



# The Three Gardens



The Bible is a literary masterpiece – it truly is! It uses all the the different literary devices from poetry, to apocalyptic language, to logic, story telling, to motifs and themes. And one of its most intriguing literary devices is it's use of *imagery*. Jesus was a master at using imagery in many of the stories He told. The writers of the Gospels often used very skillfully-crafted imagery in their depictions of the events in the life and ministry of Jesus. Every miracle they recorded revealed the mastery of Jesus over the things that had gone wrong with creation after the fall of Adam and Eve in Eden. So He was



revealed to possess the absolute power to heal **diseases** and reverse **deformities** and fix **injuries** – not in days, but in moments! He was depicted to have power over the **elements** – the wind and waves of a storm - and even power over **death**! He also had power over the spiritual realms, casting out fearful demons, and outlasting Satan himself! And remember that His contest with Satan came after He had fasted for a month and 10 days – **imagine that** – which also demonstrated that He had absolute mastery over His own flesh!

The Bible also uses imagery in the portrayal of events that occurred in 3 different garden/parks throughout salvation history. All three locations housed momentous events that proved to be turning points in human history, that depict a story of a loving Creator/God, and a willful and rebellious human creature! The story begins in the **Garden of Eden**, where God lovingly created a beautiful, luscious, self-sustaining and protective environment for His first two human creatures, Adam and Eve. It was the perfect temperature, so that the man and woman did not even feel the need to wear clothing! Eden also had food hanging from its trees and bushes year round and the purest water nearby in the rivers and streams! There were no predators, which means that even the lions and leopards ate plants.

But we have to watch with foreboding and then horror as we see Adam and Eve making a horrible decision to fall victim to the Tempter's scheme and to take the fatal step to oppose God. They made a choice to do the one thing – *the only one* – that God told them they could not do! And thus they separated themselves from God, and God kept His word. He had warned them that if they ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they would surely die. So by their horrible decision they brought death into the garden and into the world! It sent creation into a tailspin, spiraling down into the chaos and mayhem of all people everywhere “*doing what was right in their own eyes*”! The story is there to explain what has gone wrong with creation – why we now have rampant disease, deformity, terrible accidents, fearful predators, drought, flood, and every other kind of natural disaster – why Murphy's Law is so prevalent each day! This explains the origins of governmental corruption, greed, excess, and injustice that covers the earth! And finally, it explains why there is an undercurrent at every level of human society of Satan's influence and why he has so much freedom and power to deceive and destroy the people of this earth! It also explains the unnatural phenomenon of death! It is because of *our* continued decisions to cooperate with Satan's agenda and influence! The book of Revelation shows that this will only continue to get stronger all the way to the end, when finally God will have had enough, and He goes to war with Satan and the nations, a war with a foregone conclusion, and takes over! At that time God will re-institute Eden, where the lamb will lay down with the lion,.. and at the end of all things, Heaven/The New Jerusalem will descend to Earth, where the Tree of Life will grow on the banks of the River of Life that flows from under the throne of God and down through the heavenly City of God! We see it all ends well, but what suffering until then! The story of *this* garden is a story of great tragedy! It is the story of what went wrong with this place!



Then we skip forward thousands of years to another garden – the Garden of Gethsemane! All throughout the Old Testament we see a rather narrow thread of history. This thread of history we call Salvation History, because it is the recorded history of the Creator/God’s active plan to salvage a world and a creation that seemed intent on destroying itself! Salvation history chronicles the work of God primarily through the nation of Israel – through their many ups and downs, through individuals within that nation chosen by God specifically for certain tasks – Moses, Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon, the prophets Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and many more. But it was all leading to a time, a day, when God would be doing something sensational to reconcile the world to Himself. Looking back in the Old Testament texts, we see clearly that God revealed His plans to enter human history Himself! So at the beginning of the New Testament, we see the kind of personal investment that God made in this endeavor. He sent the Word, 2<sup>nd</sup> member of God’s Tri-unity, to the earth when a virgin conceived a child of the Holy Spirit, the One-and-Only begotten Son of God, who being the Word of God became also God’s Son when He was birthed in Bethlehem of Judea! It is a most amazing true story of God’s plan to offer reconciliation with Himself to the world! Everything had to be just right for this to happen! So then we see Jesus birthed in a stable amid angelic fanfare, for God had entered the world as a human being. But why? Why did He have to come and be a human? It seems like a such a big deal, and for what? Well, Isaiah 53, written approximately 750 yrs before Christ, tells us why, and is very specific! It describes a gruesome death – actually describing crucifixion long before crucifixion even existed! The verdict is that the Word of God was on a mission to die for the sins of humanity and take upon Himself the wrath of God, so that we would not have to!



