



Chapter 2: The Story of our True Home

A. How the story unfolds

1. Eden

As God was forming the world for human habitation, he planted a garden and placed man in it, a place for communion with God. Genesis 2 describes the garden, and gives a hint of the large variety of fruit trees in the garden. From chapter 3 we learn that "in the cool of the day" God would show up in the garden to talk with Adam and Eve. This was probably at the end of the work day for Adam and Eve, who were asked to tend the garden as their professional job. The work was not very challenging, because the appearance of weeds and thorns and the sweat of working came after their disobedience.

God gave one limitation (don't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil) as a test of humanity's loyalty and submission to God. Otherwise, it was a perfect home. They had access to the tree of life that we assume could extend life indefinitely and heal injuries. But most of all it was a place where God could live with his people and be their God. In the presence of God, man could find his ultimate pleasure and fulfillment.

2. Cherubim

Genesis 3 tells us that because of sin, life for people was forever changed. Women had pain in conceiving and giving birth; men had painful toil in their work; the earth stopped cooperating with man in being productive; and the serpent was cursed to "bite the dust." On top of all these curses, humans were expelled from the garden to make their own way in the wilderness outside the presence of God. To prevent Adam and Eve and their descendants from going back, cherubim and a flaming sword were posted to block the gateway to God's presence. Since that time, we humans have been ultimately homeless. We cannot return to our proper home in the garden. We feel the alienation and sense of not belonging, even in the best of countries and towns. Because we were made to live with God, we will not be truly at home anywhere outside his presence.

The story of our lost home is traced through the Bible. Times of banishment, exile, and aimless wandering fill the history of God's people. In many of the Bible stories specific acts of sin have led to forced exile. Many heroes of the faith were those who grew up in captivity or were described as "strangers and pilgrims."

Of course, God never abandoned his people in their exile from his presence. God continued to be with his people, though not in the direct, immediate way he was with Adam and Eve in the garden. The Promised Land served as a symbol for Eden. That is why exile from the land was such a drastic punishment. Before the 10 plagues were sent on Egypt to prepare Pharaoh to let the Israelites go, God spoke to the Israelites to prepare them to go in Exodus 6:6-8: "I will free you from being slaves . . . and I will redeem you I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. . . . And I will bring you to the land I swore to give you." The Land thus served as a symbol for the presence of God.

The Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle (and later in the Temple) was considered the place of God's presence, from which he guided, protected, and forgave his wayward people. The curtain or veil in the Tabernacle separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies hung on the east side of the place of God's presence forbidding all but the high priest once a year from entering. In Exodus 26:31-33 God instructed Moses to make the curtain of blue, purple, and scarlet thread, with cherubim worked into it. It, too, was a constant reminder of how human sin prevented people from enjoying the fellowship of God's presence

It is interesting to notice that many stories of exile also contain the references to the Cherubim guarding the way back into the garden. When Jacob, after being out of the land for 20 years, tried to return to the Promised Land (symbolic of going back into Eden) from the east, he encountered an angel who wrestled with him. Genesis 32 describes the struggle in which Jacob expressed his persistent faith and was rewarded by God's grace by being allowed to return home. In Joshua 5, shortly after the Israelites entered the Promised Land from the east, Joshua encountered the commander of the Lord's army. Evidently an angelic being, this soldier barred the way until Joshua expressed his loyalty and worship of the Lord.

3. Wandering

Acts 17:26-28 tells us that God determines the times when specific peoples live—and the exact places where they live. God did this in order that they would seek God and reach out for him. Though he is not far from any of us, there is a sense of restlessness, a feeling that we are missing something even in the best of times. A feeling that we don't fit in the culture or location where we live. We hunger for our true home. People might not be able to define it, but they know that nothing in this world will satisfy their desire. Whether it is Scandinavians in northern Europe or jungle tribesmen in the South Seas, native Americans or Pakistanis, people adjust to the place they occupy on earth. But it isn't really what they are looking for. People seek a city of their own and are uneasy in a sinful world.

Hebrews 11:13-16 describes the attitude of the Hebrews patriarchs, but it could also be the feeling of anyone: "They admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. . . . They are longing for a heavenly country." Until we arrive at our true home in Eden, where we will enjoy the presence of God in a direct way, we will feel like wanderers.

As children grow into adulthood, they usually feel unsatisfied with their home—both the family and the community. They have an instinctive sense that there has to be something more, something better. As they travel through life they come to realize that those other places are not their true home either.

4. Prepare a Place for You

Restless people are actually seeking for God though they may not realize it. And, even though God drove people from his presence, he plans to welcome us back into his presence. The story of our true home, woven throughout the Bible, is the story of God preparing a place for us.

In John 14 Jesus told the disciples that he was going to prepare a place for them. When he prepared the place he would come again and receive them to himself so they could be with him where he is. That is the reason Jesus came. Jesus' death was certainly to provide atonement for sin and to die for sinners. But it also was to reopen the door into God's presence. Once sin was dealt with on the cross, the curtain with its pictures of cherubim could be torn in two. Jesus' death was a promise that man could again partake of the tree of life and live forever. The waters of the river of life could again flow. God could once again walk and talk with his people in the cool of the day. The flaming sword on the east entrance of the garden could be extinguished.

