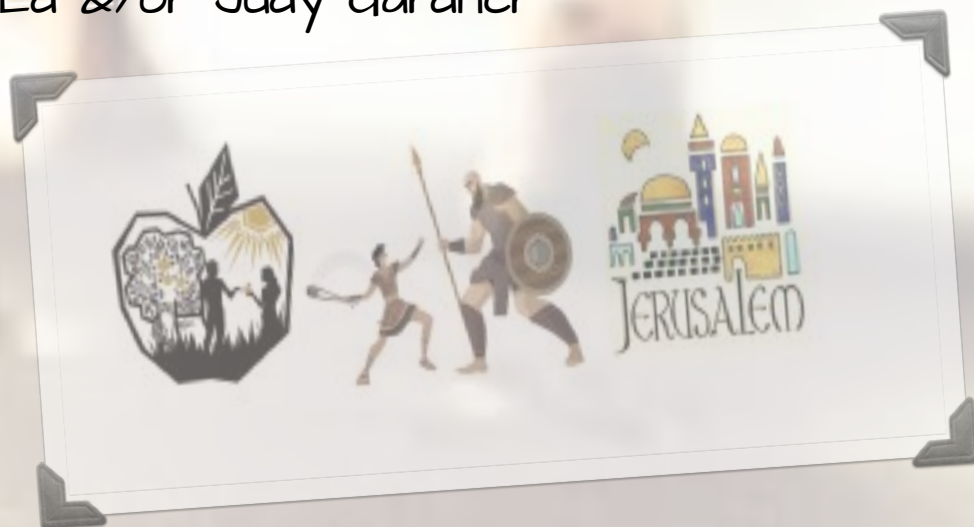


June 24-28, 2024 Edition

Following  
The Year<sup>(s)</sup> Of Jesus Part 130  
From Eden To Elah To Golgotha

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

\*\*\* These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

\*\*\*\* Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside](http://www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside)). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

**Monday Reflection:** This week we're going to be wandering WAY out in the weeds of the scriptures. What I mean by that is we're going to be talking about some things in the Bible that aren't spelled out in black and white (of if it was Jesus doing the spelling out I guess it'd be red and white). Instead we're going to be following what I think of as scriptural breadcrumbs that I believe the Holy Spirit left for us within the pages of the Bible that give us a hint or rumor of what God was/is up to without giving us all the details. God is famous for this kind of thing:

*Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things. 1 Peter 1:10-12 (NIV)*

As God's plan for redeeming mankind was being established He prophesied through the Old Testament prophets giving bread crumbs and hints about what He was up to in the world. The prophets couldn't figure it out (even though they tried). Even the angels weren't privy to the entire plan. The angels longed to look into what God was up to. Why? Why didn't the angels know? Maybe because if God brought the plan into the open too soon Satan would be able to figure out a way to throw a wrench into the whole thing? Maybe. We'll never know for sure but one thing is sure- God is very good at being ineffable. Now if you're like me and wondering what the word ineffable means here's the dictionary definition: too great or extreme to be expressed or described in words.

I'm guessing God is naturally ineffable just due to His eternal and omnipotent nature. But I think even if we could understand there are often times God is ineffable for other reasons. One of them just might be so that we have adventures to embark upon where we attempt to decipher the things we see that God is "up to" in the world. I think God loves it when we discover something that He's given us- whether in the scriptures or in the natural world. When we make a connection in the Bible that we've never seen before or when we take the natural resources of this planet and make something useful or beautiful I believe God is delighted. I know that when my son figures something out or does something impressive (which he does all the time) it delights me.