So, the gospel account has the 33 ½ yr. old Jesus visiting the Garden of Gethsemane shortly before His arrest! Luke says that this was a place Jesus used to get away and be alone. Gethsemane was located on the Mount of Olives a short distance from Jerusalem. Even the Aramaic name for the place “*Gat Shemanim*” (which means “**Oil Press**”), suggests that there was almost certainly a grove of cultivated olive trees there. Olive trees remain there today, and there are 8 of them in one specific area of the Mount of Olives that are the oldest olive trees in the world – over 900 yrs. old! There is some symbolism even in that name, **Oil Press**, because some of the best and healthiest product from the olive harvest come from the destruction of their form and structure – their bodies, if you will. So, there, in the Oil Press Garden, Jesus contemplated His mission and what He knew He would have to endure! The synoptic Gospels say that He was grieving so deeply that He felt like He was going to die! Luke specifically says that sweat dripped off of Him like blood! He anticipated having to be pressed and crushed, suffering the most excruciating mental, emotional, and physical pain! He begged God the Father to find some other way to accomplish this mission, but there just was no other way. God had been preparing and providing for this moment since creation was first spoiled by humanity and it was too late to turn back now! I cannot begin to imagine the depth of the grief that Jesus was feeling that night. Judas, Christ’s disciple and also His betrayer, knew right were to find Jesus, and he led the soldiers to Him, identifying Him with a kiss! And so began the ordeal known as “the passion of the Christ”. **[Isaiah 53]** In being crushed, Jesus unleashed the love of God upon this world and was able to offer reconciliation to humans



There was one more garden in this story of Gardens - [John 19:41] and there it was that the broken down and lifeless body of Jesus was laid. Guards were posted and a stone set Matthew's gospel explains that in the night a couple of angels had come down from heaven creating an earthquake!

The appearance of the angels coupled with the earthquake, scared the guards senseless and caused them to leave their post! One of the angels, in a show of immense strength, rolled the huge stone back from the entrance! It was before, during, or shortly after this that the spirit of Jesus was restored to His body and He was resurrected to life again! It was there on a Sunday morning, Mark says it was just after sunrise and John says it was still dark. Putting the two accounts together, it was basically right at the crack of dawn, when the world is in a state of semi-darkness and the glow of the coming sun is just beginning to lighten the eastern sky – when things are just starting to become visible, the women disciples, included Mary the mother of James, Mary Magdalene, Salome, another female disciple named Joanna, and even some other women who had followed Jesus down from Galilee, came down to check on the tomb, intending to anoint the already decaying body with sweet-smelling spices. Coming up to the tomb they saw that the huge stone that guarded the entrance to the tomb was unsealed and had been rolled back leaving the entrance wide open. But the body was not there – just the angels were still there – and they told the women that Jesus was risen as He said He would, and instructed them to make haste to go back and tell the 11 remaining disciples what had happened! John records that Mary Magdalene hung around for awhile fretting, evidently not believing what the angels said. She was lamenting that someone must have stolen the body and no one knew where it had been taken! And then, she actually had an encounter with the risen Jesus who she at first mistook for the gardener who tended the garden. Finally she recognized Him – “*Rabboni*” (*Teacher*) she exclaimed! There in the garden, she was the first to see Jesus alive, and she finally believed! The disciples, however, refused to believe the women's testimony! Peter and John ran to the tomb and found it empty, and they too wondered what had gone on in the night that the body would be gone and the cloth burial wrappings of Jesus were just laying there! So they got excited that the body was gone, but as far as rising from the dead – they were at best skeptical and at worst flatly disbelieving! But then Jesus appeared to them in an upper room they were in, showed them He was not a ghost, and they *all* believed! He appeared in all to at least 500 of His disciples, and then they were filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Combined with what they had seen, they were propelled upon a mission to tell the world about the gospel of Jesus Christ! From this garden of the empty tomb God would bring life to the world! One question remains - He has offered His eternal life to you, so that you can be together with God. Have you received it yet?<sup>6</sup>



