

AFFIRMING FAITH

LESSON 3: EDEN – IS IT REAL?

If you look at secular writings and research, you hear a lot of the “Eden Myth” or “Paradise Lost” legends. Theories range and vary, yet, all of them concur that the story surrounds real location names. So, if you take the view of not knowing anything while approaching the Biblical narrative, you come away with the question, is Eden real? We also need to understand, that the Bible is not the only reference to an Eden.

Gen.2:8-17; 3:23-24; 4:16

EPICS, MYTHS, AND STORIES

SUMERIAN (Earliest Known outside of the Bible)

There is a Sumerian story entitled “Enki and Ninhursag” which describes a paradise similar to Eden only it is called Dilmun.

The land Dilmun is pure, the land Dilmun is clean; The land Dilmun is clean, the land Dilmun is most bright. In Dilmun the raven utters no cries, The ittidu-bird utters no the cry of the ittidu-bird, The lion kills not, The wolf snatches not the lamb, The sick-eyed says not "I am sick-eyed," The sick-headed (says) not "I am sick-headed," Its old woman (says) not "I am an old woman," Its old man (says) not "I am an old man," He filled the dikes with water, He filled the ditches with water, He filled the uncultivated places with water. The gardener in the dust in his joy

(ANET 1969, 38-9).

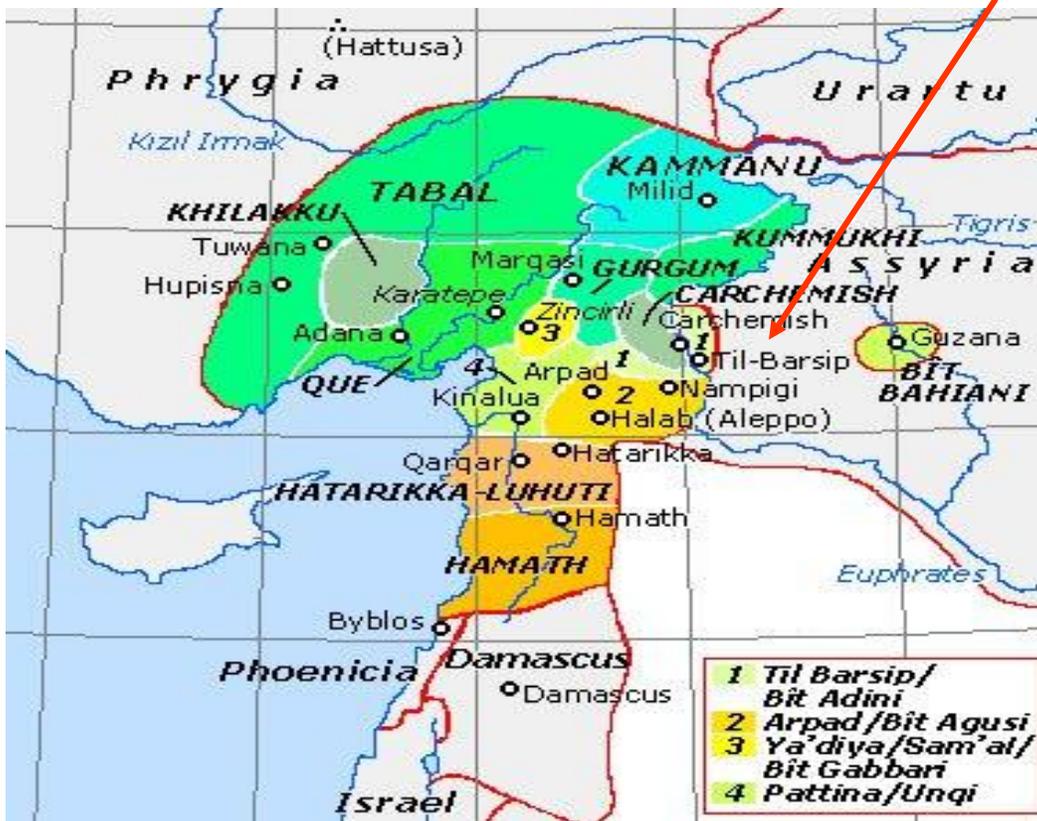
ETYMOLOGY

Etymology for the name Eden is interesting. Many have believed it to be a Hebrew rendering of the Sumerian word "edin" translating to the word 'steppe' more closely related to "plain or grassland" in English. Archaeology, however, has shown this word to be of Aramaic in origin, a language widely used to the North of ancient Israel and in ancient Lebanon and Syria. Discovered in 1979 at Tell el Fakhariyah (on one of the tributaries of the Khabur River), Syria, a statue bilingual inscription was discovered, dating to approximately the late 9th century BC. Written on the skirt of the man, the bilingual inscription was inscribed in Assyrian cuneiform and the Semitic linear text, using the word 'eden.' Used as a verb, 'dn corresponds to the Assyrian verb for 'wealth or luxuriance.' This follows the concept presented in the Bible.