And so we're going to take some time this week and follow the breadcrumbs from the Garden of Eden to the Valley of Elah (where David slew Goliath) to Jerusalem and Golgotha (the place Jesus was crucified. And just for fun we're going to toss in a connection to heaven as well. Are these connections or breadcrumbs that we're going to be discussing absolute facts that cannot be debated. Not really. They all lead to absolute facts that cannot be disputed but the way we will get there might take some imagination and a willingness to set aside your skepticism as we discover a plan that even the angels wish they knew more about. As we finish up today's reflection let me leave you with the words of Jesus (uttered during the Last Supper but I think they apply to this journey through the scriptures from the first page of Genesis chapter 1 to the last page of Revelation chapter 22:

*Jesus replied, "You don't understand now what I am doing, but someday you will." John 13:7 (NLT)*

**Tuesday Reflection:** So let's start our journey from Eden to Elah to Golgotha (and don't forget Heaven) by picking up the breadcrumb trail at the creation of The Garden Of Eden. The 6 days of creation are over. God looks at everything that He created and He declares it "very good". That might not sound like high praise but in the Bible there is nothing better than good with one exception and that would be things that are very good. After the universe was created God got busy with His next project- a garden where He would place His dearly loved child:

Then the Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there he placed the man he had made. The Lord God made all sorts of trees grow up from the ground-trees that were beautiful and that produced delicious fruit. In the middle of the garden he placed the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Genesis 2:8-9 (NLT)

Sounds like paradise right? That's because it was. The important part for us when it comes to following breadcrumbs is to remember that there are two trees in the middle of the garden- the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. One tree was meant for Adam and one was not- at least not at first:

The Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. But the Lord God warned him, "You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden- except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die." Genesis 2:15-17 (NLT)

God warns Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Now if you're like me you're wondering, then why'd He put it right there in middle of the garden right next to the tree that God knew Adam would have to come back to again and again- the tree of life. I used to think it was because if there was going to be love then God had to give Adam the opportunity or ability to reject God's way. And while there is probably some truth to that I'm not wondering if it's because eventually God would have given Adam access to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. I mean, think about it- when God finishes with creation He declares that all of it is "very good". That must include the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It's not a bad thing so why does God tell Adam not to eat from it? Why does God tell Adam that if he does eat from that tree he'll "die"?

I want to suggest that it was because Adam wasn't ready for the knowledge of good and evil- yet. That tree was more than just a test for Adam (and eventually Eve)- it was a resource that eventually they would have been ready for but if they ate from it prematurely then death would be the result. It wasn't that the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil had to mature- it was Adam and Eve who needed to mature before being given that knowledge. I mean think about it- throughout the scriptures God tries to get us humans to discern between good and evil (usually with less than satisfying results). In the book of Galatians Paul compares the maturation of humanity with the maturation of an individual human:

Before the way of faith in Christ was available to us, we were placed under guard by the law. We were kept in protective custody, so to speak, until the way of faith was revealed. Let me put it another way. The law was our guardian until Christ came; it protected us until we could be made right with God through faith. And now that the way of faith has come, we no longer need the law as our guardian. Galatians 3:23-25 (NLT)

The word Paul uses there is literally "pedagogue". A pedagogue was like a tutor put in charge of a child and responsible for that child's education in all things pertaining to life. That's what the law was supposed to be for us. Something that would train us in discerning right from wrong- good from evil. It was always something we were going to have to learn. But just like there are things we need to teach our children there are some lessons we can't learn until we mature. I think that's what God was saying to Adam & Eve- you're not ready for that lesson yet. I don't think the prohibition to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was ever meant to be an eternal ban- it was simply a fast. A fast that would eventually be broken when Adam & Eve were ready for that lesson.

Tomorrow we'll look at what happens when the Serpent tempts Adam & Eve to take the knowledge that they just weren't ready for but maybe today we could spend some time reflecting on the idea that the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil was always something that we were going to be given access to eventually. And what did grabbing it before we were ready do to us- and to this good planet.

**Wednesday Reflection:** Today we pick up where we left off yesterday looking at what happened in the Garden of Eden. Adam (and eventually Eve) are placed in this paradise and the only rule is, don't eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat that fruit, God says, you will surely die. So what happens? They eat the fruit. Now we don't know exactly how long it took for them to eat the forbidden fruit. Could have been millennia but I doubt it. I imagine it was pretty quick- especially if my theory that God's intention was to allow them access to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is correct (if you don't know what I'm talking about stop and read yesterday's reflection then come back).

