

Prayer

Your peace comes to us wherever and whenever we turn to You, Living Lord. Even when our hearts are tired and weary, and we have fought with the enemy during the trials of the day, we turn to You and take refuge in Your love, Your justice and Your mercy. You are always at our side, Living Lord, waiting to grant us Your peace. We praise You, God of all power and love. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Barak Obama

Pray for all those who are forming the new government of the US under the direction of Barak Obama. Pray for wise and godly counsel in places of power and influence.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for deprived people of the world whose voices are not heard*
- *Give thanks for the skill of pilots and the safety of travel by air.*
- *Pray about the difficult relationship between money and sport*

Meditation

(Some thoughts about blessing derived from scriptures)

Blessed are those who do God's will
In the ups and downs of everyday life,
And in all manner of demanding circumstances.

Blessed are those who bless those who hate them;
who cherish and nurture their families;
who stand firm within God's Church;
who honour the Lord with their words;
whose eyes dwell on what is good;
who bless and protect little children;
who find fullness of life with the Lord;
who face their last days with their Lord;

For in following the Lord's example,
Ours is the joy, through good times and bad
Of knowing that His Kingdom will come.

Bible Study - Genesis 2:8-17

⁸ Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and He put there the man he had formed. ⁹ Out of the ground the LORD God made a variety of trees grow which were good to look at and good for food, and in the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰ A river rises within Eden which waters the garden, and from there it divides to become the source of four streams. ¹¹ The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; ¹² the gold of that land is good, and it has precious stones and tree resins. ¹³ The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole

land of Cush. ¹⁴ The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and settled him in to the garden of Eden to tend it and keep watch over it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, 'You may eat what you want from every tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for on the day you eat of it you are doomed to die.'

Review

Today's passage reads rather like a sandwich! To begin with, we read about the garden planted by the Lord in Eden 'in the east' (2:8), and principally His planting of trees there. Two in particular are worthy of note and are presented as having symbolic interest; they are the 'tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil' (2:9). At present, we know nothing more about these trees, except that they are 'good to look at and good for food'. After this come a separate paragraph which describes the location of the garden in what appears to be elaborate detail (2:10-14). Then lastly, we are told that the Lord God settles the man in the garden with two instructions, firstly to look after it (2:15), and secondly, not to eat of the fruit of the second tree, the 'tree of the knowledge of good and evil', on pain of death (2:17). This, as we know, becomes a matter of contention in the next chapter of Genesis!

The location of the Garden of Eden We will pick up the matter of the trees again where they are mentioned next in Genesis, but for today, the main issue is the location of the Garden of Eden, which is one of scripture's great mysteries. The story would have rolled along admirably from the description of the trees planted in the garden (2:9) to God's instructions about what to eat and what not to eat (2:15-18). However, the description of the garden's location interrupts the story with five deeply mysterious verses, which appear to give us details about where Eden is located (2:10-14)!

Traditional suggestions Our difficulty is this: we know all about the last two rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, but we do not appear to know anything of the other two or the strange way they are all described as arising from the same source (2:10). It is easy to suggest that these verses are either mythical or represent some ancient mysterious and unfathomable code. Scholars have laboured with this for centuries and have come to various conclusions, including theories that identify these rivers with the Nile or the Ganges. As well as this, they have been interpreted allegorically, for example as the wealth of the land (2:11,12) representing the riches of the Sudan, and possibly even the gifts brought to the Christ Child (Matt 2:11).

Recent archaeology However, it is difficult to escape the feeling that these verses really are an ancient geographical map; they do not read like myth or symbol. It is very helpful, therefore, that recent archaeological work has shed new light on this. According to recent research, Eden can be identified from this description as a region of land on the borders of Iran, Armenia and Turkey, between Lakes Van and Lake Urmia. Unearthed ancient maps and tribal stories of that region locate all the features of the story, moreover, this region of the world was believed by many ancient civilisations to be the source of civilisation, and the 'seat of Gods'. In the full version of this Bible study, there is a complete description of the archaeology that lies behind this assertion, and in the shorter (weekend) version, there is a paragraph on this appended to the 'download' for your interest. Because the archaeological issues involved, it is important that you have access to the research conclusions to make up your mind about this.

The meaning of all this is simple; the Garden of Eden where Adam was placed by God is not mythological! Whilst the first story of Genesis still sits awkwardly with science as we know it, and a Christian must take care not to misunderstand either science or theology, The same is not true of the second story. Here in Genesis 2, the story is in fact quite precise; it fits with some facts that an archaeologist can explore, and if we accept this, it prevents us from trying to make something out of these verses that they were not intended to be!

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Is the Garden of Eden truly in Iran? Discuss what you think of the theory proposed in this study. Is it worth pursuing?
2. Does the idea that we can locate the Garden of Eden make you want to visit the area, or not? Can you give the reasons for your answer?
3. What do you think the tree of the knowledge of good and evil means?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I do not know whether the theories of archaeology we have used here will one day achieve acceptance; it may take some time because they are so radically different from what has been accepted in the recent past. That is why I have described them here within my own work. It is difficult for anyone who finds it hard to read scholarly books to engage with the issues I have presented today. Sometimes you have to accept things from people and trust their judgement because you are not in a position to weigh it up for yourself. That may be so, but it is always good for us to keep our minds prayerfully open to things which help us interpret scripture, from whatever source they come.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Try looking up the theories about the Garden of Eden by using Google and the words 'David Rohl' (the archaeologist) and the 'Garden of Eden'. Have a look at what is said, and the debates that are taking place. Remember that most people who comment on these things are protecting their own understanding of things, so be careful about what you accept as 'truth'.*
- *Pray for the church, and for the people of the church who find it hard to watch on the sidelines as scientists and archaeologists debate what is to them, precious. Pray that archaeology will accept that it does have a role in using the Bible to examine the truth about ancient history.*