LOCATION ACCORDING TO SOURCES OUTSIDE OF THE BIBLE

Assyrian sources as regards sources outside of Biblical text, provide more clues to the location of Eden. Assyrian records have revealed the identification of an Aramean state that thrived between the 10th - 9th centuries BC. The name of this kingdom was Bit Adini (translating to "House of Eden") and its capital was centered at Til Barsip (modern day Tell Ahmar). Bit Adini would be conquered and absorbed into the Neo-Assyrian empire in 856 BC, during the reign of Shalmaneser III (reigned between 859 - 824 BCE). Located in Syria, Til Barsip was situated along the Euphrates River.



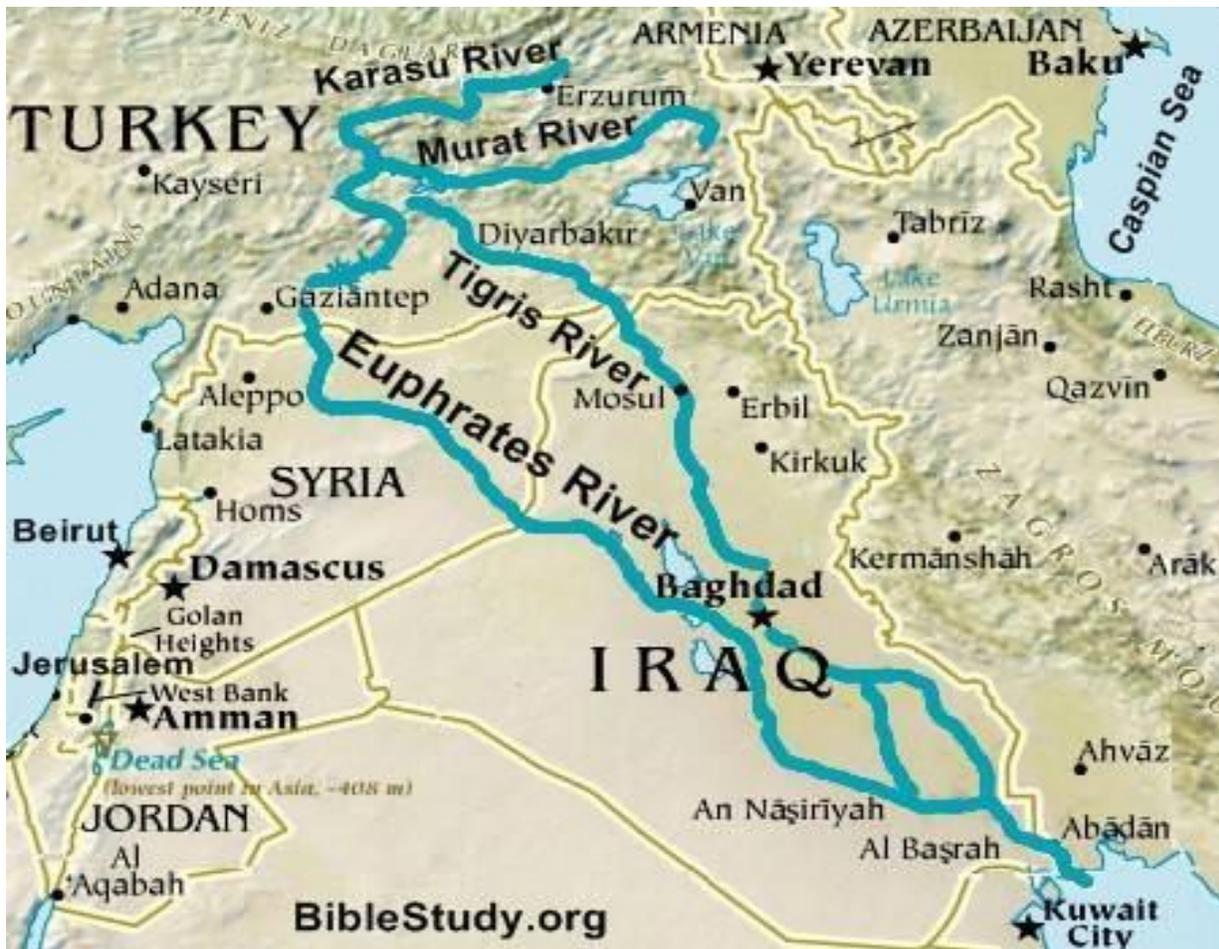


Ancient Chinese culture may refer to Eden. The written Chinese language symbol for “west” means “two people in a garden.” This character dates back at least three thousand years, indicating a pre-Christian reference at least to this concept, that the people who populated China came from the “west” and perhaps someplace in the Tigris-Euphrates valley. If a Chinese person were asked to explain the word west, he would have to say, “Well, that is where two people lived in a garden, and that the early Chinese ancestors were familiar with the story of the first couple living in a garden.”

IS EDEN REAL?

If we are going to try to locate the Biblical Eden, what things do we need to find?

What indicators does the Bible give us about the location of Eden?



NOTE

Satellite radar photographs have indicated the existence of many ancient dried up river beds in the Middle East and Africa. Some (like the Kuwait River) could be the old Pishon or Gihon rivers. For example, recently the large river that once drained the Sahara Desert and much of northern Africa has been discovered. (Sahara Desert Once Ran with Water, USA Today, Nov 10, 2015)

Do all of these indicators exist today? _____

Does this mean that Eden does not or did not exist?

If some of the indicators do not exist, why do you think they do not? _____

Is the story of Eden critical to believing in the existence of God? _____