Once they eat the fruit God comes down and issues His judgments. He curses the Serpent and I always thought He cursed Adam & Eve too. But He doesn't. He does tell them how hard life is going to be from now on for them. He tells them there are consequences that they (and their ancestors like you and me- thanks a lot Adam & Eve!) will have to deal with. And God tells them that the curse that rightfully should have fallen on them was going to impact something else instead:

*Since you listened to your wife and ate from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat, the ground is cursed because of you. Genesis 3:17 (NLT)*

I believe that Satan thought that when Adam & Eve ate the fruit that they would immediately drop dead. I am guessing he was shocked and may have even screamed "not fair!" when God pulled a fast one and caused the curse that Adam & Eve had earned to fall on the creation instead. Why would God do that? Because He could never curse His kids. And it's at this point that God utters the first prophecy in the Bible- while speaking to the Serpent He says this:

*And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." Genesis 3:15 (NLT)*

Like I said, this is the very first prophecy in the entire Bible and we now know it's pointing straight at the cross. What is God saying? Basically He's telling Adam & Eve that they've just incurred a debt they could never hope to pay. So God says, I'm going to pay it for you. I'm

going to send a Rescuer- a descendant of the woman's. That Rescuer would have his heel struck by the serpent but in so doing the Rescuer would crush the head of the Serpent. By the way- did you know that when the Romans crucified someone that they put the nail not through the bony part of the foot but through the heel? It was more stable that way and more likely to hold the one being crucified in place. And this prophecy was made thousands of years before Jesus would go to the cross to pay the debt we humans could never have paid ourselves.

But that's not the end of our time in Eden today. After God issues His judgments He does something absolutely remarkable- He makes some clothes for Adam & Eve to cover their shame:

*At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.... And the Lord God made clothing from animal skins for Adam and his wife. Genesis 3:7 & 21 (NLT)*

In a stunning act of grace God covered their shame while at the same time showing them how costly that grace was going to be. I imagine it was the nicest set of clothes they would ever own. I wonder if they ever wore out? We will never know for sure but I know this- God covered their shame by sacrificing an animal to make clothes that would cover their nakedness. What kind of animal was it? We don't know but I'd like to think it was a lamb. And that every time they wore those clothes that God had provided them with they were reminded of the consequences of sin. God covered their shame even as He allowed them to deal with the consequences of their actions and in so doing pointed us once again to Jesus- a descendant of the woman Who would one day come to this earth and in a similar act of sacrifice would provide a much more permanent covering for our shame than mere clothes could ever provide.

Tomorrow we'll pick up the trail of breadcrumbs that leads us to the Valley of Elah (where David killed Goliath) but for today maybe spend some time reflecting on how God covered Adam & Eve's shame and how now He covers yours (and mine).

**Thursday Reflection:** So on Tuesday we began looking at Eden and how the breadcrumbs for our journey from Eden to Elah to Golgotha begins in God's perfect garden. Today we'll pick the trail back up in a little valley about 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem where a giant named Goliath was defeated by a little boy named David who was probably around 13 years old when the battle was fought. We looked in detail at that story last week so if you're curious about that story you can go back to the previous reflections and read all about it. For today's purposes we only need to look at what David did when he dropped that 10 foot tall giant with a rock from his sling. He walked over to where the fallen giant lay stunned and David took Goliath's sword and lopped off his head. And then we read this:

*David took the Philistine's head to Jerusalem, but he stored the man's armor in his own tent. 1 Samuel 17:54 (NLT)*

This is strange. Why did he want to keep Goliath's head? The armor I get. That was a very impressive trophy for the young boy. But the head? What's up with that? And why did he take the head to Jerusalem of all places? Sure, Jerusalem would become an important place

for the Jews in a few years when David captures the city and makes it his capital but at the moment that Goliath was killed Jerusalem was not a Jewish city- it belonged to the Jebusites who were enemies of the Israelites. So why did David take the head of Goliath there?

