

Garden City

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The Garden

The story of Scripture begins in a Garden and ends in a City! Therefore, *it is the aim of this document is to determine how God connects the idea of “city” and “garden,” and to uncover why these two entities, when brought together, present the best illustration of God’s kingdom now, and of His kingdom coming.*

In Revelation chapter 21, when John describes the new heavens and earth, as seen in God’s heavenly kingdom, he sees a Garden-like City. *It is a kingdom comprised of a redeemed creation and people*—Christ being the Head and cornerstone of *this new heavens and new earth*. God’s ultimate end in Revelation, a *new creation*, couples with Scriptures’ beginning.

In the beginning, *God created*. In the Genesis work, our Triune God became so overwhelmed with the joy and love that he experienced within himself, that he became motivated toward expression in creating the cosmos and creature in order that they might join in that very same enjoyment. God’s creation was purposed then to experience him, glorify him and magnify his fame in loving him supremely. Adam and Eve in the Garden were to do this not only in celebrating God’s love *toward them* in *being like Him* (the *imago dei*) in worship, but they were to experience His love *through them* as they cultivated and kept the garden. They were to *serve and guard* the whole of God’s created world.

It was here that humanity experienced the presence of Christ as it permeated in perfection. This Edenic home was God’s design and *household* in which His family was to grow, multiply, and dwell. Humanity, as God’s family was then tasked with taking this *garden civility* and multiplying it outward to expand, adorn and fill the earth; as God desired to work alongside humanity to multiply His kingdom. In this multiplying effort, God, and humanity were to interlink in relationship to form a kingdom culture. Undoubtedly, what was to burst forth as a result of this was a robust culture, adorned with family and religion; full of arts and entertainment, business and government, and education. This *was* the utopia dream that God envisioned for His creation; that humanity would be *His people*, He would be *their God* and He would *dwell with them* in all and through all.

Sadly, the extent to which humanity enjoyed God’s culture was usurped in the Fall of mankind into sin—causing humanity to muddy the image of perfection that had been formed in them;

leading to shame and a feeling of unsafety in their once safe home. This put into effect the enactment of a predestined rescue mission by God toward his created world. God was going to redeem his people and his creation for they had fallen into a fragmented experience of his all-encompassing and universal presence and love.

And the story continued. Throughout the Old Testament, the fallen nature of man continued to innovate¹, and create out of their broken reality. The Old Testament is fraught with broken glass and cultural creativity that resulted in the formation of countless doomed governments, failed people groups, perverse religions, toxic family structures, untruthful communication, as well as the spread of disease into all spheres of the created order. The nature of humans had lost their enjoyment and their love in God, and out of this overflowed every thought of their mind, word of their mouth, and work of their hand. However, throughout the Old Testament, God remained faithful. Though humanity had begun to build a proverbial city of chaos, God would again restore, in His own creativity, his plan to sprout kingdom restoration within the highways and byways of humanities Babylon rebellion.

Through covenants given by God to men like Noah, Moses, and David, God's intention toward restoration and promise only elevated. His promises are continually accompanied by the language of agriculture (*garden reference*)—his people are to *be fruitful and multiply*. Continuous agricultural semantics speaks of humanity's call to be fruitful as that of a limb attached to a *vine*. God also proceeds to fill his people's days, weeks, months and years with feasts, seasonal rituals, gleanings, and offerings; reflecting an agrarian culture and way of remembering their beginnings. Not only this, but all human work is spoken of as awaiting and working toward the procurement of a *land*, a *seed* (that will crush the serpents head (Jesus)), and a *blessing*. The *seed* that began the first creation in a garden was going to once again expand in presence into the uninhabitable wilderness. The man Jesus, came in the New Testament as the *seed* in order to plant his blooded tears in Garden of Gethsemane; as he buckled beneath the weight of the world's sin only to have his heart pierced on the cross. This led to an overflow of forgiving cleansing over the entirety of creation. All this was to be the new *seed* of a new creation. Buried in the ground at his death,² Jesus thus replanted a *new* creation in which he would then restore and fill it all once again.

Jesus, now, in ascending to his throne, makes the earth his footstool. He is now at work to remake our home and to fill all things again³, as he *prepares a place* for his people in the now and the yet to come.⁴ Throughout the New Testament he calls all believers into this work, as we are referred to as his *new creation*.⁵ However, though God is at work redeeming his human creatures, the creation still groans and waits for the kingdom and its sons and daughters to be

¹ Gen 11

² Jhn. 12:24

³ Eph. 1:23

⁴ Jhn. 14:3

⁵ 2 Cor. 5:17

fully revealed.⁶ Thus, the deeds of Christians saved by faith become like innovative and creative explosions within the cosmos. The kingdom of God expands in and through his people by the power of the Holy Spirit, not by his followers merely knowing *about* him in *theology* (knowing him correctly is vital to right application), but by coupling that with knowing him, glorifying him and praising him, *in doxology* (right living in the image of his glory). The uniqueness that every believer carries—in their ideas, their Spirit-filled passions, their kingdom shaped desires—provides the taproot for beauty. Just like a fragmented humanity plowed its way into the waters of evil, which ultimately resulted in an innovated world structure that is typified by the rebellious city of Babylon in Revelation, believers now in Christ's sole work alone, now have the more supreme power of tapping into good in Christ. These means having the joy of watching their creativity, their art, and their innovation—in all realms of culture—spring up into a great nation—the *people of God*.

