

## The Bible in Context Ep 9: Creation as Temple

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Welcome back to the Bible in Context and last time we looked at

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Number seven, some special numbers that are used for structure in the Bible. We looked at the seventh day rest and now we're going to look at... Did you know ironically that was our seventh episode? Was it? Yes. Oh, that was...we planned that. We planned that well. Intentionally. Yes. We know what we're doing. That's awesome. Not at all. All right, I'm sorry. I interrupted you. No, no. So we talked about seven. What else?

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Yeah, we talked about what it means for Yahweh to rest. He's not taking a nap. He's taking up his rule and we kind of began to talk about the transition into chapter two. But we're actually going to take a break.

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Sort of. And not go straight into chapter two, but we're going to go back through chapter one into chapter two with some of the themes that I mentioned earlier. In particular, we're going to talk about how chapters one and chapter two portray the creation and the garden as Yahweh building a temple. I think we might have mentioned that a little bit before.

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Briefly but not in depth. But yeah, we want to really go into it and show that the author intends for us to see the Garden of Eden the creation as Yahweh building a temple

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So the first thing really to talk about is just the ancient Near Eastern idea of creation and temples because again, all this literature, these chapters we're looking at are at home in their ancient Near Eastern context. So throughout the ancient Near East, you have temples that are often gardens on mountaintops. They're sources of water, sources of life. Whenever temples are made, they're decorated with garden imagery and then the deity rests in that temple.

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creation in the house he has made at the end of the story. Now some of that sounds familiar we talked about how Yahweh rests in Eden we've talked about how this is a we know this is a garden there's lots of plant life and humans being created we haven't quite gotten into chapter 2 yet so some of this we haven't talked about such as the waters that flow out of Eden which you know I'm sure we're all familiar with the four rivers that come out of Eden.

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So we have that there. We also have something that might seem a little strange we haven't thought about before. And that is the fact that.

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in the Ancient Near East, the creation temple is a mountaintop, and that's not exactly explicit in Genesis chapter 1 or 2. So I can't remember if we've talked about this, but I feel like we have. Have we talked about how the Garden of Eden was part of Eden?

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And Eden was the larger region? Yeah, yeah. Well, I think we mentioned that a little bit. We didn't talk in depth about that. But yeah, there's definitely that idea that the mountaintop is the garden. And then out from there, as you go down the mountain, it's Eden. You're still within Eden. The garden is a place within Eden. So the garden's the best. Eden is a little better, but you're not quite in God's garden yet. Outside of that is still the wilderness. Outside of that is the sea.

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the uncreated ruin space. So there are these gradations within within creation that Yahweh set up. And again

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just like the tabernacle and the temple. So you got the holy of holies, and then outside of that, you have the outer, the holy space of the tabernacle. Outside of that is the outer court, and then outside of that, you're outside of the tabernacle or temple construction. And so you have these, again, these same gradations of space, of holy space, in the tabernacle, just as you have it in creation. Look up Ezekiel 28, 13 through 14.

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So, I want you to read that verse just to bring us back to this mountain idea and show that this is inside the biblical author's head. So, you were in Eden, the garden of God, every precious stone was your covering. Sardius, Topaz, and diamond, burl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle, and crafted in gold were your settings and your engravings.

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On the day you were created, they were prepared. You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you, you were on the holy mountain of God in the midst of the stones of fire you walked." Wow, there's a lot in there. Yeah, there was a lot in there, but the point of that is just seeing that Ezekiel is clearly associating the Garden of Eden with a mountain. He was on a mountain.

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And again, back in the ancient Near East, on mountaintops, that's where you met with a deity. That was a deity's throne. The ecstasy throughout the prophets and Psalms, whenever there were references to other deities, there are high places.

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these hilltops and mountaintops where altars are being set up to worship them and to commune with these gods. And that's why a lot of times in the prophets you see statements like the mountains will be laid low when Yahweh returned. That's the other gods thrones being put down and destroyed. Well, you definitely, like you said before, there's hints in Genesis chapter 2 that the garden is up on a mountain because you've got these rivers that are flowing out of the garden and so water always flows down. Right. So it makes sense that the garden is up high on a mountaintop.

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Right. Yeah. So I think that kind of puts us in the Ancient Near East, at least, as far as seeing that there is some conceptual similarities between Ancient Near Eastern temples and the Garden of Eden with the... There's fertility and garden life. There's vegetation. There's sources of waters. There's these decorative stones that are all around, and it's where the deity is setting up and resting. So at least in the Ancient Near East, we can see how...