Great question. There's no way of knowing for sure. Jerusalem was about 6 miles from Bethlehem (where David lived). So maybe David had already had some run ins with the Jebusites from Jerusalem. Maybe he went to put Goliath's head on a pike outside the city walls to let the citizens of Jerusalem know that he was coming for them next. We'll never know (and I think it's more than possible that David didn't know himself why he was doing it but simply obeying the leading of God to do what he did) but we do know this- since Goliath was a gentile, his severed head would have been considered unclean. Therefore it would have had to be buried. So more than likely David buried Goliath's head outside the walls of the city.

And what we see in the story of David and Goliath is a sort of side quest in the midst of The Great Rescue. The story of the Bible is a series of side quests that together make up the much bigger story of the Bible (The Great Rescue where God will pay the debt incurred by Adam & Eve that they could never hope to pay themselves). Each of these side quests in some way are a metaphor for the much bigger story of the Bible. David and Goliath is no different. David is a metaphor for Jesus in the story- the unlikely hero who against all odds defeats the powers of evil. Goliath is a metaphor for the Serpent who tempted Adam & Eve. The big story of the Bible is this prophecy that God would send a descendant of Eve's who would crush the head of the Serpent. When David slays Goliath we see a story of micro-redemption that in many ways is a metaphor for the much bigger salvation Jesus will bring. And somehow the story of David & Goliath ends with David taking Goliath's head to Jerusalem.

There are so many other stories of micro-redemption that involve Jerusalem. We'll take a look at a couple of them tomorrow. Eventually David would capture the city and make it the capital of the united kingdoms of Israel. God would confirm that the city was His holy city and while David would want to build the Temple of Yahweh it would be his son, Solomon who would have that honor. Why all this talk about Jerusalem you ask? Because it ties in with the Garden Of Eden. Remember we're following breadcrumbs this week from Eden to Elah To Golgotha. So how far is it from Eden to Jerusalem? Well that depends on how you're measuring distance. In terms of years it's an eternity away. In terms of miles it may be closer than we've ever considered.

Have you ever wondered where the Garden of Eden was located? I once spent quite a bit of time and energy trying to map it out (LONG before google was around to give me hundreds of ideas to wade through). I finally realized that the flood would have completely changed the topography of the land of the Bible so the geography that is described in Genesis 1 and 2 would be useless in trying to figure out the location of Eden post flood. We may not be able to figure out where Eden was from the geography given us in the opening pages of Genesis but there are still some clues I think.

And I'm starting to wonder if it might have been located where Jerusalem now exists? The more I see the big story of the Bible the more I start to realize the importance of the hill upon which Jerusalem now sits. It will play a HUGE role in the life of Abraham, Isaac, King David and so many other stories in the Bible between David and Jesus. I mean, even the

beginning of the church will take place on that hill. But that's the not the last we hear of Jerusalem. In the book of Revelation when John is shown "what will surely take place" one of the last things he sees is this:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God... Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life.  
Revelation 22:1-2 (NLT)

Wait a minute- what is the Tree Of Life doing in the New Jerusalem? I thought the Tree of Life was in Eden. Remember- God didn't destroy Eden when Adam & Eve were evicted. He just made it unavailable to them. How? If Eden still existed somewhere on this planet wouldn't we have found it now that we've pretty much fulfilled the instruction to fill-the-earth? Not if Eden was in another dimension and when Adam & Eve were expelled they weren't sent to another geographical location but simply moved to another dimension. I don't want to get to Art Bell-sy with you (for those of you uninitiated in the ways of Art Bell and his radio talk show coast to coast you need to google this guy- he was like the X-Files meets... well reality. I was a regular caller on Art's show back in the 90s but I was finally barred from the show because I was always just calling to mess with the true believers- a story for another time I guess) but I'm wondering if our geography and Heaven's/Eden's geography aren't separated by miles but by a change of dimension. The Kingdom of God is described by Jesus as something that is "coming near". He once said that the kingdom is "coming" but not in a way you'll be able to see with your eyes because, as Jesus put it- the Kingdom of God is within you.