The Garden-City imagery of Revelation couples with the Genesis account in that God is working in and through his people to restore both creature and cosmos back to his original intent. A Holy God intends to dwell amidst a Holy people. This work is accomplished in worship as God's people experience his joy and love afresh, and it is multiplied as God's people go to *create* new culture as a response to this love.

Thus, redeemed humanity should not seek to return to the Garden of Eden, but rather to experience the final embrace between God's creation (the Garden) and the God-Man (Jesus) in and through his people (the Kingdom/City of God). As God's image bearers, humanity carries the civility of God in their hearts and churches. As temples of the Holy Spirit, God enraptures us again in his love in order that we may fully experience his joy and fulfillment. This Trinitarian culture in our hearts springs forth in a worldview and cultural perspective that seeks to transform how we steward all the realms of the created world. Creation is groaning that we would take this endeavor of kingdom innovation and stewardship seriously because all spheres of culture have experienced the cancerous leadership of our previous rebellion.

Therefore, all innovation is a creative work of worship *unto* God in worship, and *before* men in mission—that they would believe. We therefore wait for a Garden-City of God with better foundations⁷ that will last.⁸ God graciously partners with his people to take our kingdom-centered creativity, and cultivates in us and through us gardens of hospitality (e.g. in homes, businesses, offices, churches, streets etc.) as we spread the fragrance of Christ's culture into the toxic over flow of what man has created out of his own perverse heart. Though the transition of the New Jerusalem in Revelation incorporates all the treasured ideals of Eden, it is also a city. It is the colliding of both heaven and earth! The New Jerusalem, like a modern metropolis with its ruralism, incorporates within itself the idyllic Eden. **It is profoundly a Garden-City.**

⁶ Rom. 8:19-24

⁷ Heb. 11:10

⁸ Heb. 13:14

The City

God invented cities⁹ to be places of freedom¹⁰ and the apex of His redemption.¹¹ This is His purpose in building and establishing all civilization through His people on the earth. Throughout the Scriptures it is observed that the human heart drives the development of earthly civilization. Therefore if the human heart is corrupt so goes the city; if the human heart is pure, so goes the city. This produces a dichotomy as seen in throughout Scripture. On one hand, cities are obviously spoken of in the positive, as they are centers of spiritual growth and prayerfulness,¹² centers to proclaim the gospel,¹³ centers of music and arts, commerce and real estate,¹⁴ centers of manufacturing, trade and retailing, and the crux of technological advance and family building.¹⁵ They serve as centers for provision and wise leadership in which God chooses and instates people in which He can work through as gatekeepers and societal heads.¹⁶

In God's mind, cities are to be for refuge;¹⁷ as places representing mercy and justice—where people may be free from the “*avenger of blood*” until their case is fairly heard. Ezekiel also labels a city in its restored and purposeful sense to be known as; “The Lord is there.”¹⁸ The city is typified in Scripture as a place where God's presence dwells.¹⁹ Isaiah issues a similar pronouncement of blessing and presence after the restoration of God's broken humanity is to be completed in their heavenly home when he concludes: “*They shall call you the City of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.*”²⁰ God labels a city with His name, and even likens the life devoid of the city and His presence as being a life of wandering.²¹

We are to consider this positive outlook because cities produce and house community, and faith is by nature societal and communal.²² Thus, these potential centers for communal and mob repentance and revival²³ are to be places of God's prosperity; “*And this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I do for them. They shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it.*”²⁴ This is why Abraham looked and hoped for a city as his ultimate

⁹ Heb. 11:10

¹⁰ Gal. 4:26

¹¹ Rev. 21

¹² Acts 11:5

¹³ Acts 13:44

¹⁴ Lev. 25:29

¹⁵ Rev. 18:22-23

¹⁶ Gen. 41

¹⁷ Num. 35; Josh. 20

¹⁸ Ez. 48:35

¹⁹ Ps. 48:1-2

²⁰ Isa. 60:14

²¹ Ps. 107

²² Mt. 5:23-24

²³ 1 Sam. 4:13

²⁴ Jer. 33:9

end.²⁵ Whereas the cities of the world, as portrayed in Revelation as Babylon, are portrayed as a Harlot, God's city is portrayed as a beautiful and chaste bride who is adorned for her wedding day.²⁶ Because of this, we are to seek a city that is to come²⁷ and we are as God's people likened to a city;²⁸ and it is in this center that God longs to house His family and release the message of His life, death, resurrection, ascension and coming reign.²⁹

