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The Garden in Eden: a Holy Place?

Robin B. ten Hoopen

*Non ignoro de paradiso multos multa dixisse*¹



The Eden Narrative (Gen 2:4–3:24)² does not contain explicit references to a temple, sacredness or holiness. It might thus come as a surprise that both ancient and more recent interpretations of this narrative attest that the Garden in Eden³ is a sanctuary, a depiction that implies concerns about holiness and purity.⁴ These interpretations are not only remarkable in light of the silence of

¹ Augustine, *Gen. litt.* 8.1.

² From a diachronic perspective, Gen 2–3 is part of a non-P layer that is at least present in Gen 1–11. While Gen 2–3 contains older traditions, I agree with Mettinger that no clear sources can be distinguished within the narrative. See Tryggve N.D. Mettinger, *The Eden Narrative: A Literary and Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 2–3* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 5–41. A clear addition to the non-P narrative can, however, be seen in 2:4. In my view, the whole of Gen 2:4 should be seen as a heading created by a priestly editor, connecting Gen 1:1–2:3 and 2:5–3:24. On the redaction of Gen 1–11 see Robin B. ten Hoopen, “Genesis 5 and the Formation of the Primeval History: a Redaction Historical Case Study,” *ZAW* 129 (2017): 177–93.

³ Whereas some scholars use “Garden of Eden,” I prefer the term “Garden in Eden” to emphasize that the Garden is not coterminous with Eden, but is in Eden (Gen 2:8). The Garden of Eden combines two motifs: Eden and a garden located within this larger area. See Arie van der Kooij, “The Story of Paradise in the Light of Mesopotamian Culture and Literature,” in *Genesis, Isaiah, and Psalms: A Festschrift to Honour Professor John Emerton for His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Katherine J. Dell, Graham Davies, and Yee Von Koh, *VTSup* 135 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 3–22.

⁴ The best-known recent advocates of this view are Gordon J. Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,” in *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11*, ed. Richard S. Hess and David T. Tsumura (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 399–404; Gregory K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: Apollos IVP, 2004), 66–80. For a critical view see Jacques T.A.G.M. Van Ruiten, “Visions of the Temple in the book of Jubilees,” in *Gemeinde ohne Tempel/Community without Temple: Zur Substituierung und Transformation des Jerusalemer Tempels und seines Kults im Alten Testament, antiken Judentum und frühen*

Gen 2–3; the whole book of Genesis remains rather silent on the topic of holiness. The root שׁדק is nearly absent⁵ and references to holy ground or a holy God do not occur.⁶ There thus seems to be a tension, maybe even an ideological confrontation, between what the Eden Narrative explicates and how the passage is interpreted.

The current contribution discusses whether the idea of the Garden in Eden as a holy place was already part of the Eden narrative as it is found in the book of Genesis or if it should be seen as part of the reception history of the story, founded on a desire to connect the garden and the temple in Jerusalem. Particular attention is given to Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) sources that have been used to contextualize and interpret the Garden.

My contribution contains six sections. First, I set the stage by introducing the Garden. Second, I briefly reflect on the term holiness. Third, I introduce early voices who present the Garden in Eden as a holy place. Fourth, I take up recent voices who attest this position as well as reflect on some exegetical issues related to this position. Fifth, I carry out a comparison between several ANE gardens and the Garden in Eden. A short conclusion is found in the sixth and final section.

1 Setting the Stage

After God has created the first human being (אדם), the Eden Narrative tells that God planted a garden in Eden. Eden is a luxurious and fertile place,⁷ rich in water and located in the east.⁸ Gen 2:8–15 depicts Eden as near a source that

Christentum, ed. Beate Ego, Armin Lange, and Peter Pilhofer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 215–27; Daniel I. Block, “Eden: A Temple? A Reassessment of the Biblical Evidence,” in *From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and Benjamin J. Gladd (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 3–29. The tension in the Eden Narrative between concerns for holiness and the presence of death and sexuality has been discussed by David P. Wright, “Holiness, Sex, and Death in the Garden of Eden,” *Bib* 77 (1996): 305–29.

5 Besides the reference to a shrine attendant/prostitute (Gen 38:21–22) and Kadesh (Gen 14:7; 16:14; 20:1), Gen 2:3 is the only occurrence of the root שׁדק.

6 See Stuart Lasine, “Everything Belongs to Me: Holiness, Danger, and Divine Kingship in the Post-Genesis World,” *JOT* 35 (2010): 31–62.

7 The root שׁדק has the connotation of “abundance,” “fertility,” and “luxury.” The attention for etiologies in non-P narratives shows the importance of this meaning. See Terje Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden: Genesis 2–3 and Symbolism of the Eden Garden in Biblical Hebrew Literature*, CBET 25 (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 257–61.

8 In my view, מן־קדם refers to a location. The Vg. and the *receptiones* (but not LXX) translate the term as “of old.” See Stordalen, *Echoes*, 261–70. Although this could solve the apparent discrepancy between Gen 2:8 and 3:22–24, all other occurrences of מן־קדם in Gen 1–11 imply

later turns into four rivers.⁹ This picture reminds one of (1) glyptic art containing deities and cult,¹⁰ (2) temple imagery,¹¹ and (3) ANE locations where gods and immortals dwell.¹² While some of these involve cult, all contain motifs of blessing and abundance provided by a deity. Thus, both the name Eden and its ancient context reveal that Eden is not a regular place, but a place of abundance filled with blessings and related to a deity.

The location of Eden was probably perceived by the author as locatable as well as mythical and unreachable for regular humans.¹³ While the former two are illustrated by the reference to countries and the well-known Tigris and Euphrates (2:10–15),¹⁴ the latter are manifested by YHWH's placing of the $\square\text{ד}\text{א}$ in the garden (2:8, 15),¹⁵ the cherubim that guard the road to the tree of

the meaning “eastward” (2:14; 4:16; 10:30; 11:2). Since locations in the east are well known from Mesopotamian sources as places where immortals and deities dwell, a spatial location is to be preferred for Gen 2:8. See for the Mesopotamian material Christopher Woods, “At the Edge of the World: Cosmological Conceptions of the Eastern Horizon in Mesopotamia,” *JANER* 9 (2009): 183–239.