Let's get back to the connection between Eden and Jerusalem. The Tree of Life was in Eden. At the end when all is restored the Tree of Life will be in the New Jerusalem. Why? Maybe because Eden and Jerusalem are one and the same. We just can't see it- yet. It would make some sense of why this plot of land was so important to God. The Jews always believed Eden's location was where Jerusalem is. Even the veil in the Temple that separated the Holy Place from the Holy Of Holies (remember the one God tore from top to bottom when Jesus was crucified?) was decorated with imagery and symbols of Eden.

The ancient Christians also believed that Eden was located where Jerusalem sits today. If you go into the Church of the Holy Sepulcher you will find a massive cathedral that houses the place Jesus died and the place He was buried. Is it really the actual place of those two events that brought about the redemption of the world? Our guide in Israel sure thought so. Doesn't necessarily make it so but when we were inside that Church (by the way "sepulcher" just means tomb) and I was wandering around taking it all in (it's very much like the Winchester House in San Jose, California where the widow never stopped building on to her house and so it became one of the strangest places imaginable) I noticed something that was called the Omphalos. It literally means "naval" but it's use is to describe the center of something. Inside the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem is what is called the Omphalos of the world- the very center of this planet. The earliest Christians believed this was where the Garden of Eden was.

Ok, so what does all of that matter? Well we're following breadcrumbs this week, right? So far we've followed those breadcrumbs from the Garden of Eden to- the Garden of Eden! I mean, yes it's technically called Jerusalem today but it's my belief that they are in the same geographical location- it's just that Eden still exists in a different "dimension" or "reality". A dimension we can't yet see with our fallen eyes. But according to the scriptures on day when Jesus returns and sets everything right then we will see the New Jerusalem (which is a mash-up of The Garden of Eden and the holy city of Jerusalem). What we will be witnessing is the merging of the spiritual and the physical once again. Can I prove it? No but I hope you see how much evidence there is for this idea. Tomorrow we'll look at a few more micro-redemption stories that took place in this most holy of places where eventually the BIG story of redemption would take place. But for today maybe spend some time reflecting on why God would have David carry the head of Goliath to Jerusalem- we'll get to that in a couple of days.

**Friday Reflection:** Today we're going to look at a couple of these micro-redemption stories that take place in the place that once was called Eden and would eventually be called Jerusalem. I'm hoping that maybe we'll start to see just how important this place is to God. I know this is getting off the path a bit when it comes to tracing the breadcrumbs from Eden to Elah To Golgotha but consider this a bit of side-quest in the midst of our broader quest to follow God's breadcrumbs.

When God calls Abram to leave his home town of Ur (located in modern day Iraq) he doesn't really tell Abram where he's going to end up:

*The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your native country... and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others... All the families on earth will be blessed through you." Genesis 12:1-3 (NLT)*

Basically God says, "get moving and I'll tell you when you're there". The land God wants to show Abram is in modern day Israel. For some reason that piece of land was important to God but why? We'll get to that in a minute but many years after Abram arrives in the Promised Land (and after God changes his name from Abram [which means "father"] to Abraham [which means father of many] God asks Abraham to play a part in one of these micro-redemption stories. He asks Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. Now this is horrifying to us but it was business as usual for the religions of ancient Israel that existed when Abraham arrived the Promised Land. Everyone knew that the first born son was sacrificed to the gods. It's just the way it was.

So when Abraham hears God ask him to sacrifice Isaac it wasn't an unheard of request from a god- it's just that Abraham thought God was different than those other bloodthirsty gods that everyone was so familiar with. Abraham complies but we know from the rest of the scriptures that Abraham still believed God would fulfill His promise to Abraham (to become the father of a great nation with ancestors more numerous than the sand on the seashore) through Isaac. Maybe He'll stop me. Maybe He'll resurrect Isaac after I've sacrificed him. It's still horrifying but it wasn't an unusual request.



