Unseen Realm

Sacred Spaces and Places

Introduction

Within cultures different things (gestures, places, numbers, etc.) are ascribed certain meanings. This is true of the Hebrew world, as well as the culture of the Ancient Near East (the time in which the Old Testament is set).

In this lesson, we'll talk about some of the geographic locations that continually arise throughout the Old and New Testament, and the meaning that was ascribed to them.

Localization

As we talk about these sacred spaces and places, keep in mind our last lesson, the disinheriting of the nations at the Tower of Babel. God is going about reclaiming the nations (Dt. 32:8; Psalm 82). There are entities that God is going to reclaim from.

The people of the Ancient Near East (ANE) culture, believed that "gods" were localized, that is, they were in one location. This was the belief of the Jewish people for a considerable amount of time as well (though God will go about changing that as the story of Israel progresses).

Mountains, Gardens, Temples and God's Hierarchy

Mountains

Mountains were the places that people traditionally didn't live so naturally this was the home of the gods.

> You were limited in how high you could go on mountains in the ANE (equipment, difficulty). Making mountains a perfect getaway to leave annoying human beings.
>
> In addition to this, mountains "touched" the heavens, the general home of the gods.

God would regularly meet with His people on mountains:

> Exodus 3:1-2 – *"Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the* ***mountain of God****. 2 And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed."*
>
> Exodus 15:17 (expectation of what God will do for freed Israelites) –

"*You will bring them in and plant them on **your own mountain**, the place, O Lord, which you have made for **your abode**, **the sanctuary**, O Lord, which your hands have established*."

See also **Exodus 19:12-20** for the importance of mountains.

Gardens

In addition to mountains, the home of the gods were gardens.

The people of the Ancient Near East (ANE) lived in arid, desert climates and struggled to grow food and find water.

Gardens, then, were the epitome of high living. A land of abundant growth and flourishing plant-life would've been the best kind of life desert dwellers could think of.

It is important to note as well that mountains and gardens are often mixed ("both", not "either/or"). The mountain of God is described as a place flowing with water and vegetation (Isa. 33:20-22; Ezekiel 47:1-12; Zech. 14:8; Joel 3:18).

Temples

Temples (this includes the tabernacle as well) were built with mountain/garden imagery as their design as well. For example, listen to the description of Solomon's temple construction in 1 Kings 6:29-36

*[29] Around all the walls of the house he carved engraved figures of **cherubim and palm trees and open flowers**, in the inner and outer rooms. [30] The floor of the house he overlaid with gold in the inner and outer rooms.*

*[31] For the entrance to the inner sanctuary he made doors of olivewood; the lintel and the doorposts were five-sided. [32] He covered the two doors of olivewood with carvings of **cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers.** He overlaid them with gold and spread gold on the cherubim and on the palm trees.*

*[33] So also he made for the entrance to the nave doorposts of olivewood, in the form of a square, [34] and two doors of cypress wood. The **two leaves of the one door were folding, and the two leaves of the other door were folding**. [35] On them he carved **cherubim and palm trees and open flowers**, and he overlaid them with gold evenly applied on the carved work. [36] He built the inner court with three courses of cut stone and one course of cedar beams.*

Not only are we given garden vegetation imagery here ("palm trees and open flowers") we are also repeatedly invited into the spiritual world in the garden with the repeated mention of "cherubim".

This garden/temple construction is found in the original tabernacle building as well.
NOTE: see adjoining page on Creation/Tabernacle connections.

Summary

Just like the surrounding cultures, God uses language of mountains and gardens as His sacred space. Unlike the "gods" in the other cultures, Yahweh invites us into those sacred spaces to join Him on the mountain, in the garden, or in His presence.

Wilderness

Outside the mountain, garden, and temple of God lies the wilderness, a place devoid of life. This is where evil finds its existence.

> Mountains/Gardens – are a place of growth and beauty. The wilderness is dead and empty.
>
> Temple – this is where God's presence dwelt (see Ex. 40:34-38). God was in the midst of the people of Israel who were neatly organized in camp around the tabernacle. The wilderness was perceived as being outside of/away from God's presence.

Notice some of language of "outside the camp" in the Levitical laws:

> Leviticus 13:46 – (on lepers) "*He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp*."
>
> Numbers 5:1-4 – "*The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Command the people of Israel that they put out of the camp everyone who is leprous or has a discharge and everyone who is unclean through contact with the dead. 3 You shall put out both male and female, putting them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camp, in the midst of which I dwell." 4 And the people of Israel did so, and put them outside the camp; as the Lord said to Moses, so the people of Israel did*."

Notice as well a very strange practice involving goats in Leviticus 16:

> "*Then he shall take the two goats and set them before the Lord at the entrance of the tent of meeting. 8 And Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one lot for the Lord and the other lot* ***for Azazel****. 9 And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the Lord and use it as a sin offering, 10 but the goat on which the lot fell* ***for Azazel*** *shall be presented alive before the Lord to make atonement over it, that it may be* ***sent away into the wilderness to Azazel****… 20 "And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. 21 And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away* ***into the wilderness*** *by the hand of a man who is in readiness. 22 The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free* ***in the wilderness***." (7-10, 20-22)

One goat is sacrificed, the other is sent away, carrying the sins of the people of Israel "outside the camp" into the "wilderness" away from the presence of God.

Sin, and impurity, doesn't belong in the camp of Yahweh, it belongs outside the camp of God!

The Day of Atonement was a "reboot" of the sins of the people of Israel. A total cleansing of everything. All sin must go!

Q: Who is Azazel?

Some translate this as "scapegoat". It's true that this goat would be a "scapegoat" in that it bears the sins of the people instead of the people bearing their own sins, but the Hebrew language makes it clear that Azazel is an entity, at least in the mind of Moses' writing.

> "for Yahweh" (Heb. 'lamed El Adonai')
>
> "for Azazel" (Heb. 'lamed Azaz-el')
> NOTE: "el" in both places. This is our designation for spiritual beings ('el-ohim')

The goat may be a scapegoat, but the language says "for Azazel" so we'd have to translate "for the scapegoat" if we're going to do that.

Azazel is regarded as a demonic entity, associated with the wilderness. He is repeatedly condemned and charged in the books of Enoch with leading the creation into sin. Here is 1 Enoch 2:8 for example:

> "And Azazel taught men to make swords and knives and shields and breastplates; and made known to them the metals [of the earth] and the art of working them; and bracelets and ornaments; and the use of antimony and the beautifying of the eyelids; and all kinds of costly stones and all colouring tinctures. And there arose much godlessness, and they committed fornication, and they were led astray and became corrupt in all their ways."

Summary

As we progress throughout the Old and New Testaments in our study of the unseen realm, these geographic locations will make constant appearances, directing our attention to good and bad spiritual entities and events.

In our next lesson, we will begin our spiritual journey in the garden of God and watch as evil spiritual entities bring corruption to the creation through the deceiving of humans.

Take Home

Read Genesis 2 and 3

Q: Where does this evil spiritual being of Genesis 3 come from?

Q: How does the evil spiritual being deceive Eve?