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Genesis 1 & 2 are at home with these concepts. It's in the same realm. And in those ancient Near Eastern temples, often in the middle of them, they would have an image of the God, right? Oh, right. Right. And so what did God do? He took humans and rested them, placed them in the garden as his image bearers. Yeah. Yeah, these temples that they were building, they're little tiny cosmoses, little tiny

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versions of the world where the image sits in the center or inside of it to represent the deity and then just like God created us in his image. He sets us up in his temple the cosmic temple So again that kind of puts us in the ancient Near Eastern context But let's look at the actual biblical context and see is the author trying to Take this idea that the cosmos is a temple and is he running with it or is he? Saying that that's not how it works. Let's abandon that idea

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So the first thing to notice is the garden imagery that's applied to the tabernacle and the temple. Now I'm not gonna run through all these verses, but I'm gonna just mention some places where you'll see this imagery show up because otherwise we could be here again reading for a long time. And then I'm gonna also mention Ezekiel and places where these ideas show up in Ezekiel as well because he is portraying this.

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new prophetic temple and he's tracking on these same themes. So we'll see this Garden of Eden imagery show up in the tabernacle and temple and then we'll also see it show up again in Ezekiel because he's just tracking on the same thing and we don't really have to go into Ezekiel here, but it's just kind of cool now I want to bring it up. So the first thing is you see in first Kings 6 the temple when it's being built is

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covered with garden imagery with almond blossoms and trees engraved into the sides of the walls. The whole space is decorated to represent a garden and vegetation and plant life. So again you're supposed to walk into the temple and see all these golden engravings of trees and blossoms and things like that and take it's supposed to take you back to the garden.

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Again, Ezekiel 41, you see the same thing. Was there something about the curtains too when you walked in that represented the sky, at least in the Holy Place? Oh. That's more of the tabernacle. Yeah, what you're referring to is, that's Beel, the temple and the church's mission. In that book, he goes a lot into the Jewish tradition about the colors they're used to build the tabernacle. Right.

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blue-purple. That's on the inside of it, the under layer. That's what you would actually see if you walked in. Right. And then there's also the menorah, which is the lights. So again, that's kind of corresponding to the lights that you always set up in day one, the stars, the sun, the moon, and then it's kind of this night sky imagery. Yeah. Well, and even the shape of the menorah. Wasn't the menorah decorated?

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has a tree. All in blossom. Yeah, all in blossom. Yeah, so again, yeah, it also has this kind of tree of life idea to it. I don't know if the ceiling of the tabernacle being the night sky is explicitly spelled out in the Bible, but I could see it totally being what they intended to do. Yeah, Jewish tradition at least saw that. Gotcha. Yeah, I don't feel he goes a lot more into...

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he goes starting in the ancient area of the eastern and then goes into Jewish tradition and then goes into some of the textual stuff as well. Some of it is very helpful observations but tradition that he's seen. So there is that garden imagery in the menorah as well as the engravings of the temple. And then you also have the decorative stones that show up. In Genesis 2, 12, he's got gold and delium and onyx, all these decorative, costly stones and then again with the...

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tabernacle and the temple you have the priest who's wearing these stones and then you've also got it in, for instance, like Revelation where the entire foundation of God's city which is the temple is made out of these decorative stones just like this. So again, that should bring our minds back to the garden. Now, I think where it gets really interesting is where you see Cherubim placed at the tabernacle and the temple.

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So we'll see in Genesis 3 that after Adam and Eve fall, cherubim are placed outside the garden to guard the entrance to the way to the Tree of Life, which ultimately we're going to see is

associated with where Yahweh dwells. So we have cherubim guarding the way to Yahweh. And then in Exodus 26.31, we see

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cherubim are woven into the curtains that lead into the most holy place. So they are representing these guardian cherubim that are guarding the way to Yahweh. Again, Ezekiel 41, this shows up again. Now these cherubim, in this entrance into Yahweh's dwelling, is facing east. Just like the garden is facing east. Heaven Eve, when they're exiled in chapter 3, they're exiled out.

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to the east. That's the way out. Exodus 26, 31, 27, 13 talks about this, talks about the tabernacle facing east and the cherubim guarding that way. Also in Ezekiel 46 and then 43, 3, you see this same thing going on. So again, Ezekiel's tracking on these temple garden

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it's 1 Kings 6, 38, we see that it took seven years for Solomon to build the temple. And how many days did it take for Yahweh to build creation? I mean, yes, six days, but it's using that seven. That seventh day was important though. Yes, yeah. And the seventh is the commemorative day. And when they did commemorate the temple in 1 Kings 8, 65, it was a seven-day feast. Again, seven days of essentially

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Sabbath of feasting and resting enjoying what they just built and Getting ready to commemorate it for Yahweh to take up his rule in that temple Now you mentioned this already. He sets up priests in The well not you mentioned the image there's images set up in the temple All right, and typically in the ancient Near East and Yahweh sets us up as images There's also the priests that are set up in the temple system so in numbers

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3, 7 through 8, or in numbers 8, 25 through 26, or in Ezekiel 4, 14, we see the command to work and to keep the tabernacle or the temple. The words there for work and keep are avad and shanar. And the reason I'm bringing up the actual Hebrew word is because it's translated differently in different places. In some places it's translated to work and to keep, other places it's translated to serve and to guard.

