



Back to Eden!

A Re-examination of the Call of Abraham
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When God asked Abraham to leave his home and country (Gen 12), he sent Abraham to a rather forsaken corner of the then-known world. Why Canaan? Why not Europe or China or India? Why not Turkey or Ethiopia? To compound this further, why is Bible history limited largely to the world we now refer to as the Middle East? Paul's forays into Greece are the only examples of Bible history played outside the Middle East. Why is this so?

I believe the answer may be more of a surprise than we imagine. In this study I will offer certain possibilities as a way of finding answers to such questions. These suggestions are difficult to prove empirically but they do provide a plausible solution.

However, we need to travel back in time, all the way to the beginning. When God created humans, he also provided a home for them. Gen 2.8 states that God 'planted a garden in Eden and placed the human there'. Eden was not the name of the garden but the locale where the garden was situated. There are detailed descriptions of this locale but we shall concern ourselves with only one item, the rivers.

There was a single river with four major tributaries (Gen 2.10 ff):

- Pishon which flowed through Havilah. The eponymous name Havilah is associated in Gen 10 with both Ham and Shem's descendants. However, the identification of Ishmael's territory in Gen 25 and the location of the Amalekites in 1 Sam 15 points to the north-western region of the Arabian peninsula. This is a possible reference to the Jordan river which would later be upended by the Dead Sea.
- Gihon which flowed through Cush. This is the Hebrew Bible designation for Ethiopia, parts of Sudan and Egypt, or the upper Nile region. Perhaps, Gihon is the Nile river.
- Hiddeqel flows through the land of Ashur. We know Hiddeqel is the Tigris because Ashur is Assyria.
- Parat is the fourth river and it is the Hebrew name for Euphrates.

We should admit that the topography of the world changed substantially after the Flood, but the mention of these particular rivers is almost like satellite mapping of ancient buried cities such as Angkor. These names provide a rough post-flood location for Eden and therefore the Garden.

To pursue this further, we should look at the migration patterns of the post-deluvian races. Gen 10-11 paint a picture of initial resistance to God's will to populate the earth followed by an enforcement of that plan. Noah's descendants migrated from the Ararat mountains, the northern limits of biblical lands, to the plains of Shinar, the area between Tigris and Euphrates. In direct opposition to divine will, they built a city, Babel (later known as Babylon) and tower, most likely the Babylonian Ziggurat (a step pyramid).

At the Tower incidence, God forced the peoples to move and spread out. Japheth's descendants moved north and west to the regions we now call Russia and Europe. Ham's descendants moved south to the Arabian peninsula and Africa. Shem's descendants remained around the Middle East and moved east a bit, populating most of West Asia.

Another clue to consider concerns the city of Jerusalem. We first encounter this city in the Melchizedek episode of Gen 14. Melchizedek appears mysteriously in the story and disappears the same way. The mystery

surrounding Melchizedek caught the full attention of the author of Hebrews who saw him as a proto-type Christ (Heb 7). Melchizedek is described as King of Salem (Jerusalem's ancient name) and priest of El-Elyon (God Most High). Two things happened in this narrative: Melchizedek blessed Abraham and Abraham returned tithe to Melchizedek. Clearly, Melchizedek was accepted and acknowledged as God's representative by Abraham.

In later history, Jerusalem would become the political and spiritual centre of Israel when David finally conquered the city and made it God's home. David thought that building a Temple would establish a permanent home for God, whereas Ps 132.13-18 assures its readers that it is Jerusalem which God chose as his home and David was honoured because he did this for God. From this point onwards, Jerusalem became the fulcrum of God's kingdom, literally and spiritually.

That brings us to Abraham. He grew up in Shinar, in the Mesopotamian city of Ur. His clan migrated north along the Shinar to Padan-Aram in modern day Syria. While in Padan-Aram, God appeared to Abraham and asked him to move on to a new locality which God would reveal (Gen 12). Abraham's migration covered the Shinar, Syria, Canaan and even Egypt.

Eventually, Abraham settled in Canaan. Once this had happened, God re-appeared to Abraham and drew up the boundary of his territory (Gen 13.14-17; 15.17-21; 17.8). Chapter 15 provides the limits of the 'land' given to Abraham: 'I will give this land, from the River of Egypt until the great river, the River Parat'. That is, from the Nile to the Euphrates, basically the entire Middle East or the equivalent of the land of Eden (see the map).



The call of Abraham was not an ordinary event or one of mere historical significance. Abraham was given a new name since he was to become the father of many nations (Gen 17.5) and the father of faith (Rom 4.11 ff.). Abraham was the designated 'second' Adam and his mandate was to take God's people home, back to Eden (or thereabouts).

In relocating Abraham to the general vicinity of Eden, God showed that Eden was never far from his plans. Combined with the choice of Jerusalem as centre and home of Yahweh, Bible events were played out (despite topographical upheavals) at the very site where the first humans lost their home. In a manner of speaking, with Adam it was paradise lost, whereas with Abraham it was attempted paradise regain. The plan very nearly succeeded except for the uncomfortable reality that humans are and will always be unpredictable.

Ultimately, God himself through Jesus had to enter the arena and do what both Adam and Abraham had failed to do, bring God's people back to Eden. The story is that much sweeter because the theatre was and still is Eden. Even in the new creation (see Isa 65-66 and Rev 21-22; also Zech 14) it is in the locale of Eden that the final acts of God will occur and a new earth is created.

So, when God called Abraham to leave his home, he was really saying, 'Abraham, time to go home!'

BARUKHIM HAVA'IM (Welcome)
SHALOM ALEIKHEM (Peace to you)