Some time later, God tested Abraham's faith. "Abraham!" God called. "Yes," he replied. "Here I am." "Take your son, your only son-yes, Isaac, whom you love so much- and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you." Genesis 22:1-2 (NLT)

What's important for the purposes of this reflection is where God sends Abraham. He sends him to the region of Moriah. Where is that you ask? It's where Jerusalem is. Now this is hundreds of years before David would fight Goliath but the city of Jerusalem (at that point simply called "Salem") was already there. Abraham takes Isaac and makes the 60 mile trip and another micro-redemption story plays out in this famous place. Isaac doesn't know what's happening- only that he and his father have come to this place to worship Yahweh. Abraham takes the jar with the fire in it and he loads the wood for the sacrifice on Isaac's back and they begin to climb a hill near the city of Salem. And in a staggering moment of foreshadowing we see Isaac carrying the wood for his own sacrifice up a hill that would become the holiest mountain in all of the world's religions. Three religions (Christianity, Judaism and Islam) all consider this hill to be one of the most holy sites on earth.

We don't have time to go through the entire story but God stops Abraham from sacrificing his son on that hill. Why all the drama if God was just going to stop Abraham at the last minute? Well I think it was more than just a trust test. It was an acting out of a much larger sacrifice that God's own Son would make thousands of years later (on that very same hill by the way). A sacrifice that would finally pay the debt incurred by humanity in the Garden of Eden. But I think the story of Abraham and Isaac was also so dramatic because God wanted Abraham's descendants to never forget this lesson- He is not like the other gods that the locals in what would become Israel knew. Child sacrifice was NOT something that Yahweh desires nor will He tolerate it from His people.

And the last of these stories of micro-redemption we're going to look at is the time God told David where to build the Temple of Yahweh. The Temple was a place where heaven met earth. It was the connection between this world that we reside in and the Kingdom of Heaven where God resides (and maybe where Eden is to this very day). David at this point has killed Goliath which made him the most famous person in Israel. He then joins the king Saul's court and serves the king who David already knows he will be replacing someday (David knows but Saul has no idea). Eventually David becomes a soldier in Saul's army and becomes the best soldier in the history of Israel. Eventually he becomes the greatest general Israel ever saw. And finally after Saul's death in battle David takes his rightful place as the king of Israel. Then he captures Jerusalem and makes it the capital of Israel. Some time after that God informs David of where His place of worship will be located:

Gad came to David and said to him, "Go up and build an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite." 2 Samuel 24:18 (NLT)

That's not a typo- it does say "Gad" and not "God". I was a tad confused myself. Turns out Gad is the prophet of God and if that sounds confusing to you just know that in Hebrew the name "Gad" would sound like it's spelled in English but the word for "God" sounds like Elohim so there wouldn't have been any confusion in Israel. So Gad tells David that God wants His altar to be built on the threshing floor of a man named Araunah. Where is Araunah's threshing

floor you ask? On the top of the very same mountain where the story of Abraham and Isaac played out. And what is a threshing floor? It's the place where farmers would bring their wheat to have it processed (in a sense). They would lay the wheat out on the threshing floor and run a huge stone over it to separate the valuable grain from the chaff (what we'd call straw today- which might be good for livestock but it's not fit to eat for humans). Why is it important that the Temple of Yahweh was built on top of a threshing floor? Because of something John the Baptist says to a group of priests from the Jerusalem Temple:

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire." Matthew 3:7-12 (NIV)

I never noticed this until it was pointed out during my visit to Israel back in 2020 (before the pandemic and thank God I went when I did or it might have never happened for me). The Temple of Yahweh was build on a threshing floor. When John says that the Messiah will be clearing His threshing floor it is a threat pointing straight at the Jerusalem priests (who called themselves Sadducees). The group that was most threatened by Jesus was not the Pharisees- although they did have their run-ins with Him- it was the Sadducees. And the Sadducees knew all too well what John was saying to them- the Messiah was coming to reclaim His temple and when He did the Sadducees would be in big doodoo (anyone else go back and read that sentence again in JarJar Binks' voice?).

