

## THE KING'S GARDEN

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And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden  
(Gen. 2:8).

Beautiful gardens are always attractive, and each year the nations of the world spend enormous sums of money surrounding their tourist centers with scenes of loveliness. This has always been the case, for even in Bible times kings delighted in planning royal gardens. Probably one of the most famous was made by King Ahasuerus of Persia. In the third year of his reign he invited many international dignitaries to be his guests at a magnificent party that lasted for one hundred and eighty days. This illustrious event came to a climax with a special banquet that lasted intermittently for seven days in "the court of the garden of the king's palace" (see Est. 1:3-5). The ancient writer who described that glittering occasion seemed to be ecstatic when he wrote:

Where were white, green, and blue hangings, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble: the beds were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of red, and blue, and white and black, marble (Est. 1:6).

When interspersed with beds of glorious flowers, that garden would have graced heaven itself! Perhaps the king arranged for his plants and flowers to be in pots so that throughout his festivities ailing plants could be replaced. The magnificent splendor continued until the day his guests departed. The Bible reveals that sin commenced in the Garden of Eden; it was challenged in the Garden of Gethsemane and conquered in the garden where Christ rose from His tomb. (See also Bible Highways.) Much may be said about the gardens mentioned by ancient writers.

Personally Desired... Wanted

"And the Lord planted a garden eastward in Eden." I wish I could have seen that garden. Alas. I was born too late! Did it possess long winding paths, and were there enchanting borders of multicolored flowers? Were there shady corners where Adam sat listening to the songs of the birds? Were some of the

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flowering trees aflame with the Creator's art? And did the gentle breezes of evening produce music of exquisite sweetness as they played among the leaves? Yes. I wish I could have seen that garden, for it has been said, "One is nearer to God in a garden than anywhere else on earth." A garden is a mirror reflecting a world. There, we find enemies: there, we find friends. Within the confines of a garden stalks the shadow of death, but in that same shadow may be found promise of glorious resurrection. The gardens of the Bible have a wonderful story to tell)

It appears to be significant that although God created the heaven and earth. He planted the first garden. Behold God on His knees—possibly with soiled hands! When He brought the worlds into being, would it not have been easy to include a garden with the finest expressions of eternal beauty? The mountain ranges, far reaching forests, the graceful rivers and meadows would have been wonderful settings in which to create a place of outstanding loveliness. The Lord specially designed that garden in Eden. He created the seeds, but it was with love and tenderness He handled the young plants, placing each one exactly where He desired it to be.

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The Almighty loved to walk there in the cool of the evening. It was meant to be a sanctuary where He could commune with Adam and Eve. That garden exhibited everything valued by the Creator. He could have commissioned angels to plant it. but that was unsatisfactory. "The LORD God planted a garden And a river went out of Eden to water the garden" (Gen. 2:8, 10). "And God saw that it was good." When the Lord sat on the banks of that delightful river, did He look down the corridors of time to see gardens of another type? As time progressed, Eden became a memory. Jehovah planned to place other gardens within redeemed hearts, where in the stillness of the human spirit He would commune with those He loved. Yes, He wanted that place in Eden, and He still does within the souls of men and women.

### Proudly Displayed... Watered

When the king of Persia planted his magnificent garden, he arranged that it would be near the canals fed by the river Euphrates. He reigned over the eastern world, and therefore could bring precious commodities from conquered domains. The "red and blue, and white, and black marble" were probably imported

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items, but with great care each piece was cut and placed into position. The view of the royal garden was amazing. At enormous expense the monarch did everything possible to make the area the most attractive place known to men. When his guests arrived, he proudly escorted them along the winding paths and indicated the prized plants and shrubs. His spirits rose when words of appreciation were spoken; he had produced something unequalled anywhere.

It may be possible to detect that kind of pride in the heart of the Almighty. The Lord had a servant called Job whose heart was a garden that pleased Jehovah. The sacred writings describe how God said to Satan: "Hast thou considered my servant Job. that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil?" (Job 1:8). God had created a garden within the soul of His servant, and it surpassed anything seen in Eden. Evidently the Lord was intensely proud of that ancient saint. When the faithfulness of Job was questioned by Satan, the Lord permitted his testing because His child was completely reliable, and would withstand every challenge brought against him. The Savior said: "I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29), and that testimony was endorsed when God spoke from heaven saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Matt. 17:5). When the Almighty looked into the life of Jesus, He saw beauty which made the Garden of Eden fade into insignificance.