- 9 The Hebrew signifies a place where water exits the ground. See Ziony Zevit, *What Really Happened in the Garden of Eden?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 97–103.
- 10 See the collection in Terje Stordalen, “Heaven on Earth—Or Not? Jerusalem as Eden in Biblical Literature,” in *Beyond Eden: The Biblical Story of Paradise (Genesis 2–3) and Its Reception History*, ed. Konrad Schmid and Christoph Riedweg (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 28–57 (55–57).
- 11 See Manfred Dietrich, “Das biblische Paradies und der babylonische Tempelgarten: Überlegungen zur Lage des Garten Eden,” in *Das Biblische Weltbild und seine altorientalischen Kontexte*, ed. Bernd Janowski and Beate Ego (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 281–324 (290–99).
- 12 One could think of distant locations in the east such as Dilmun, the “mouth of the rivers” (*pi nārāti*) in Gilgamesh Epic (GE) 9.205–206, as well as of the residence of Ilu at the source of the rivers (*mbk nhrm*) in KTU 1.3 v 13–16. According to Wyatt, the Ugaritic material (and Gen 2–3) refers to a location at the cosmic centre. However, as noted by Niehr, Ilu resides in the east, at the borders of the world. Nicolas Wyatt, “A Royal Garden: The Ideology of Eden,” *SJOT* 28 (2014): 1–35; Herbert Niehr, “Die Wohnsitze des Gottes El: Ein Beitrag zu ihrer Lokalisierung,” in Janowski and Ego, *Das biblische Weltbild*, 325–60 (341). See also John Day, *From Creation to Babel: Studies in Genesis 1–11* (London: T&T Clark International, 2013), 27–32.
- 13 Unreachable does not imply unlocatable, although Eden was outside the regular world. This contra Mettinger, *Eden Narrative*, 16; Ronald S. Hendel, “Other Edens,” in *Exploring the Longue Durée: Essays in Honor of Lawrence E. Stager*, ed. David Schloen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 185–89. Stordalen, “Heaven on Earth,” argues that Eden is a utopia. However, as the Ugaritic Mount Zaphon is both a real mountain and the mountain of Baal, the Garden in Eden is also locatable and beyond the regular world.
- 14 These verses are not to be seen as an addition. They fit the meaning of the term Eden very well.
- 15 Gen 2:15 is not a doublet, but should be read in line with GE 9.205–206 where the flood hero is taken away and placed at the *pi nārāti*. See Van der Kooij, “Paradise,” 11–14. The root

life (3:24), and the location in the east near the source of the rivers.¹⁶ While some have argued that Eden should be located in the cosmic centre,¹⁷ both the fact that the $\square\text{ד}\text{א}$ is taken there and the location in the east (2:8) argue against such a view.¹⁸ As noted above, Mesopotamian and Levantine sources¹⁹ attest similar whereabouts of gods and immortals in the east, beyond or near the borders of the ordinary world.²⁰ The Garden in Eden should be seen as a similar location.²¹ The fact that the Garden contains a tree of life (2:9), is guarded by cherubim (3:24) and is depicted as a place of possible immortality does not exclude but actually argues for a location at the border of the world. Such a mythical space does, however, not exclude a place on the map: either Mesopotamia²² or more likely Armenia.²³

Finally, the Garden was probably assumed to be close to a mountain on which the residence of YHWH was located. In contrast to Ezek 28, Gen 2–3 does not refer to a mountain. However, its presence might be assumed on the basis of two elements. First, the Tigris and Euphrates originate in the mountains. The source of these rivers should thus likely be sought there. Second,

$\square\text{ד}\text{א}$ in Gen 2:15 might have been used to create a connection between Adam and Noah. For the connection between this passage and the taking away of Enoch see Robin B. ten Hoopen, “Where Are You, Enoch? Why Can’t I Find You? Genesis 5.21–24 Reconsidered,” *JHS* 18 (2018): 1–23.

- 16 While in English the “mouth of the river” assumes the end of the stream, Akkadian *pī nārāti* refers to the source. See William F. Albright, “The Mouth of the Rivers,” *AJSL* 35 (1919): 161–95 (167, 172–74).
- 17 Pirque R. El. 11.78; Michael A. Fishbane, “The Sacred Center,” in *Texts and Responses: Studies Presented to Nahum N. Glatzer on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday by His Students*, ed. Michael A. Fishbane and Paul R. Flohr (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 6–27; Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (New York: HarperCollins, 1985), 128–35; Wyatt, “Royal Garden.” The idea of a centre is also based on the interpretation that all four rivers encompass the earth. But see Zevit, *What Really Happened*, 107 for a critique on the latter.
- 18 An eastern location for the Garden in Eden or Garden of Righteousness is found in Jub. 8:16; 1 En. 28–32; 2 En. 42:3; 65:10.
- 19 See Woods, “At the Edge” and note 12.
- 20 In Gen 2:8 the east does not imply the utmost east, but a location related to the eastern horizon. In a similar way, the Jewel Garden in GE is related to the eastern horizon without being at the utmost east.
- 21 In this instance, I follow but adjust the view of Van der Kooij. Eden is a place *like* Dilmun (contra Van der Kooij, “Paradise,” 12–14). I also emphasize that Levantine sources mention the idea of a source of the rivers.
- 22 Dietrich, “Paradies,” but many before him.
- 23 Day, *From Creation*, 27–32; Marjo C.A. Korpel and Johannes C. De Moor, *Adam, Eve, and the Devil: A New Beginning*, 2nd enl. ed., HBM 65 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2015), 29–44.

several ANE texts show that a connection between the source of the rivers, the east, and a mountain was broadly shared.²⁴ In sum, Eden is located in the east on a mountain in a real, but unreachable place. It should be seen as a place of divine blessing and possible immortality.

