

GOD'S GUARANTEE STUDY NOTES

APRIL 12, 2009

“We're not in Kansas anymore!”

The biblical story begins in Genesis (1-2) when God creates the world and everything in it. To house his creation, God plants a garden, called Eden (2:8). Eden is God's paradise: it's where everything grows, where human beings (Adam and Eve) are placed, where complete fulfillment is, even where God himself walks among his creation (3:8).

But things quickly move away from the perfection of Eden. After Adam and Eve sin and become mortal (Gen 3) God drives them out of Eden and protects it so there is no longer access to the tree of life. After this, the two sons of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, soon have a conflict: as they both go to worship God, only Abel's offering is accepted by God. In a fit of calculated rage and jealousy Cain kills Abel. As punishment, God expels Cain from the land he lived on that was already outside of Eden, where he is to be a “restless wanderer on the earth” (4:14).

But Cain quits wandering and settles down. He has a family and builds a city. And the story reminds us that he is outside the garden of Eden, referred to as “east of Eden”, which is actually away “from the LORD's presence” (4:16).

Like Cain, we're “east of Eden.” We've been trying to get back ever since.

East of Eden

“East of Eden” is a metaphor used throughout Genesis to signal the effort of humans as they try to find paradise, contentment, and connection with God on their own. This phrase occurs several more times in Genesis to indicate this struggle in life.

The builders of the Tower of Babel “moved eastward” (11:2) where they found a land to live in, put down roots, and started building the Tower.

When Abraham and Lot decided to split up, Lot looked around and took the best land, which was “toward the east,” closer to Sodom and Gomorrah (13:11). Later, as Abraham is tying up loose ends and preparing his will, he appears to be concerned about how the sons of his concubines will react to his leaving everything to Isaac. So he sends them away to “the land of the east” (25:5-6), symbolically, if not literally, removing them from the promise of God.

During his wanderings, Jacob has a dream where God tells him that God is continuing the promise made to Abraham through Jacob. In response to his dream, Jacob goes to the “eastern peoples” as a test of faith, where he finds his wife (28:10-29:1).

We keep going to the “east” as a metaphor for trying to find our way back to the Edenic paradise.

God's Guarantee

The garden of Eden, which we quickly find ourselves “east” of, is a central motif of the entire biblical story. This story begins with a garden, follows the expulsion from the garden, traces God's actions to bring humans back to the garden, and ends with a return to a (new) garden (Rev 21:1-5; 22:1-5). Central to this story is a promise—God's promise, God's guarantee.

God promised Abraham that God would “bless” Abraham, make him into a great nation, and bless all peoples on earth through Abraham (Gen 12:1-3). Later, God promised that his promise would be fulfilled through a son (Gen 15:1-5).

Throughout the Old Testament, there was some confusion among the Jewish people whether this promise was fulfilled through their land or through the giving of the law. This confusion existed among the Jews even into New Testament times. Thus, Paul has to make clear in Galatians that the promise was fulfilled neither through the land nor through the law. Instead, the promise was fulfilled through the spiritual son of Abraham—Jesus Christ! (3:15-29, esp. 16)

God's guarantee to bless all people through Abraham has been fulfilled in Christ. We experience God's guarantee through his Spirit. As Paul says in Ephesians, when we received the promise by faith, we “were marked in him with a seal, the *promised* Holy Spirit, who is a deposit *guaranteeing* our inheritance” (1:14; my emphasis).

God resides personally within us, guaranteeing our inheritance, which is our return to Eden, to the new garden, where we will live and reign with him forever. At that time, the curse will be gone and we will see God's face (Rev 22:3-4).

Westward Migration

How do we get from “east” of Eden, away from God, back to the perfection of Eden, with God? How do we get to the point where God resides within us, where God guarantees our safe migration back to Eden to be with him? WE don't. We can't do any of it. God does. God does all the work to bring us home (Eph 2:11-22).

On our own, we are “east of Eden”—separate from Christ and without God, even without hope (Eph 2:11-12). But God takes the burden upon himself to bring us home. *God* has brought us near (Eph 2:13); *he* is our peace; *he* destroyed the barrier by his own work (2:14-15); *he* made peace and reconciled us to God (not us; 2:16); because *of him* we have access to God (2:18)!

God *guarantees* all this. God's spirit lives in us and we are God's dwelling. The Spirit not only empowers us to live but guarantees that every promise of God will come true to and for us (Eph 1:14; 2:21-22).

This is God's guarantee to you.

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