Obviously this plot of ground meant something to Yahweh. Tomorrow (yes a Saturday reflection because I got so carried away with this Twilight-Zone-esque journey following the breadcrumbs that lead us from Eden to Jerusalem) we'll look at how the breadcrumbs lead us to Golgotha- the place of the skull but maybe for today spend some time reflecting on why this piece of real estate was/is so important to God.

**Saturday Reflection:** So this week we've got ourselves a Saturday reflections as well. Some deal, huh? Six reflections for the price of 5. Well you know what I mean. Today we will finish up (I hope) our week of following God's breadcrumbs from Eden to Elah to Golgotha. We've already followed those crumbs from the Garden of Eden to the Valley of Elah (where David slew Goliath) to Jerusalem (where David took the severed head of Goliath after the battle). We saw how those breadcrumbs all sort of led us in the direction of Jerusalem. Today we will get even more precise as we see those breadcrumbs lead us to the hill where Jesus was crucified- a place called Golgotha. When Jesus was sentenced to die He was led outside of the city walls of Jerusalem where He was to be crucified:

And they brought Jesus to a place called Golgotha (which means "Place of the Skull"). Mark 15:22 (NLT)

So the hill where Jesus was sacrificed was called Golgotha- or in Greek they called it Calvary. Why was that hill called Golgotha by the locals. Well nobody knows for sure- that story has been lost in the fog of history. All we know for sure is the word "Golgotha" was taken to mean place-of-the-skull (and Calvary is the Greek word for skull). But while the word Calvary is the literal word for skull the word Golgotha is not the literal word for skull in Hebrew. So why did they call it that? Some think that the hill must have looked like a skull in some way. That's possible but there's no indication in the Bible that was the reason. Some think it was because when the Romans got done executing someone they dumped their body over the edge of the cliff and there were so many skulls that it became known as the place-of-the-skull. But if that's the reason why wouldn't it be known as the place of the skulls? Or even the place of the bones?

Here's what I think- I think that it was referred to by the locals as the place-of-the-skull because that's where David buried the skull of Goliath. Let's break it down- the hill was called Golgotha. Whose skull was buried there? Gol(iath) of Gath. So ipso-facto the place came to be known as Gol-gotha. And don't let the fact that Golgotha has an "o" in that second part of the word and Gath has an "a". Transliterating Hebrew and Greek words into English is the process of taking a word that has no English meaning and simply sounding it out with English letters. When we say Golgotha it sounds very similar to when a Hebrew says it. And in Hebrew the letter that makes an "a" sound and the letter that makes an "o" sound can be used interchangeably. So the word "Gath" could've been pronounced as "Goth" or the word "gotha" could've been pronounced as "gatha".

There's no proving that it was called Golgotha because Goliath of Gath's skull was buried there but it's one heckuva breadcrumb don't you think? So they take Jesus to Golgotha and crucify Him there. When He dies there's a powerful quake:

*Then Jesus shouted out again, and he released his spirit. At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, rocks split apart, and tombs opened. Matthew 27:50-52 (NLT)*

Do you remember me talking about the Church of the Holy Sepulcher yesterday? It's a massive church (and one of the strangest holy sites in all of Israel if not the world) that is built around the site where many Christians believe Jesus was crucified and also the site where He was buried. There's a ton more involved in that one building and we'll get to another important location inside that church in a moment. If you go upstairs when you get inside the church you will find a chapel that surrounds the place where it is believed (again by many Christians but not by all) that Jesus was crucified. It is built around a rock that before the church was built was just a hill outside the walls of Jerusalem. In the middle of this hill runs a giant crack from an ancient earthquake. The crack runs all the way through the rock to another chapel located immediately below the Altar of the Crucifixion. What is the significance of the chapel immediately below the crack in the rock of Golgotha? A chapel where some believe the skull of Adam- the first man who together with his wife brought sin into the world- was buried. This is a story for another time but the theory is that when Jesus died and the rock split apart that His precious blood flowed down the cross into the crack and covered the skull of Adam. A sort of metaphor for what Jesus' sacrifice did in the spiritual realms. His sacrifice covered Adam.