The description of the Garden is not that extensive. It may be assumed that the Garden had one entrance and was enclosed.²⁵ It contains trees that are pleasing to the eye and good for food, and mentions two trees in particular (2:9, 16–17). The מִדְּבַר is called to work and guard the garden (2:15). While the working of the ground continues outside the garden (3:22–24), the task of guarding has to be handed over to the cherubim and the sword (3:24).

The presence of the cherubim and the sword, the walking of God in the garden (Gen 3:8), the notion of divine blessing, and the reference to the presence of YHWH near Eden in Genesis 4:16 make it likely that the Garden is God's garden and was near his domain.²⁶ Although the garden and Eden are thus distinguished,²⁷ they are also related.

Finally, the presence of a tree of which one is not allowed to eat (the tree of knowledge of good and evil), as well as the presence of the serpent, show that although Eden and the Garden function as a place of blessing, danger and evil are not far away.

2 Holiness

From an ANE perspective, the holiness of a place is grounded in an assumed relationship between a place and the divine presence in that place as well as by a connection between place and cult, and from there the notions of purity and impurity.²⁸ The divine imparts holiness to a place, but because a place

24 The mountain of Ilu and the *mbk nhrm*, but also Akkadian and Sumerian sources attest a mountain at the borders of the world. See Day, *From Creation*, 28–29; Woods, “At the Edge,” 186–90, 203–4; Korpel and De Moor, *Adam, Eve, and the Devil*, 29–44. Royal Neo-Assyrian gardens also attest a garden and a mountain. See Stephanie Dalley, *The Mystery of the Hanging Garden of Babylon: An Elusive World Wonder Traced* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 43–63, 129.

25 The reference to the guarding of the way to the tree of life in 3:24 suggests this. The root רָגַל , could also imply an enclosed area as does the rendering of the LXX as *παράδεισος*, although the latter could also attest a later interpretation.

26 Gen 13:10; Isa 51:3; Ezek 28; 31 show evidence for a connection between Eden and the domain of God.

27 See Van der Kooij, “Paradise,” 14.

28 See David P. Wright, “Holiness (OT),” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:237–49.

is marked holy, the divine will enter there.²⁹ Having noted above that God's presence is to be found in the Garden in Eden, the Garden might contain some degree of holiness.³⁰ Since the Hebrew Bible, does, however, not speak univocally about holiness,³¹ and the book of Genesis remains rather silent on this topic, no clear-cut concept of holiness can be deduced from Gen 2–3. One may doubt whether we can even assume the larger ANE perspective as set out above. Although I remain reticent to do so, two pointers for this view could be found in the Eden Narrative. Firstly, Eve states that the couple is not allowed to touch the tree (Gen 3:3). This might assume that, at least in Eve's view, the tree has some element of holiness to it (see Num 4:15).³² Secondly, the fact that the garden is enclosed and has to be guarded shows that it is intentionally separated from other places. In an ancient Israelite worldview, this separation could also point to a degree of holiness. While one must be careful to assume too much, some degree of holiness, although explicitly not expressed in this terminology, can likely be assumed for the garden.

The next question to take under consideration is whether this concept of holiness assumes cult and concern for purity.³³ In light of the absence of explicit cultic concerns in Gen 2–3, a concern for holiness without assuming cult seems to be preferred. Both Sinai (Exod 19:12–13, 23) and the Ugaritic Mount Zaphon (KTU 1.3 III 30; 1.16 I 7) are examples of holy places without clear attestation of cult. Should such a perspective also be assumed for Gen 2–3? A closer examination of arguments for the presence of cult in the Garden in Eden must be carried out before conclusions may be drawn.

3 The Garden in Eden as a Holy Place: Ancient Exegesis

One of the earliest representatives of the position that the Garden in Eden can be considered a holy place is found in the book of Jubilees.³⁴ Here the

29 Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 93–94.

30 See Wright, "Holiness," 237, for the notion of degrees of holiness. In contrast to for example Isa 6 and Ezek 1–2, the couple hides from YHWH because they are naked (3:10), not because of his holy presence.

31 See Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 225–32.

32 A connection between touching, holiness, and death also occurs in Exod 19:12, 13, 23.

33 See for a positive answer Wright, "Sex and Death."

34 4Q265 11–17 shares this interpretation. See Florentino García Martínez, "Man and Woman: Halakah Based upon Eden in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Qumranica Minora II: Thematic*

garden is seen as the “Holy of Holies and dwelling of the Lord” (3:12; 8:19).³⁵ Jubilees, moreover, presents Adam as a priest burning incense at the gate of the Garden. Finally, Jubilees connects the Garden to both Sinai and Zion, emphasizing that cult goes back to the first human (8:19). Although such explicit references to the Garden as holy are rare,³⁶ a larger corpus of texts does relate the Garden to the eschatological temple or the future residence of God, thus also comparing and connecting Eden and Jerusalem (e.g., Isa 51:3;³⁷ Ezek 36:35; Joel 2:3;³⁸ Rev 2:7; 21–22; 1 En. 25; 2 En. 8; T. Levi 18:6–11; T. Dan 5:12; Apoc. Mos. 13). While these passages do not imply that Eden was seen as a holy place, they do relate Eden and Jerusalem by comparing *Urzeit* and *Endzeit*. Jerusalem or a new Jerusalem will be as Eden. In contrast, several passages from rabbinic literature could imply the holiness of Eden. These describe the garden as a sanctuary (Gen. Rab. 16:5), refer to YHWH dwelling in Eden, relate the exile from the garden to the ascent of the Shekinah,³⁹ and refer to Adam as a priest (Gen. Rab. 34:9; Lev. Rab. 2:7).⁴⁰ Ephrem the Syrian and the author of *Syrian Cave of Treasures* are amongst the Christian authors who designate the Garden as holy. In both cases, holiness is intimately connected to the figure of Christ and the tree of life.⁴¹

In sum, only a handful of texts describe the Garden as holy. A larger corpus compares Eden to the holy place par excellence, the temple, or depicts

Studies on the Dead Sea Scrolls, ed. Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar, STDJ 64 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 57–76 (71–76).