Because of the sinfulness of mankind, the city has also become an evil representation and creative outflow of our human hearts. After the Fall in the Garden, one of the first cities to be established is associated with Cain's murderous act;³⁰ which resulted in the further growth of human pride—climaxing in Genesis in the creation of the city at Babel³¹ and Sodom and Gomorrah.³² In regard to these types of cities, Prophets throughout the O.T. are negative about the city,³³ declaring it a place of bloody crimes and injustice;³⁴ a place of ambush and false leadership;³⁵ a place for wicked counsel;³⁶ a multiplier of sin and death,³⁷ of war,³⁸ of gossip,³⁹ of the demonic,⁴⁰ and of pride.⁴¹

Against these cities God is an adversary!⁴² God is roused to anger by these cities!⁴³ The climax of their end seems to come in Revelation 17:8 when Babylon rises to power; *"The woman that you saw is the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth."* Babylon typifies a city structure that reflects the human heart. Instead of growing up to worship and honor God, it becomes a hotbed for religious cults and false belief;⁴⁴ a center for depravation, ill council, and a place for Satanic works⁴⁵ --a place that breaks God's heart.⁴⁶

A Garden City

God's heart and aim is to lead rebellious people to repentance in order to restore the city.⁴⁷ To do so, Jesus had to be born into the very state of brokenness that His people faced. He was born in a city and ended in the anguish of the Garden of Gethsemane.⁴⁸ Jesus was tempted at the height of

²⁵ Heb. 11:10

²⁶ Rev. 21:2

²⁷ Heb. 13:14

²⁸ Mt. 5:14

²⁹ Mt. 27:53

³⁰ Gen. 4:17

³¹ Gen. 11

³² Gen. 18-19

³³ Micah 6:9-10

³⁴ Ez. 7:23, 9:9

³⁵ Judges 16:2

³⁶ Ez. 11:2

³⁷ Ez. 11:6

³⁸ Nah. 3:1

³⁹ Mt. 21:10

⁴⁰ Lk. 8:27

⁴¹ Amos 6:8

⁴² 1 Sa. 5:9

⁴³ Jer. 32:31

⁴⁴ Ex. 9

⁴⁵ Eph. 6:12

⁴⁶ Lk. 19:41

⁴⁷ Jon. 3:3

⁴⁸ Mt. 2:32

the city, and within the wilderness⁴⁹ and in refusing its false pleasures, He secured for humanity real and perfect joys. He Himself became a perfumed garden bringing new life to desolate places. He now builds a kingdom of His own on earth as it is in heaven.

The imagery of a Garden that flowers up and expands outward in order to cultivate and establish culture, is the image the Bible gives us in order that we may understand God's *Incarnational* mission out into the world. The world is *uninhabitable wasteland* in flesh, and God's *home* is a place of order and *hospitality*—like a fragrant garden of civility. This *home* and *haven* is where we are meant to reside in worship for all eternity. For now, God indwells us with a *deposit* of what's to come. He reaches to the ends of the earth to call believers into salvation, and to equip them with the Holy Spirit to teach and disciple the nations in a full-fledged mission to bring as many people *home* as possible.

Therefore, all of God's people—who believe in Jesus as their Savior and King—should view **innovation** and all **creativity** as intensely purposeful. What we do with God's energy coursing through us is we establish little gardens of worship and mission where we work and play. This is the original mandate that humanity was given in *taking dominion*. In the beginning God *created*; so now shall we! An overwhelming experience of God's love will cause humanity to worship the Lord in *looking like him*, but also in taking their gifts, talents, passions and uniquenesses and developing them into creative, inventive, and kingdom cultivated gardens that will enrich our world. These gardens *are niches carved out by redeemed and creative humanity, and cultivated in the various realms of culture; in arts and entertainment, business and government, education, and in religion and family. Once cultivated, these creative gardens begin to beautify the cities' harsh and chaotic landscape with ethereal, real, tangible, fragrant beauty and order—bringing it to life.* This is the vision of a redeemed people; a kingdom, and a people flourishing within a Garden-City.

Conclusion

Therefore, it is our conclusion that all humanity is made in the image of the Triune God. Our experience of his love will only drive us to worship him and be on mission with him in extending that love to others. Therefore, Garden City will begin by developing the skills of creativity and innovation in others. At this time it is limited to the production and fine arts, but our vision is to see a heart for discipleship permeate throughout what we do in a way that shapes people and shapes their talents in all facets of *being* and *doing*, so that in all realms of culture, a person may act out kingdom ethics. This is for the purpose that all may hear the *truth* of the gospel; that all may be baptized into the *life* and family of God, and that all might be disciplined in and along the *way* of life.

⁴⁹ Mt. 4:5