

Searching for Paradise

(Genesis 2:4-17)

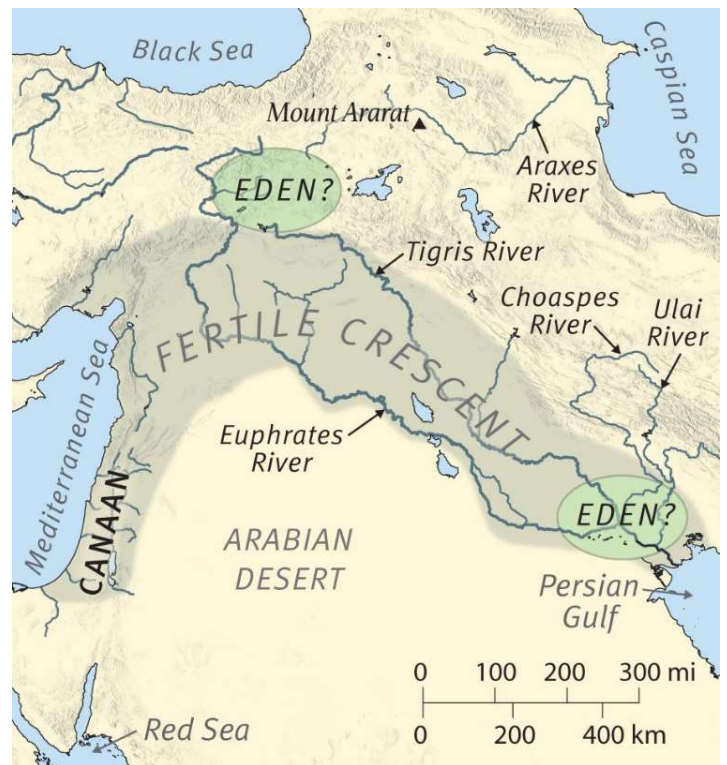
Where Was Eden?^{1 2}

The mystery of the garden has invited incredible fancies. When **Christopher Columbus** passed the mouth of the Orinoco River in South America, he surmised that its waters came down from the garden of Eden. Of course, he thought he was on the east coast of Asia.

Nineteenth-century author **W. F. Warren** outdid everyone by locating Eden at the North Pole! He contended, "In northern Greenland and in Spitsbergen abundant remains of fossil plants show that during the middle of the Tertiary period the whole circumpolar region manifested a climate similar to that occurring at present in southern Europe."

But the most exotic assertion came from the great British General **Charles George Gordon**, who fought in the Crimean War and then in China where his exploits earned him the popular title "Chinese Gordon."

...Gordon was also a devout student of the Bible. His answer? The Garden of Eden was located on one of the one hundred beautiful islands in the Indian Ocean that make up the Seychelles. Specifically, he pinpointed the location of the garden in the valley of Mai on Praslin Island. As one British officer quipped, "Whether Chinese Gordon was right or wrong, **you must admit that Eden should have been there.**"



Responsible guessers place it in Mesopotamia near the head of the Persian Gulf. But it was so long ago, we cannot be sure. We must allow for topographical change like what might have come from the great flood.

¹ Map taken from Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 54.

² Written material from R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 53.

The location of Pishon and Gihon are not known to us today. Perhaps they dried up. "Analysis of sand patterns in Saudi Arabia and satellite photography have helped identify an old riverbed running northeast through Saudi Arabia from the Hijaz mountains near Medina to the Persian Gulf in Kuwait near the mouth of the Tigris and Euphrates."³ Today it is called *Wadi al-Batin* (or the Kuwait River). This river is believed to have dried up between 3500-2000 BC.

1) **The Wealth of Paradise (2:4-14, 16)**

The tree of life probably refers to a tree of youth that extends and sustains life, not instantaneous immortality from a single bite. Perhaps this means that mortality could be held at bay by the regular eating from this tree. Thus, when God punished Adam and Eve, He refused access to the Garden of Eden, and they ultimately died.

2) **The Worship and Work of Paradise (2:15) (Gardener and Guardian)**

The work of agriculture or farming has been a major, if not the major, labor occupation in world history until just a few centuries ago. Yet, it would be wrong to restrict the author's intention to only this type of work. As Westermann has said, "It can be said that every human occupation shares in some way in this 'tilling and keeping.'" Paradise was not a life of leisure.... [M]an's labor in the garden is indeed a kind of divine service, for it is done for God and in his presence.⁴

"**tend and keep**" could be translated as "**worship and obey.**" G. K. Beale writes, "It is true that the Hebrew word usually translated 'cultivate' can refer to an agricultural task used by itself (e.g., 2:5; 3:23). When, however, these two words (verbal [*avadh* and *shamar*] and nominal forms) occur together in the Old Testament (within an approximately 15-word range), **they refer either to Israelites 'serving' God and 'guarding [keeping]' God's word (approximately 10 times) or to priests who 'keep' the 'service' (or 'charge') of the tabernacle** (see Num 3:7-8; 8:25-26; 18:5-6; 1 Chr 23:32; Ezek 44:14)."⁵

3) **The Warning in Paradise (2:17)**

Literally, "in dying you shall die." One scholar paraphrased it, "When you eat of it, you will be sentenced to death and therefore doomed to die."

The fruit could be understood as giving ... "moral discrimination, moral responsibility, and moral experience. Of these possibilities, the last is the most likely: by their obedience or disobedience the human couple will come to know good and evil by experience. Experience gained by "**fearing the LORD**" (Prov. 1:7) is wisdom, while **that gained by disobeying God is slavery.**"⁶

Application Points:

- 1) **Thank God for His provision in your life.** Instead of thinking about what you do not have or what God has refused to bring into your life, thank Him for all His blessings.
- 2) **Appreciate your work as a gift from God.** Work is not part of the curse and is not the result of the Fall. We are meant to "cultivate the garden" in our sphere of influence.
- 3) **Realize the severity of obeying and disobeying God.** When God says "no", He is saying, "Don't hurt yourself!" God's way is always best.

³ John Walton, *Genesis, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 168-169.

⁴ Kenneth D. Keathley and Mark F. Rooker, *40 Questions about Creation and Evolution* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2014), 106.

⁵ As quoted in *ibid.*, 102-103.

⁶ *ESV Study Bible*, 54.