Now this is where Goliath comes in. I want to suggest to you that the breadcrumbs lead us to this room where some believed Adam's skull was buried and to the idea that it's the same place David buried Goliath's skull. I know it's a lot to take in but can't you just see God setting all of this in motion with a smirk wondering if we'd ever figure out all the connections? I can. I may be WAY off base here but there's nothing in the Bible to contradict it and it would tie up so many loose ends. What would that mean if Goliath's skull was buried next to Adam's right below the place where Jesus was crucified? To answer that let's go back to the very first prophecy made by God in the Garden of Eden right after Adam & Eve had brought sin into this world:

*And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." Genesis 3:15 (NLT)*

Ok, so Jesus is the Rescuer who was prophesied to come and pay the debt Adam & Eve incurred on behalf of all humanity that we could never hope to pay. God says that He will send someone who will pay that debt for us. Adam represents, well, himself but also all of us who needed the debt relief that only Jesus could provide. But who does Goliath represent in this metaphor? Satan. The Serpent. Goliath was the enemy of the people of God. He was Satan's champion. In a way Goliath represented the seed of the Serpent. Remember that's the guy who will strike the Rescuer's heel and in so doing the Rescuer (the seed or offspring of the woman). When Jesus was crucified the Romans would have driven nails through His hands (they actually drove them in to the wrists because that was a more sturdy place to pin someone up on the cross) and then driven nails through His feet. But they actually put the nails through the heel for the same reason that they used the wrist. Jesus' heel was struck. But it wasn't a death blow:

*You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross. Colossians 2:13-15 (NLT)*

When I say it wasn't a death blow I should clarify. He did die. Just not permanently like Satan thought He would (which interestingly is the same thing Satan expected to happen to Adam & Eve). He had to die for a time because that was the debt Adam & Eve incurred when they rejected God's way and believed the lie that they were better off without Him. So Jesus dies for a time and when He does that same blood that (might have) splashed down through the crack in the rock to cover Adam's skull (might have) also covered the skull of Goliath. And in this amazing moment we see a metaphor for the prophecy that God made in Eden. The offspring of the Serpent struck Jesus' heel but Jesus crushes the skull of offspring of the Serpent when He dies. How? Well, not with His literal heel. I think the metaphor is pretty clear (if all this supposition is the way it actually happened which may not be but wouldn't it be cool if it was?). How does Jesus defeat sin, hell and death? Not with any weapons we've ever seen. He defeats Satan with His own precious blood. So when that blood pours down the cross and covers the skull of Goliath the imagery is pretty compelling. He crushes the

skull of the offspring of the Serpent not with weapons nor with His heel but with His own blood.

And here we reach a point in our breadcrumbs trail where we really need to stop. Truthfully I can't believe you've made it all this way with me, spending a week in the mind of Pastor Ed is not for the faint of heart so let's finish this up shall we? We've followed the breadcrumbs from Eden to the valley of Elah to Jerusalem to Golgotha. And along the way we even saw how the breadcrumbs led us to heaven itself and the New Jerusalem. So let's finish there- in the New Jerusalem because that's what all of this has been about- God redeeming humanity and making a way for us to once again be with Him forever in a perfect paradise. And this is one way the John describes that paradise in the book of Revelation:

I saw no temple in the city, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of sun or moon, for the glory of God illuminates the city, and the Lamb is its light. The nations will walk in its light, and the kings of the world will enter the city in all their glory. Its gates will never be closed at the end of day because there is no night there... Nothing evil will be allowed to enter... but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Revelation 21:22-27 (NLT)

Doesn't that sound amazing. I don't know exactly what it will be like but after the last few years (and especially the last few months) and all the health struggles I've had to deal with I'm really looking forward to the day when none of that will ever bother me (or you or my wife Judy) again. And now the final words of John's Revelation:

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come, and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life... He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen. Revelation 22:17-21 (NLT)