

# Turned Out of Eden

They were turned out of Eden - flaming swords at the entrance barring any return. For Adam and Eve, home was lost and what they faced outside the garden would never truly attract their souls again. Their new reality was horrendously challenging. He had to learn how to survive by growing food or searching for it. She faced monstrous insecurity, painful child bearing and they both endured bitter tragedies. Paradise became a pit, a sad parody of purpose.

He was turned out of Egypt - flaming tempers in Pharaoh's court barring any return. For Moses, home was lost and what he faced outside of Egypt was a desert wilderness. His new reality was humiliating. He learned to survive by chasing sheep and goats with a stick and fighting over precious water. Previous privilege became a parched corner of nowhere, a pitiful and constant reminder of his loss.

He was turned out of Jerusalem - flaming betrayals in his own family and inner circle of friends hot on his heels. For David, home was lost and what he faced in running away was disgrace, alienation and the threat of death from those he loved. He learned to survive by surrendering his own will to the Almighty. Potentate became a persecuted pawn, a pilgrim in his own land.

These and many other stories from the scripture, as well as our own experiences, affirm a powerful principle of God's plan for us in our earthly existence - pilgrimage. Someone once told me, "Everything, good or bad, is for a season." And that is terribly important for us to understand and embrace for at least two reasons.

First, ever since Eden, our hearts have longed for a real home, for the eternal security of God's presence and fellowship. We were created with that spiritual 'instinct'. However, everything in this life fights against and frustrates that God-given desire.

Second, our fleshly nature is always rooting itself in this world, thus drawing out from the soil of sin the deadness and dullness of Satan's desire. You see, both the spiritual and physical natures within us are ever intent upon their separate homes.

Thus, God's program for our preservation necessitates a pilgrimage, a sojourning, a constant trek of faith. And in this travel, He tells us that our inner man must look ahead in hope while our outer nature must repeatedly die. Neither one can truly satisfy its homeward goal in the here and now. In fact, the 'pot gets stirred', so to speak, every once in a while to remind us of this principle - loved ones die, jobs are lost, betrayal, bankruptcy and so on. Of course, that stirring up or turmoil that comes our way is part of the

warfare in which we've been commissioned to engage.

Generally, though, we are inclined in those times to dwell within the pain and discouragement of the moment and that's understandable.

However, if as a child of God, we are endeavoring to be spiritually minded, these disasters can and should serve to ultimately refocus our hearts upon the temporal nature of life here and the promises of eternal realities ahead. We mustn't let the trials of this life steal that hope away. Rather we must ever embrace the notion of pilgrimage.

When the patriarch Jacob was nearing the end of his tumultuous life, he stood before Pharaoh and said, "*The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years. Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life.*" (Gen 47:9) In fact all the saints before us have had this attitude. The scripture says, "*These all died in faith, not having received the promises but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a heavenly home.*" (Heb 11:13,14)

And there's the key; did you catch it? They saw the promises afar off and were thus assured. Friend, what are you looking forward to? A heavenly home? Like the faithful who have preceded us, can you 'see' it? The

promises are for pilgrims. Uttered by our Shepherd, they draw us on through the storms and trials, leading us home - back into the presence of God.

*Like a bride's dreams of sharing a home with her groom, our love for heaven should be overflowing and contagious, just as our love for God should be (Revelation 19:7). Our passion for God and our passion for heaven should be inseparable. The more I learn about God, the more excited I get about heaven. The more I learn about heaven, the more excited I get about God.*

*How it must wound the heart of our bridegroom to see us clinging to this roach-infested hovel called earth, dreading the thought of leaving it, when he has hand-built a magnificent estate for us, a place beautiful and wondrous beyond measure.*

*What's your attitude toward heaven, your theology of heaven? Does it fill you with joy and excitement? How much thought do you give to heaven? How often do you and your church and your family talk about it?*

*If you lack a passion for heaven, I can almost guarantee it's because you have a weak, deficient, and distorted theology of heaven. (Or you're making choices that conflict with heaven's agenda.) A robust, accurate, and biblically energized view of heaven will bring you a new spiritual passion. (Randy Alcorn)*

Now, the Bible does give us some clues about heaven. Let's consider them.

At the beginning, Eden itself was an earthly type or picture of heaven – God created it specifically as a place of wondrous fellowship with Him. Man didn't earn it or discover it – God placed him in it when it was complete. It was a place of innocence and beauty. In like manner, Jesus said, *"I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know."* (John 14:2,3)

When we are in heaven we will be like Jesus in many ways – David praised with confidence saying, *"I will behold your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with your likeness."* (Psa 17:15) John the apostle wrote, *"...we shall be like Him."* (1 John 3:2) In fact, in the course of receiving the Revelation, he twice mistakenly took a fellow believer in heaven to be Jesus and was corrected for worshipping in error. (Rev 19:10, 22:9)

We will also have new bodies – clothing, if you would, for our spirits that is made for eternity, and on top of that, new characters or natures. In fact, the scriptures promise that we shall know even as we are known. How wonderful that both of these gifts will be completely free from sin and death. (Phi 3:20,21; 1 Cor 15:42-44, Rom 8:23 and 1 John 3:2)

One famous author put it this way: *Think of perfect obedience to the Ten Commandments. Having no other gods before the Lord: Easy, we will be one with Him. I don't know about*

*you, but I would love to tiptoe alongside the ranks of the seraphim and harmonize as they constantly proclaim day and night, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty."*

*Jealousy? You and I will have nothing but admiration for whomever is selected to sit on the right and left hand of Christ.*

*Keeping the Sabbath? We will have entered God's seventh and final day, the Sabbath-rest of peace and joy for eternity.*

*Adultery? I will love everyone as perfectly as Christ loves, and I will never be grieved with the thought that I am slighted by those I love or that their love is not fully and fondly returned. I will find in every person that facet of the Lord's loveliness that only he or she can uniquely reflect – I'm going to be in love with a mountain of people, both men and women!*

*Coveting? We will be joint-heirs with Christ. We'll have everything.*

*Bearing false witness: The father of lies will be dead. The flesh will no longer entice us to lie. Only truth will spring from our heart.*

*Misusing the name of the Lord? Only praise will be on our lips.*

*Never a hurtful thought.*

*Oh, happy day, we shall have the mind of Christ!*

*And with the mind of Christ we shall "know fully." (Joni Eareckson Tada)*

There will be no more pain or sorrow but rather fullness of joy.

In all our existence, we have nothing to compare this with. We simply cannot imagine it. It's like asking a blind man to visualize the colors in a rainbow. Regarding this heavenly condition, we have all been born blind. Nevertheless, the promise will be fulfilled. God cannot lie and cannot fail.

The joyfulness, love and awe of heaven is not momentary or temporary but rather complete and yet ever expanding. We can see this modeled in the book of Revelation wherein those extraordinary beings (described simply as "living") who are closest to the throne of God and of the Lamb are continually overwhelmed with awe and thus are ever

proclaiming the holiness of our Lord. Again, our earthly mind cannot truly conceive of this dynamic and thus we tend to trivialize it.

In C.S. Lewis' Narnia stories, one of Aslan's creatures is departing that land for heaven and declares, "I have come home at last! This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now." That's simply because it is God who makes heaven what it is – paradise. It is His presence, His divine nature, His life, light, love, grace and goodness. All our pilgrimage here is passage from death and darkness unto the glorious presence of our living and life-giving Savior. It is a journey of faith in Christ. He **is** true. He **will** come. You will see.