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So knowing that is helpful because in Genesis, humanity is given the charge to work and to keep the garden. That's Genesis 2.15. In numbers, whenever this commission is given to the priests, they're told to serve in the temple and to guard it. So same words there. And again, that is Yahweh commissioning Adam and Eve to do priestly work within the garden.

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And then this commission he gives later to the Levites and the priests should, again, bring us back to the commission that he gave to Adam and Eve. It's the same job, the same commission. So those are really a good collection of all the correspondences, maybe not all, but a good collection of the correspondences between the tabernacle and the temple and even future prophetic temples and the Garden of Eden.

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We're supposed to understand the tabernacle and the temple as a little picture, a pattern of the true cosmic temple that Yahweh intended to build at creation. And this cosmic temple is actually still, we're supposed to think of it as up in heaven, up in the skies with Yahweh. Because when you get to Exodus 24, or no sorry.

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When you get to Exodus 25.40, you see that's where Moses gets the instructions for building the tabernacle. And he is told to make everything according to the pattern that he has shown on the mountain. And Hebrews 8.5 echoes that, saying that the tabernacle and temple, they were a shadow and a copy of the heavenly things. So we shouldn't be thinking of Eden as this kind of lost place.

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but rather it's on this cosmic mountain. It is where heaven and earth overlap. And Moses, when he went up Mount Sinai, he was able to see the cosmic temple that was still with God up in heaven. And he came down and built a copy of it. Now what's really cool is, it's easy to look at the passage where Moses is told, build according to the pattern he was.

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shown and think, well, he was shown a vision, obviously. He was still just on a mountain. He didn't go to heaven. He just climbed a mountain. So he was shown a vision. Here's a question for you. So, like, I recognize that the tabernacle was like a pattern or a copy, like a microcosm of the heavenly temple. So when Eden was God's temple,

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it was in the heavens because it was on a mountain, there was no other temple above it, right? Or they were just kind of in the, like you said, overlapping each other, but there wasn't like a second. Like you get to the tabernacle and you've got the tabernacle as a temple, but then you have that represents a cosmic temple, but you don't have that because everything's combined at the beginning. And that's what you see in Revelation too, is everything gets combined again.

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Yeah, I think from Genesis 1, we still see there's kind of that expanse in the midst of the waters. So it's not like we're on top of the waters, then after the fall, we go down into the bubble. We're still kind of in the bubble, but the mountain, I guess, goes up and penetrates that space between heaven and earth. I mean, I don't think they're trying to paint a clear geography for us, but the

idea is just that that's where heaven and earth overlap. That's where God actually resides. Right.

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Once we fall, I guess that overlap closes and he goes up to the heavens, or goes a little farther away so that his dwelling is no longer actually on the earth. Right. Well, or at least initially, it seems like he's still in Eden, but humanity is kept out, like guarded from getting back into the garden. That's true. But obviously, it's not like you can go find the Garden of Eden right now.

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And so at some point, and I don't know if the Bible really tells us, but at some point it does seem like that the Garden of Eden up on that mountain no longer was the place where God resided. Yeah. I think if you were going to have to pick a point that would be like Noah's flood because he re-submerges all creation. But again, I don't know if the author is actually trying to give us that. Yeah, Scripture doesn't really say, but that makes sense to me.

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probably where he would say like okay you're getting into refrigerator logic. Yeah. Yeah, probably. Well, and it does kind of make sense in the sense, like, right after the flood, what's the next story? You got the Tower of Babel where they're trying to remake a mountain, right? Yep. Right. To the heavens. Yeah, exactly. Yeah, make their own man-made Eden. Yeah. Going back to what Moses did see whenever he went up to the heavens, again, was this just a vision? He just climbed a mountain and then had a vision.

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ate some mushrooms. Right.

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The text actually suggests something a little more tangible. So let's read Exodus 24, nine through 10. And so this is where Moses and the elders go up, Sinai, and they see Yahweh. And here's what it tells us. So Moses and Aaron, Neh-dab-nab-i-hu, and 70 of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet, as it were, a pavement of sapphire stone.