- 35 See Jacques T.A.G.M. Van Ruiten, “Adam in the Book of Jubilees,” in *The Adam and Eve Story in the Hebrew Bible and in Ancient Jewish Writings including the New Testament*, ed. Antti Laato and Lotta Valve, SRB 7 (Turku: Åbo Akademi University; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 143–75 (161–66).
- 36 Zoharic tradition also relates the Holy of Holies to Eden. See Rachel Elijor, “The Garden of Eden is the Holy of Holies and the Dwelling of the Lord,” *Studies in Spirituality* 24 (2014): 63–118 (75–76).
- 37 Note also Isa 65:17–25, which uses Eden imagery to describe a new Jerusalem.
- 38 The presence of shared imagery between the temple (1 Kgs 6–8) or future temple (Ezek 41:17–25; 47:1–12; Joel 4:18; Zech 14:8–11) and Eden is often used to show that the temple is a new Eden or Eden a temple. These similarities could, however, also be explained by assuming shared imagery for temples and divine gardens.
- 39 Gen. Rab. 19:7 connects Gen 3:8 to the ascent of the Shekinah from the earth. In contrast, 3 En. 5:1–3, 10–14 reports how the Shekinah descended in Eden after Adam was exiled. See Christfried Böttrich, “The Figures of Adam and Eve in the Enoch Tradition,” in Laato and Valve, *The Adam and Eve Story*, 211–51 (246–47).
- 40 See also Tg. Ps.-J. 8:20 and Apoc. Mos. 29. Sir 49:16–50:1 (Hebrew) relates Adam to the high priest. See for a broader discussion Gary A. Anderson, *The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 121–34.
- 41 Ephrem, *Hymn. Parad.* 3.14–16; 4.2–4; *Cave of Treasures* (W) 3–4. See Anderson, *The Genesis of Perfection*, 55–58, 79–80.

a new Jerusalem in Eden imagery. Within the Hebrew Bible, the comparison between Eden and Jerusalem focuses especially on fruitfulness (Isa 51:3; Ezek 36:35; Joel 2:3), not on cult. Only Ezek 28, to be discussed in the next section, might point in another direction.

4 The Garden in Eden as a Holy Place: Recent Exegesis

A still-growing group of exegetes argues that the intimate connections between Eden, temple, and cult are already found in Gen 2–3. In their view, the Garden in Eden should be seen as a prototype of a sanctuary or an actual sanctuary.⁴² The arguments for such a position are at least fourfold:

- Gen 2–3 contains “sanctuary symbolism.”⁴³ Scholars refer to the use of the *hitpael* of לָהֵךְ (Gen 3:8; Lev 26:12; Deut 23:14), the cherubim (Gen 3:24), and the description of the task of the מִדְּבָר (Gen 2:15).
- The river Gihon in Gen 2:13 should be related to the Jerusalem river Gihon (1 Kgs 1:33, 38, 45; 2 Chr 32:30; 33:14).⁴⁴
- Gen 2–3 resembles so-called cosmic mountain ideology and/or relates Zion and the temple. This shows that the Garden is a pre-figuration of tabernacle and temple.⁴⁵
- The Garden should be interpreted as a sacred or holy place on the basis of Mesopotamian temple gardens.⁴⁶

Criticizing this position, others have emphasized that the “sanctuary symbolism” is read into the story,⁴⁷ the garden cannot be located in Jerusalem,⁴⁸ the whole cosmic mountain theory cannot carry the weight attributed to it, and the Edenic Garden should not be seen as a temple garden.⁴⁹ The two camps

42 See note 4. More scholars might be mentioned, e.g., Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 282; Fishbane, “The Sacred Center”; L. Michael Morales, *The Tabernacle Pre-Figured: Cosmic Mountain Ideology in Genesis and Exodus*, BTS 15 (Leuven: Peeters, 2012).

43 Wenham, “Sanctuary,” 400.

44 Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 129–31.

45 Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 129–31; Morales, *The Tabernacle*.

46 Dietrich, “Paradies.” See also John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2–3 and the Human Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 104–27.

47 See Day, *From Creation*, 31–32; Robert P. Gordon, “Evensong in Eden: As It Probably Was Not in the Beginning,” in *Leshon Limmudim: Essays on the Language and Literature of the Hebrew Bible in Honour of A.A. Macintosh*, ed. David A. Baer and Robert P. Gordon, LHBOT 593 (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 17–30.

48 Hendel, “Other Edens.”

49 Van der Kooij, “Paradise,” 9–14.

illustrate different approaches to the text. Proponents of a holy Eden are often interested in larger themes and/or argue for a more theological or canonical reading. Also those who assume a broadly shared ANE symbolism are amongst the proponents of a holy Garden in Eden. Opponents of this view emphasize the lack of evidence in Gen 2–3 as well as the absence of a concern for holiness in non-P literature. Although I am amongst those who are critical of the idea of Eden as a temple, the current contribution also intends to build a bridge between the two camps.

The scope of this contribution prohibits me from discussing all of the four arguments mentioned above. The focus will be on the fourth issue: comparative traditions concerning gardens. Before I discuss these, I will briefly lay out my view on three aspects related to the second and third argument.⁵⁰

4.1 *Genesis 2–3 and Other Passages That Refer to the Garden in Eden*

The Hebrew Bible contains several passages that identify the Garden in Eden as the Garden of God (Ezek 28:11–19; 31:8–9) and Garden of YHWH (Gen 13:10; Isa 51:3). While Gen 13:10 and Isa 51:3 (as well as Ezek 36:35 and Joel 2:3) resemble a concept of the Garden that is similar to Gen 2–3,⁵¹ Ezek 28 and 31 show some explicit differences to Gen 2–3. Ezek 28 is of particular interest here. This oracle not only contains a recasting of a myth about Adam or a divine being,⁵² but could also be seen as the clearest illustration of “the figurative field ‘Zion-is-Eden.’”⁵³ The connection between Eden and Jerusalem is especially pertinent in the LXX version of Ezek 28, which depicts the King of Tyre as the high priest and locates him with the cherub.⁵⁴ The MT version of Ezek 28 is more reluctant to relate the King of Tyre to Jerusalem. While it primarily speaks of Tyre, it subtly echoes Jerusalem and criticizes its establishment.⁵⁵ This criticism of Tyre and the Jerusalem establishment is visible in the use of the cultic language (28:7, 9, 16, 18). Some scholars also interpret the holy mountain and fiery stones (28:14) as references to Zion. Although these elements probably suggest the use of an older myth about a mountain of the

