

Thesis: The Bible depicts God’s creative activity at the beginning of history as bringing life into a wilderness-like place—a space where the basic conditions for life are absent. Just as the creation narrative in Genesis moves from wilderness to garden—the Garden in Eden—so the narrative of Numbers portrays God bringing Israel into the wilderness in order to reenact creation itself. In the book of Numbers, God brings structure, order, and a garden-like dwelling—the Tabernacle—into a space otherwise uninhabitable and hostile to human life.

Biblical Echo

“An allusion or echo occurs when a later biblical author intentionally uses language, imagery, or concepts from an earlier text in a way that presupposes the reader’s familiarity with that earlier context.”

— G.K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, p. 31

“An echo is an intentional but indirect reference to an earlier text that is not formally introduced as a quotation yet contributes meaning through intertextual association.”

— Christopher Beetham, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians*, p. 23

Echo 1: Genesis 1 and the Wilderness Before God’s Speech

- The wilderness is described using language associated with the pre-creation world—*tobū*.
- *tobū* = formless, waste, nothingness, (sometimes translated “chaos”)
- *vohū* = void, emptiness
- Deut. 32:10 = the term *tobū* is used to describe the wilderness as a wasteland.
- Jer. 4:23 = The Kingdom of Judah, a developed city, becomes *tobū* and *vohū*—undeveloped and uninhabited—because of God’s judgment. To be in a state a *tobū* is to be in a state in which God has not yet brought life.

Echo 2: Genesis 2, Dry Land, and the Wilderness

Genesis 2:5; 1:2	Jeremiah 2:6
No Water	Land of drought
No Adam	Where no man dwells
Darkness was over the face of the Deep...	Land of deep darkness

Summary: The wilderness represents a return to pre-creation conditions—a place where the basic requirements for life are absent until God intervenes by speaking, watering, and placing humanity within it.

The Garden in the Desert

Numbers depicts God planting a garden in the wilderness—the Tabernacle—just as He planted a garden in the formerly barren dry land in Genesis 2.

The strongest evidence comes from the echoes of the Garden of Eden in later texts about the Tabernacle.

Echoes 3 & 4: Three-room World and Dry Land with Graded Holiness

- The cosmos: waters above the earth, the earth, waters below the earth.
- Tabernacle: Most Holy Place, Holy Place, Courtyard
- Cosmos: God's House
- Tabernacle: God's House
- Dry Land: Garden, Eden, Outer Lands (graded holiness)
- Tabernacle: three spaces (see above) with graded holiness

Echo 5 & 6: Eastern Entrance and Guarded Access

- Both the Garden and the Tabernacle are entered from the east. (Gen. 3:24; Num. 3:38)
- Cherubim woven into the Tabernacle's curtains visually recall Eden's guarded entrance.
- Movement eastward consistently signals exile from God's presence.
- Movement westward signals return into God's dwelling.

Echo 7: God Walks There

- God walks in the Garden of Eden. (Gen. 3:8)
- God walks in Israel's camp and the Tabernacle (Lev. 26:12; Deut. 23:14)
- God walks where He dwells; both Eden and the Tabernacle function as sanctuaries.

Echo 8: Household Attendants and Sacred Service

- Adam is placed in the Garden "to work and keep it." (Gen. 2:15)
- These same verbs describe the Levites' duties at the Tabernacle. (Num. 3:8)
- Adam functions as the first priest; the Levites continue that priestly vocation in Israel and in the new "garden" of the Tabernacle.