Final Prayer

We give our thoughts and feelings to You, Lord Jesus. We ask You to help us make sense of all that is going on in our lives, and give us a Godly perspective on ourselves, our homes and families, and our work. Then, Lord Jesus, help us live in the light of Your guidance. AMEN

ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE GARDEN OF EDEN

As we explore all this, it is not the truth of God's Word which is at stake, but our understanding of it. Those who have read widely will recognise from my opening remarks that I will be talking about theories of the secular archaeologist David Rohl, whose book 'Legend, the Genesis of Civilisation' has been largely dismissed by modern theologians. As someone who was once a scientist myself, I find the arguments David Rohl presents about the Garden of Eden and its location, to be fascinating. We shall discover later that he also has much to say about the historical reality of Adam; a theory we cannot ignore! These archaeological studies help us understand much about the Bible which we have previously found almost incomprehensible, and they can be very helpful.

David Rohl is the only acclaimed scholar who has worked to try and investigate the ancient sources of civilisation using the Bible as a worthwhile historical document. His work contains far fewer loose presumptions than the majority of theological work on Genesis available today from scholars who have long since dismissed the Old Testament as something which reflects real ancient history. Evangelical scholars have naturally found his work of more interest than mainstream Biblical scholars.

The first chapter of David Rohl's book outlines research which gives the identity of the Garden of Eden by finding the historical origins of the two other rivers, the Pishon and the Gihon.

The four rivers

Firstly, we should look carefully at the Biblical text itself and what it says. If we do this we will soon discover that the location of the 'Garden' is twofold. Literally, it is 'to the east', either 'of' or 'to' a region called 'Eden' (Gen 2:8). We therefore reckon that Eden is a large region and the garden is a smaller area towards the east of this region. This, of course, is hardly relevant if you are looking at these verses to find mythological or symbolic truth, but if we are to follow it geographically, it is important.

Now, to try and find the whereabouts of Eden, we must look for the source of the four rivers mentioned in Genesis (2:10-14). With complete geographical confidence we can say that the rivers Euphrates and Tigris arise in mountainous regions to the far northeast of modern Iran, just south of Armenia. If we go back in time before the modern division of States, the region was generally called Armenia, and the mountain ranges from which these rivers come contain the lakes Urmia and Van, which you can find on any map. The problem is then to try and identify the other rivers; Pishon and Gihon. David Rohl describes how this region of Armenia now in Iran has ancient maps, local legends and linguistic histories which link these two rivers with those now called the Kezel Uizhun (Pishon) and the Aras (or Gaihun, hence Gihon). They arise near Lake Urmia and flow toward the Caspian Sea. You will have to read the book to discover how he gets from 'Uizhun' to 'Pishon', and from 'Gaihun' to 'Gihon', but if you have ever gone into an old church in England and tried to read the inscriptions from a few hundred years ago, you will easily see how language changes over the years with words retaining similar sounds, but altering in the way they are spelt!

From all this it looks very much as if the Garden within Eden we are looking for is indeed in Armenia, somewhere near Lake Urmia. David Rohl's book digs further and deeper, and comes to the conclusion that the Garden can be identified as a valley of the Adji Chay river which flows down from a mountainous range to the east (significantly) of the region we are discussing, into Lake Urmia. What is interesting is that the general region of Lake Urmia contains the headwaters of the four rivers in Genesis 2! All this accurately fits the strange wording of Genesis 2:10 which has puzzled translators for years because it does not sound right, geographically. The words of verse 10 really do mean that in the region of Eden there is a river which waters the garden and divides to make four rivers, just as with the Adji Chay river and the mountainous regions of Armenia around Lake Urmia!

David Rohl goes on to identify the ancient records which tell us of the mining of gold in the regions around the Kezel Uizhun river (Pishon) and the distinct possibility of the name Havilah being connected with this region, now known as Anguran. The mineral wealth of this area between Lake Urmia and the Caspian Sea also accounts for the description of items of wealth associated with the Kezel Uizhun (Pishon) river, including bdellium which is an aromatic tree resin prized for its scent and use in ornamentation). Finally, he identifies the land of Cush as a nearby region of Azerbaijan which contains the river Gaihun (Gihon) to the north of Anguran.

All this fits well, and whilst scholars will debate all this for a long time yet, it is good for us to know that independent archaeological research yields this information which is so close to our Biblical account. We can still rejoice in the fact that the Bible talks of rivers frequently as symbolising life and the gifts of God (see Ps46:5, Ez47:1-12), and the fact that the word for 'precious stone' in verse 12, otherwise called 'onyx' is the same word used for the stones upon which the names of the tribes of Israel were engraved in the High Priestly vestments of Aaron (Exodus 25:7, 28:8). However, the reality of David Rohl's work prevents us from being too carried away by mythological explanations of the four rivers!

The real 'Garden' of Eden is therefore identified by David Rohl as a beautiful and secluded valley of the river Adji Chay in the general region of southern Armenia but actually within what is now part of Iran. There may be value in going there to look at it, but as we read the Biblical account, the power of what God did there is not something that we can tap into just by turning up at a place. It lies in what we believe about God and people. If what I have presented is anywhere near the truth of the matter, what God did there was unique, just as what happened in Bethlehem when Jesus was born was unique, or on Golgotha when He died uniquely, for us and for our salvation.