50 For a critique on Wenham’s work see Block, “Eden: A Temple?”; Gordon, “Evensong.”

51 Gen 13:10 does not contain a different concept. Contra Stordalen, *Echoes*, 321–29.

52 See Day, *From Creation*, 47–49.

53 Stordalen, *Echoes*, 332, 352–54

54 See Stordalen, *Echoes*, 335–56 for an extensive discussion of the differences between LXX and MT.

55 See Lydia Lee, *Mapping Judah’s Fate in Ezekiel’s Oracles against the Nations*, ANEM 14 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 89–95.

gods (see Ezek 28:2),⁵⁶ the choice for the term “holy” could have been read by Ezekiel’s contemporaries as a reference to Zion. However, Ezek 28 does not identify Eden and Zion (so also Ezek 36:35), it rather subtly relates the two domains or fields. So, while it comes as no surprise that Ezek 28 was one of the impetuses for linking Eden and Jerusalem,⁵⁷ a direct connection between the two is not attested in this text.

The exegesis of Ezek 28 is of more importance since some hold Gen 2–3 to be dependent on Ezek 28. In their view, the cultic symbolism used in Ezek 28 can also be found in Gen 2–3.⁵⁸ Such a view should, however, be refuted. First, Ezek 28 and Gen 2–3 show related traditions, but one does not depend on the other.⁵⁹ Second, as seen above, the cultic motifs primarily criticize Tyre and hint at the Jerusalem establishment. They should not be seen as evidence for a cultic Garden in Eden. In sum, while Ezek 28 was an impetus for relating Eden and the temple, neither Ezek 28⁶⁰ nor Gen 2–3 attests a cultic Garden in Eden.

4.2 *Eden and Jerusalem*

As noted above, I do not assume a cosmology in which the references to the Tigris and Euphrates are not seen as geographical pointers. It is only in such a reading that the Gihon can refer to the spring in Jerusalem. The geography of Gen 2–3 locates this river, however, near Cush (Kassite Mesopotamia or Nubia).⁶¹ Although later readers might have perceived the name Gihon as an echo to the river in Jerusalem (or the other way around), Eden is not in Jerusalem.⁶²

I also disagree with those who see the Garden’s alleged pre-figuration of the land of Israel (based on Num 24:5–7; Isa 5:1–7 and Ps 80:9–17) as an argument for the view that Jerusalem is implied in Gen 2–3.⁶³ Garden imagery and exile are found throughout the Hebrew Bible and ANE in different contexts.⁶⁴ Their presence in the Eden Narrative neither implies a direct connection between the location of Eden and Jerusalem nor a post-exilic date for the Eden

56 Korpel and De Moor, *Adam, Eve, and the Devil*, 166–71. The term “holy mountain” was a flexible term used for different mountains in different periods: Zaphon, Horeb, Sinai, Zion, and maybe even a mountain in Tyre.

57 But see Stordalen, *Echoes*, 352–56, 394–97, for a different view.

58 See for example Wyatt, “Royal Garden.”

59 See Day, *From Creation*, 47–49.

60 LXX is more explicit in linking the high priest and Eden, however, even here Eden is not in Jerusalem.

61 See Hendel, “Other Edens,” 186; Day, *From Creation*, 29.

62 The LXX renders Gihon as Γηων, likely the Nile. It does not relate the two Gihons.

63 See for example Wyatt, “Royal Garden.”

64 For the first see Ezek 31 and the ANE texts in section 5. For the second see Gen 4:11 and 11:8.

Narrative.⁶⁵ While it would have been very likely for an Israelite scribe to locate the Garden in Eden in Jerusalem, this scribe does not do so.

4.3 *Eden as a Cosmic Mountain*

A final argument to relate Eden and temple is to perceive the alleged mountain in Gen 2–3 as an *omphalos* and cosmic mountain.⁶⁶ I remain unconvinced of this larger cosmic mountain theory. While the motifs of creation, temple, and mountain were related throughout the ANE, a passage containing a mountain near a water source does not necessarily imply cult. What connects a mountain of the gods and cult is the motif of divine presence. It is only from either a phenomenological perspective⁶⁷ or from a particular canonical perspective⁶⁸ that the assumed mountain of Eden in Gen 2–3 can be seen as a cosmic mountain. Moreover, Gen 2–3 clearly differentiates between the place of creation (Gen 2:7) and the garden (2:8ff). This differs from what is presented in Ezek 28 and Ezek 31. In Gen 2–3, the two motifs are distinguished, implying that even when a cosmic mountain theory is assumed, the garden cannot be the temple.⁶⁹

5 To What Should One Compare the Garden in Eden?

Both in the Hebrew Bible and throughout the ANE, gardens symbolize fertility and cultivation, but also hold a symbolic function.⁷⁰ They function as cultic, royal, mythical, or even divine spaces.⁷¹ It has often been noted that the Garden in Eden has much in common with other ANE gardens. Four main suggestions have been proposed to contextualize the Garden in Eden:⁷²

65 See Day, *From Creation*, 46–9. I currently remain unconvinced of an exilic or post-exilic date for Gen 2–3.

66 See Morales, *Tabernacle*, 2, 7–20.

67 Eliade, *Patterns*.

68 Morales, *Tabernacle*, 1.

69 Note that Clifford does not find the cosmic mountain in Gen 2–3. Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament*, HSM 4 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 98–103.

