

Holy Place: Canaan and Eden

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Abraham’s Call to the Promised Land

Abraham’s call to the Promised Land helps us understand the place of God’s kingdom in at least two ways: first, we will see that God called Abraham and Israel to serve him at the original center of his kingdom; second, we will see that God called Israel to extend his kingdom beyond that original center. Let’s look first at the idea that God called Abraham and his descendants to serve him at the original centerpiece of his kingdom.

Original Center

As we have seen, the original center of God’s earthly kingdom was Eden. Unfortunately, many interpreters have wrongly believed that Eden was in Mesopotamia. So they also mistakenly believe that Abraham actually left the vicinity of the Garden of Eden in order to move to Canaan. But Scripture draws a very close connection between Abraham’s Promised Land and the land of Eden.

In reality, God called Abraham back to the vicinity of the Garden of Eden, rather than away from it. Listen to the way God described the boundaries of Eden in Genesis:

“A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah.... The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. The name of the third river is the Tigris ... and the fourth river is the Euphrates” (Genesis 2:10–14).

Four rivers formed the boundaries of Eden: the Pishon and Gihon, which are associated with the lands to the southwest in the area of northeastern Egypt, and the Tigris and Euphrates to the northeast of Canaan.



These geographical references are important to us because the Promised Land had similar boundaries. In Genesis chapter 15 verse 18 we read these words:

“To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great Wadi, the Euphrates” (Genesis 15:18).

Now, most interpreters agree that the “river of Egypt” is not the Nile but one of the smaller rivers in northeastern Egypt. But whatever the case, we can see that God promised Abraham land that was bordered by the Euphrates in the northeast and Egypt in the southwest, and as we have seen, the Promised Land’s geographical boundaries reflect the boundaries of Eden.

(Notice also how Scripture describes the borders of Israel’s kingdom at the time of its height, in 2 Chronicles 9:25:

*“[Solomon] ruled over all the kings from the Euphrates River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt.”*¹

Although some questions remain about how closely we should associate Canaan with Eden, it is at least clear that when God called Abraham to Canaan, he called him back to the area where Adam and Eve first served God.

So, just as Eden had been established in the very beginning as the centerpiece of God’s presence on Earth, after the failures of the primeval history, God called his special servant Abraham back to the geographical center to begin rebuilding the kingdom.



¹ Editorial addition.