### Perceptively Damaged... Watched

But the gate of the fountain repaired Shallun the son of Colhozeh, the ruler of part of Mizpeh; he built it and covered it, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof, and the wall of the pool of Siloah, by the king's garden. and unto the stairs that go down from the city of David (Neh. 3:15).

The kings of Israel and Judah arranged that their special garden would be close to the pool of Siloam, where its seclusion would be an asset. Apparently there was a secret gate in the wall, possibly hidden by ivy or some other shrub. When danger threatened the life of Ahaziah, he fled through that gate but, unfortunately, was overtaken by Jehu who refused to spare the

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life of the monarch (2 Kings 9:27). After the Babylonian captivity Ezra and Nehemiah returned to their homeland to discover seventy years of decay and neglect had destroyed everything of value, and the task of reconstruction would be immense. The son of a ruler was either assigned, or volunteered, to repair the wall close to what had been the king's garden. It is refreshing to know that this builder was not an ordinary peasant. It is said he was the son of a man who was co-ruler of Mizpeh. Family influence might have found a less arduous task, but evidently the man desired to restore that part of the wall. The king's garden had been neglected but Shallun desired to restore its former grandeur.

Unfortunately there were, and still are, enemies who would destroy everything valued by the King of Kings. They include foes from without and complacency from within. Any believer who would preserve the Savior's property must be ready to work with one hand, and fight with the other. God's enemies are ruthless and sometimes attack when least expected (compare Neh. 4: 17-18).

Perpetually Demanding... Work

Without careful attention any garden can become a wilderness. Evidently King Solomon had seen this happen, for he wrote:

I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding. And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth: and thy want as an armed man (Prov. 24:30-34).

It is not known how long Adam resided in the Garden of Eden, but one fact is indisputable. God planted the garden. but man was expected to do the weeding! "The vineyard of a man void of understanding." That statement described a person whose brain was inactive! Either the man had inherited property or had purchased it. He loved to look at his vineyard but was too tired to work! He loved to dream about possibilities, but while he did, the weeds and thistles increased, and the land became

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unproductive. Solomon might have learned more from that sleeping husbandman. He described the folly of the dreamer but neglected his own weeding. He who had been given special wisdom permitted Egyptian weeds to grow in his garden. which, within a short time, became inundated with thistles.

But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites. Of the nations concerning which the LORD said unto the children of Israel. Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. And he had seven hundred wives. princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart (1 Kings 11:1-3).

Solomon proved that the higher a man climbs, the farther he has to fall. He who offered advice through his poems and sonnets became a man "void of understanding." He had a wonderful vineyard, but instead of soiling his hands weeding. he contaminated his soul with infamous conduct.

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Perfectly Delightful... Wonderful

Thus saith the Lord God; In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities I will also cause you to dwell in the cities, and the wastes shall be builded. And the desolate land shall be tilled, whereas it lay desolate in the sight of all that passed by. And they shall say. This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden: and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are become fenced, and are inhabited. Then the heathen that are left round about you shall know that I the Lord build the ruined places. and plant that that was desolate: I the LORD have spoken it, and I will do it (Ezek. 36:33-36).

It is thrilling to know that as the Lord planted a garden in Eden, He intends to do it again but on a much larger scale. Ezekiel spoke of the final days of time when the kingdom of God will be established upon the earth. A foreshadowing of what is to come was supplied when the Hebrews returned from Babylon. Yet, the details given by the prophet can only be fulfilled when "the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." Then Israel will be transformed into far-reaching places of beauty, and the entire landscape will resemble the garden of God. God said "I will do it."

The coronation of the King of Kings will make all this possible. Wilderness areas should not exist within the life of the Christian. The Lord gave a remarkable promise to His people. "And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not" (Isa. 58:11). God is able to make the human heart into a garden filled with rare beauty. Happy is the man or woman who can say:

I come to the garden alone.  
While the dew is still on the roses:  
And the voice I hear, falling on mine ear,  
The Son of God discloses.

He speaks, and the sound of His voice  
Is so sweet the birds hush their singing:  
And the melody that He gives to me  
Within my heart is ringing.

And He walks with me, and He talks with me,  
And He tells me I am His own;  
And the joy we share as we tarry there  
None other has ever known.  
J. Austin Miles

1. Ivor Powell, Bible Highways (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1985). I.
2. Ibid.
3. Ivor Powell, Bible Treasures, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1984), 47-48.

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