70 See for an overview Donald J. Wiseman, “Mesopotamian Gardens,” *Anatolian Studies* 33 (1983): 137–44.

71 Most scholars focus on Mesopotamian parallels. See for the Egyptian material Izak Cornelius, “The Garden in the Iconography of the Ancient Near East: A Study of Selected Material from Egypt,” *Journal for Semitics* 1 (1989): 204–28.

72 I will limit myself to the gardens that are most referred to in scholarly literature, being aware that I will leave out promising material such as erotic/love gardens and gardens in Egyptian graves.

- The garden is a garden of God/the gods⁷³
- The garden is a temple or cultic garden⁷⁴
- The garden is a royal garden⁷⁵
- The garden is a numinous or mythological garden⁷⁶

The final part of this contribution will contain a comparison of these four types of gardens to the one in Eden.⁷⁷ In the following, I will limit myself to a horizontal comparison as set out in William Hallo's contextual method.⁷⁸ Differences and similarities between texts are noted, but no direct dependence is assumed. The section aims to show that a broad contextualization of sources prevents scholars from too easily assuming cultic symbolism to be present in the Edenic Garden.

In almost all cases,⁷⁹ the comparative material is reconstructed from multiple texts rather than from just one source. Another complicating factor is that the material stems from different periods: from the Old Babylonian to the Persian. Moreover, the distinction between gardens is not always clear-cut. For example, it is often difficult to distinguish between temple and royal gardens. In sum, the next section contains a daunting exercise and is part of an ongoing discussion in light of new evidence.

5.1 *Numinous or Mythological Gardens*

Two "gardens" found in the Gilgamesh Epic (GE) have been presented as parallels to the Garden in Eden.⁸⁰ The first is the Cedar Forest.⁸¹ This forest

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- 73 Howard N. Wallace, *The Eden Narrative*, HSM 32 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985); Korpel and De Moor, *Adam, Eve, and the Devil*.
- 74 Dietrich, "Paradies"; Walton, *Lost World*.
- 75 Wyatt, "Royal Garden"; Van der Kooij, "Paradise."
- 76 Stordalen, *Echoes*.
- 77 I will limit myself to the garden and not discuss the similarities and differences in protagonists, plots, or motifs.
- 78 William W. Hallo, "Introduction: Ancient Near Eastern Texts and their Relevance for Biblical Exegesis," in *The Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*, ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger Jr., 4 vols (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 1:xxii–xxviii.
- 79 Except the numinous gardens and the one reconstructed by Korpel and De Moor, *Adam, Eve, and the Devil*.
- 80 Stordalen, *Echoes*, 146–55. See for text and translation Andrew R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- 81 GE 2.217–229, 274–300; 5.1–9, 182–184 (George, *Gilgamesh*, 566–71, 602–3, 610–11). According to Dalley, the forest contained pines, not cedars. Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, The Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others*, rev. ed., Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 61.

is presented as a dangerous place,⁸² located on a mountain described as “the dwelling of the gods, the throne-dais of the goddesses.”⁸³ It includes high trees and one cedar standing at its top, reaching to heaven.⁸⁴ The forest is guarded by Humbaba who is appointed by Enlil “to keep the cedars safe.”⁸⁵ The similarities and differences between this passage and Gen 2–3 are the following:

Similarities

Domain of gods

Guard(s)

Alleged mountain

Reference to a particular tree (cedar)

In the East?⁸⁶

Presence of animals⁸⁷

Differences

Forest (GE)—garden (Genesis)

No mention of trees as food in GE

No presence of water in GE

No task/work in the garden in GE

Forest is a place of danger in GE, but

garden is a place of blessing in Genesis

No creation motif in this passage of GE

The second garden is the so-called Jewel Garden. This “garden” is located at the exit of Mount Mashu, a mountain guarded by a scorpion-man and his mate. Unfortunately, the text is highly fragmentary. It describes trees that are full of gemstones or are made of gemstones and bear fruit.⁸⁸ The conjecture that the trees are “trees of the gods” seems likely and suggests that this is a place in which divine presence is found.⁸⁹ It is, however, not clear whether the trees imply a garden or a forest. The similarities and differences are the following:

82 GE 2.274–300 (George, *Gilgamesh*, 568–71).

83 GE 5.6 (George, *Gilgamesh*, 602–3). The OB version depicts this forest as the dwelling of the Annunaki. George, *Gilgamesh*, 466. Stordalen, *Echoes*, 150–51 argues that the Cedar Forest is not a divine abode, but a place where chthonic forces dwell. This interpretation is rarely followed.

84 GE 5.293–294 (George, *Gilgamesh*, 612–15).

85 GE 2.227–228 (George, *Gilgamesh*, 566–67).

86 According to some traditions it was located in the east. See George, *Gilgamesh*, 496.

87 Both the LV version as well as the recently found SB fragment report the presence of animals in the forest. See Farouk N.H. Al-Rawi and Andrew R. George, “Back to the Cedar Forest: The Beginning and End of Tablet v of the Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgameš,” *JCS* 66 (2014): 69–90; Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 71–72.

88 The presence of gemstones in both Gen 2–3 and GE is often emphasized. The gemstones in Gen 2:11–12 are, however, not in the garden (in contrast to Ezek 28) and do thus not contribute to the description of the garden.

89 See GE 9.172 (George, *Gilgamesh*, 497, 672–75). Note, however, the different translation in Dalley, *Myths*, 99.

Similarities

Trees are depicted as beautiful
 Beautiful place
 Trees contain fruit⁹⁰
 Garden?
 Domain of gods
 Alleged mountain
 In the East⁹¹
 Guards

Differences

No animals in GE
 No water in GE
 No task/work in the garden in GE
 No creation motif in GE

5.2 Temple or Cultic Gardens

Temple or cultic gardens were known throughout the ANE, but have been especially attested in Mesopotamia. They were mostly found in the courtyard of the temple, near a spring and emphasized the fertility given by the deity. Both garden and temple were seen as a representation of the deity's abode. The most extensive reconstruction of temple gardens has been proposed by Geo Widengren.⁹² His study has, however, rightly been criticized as overinterpreting the material.⁹³ A more nuanced argument for the idea that the Garden in Eden is a temple garden has been set out by Manfred Dietrich.⁹⁴ The similarities and differences are the following:

Similarities

Garden
 Water
 Creation Motif
 Domain of gods

Differences

No mention of cult (altar/sacrifice/statue) in Genesis
 The depiction of trees as beautiful and good for food is rare in comparative material⁹⁵

90 Whether the fruit from the trees in the Jewel Garden could be eaten or not is unclear. It partly depends on whether one assumes that the fruit is compared to gemstones or actually consisted of gemstones.