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like the very heaven for clearness. Okay, what are they looking at? They're looking at the rock here. Yeah, they're looking at the top of the dome. Obviously it's blue and under his feet because the earth is his footstool, he dwells up there. So they actually went up Sinai and broke into heaven and actually saw basically the Garden of Eden. Came down and made a pattern of the Garden of Eden. Yeah. Well, and on that mountain you've got kind of a three tier

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You've got the segments there, right? So you've got where Moses and Aaron went, kind of like the Holy of Holies, at the very top of the mountain where he received the blueprint for the

tabernacle and then also eventually the tablets with the Ten Commandments. And then you've got this kind of middle of the mountain where what we just read, where the elders and Aaron and his sons all went to and had that amazing experience.

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But then, yeah, you go to the next level down, there's the base of the mountain where the people aren't even supposed to go up and touch it because they're unclean and all that. Yeah. So it's very similar to the Tabernacle where you get the Holy of Holies and the Holy Space and then the outer courts where the rest of the people are. So yeah. I mean, all this temple imagery, I think it helps, first of all, when we're looking for this temple, this shape to show up, this pattern in scripture to show up.

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First of all, it's going to help us interpret the narrative better because we see it, we know what's going on. It's not just, what the heck is this weird detail about? And now I'm lost and I don't get the story anymore. But it also helps us show what is our, what is the driving force behind the biblical narrative? We see, we start off with humans in the garden serving as Yahweh's priests, as his royal representatives, in this good place with Yahweh, who is our source of life.

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and we lose that and we keep trying to get back to that state and at first it happens through patterns of the garden where we go and we communicate with Yahweh or the Israelites did and Yahweh actually came down and dwelt in that little pattern of the garden until eventually we get to Jesus who himself is the tabernacle and then ultimately whenever the Garden of Eden comes back down.

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out of the sky, the sky is peeled back. Again, there we are in our garden that has become a city. So we're back with God as his images and ruling the earth with him in his presence.

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comes full circle. Yeah. And I guess that does kind of color how we think about how we interact with the world. We talked a little bit already about what it means to be an imager and be Yahweh's royal representative to the people around us. But we're not just trying to take the bad and turn it to good. We're also building Yahweh's temple, expanding the bounds of his temple when we do that. Yeah. So when Jesus came and we've got Pentecost.

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The Holy Spirit has poured out on everyone. There's that sense of God's presence being propelled outward again, once again, in a major way through Christ, who is the perfect image of God that we failed to be. Yes, you see all of those things that are kind of hard to wrap our minds around. If you grew up knowing the stories of the Old Testament...

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And you grew up seeing stories of us being image bearers and failing at that. And then God electing Noah or Abraham or go down the line, somebody who, like Noah's case, is a righteous person who ends up saving his family. Like the righteousness of that one

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saving others. And like you have all these this background knowledge and so when you come to the New Testament and we read about our righteousness coming through faith in Jesus and you see him as the image. Like all of these things start to make a whole lot more sense because you've been rooted in the background of the Old Testament. That's why Genesis is so important.

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Yeah, it really puts, I mean, you know, what Jesus has done for us even without that background understanding is, you know, has cosmic significance. It's that weighty, but it becomes so much more weighty whenever you have the full tension of the narrative that goes before him in your mind whenever he says what he says and does what he does. And, you know, we, I think, talked about that a little bit in the first episode where hopefully what we're going to do is we go through the book of Genesis and then...

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Yeah, as we go through the book of Genesis, we'll be able to better understand what Jesus said about himself and not only understand the propositions we're often taught about the basic understanding of what it means to have faith in Jesus, but also we'll be able to understand the weight of what he said about himself and the imagery that he applied to himself and hear it like an Israelite would have. Yeah, and so bringing this back, this conversation about the temple language and the garden,

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We see in the New Testament a couple different things coming to mind. First of all, John chapter 1 talks about Jesus tabernacling with us. He set up a tent, he set up a tabernacle because he is the very presence of God. And then you had mentioned to me earlier just when Jesus was on the cross and he tells the one thief next to him who is trusted in him

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Surely today you'll be with me in paradise and that word paradise in the Greek is the same word for garden Yeah, it's it's literally I think it's paradise. Oh, it's the word It might have a slightly different pronunciation if I'm remembering correctly, but yeah It's just a transliteration of a Greek word for garden Yeah, that is used in the set to agent in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible for the Garden of Eden Yeah, so he's telling him like hey, we're gonna go to the garden eat

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We're going to be eating when we die tonight. Yeah, which I think is actually really comforting for people. In fact, just yesterday, we were doing a membership class, and one of the questions that came up is, like, I've got relatives who are believers, but they passed away. And are they just sleeping right now, unconscious? Or are they conscious with the Lord? And

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So I took them to that passage with Jesus, and it gave them so much comfort to know that their relatives who are in Christ weren't just unconscious right now and waiting for Christ to return, but they were actually enjoying the presence of the Lord. Yeah, they've been reinstated in his temple. Yeah. Waiting for it to descend to the rest of us. Absolutely, absolutely. That's awesome.