Jesus went on in John 14 to describe how this "preparing a place for you" would take place. In verses 20-23 he tells us about the day of being at home. "You will realize that I am in the Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. . . . My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." Jesus went to the cross to prepare a place. Right now that place is in the heart of each believer. It is only through the death and resurrection of Jesus that we can enter God's presence. But instead of moving us out of the world into heaven, the cross moves God out of heaven into us.

5. New Heaven and New Earth

Sin still exists in our world and the effects of sin and the curse spoil God's creation. Even though things are not yet what they will be, we are now admitted into the presence of God by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

But a future day will bring this to complete fulfillment. All sin and its effects will be removed in the new creation, and fellowship with God will be restored. The old heaven and the old earth will pass away. The effects of sin and the curse will be scoured from our planet by the fires of God's judgment. God will make a new heaven and new earth. We will live at home with God, not in some ethereal place in outer space, but on the world God intended to live with us. We won't be restricted to a segment of the earth like the original garden was, but the entire planet will be God's garden.

Revelation 21:1-8 describes this for us: "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

B. Scriptures for further study in tracing the story of Home

Woven through the 1,189 chapters of the Bible is the story of paradise lost: a longing for our true home, which our sinfulness has prevented us from enjoying. The promise of God gives us hope that we one day will be able to return, because of the work of Messiah. The title of Immanuel holds a deep meaning to those who are looking forward to the reward of living with God himself and being at home.

1. Adam and Eve

Genesis 3 describes the first sin of our first parents and the punishments that came because of that sin. Their exile from the presence of God in Eden is the first of many exile stories we find in the Bible.

2. Cain

Genesis 4 tells us of the first murder, when Cain killed Abel. His punishment was to be driven from the ground that soaked up Abel's blood. He would be a restless wanderer on the earth. He went out from the presence of the Lord east of Eden.

3. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob

Though they lived in the Promised Land, they owned none of it except the burial plots for their families. They considered themselves pilgrims and strangers on the earth. Their focus was on the future home God would give. (Hebrews 11:13-16)

4. David fleeing from Saul

The last part of 1 Samuel describes King Saul's attempt to track down David and kill him. Twice David spared Saul's life. In 1 Samuel 26:17-25 David appealed to Saul not to drive him from the Lord's inheritance or let his blood be shed far away from the Lord's presence.

5. Wilderness Wanderings

Numbers 14 shows the Israelites on the edge of the Promised Land, but fearful of entering. For their unbelief God required them to spend another 40 years in the wilderness, with no direction or purpose or home (chapters 14-36).

6. God devises ways to restore the banished person

In 2 Samuel 13-14 we read the story of Absalom's exile after murdering his brother. David longed for reconciliation, but also knew Absalom had committed a wicked crime. Finally, David allowed him to return after he looked at the case more objectively. He did not fully restore his son, however.

7. Babylonian Captivity and Return

Jerusalem was destroyed by the Chaldeans and survivors taken as captives to Babylon for 70 years as punishment for their sins. Their welcome home after the exile stands as a picture of Christ's reconciling work. See 2 Chronicles 34:36.

8. Foxes and Birds

In Luke 9:57-62 Jesus told a man who wanted to follow him that he must count the cost. While foxes have holes and birds have nests, the son of man has no place to lay his head. Jesus so identified with lost people that he shared their sense of homelessness.

9. Great Banquet

Jesus told a story of a man who gave a great banquet and invited people to it (Luke 14:15-24). This feast, representing the celebration and joy of home, was spurned by those invited, who preferred the business of the world outside God's presence. But all who are longing for God's presence may attend.

10. Prodigal Son

The story of the younger son who took his inheritance and wasted it in a far country (Luke 15) is the story of all sinners who have undervalued the Father's house. Eventually, though, he remembered his Father's house and wanted to go back.

11. I go to prepare a place for you

Jesus comforted the disciples who were concerned over Jesus' announcement that he was leaving. He was going to prepare a place for them. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus dealt with the sin that separates us from God (John 14:1-6). He went on to explain that those who love and obey him would be at home with Jesus and the Father (John 14:20-24).

12. Live as aliens and strangers

Peter advises in 1 Peter 2:11-12 that we should live our lives as those not really at home in this world. We should avoid the standards, the desires, and the behaviors of this world. We should live as true citizens of our righteous home that is coming.

13. River and Tree of Life

In Revelation 22:1-5 John records his vision of the new heaven and new earth in terms of the garden of Eden. The river of the water of life is flowing down the street. On each side of the river are the tree of life. There is no curse. The throne of God is there, and they will see his face.

C. Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss a time when you really felt safe, fulfilled, and at home. When do you feel most like you are where you belong? What situations increase your sense of longing for being at home with God? (the frustrations and pains of sin's curse, the absence of loved ones, an ache to be with God, the knowledge that something is missing, the emptiness after realizing your latest desire didn't satisfy)

2. Can you think of other Bible stories that tell the story of being an exile or wanderer who can't go back home? Is there a Christ-figure in the stories to indicate that Jesus came to provide the answer to the alienation? What stories outside the Bible use this plot? How well do they portray the feeling of being disconnected from God and the hope of resolution? If you are ambitious read *Paradise Lost* by John Milton or *The Land of the Wildflowers* by Jerry Foote.

3. Memorize John 17:24. Reflect on Jesus' desire to have believers with him in his glory. How can we cultivate a stronger desire to be with Jesus and have him make his home in us?

4. Track the story of losing and regaining our true home as you read through the Bible. You might underline or highlight this theme with gold or yellow in your Bible.