91 George, *Gilgamesh*, 492–96.

92 Geo Widengren, *The King and the Tree of Life in Ancient Near Eastern Religion* (Uppsala: Lundequistska bokhandeln, 1951).

93 See Stordalen, *Echoes*, 140.

94 See Dietrich, "Paradies." To be able to make such a comparison Dietrich argues that the $\square\text{D}\text{N}$ was created in the garden. This, however, contradicts Gen 2:8, 15. Another argument for a cultic garden has been set out by Schüle. See Andreas Schüle, "Made in the Image of God: The Concepts of Divine Images in Gen 1–3," *ZAW* 117 (2005): 1–20.

95 An exception might be Sennacherib's garden next to the Akitu temple; see Dietrich, "Paradies," 290–91. In temple gardens, however, the food was primarily used as an offering to the deity and not, as in Gen 2–3, as food for humans.

Alleged mountain?⁹⁶ No animals in comparative material⁹⁷
 Guard(s)
 Reference to a particular tree⁹⁸
 Work in the garden⁹⁹

5.3 *Royal Gardens*

While the Hebrew Bible reports a Garden of the King,¹⁰⁰ especially Assyrian and Persian kings were known for their orchards.¹⁰¹ Located adjacent to the palace, these gardens were full of beautiful trees, well-watered, and often contained animals. As set out by Stephanie Dalley, royal gardens came in different versions.¹⁰² All gardens, however, showed that the king ruled over his empire, guarded creation, and made it prosper as a true gardener.¹⁰³ While most scholars distinguish royal gardens from temple gardens, at least in the Neo-Assyrian period royal gardens contained aspects of cult and sacredness.¹⁰⁴ Neo-Assyrian kings were seen as high priests and several depictions of gardens combine cultic and royal aspects.¹⁰⁵ The following differences and similarities between royal gardens and Gen 2–3 may be noted:

Similarities

Garden
 Trees that are pleasing to the eye
 and for food

Differences

Royal garden is not the domain of the
 gods
 It is not a king, but YHWH who plants

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- 96 Some scholars relate temple garden and mountain, but the mountain is not found in Dietrich, "Paradies."
- 97 Animals might be assumed for cultic gardens, but are not referred to by Dietrich. They would, moreover, have served for the cult.
- 98 See for example the Kiškanu-tree passage. Mark J. Geller, *Evil Demons: Canonical Utukkū Lemnūtu Incantations*, SAACT 5 (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2007), 169–71, 245–46.
- 99 In temple gardens this task is cultic, while in Gen 2–3 it is primarily related to the ground.
- 100 2 Kgs 25:4; Jer 39:4; 52:7; Neh 3:15; Qoh 2:5 (both גן and פרדס); Esther 1:5; 7:7–8 (גנה).
- 101 Wiseman, "Mesopotamian Gardens"; Dalley, *The Mystery*; Oded Lipschits, Yuval Gadot, and Dafna Langgut, "The Riddle of Ramat Rahel: The Archaeology of a Royal Persian Period Edifice," *Transeuphratène* 41 (2012): 57–79.
- 102 Dalley, *The Mystery*, 172–4.
- 103 Dietrich, "Paradies," 287.
- 104 Anastasia Amrhein, "Neo-Assyrian Gardens: A Spectrum of Artificiality, Sacrality and Accessibility," *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes* 35 (2015): 91–114 (96–97).
- 105 See for pictures Dalley, *The Mystery*, 44. The Nineveh garden has a statue of the king and an altar. Sargon's garden in Khorsabad also has an altar. The Garden Party depicts a priest and might be associated with the cult of the dead.

Guard (cherub-king)	the garden in Genesis
Animals	No reference to particular trees in the
Beautiful and abundant place	royal garden
Water	
Alleged mountain? ¹⁰⁶	
Work in the garden	
Creation motif? ¹⁰⁷	

5.4 *Garden of the Gods*

The view that Eden is a divine garden has been posited in two different ways. A first reasoning connects the Levantine mountain of the gods, Ezek 28; 31, the Zion tradition, and Hebrew Bible passages that depict Eden as the Garden of YHWH (Gen 13:10; Isa 51:3).¹⁰⁸ This argument is often complemented by a larger cosmic mountain theory. If we follow the position as set out by Howard Wallace, the following similarities and differences appear:

<i>Similarities</i>	<i>Differences</i>
Domain of gods	No trees as food in comparative material
Garden of the gods? ¹⁰⁹	No animals in comparative material
Alleged mountain	No clear work/task in comparative
Beautiful and abundant place	material
Reference to particular tree	
Guard(s)	
Creation motif	
Presence of water	
Exile	

The second reasoning has been set out by Marjo Korpel and Johannes de Moor. On the basis of their reconstruction of an Ugaritic myth,¹¹⁰ they argue that the vineyard of the great gods in KTU 1.100 and 1.107 is similar to the Garden in Eden. Their reconstructed myth also contains a tree of death (and life?), a serpent, and a protagonist called *'adammu*. The similarities and differences are the following:

106 Present in some sources. See Dalley, *The Mystery*, 43–63, 129.

107 The royal garden illustrated the king's ability to create in a similar way as the gods did.

108 See primarily Wallace, *Eden Narrative*, 76–83.

109 Most Levantine sources do not attest a garden of the gods, this in contrast to Ezek 28 and 31.

110 Korpel and De Moor, *Adam, Eve, and the Devil*.

Similarities

Particular tree (tree of life/death)
 Domain of gods
 In the East
 Alleged mountain
 Tree as food
 Beautiful and abundant place
 Exile
 Work/task¹¹¹

Differences

Vineyard-garden
 No other animals in KTU
 Creation motif in KTU?
 No guard(s) in KTU

5.5 Summary

The similarities and differences between the various options are shown in Table 9.1.

