yahweh spoke to Moses face to face or mouth to mouth. These texts are among the oldest traditions that emphasize the role of the Tent in prophecy. Everyone who wanted to consult with Yahweh went to the Tabernacle, where Moses acted as his spokesman before God (Tanasyah, 2024, p. 96). God's covenant with Israel through Moses at Mount Sinai, proclaiming the Godship and kingdom of Jehovah God over Israel, his people (Lempp, 1997, p. 229). Later in the Old Testament, Israel had to travel to the temple to experience God's presence, which was a special location. While Adam strolled and conversed with God in Eden, the priest in Israel's temple sensed God's singular presence. God's presence in the tabernacle is described by the same Hebrew verb form (*hithpael*) that is used to express God's "walking back and forth" in the Garden (Gen 3:8) (Lev 26:12; Deut. 23:14; 2 Sam 7:6-7; Ezek 28:14) (Beale, 2018).

The idea of "sacred space," which differs from the related idea of a holy place, was the true invention of the *mishkan* for Jewish philosophy. One instance of the latter is when Moses is warned, "Do not draw closer, put your shoes off your feet, for the place (*makom*) upon which you stand is holy ground," as he approaches the flaming bush (Ex. 3:5) (Spero, 2004). We place more stress on space than location in the idea of the *mishkan* as a holy home (*bet kedusha*). Each encampment's "Tent of Meeting" was dismantled and reassembled in a new location. However, a new sacred space was created after the Tabernacle was put back together, the Ark was placed, and worship was resumed. Therefore, holy sites and holy space are not always related. The holiness of a House of God seems to come from two sources. One could be the permanent presence of a sacred item in the home, like the Ark of the Covenant or possibly the Torah scrolls. The worshippers' actions can also be a source of holiness (Spero, 2004). Spero continues that *Mishkan* had introduced us to the idea of a confined, hallowed area where one could sense God's presence (Spero, 2004).

The Garden of Eden and the Tabernacle is the Dwelling place of God

Yahweh has entered into the historical process of protecting His vital interests in the world He created (Bullock, 2002, p. 22). That is, he created all things for his own glory (Thiessen, 2008, p. 181). Including the Garden of Eden and the Tabernacle and humans. Rather from being inspired by the Garden of Eden imagery, the Solomonic Temple shows how elements of Jerusalem and the Temple were integrated into the Garden of Eden narrative (Kang, 2020). There are several things that state the

relationship between the Garden of Eden and the Tabernacle, namely:

1. God "walked" in the Garden (Gen. 3:8) just as He then "walked" in the middle of the Tabernacle (Lev. 26:12).
2. Adam and Eve were called to "work and serve" in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15). In the Old Testament these two words are found in Numbers 3:7-8, 8:26 and Numbers 18:5-6, where they serve as job descriptions for the Levitical priests in the sanctuary.
3. Cherubim played an important role in guarding the Garden of Eden (Gen.3:24) and the Tabernacle (Gen.25:18-22).
4. Both the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:24) and the Tabernacle (Num. 3:28) were only entered from the East.
5. The menorah at Tabernacle (Gen. 25:31-35) is a symbolic tree, pointing back to the original tree of life in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:9). Both reminded Israel that life can only be found in God's presence.
6. Adam and Eve wore God-given garments after their rebellion (Gen. 3:21) which was reminiscent of the priestly garments worn by the Levites in the Holy of Holies (Ex. 20:23).
7. Just as eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil brought death in the Garden of Eden, so touching the ark containing the law brought death (2 Sam. 6:7).
8. There is a parallelism in the phraseology between the conclusion of the creation story (Gen. 1:1-2:3) and the story of the building of the Tabernacle (Gen. 25-40).

The Garden of Eden served as humanity's first temple. The essay started off by pointing out that Eden's role as a sacred place serves as a model for all future shrines and offers a conceptual framework for comprehending and appreciating their significance. Worshippers carry out a number of ceremonies and rituals in these later-appearing temples, which are revered locations where the Lord makes His presence known (Liroy, 2010).

Both the Talmud and the Midrash contain references to the relationship between Temple and Eden. A midrash that specifically addresses this problem in its commentary on the line, "The Lord God banished him from the garden of Eden, to till the soil" (Gen. 3:23), is one example. Midrash ha-Gadol, Bereshit, 3:23. "He took him from the Garden

of Eden and placed him on Mount Moriah to serve God until the day of his death" is the comment made in this midrash (Schachter, 2013).

God created the world to make room for humans. The *Mishkan* were people who created room for God. An act of creation gave birth to the world. The construction of the *Mishkan* marked the beginning of the Jewish people's history as a free people. God and humanity work together to create and preserve the world. People are as capable of creation as God is. "To work it and to keep it" is Adam's duty in the Garden of Eden. [Gen 2:15] Using the same verbs, the priests are instructed to care for the *Mishkan*. [Numbers 8:25–26, 3:7–8] (Mizrahi, 2021). When God decides to descend among the people, He will reside in the *Mishkan*. The Divine Presence, or Shekhinah שְׁכִינָה, is derived from the same root as *Mishkan*: *shin kaf nun*. The construction of the *Mishkan* and the creation of the world are verbally paralleled in the Midrash: [Tanḥuma, Pekudei 2] (Mizrahi, 2021).

CONCLUSION

The profound parallels between the Garden of Eden and the Tabernacle reveal more than mere literary or architectural resonances; they disclose a central theological impulse within Judaism—the yearning to restore the intimate communion between humanity and the Divine that was fractured by exile from Eden. The Tabernacle, far from being a novel institution, is a divinely orchestrated return to sacred space, a portable Eden in the wilderness, where God's presence once again dwells among His people. By situating Eden as the archetypal sanctuary, Jewish theology frames the *Mishkan* not merely as a ritual center, but as a symbolic response to humanity's existential exile. The cherubim, the menorah echoing the Tree of Life, the priestly garments reminiscent of Edenic purity—all these elements serve to ritually reenact and spiritually reimagine the Edenic ideal. The Tabernacle becomes a sacred microcosm, collapsing the cosmic order into a tangible structure, where the boundaries between heaven and earth, divine and human, sacred and profane, are temporarily suspended. In this light, the *Mishkan* is not only a theological echo of Eden but also a prophetic anticipation of the ultimate redemption, in which the presence of God will again fill all creation, as it did in the beginning. Eden and the Tabernacle, then, are bookends of a sacred narrative—one of exile and return, concealment and revelation, distance and nearness. Through this lens, Jewish theology affirms that the journey through history,

halakha, and ritual is itself a path back to Eden—a continual striving to dwell once more with God.

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