TABLE 9.1 Features of ANE gardens

	Cedar forest	Jewel garden	Temple garden	Royal garden	Divine garden (Wallace)	Korpel/De Moor
Garden	-/?	?	X	X	X	-/?
Particular tree	X	-	X	-	X	X
Trees for food	-	?	-	X	-	X
Beautiful trees	X	X	X/?	X	X	?
Beautiful place/blessing	-	X	X	X	X	X
Domain of gods	X	X	X	-	X	X
In the East	?	X	-	-	-	X
Alleged mountain	X	X	-	X/?	X	X
Creation motif	-	-	X	X/?	X	?
Guarding	X	X	X	X	X	-
Water	-	-	X	X	X	X
Exile/removal	-	-	-	-	X	X
Animals	X	-	-	X	-	-
Work/task	-	-	X	X	-	X

111 *ʿAddamu* takes up/is given the task of going to the vineyard.

Both the table and the comparison set out above illustrate that the garden of Gen 2–3 resembles many of the motifs found in gardens throughout the ANE. While a more thorough study should consider the possibility that the author(s) had one of these gardens in mind when drafting his Garden in Eden, my purposes here are more limited: to see whether the comparative evidence shows that the Garden in Eden should be seen as a cultic garden. It does not. While the cultic or temple garden has some specific similarities to Gen 2–3, the similarities to other gardens are as large or even larger.

The royal garden, for example, seems a better possibility, especially because of the shared double function of the trees (food and beauty), its abundant status, and the presence of animals. However, the planting of the garden by God and his walking in the garden, as well as the presence of two particular trees and a serpent show that the Edenic garden is more than a regular royal garden. In this royal-divine garden, YHWH is King.¹¹²

The numinous gardens could be linked to the divine garden, as both are referred to as domain of the gods. Especially the presence of particular trees shows similarity to the Eden Narrative. However, while the comparison to the Jewel Garden seems promising at first, the similarities are not that extensive compared to other options. The Cedar Forest resembles more elements found in Gen 2–3. However, the dangerous atmosphere as well as the absence of creation motifs clearly differs from Gen 2–3.

While the divine garden seems to come closest, the proposals of Wallace and Korpel and De Moor do not close the case yet. Although the vineyard of KTU texts shares the most specific elements with Gen 2–3, Korpel and De Moor's reconstruction of the Ugaritic texts has not been reviewed extensively by others. Wallace's reconstruction is not found in a single text. In addition, Gen 2–3 locates the garden nearby the divine dwelling, not at the same place. God does not live in the garden.

In sum, the presence of particular trees, water, and a creation motif does not have to imply a cultic garden, but could suggest a divine garden or royal garden. Moreover, the most pressing similarity, cult, has to be assumed for Gen 2–3. In my view, seeing Eden as a cultic garden is thus the least convincing option. The comparison set out above, God's planting of and walking in the Garden, as well as other passages in the Hebrew Bible (Isa 51:3; Gen 13:10; Ezek 28; 31), show rather that the garden is God's own garden, located near his

112 The presence of both royal and divine elements should not be surprising since royal gardens were likely based on divine gardens. See Dalley, *Mystery*, 156–57.

domain. In contrast to Ezek 28 and 31, Gen 2–3 uses elements known to us from royal gardens to depict this divine garden in Eden.¹¹³

6 Conclusions

Although Gen 2–3 locates the garden near the place where God resides and likely assumes a degree of holiness for the garden, it is not concerned with cult or sacrifice. Especially in recent scholarship, this has led to an ideological confrontation between those assuming cult to be implicitly present and Eden functioning as prefiguration of the temple and those arguing against such a position. In my contribution, I have tried to show that Eden can contain a form of holiness without being cultic. I argued that the depiction of Eden as a prefiguration of the temple in Jerusalem is not found in the book of Genesis, but was part of a later tradition.

Three elements have contributed to seeing Eden as a temple:

- While prophetic literature mainly compared Jerusalem to Eden (Isa 51:3; Ezek 36:35) some prophetic, but primarily early Jewish and Christian, sources depicted a new Jerusalem in Eden imagery (e.g., Isa 65:17–25; Rev 2:7; 21–22; 1 En. 25). This identification of *Urzeit* and *Endzeit* led later interpreters to read backwards and see Eden as a prefiguration of the temple. The reception of Ezek 28 and the presence of the Gihon in Gen 2:13 might have contributed to this view.
- As noted above, temple and divine dwelling were closely related in the minds of Ancient Near Eastern people. Some early Jewish and Christian interpreters were aware of this (e.g., Ephrem the Syrian). The use of similar imagery for Eden and the temple likely led them to identify the two.
- The book of Jubilees, rabbinic literature, and Zoharic tradition illustrate a desire to relate the issues of cult and/or purity to the book of Genesis, a book that remains silent about these issues.

These three elements contributed to the idea of the Garden in Eden as the holy place par excellence, an idea not found in Gen 2–3. The fact that some of my colleagues will disagree with me not only shows the ongoing fascination for the Eden Narrative, but also illustrates how this holy place has become a metaphorical place of ideological confrontation. This confrontation is not one

¹¹³ Other aspects of royal imagery are present in Gen 2–3. See Stordalen, *Echoes*, 312–14. The 𐤀𐤍𐤍 was, however, no king. The royal imagery rather illustrates his special status and relationship to YHWH.

between Jewish and Christian interpreters, but one between different views on what may be assumed to be present in Gen 2–3 as well as on which comparative material best illuminates the biblical text. Or in the words of Augustine: *Non ignoro de paradiso multos multa dixisse.*

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