9. GENESIS SERIES:
The Garden of Eden – Genesis 2:8-17

‘And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads. The name of the first is Pison: that is it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; And the gold of that land is good: there is bdellium and the onyx stone. And the name of the second river is Gihon: the same is it that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia. And the name of the third river is Hiddekel: that is it which goeth toward the east of Assyria. And the fourth river is Euphrates. And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (Genesis 2:8-17).’

In our previous study we saw how Genesis has now moved into a more detailed consideration of the creation and origin of man. The creation of man had already been covered in the previous chapter of Genesis, yet in this chapter we gain more information of just how God made man. As we continue to move through chapter two we take note of how God carefully provided everything for man, especially in His provision of the Garden of Eden.

In the garden there is also a test for man, a test of obedience and we will consider this test (or rather man’s failure of the test) more carefully in chapter 3.

**Verse 8:** We have already seen that God was pleased with all that He had made (Gen 1:31), yet there was a place on earth that God gave even more attention and care to, the place that He had designed as a home for the first man and woman. This was a purpose-built garden in a place called Eden.

Where was this garden? The first clue we get from the passage under consideration is that it was in the east. This would have to be east of that region which is so central to the story of the Scriptures (Canaan or Israel), the home of those people to whom this book was originally written.

**Verse 9:** This verse gives us an indication of God’s care for man, for in the garden that was planted as a home for man, everything that man would need could be found. But
the plants present in the garden were not just there for food, they were also there to provide a ‘scenic’ place for man to live, the plants being also ‘pleasant to the sight.’

In the garden (‘in the midst of the garden’) was found ‘the tree of life,’ a tree which signified the immortality of man. Were the fruit of this tree in some way supernaturally enhanced to allow immortality for the one who ate it? Or, were the fruit simply symbolic of man’s immortality at the time?

John Calvin says:

‘He gave the tree of life its name, not because it could confer on man that life which he had previously endued, but in order that it might be a symbol and memorial of the life which he had received from God. For we know it to be by no means unusual that God should give to us the attestation of his grace by external symbols. He does not indeed transfer his power into outward signs; but by them he stretches out his hand to us, because, without assistance, we cannot ascend to him. He intended, therefore, that man, as often as he tasted the fruit of that tree, should remember whence he received his life, in order that he might acknowledge that he lives not by his own power, but by the kindness of God alone; and that life is not (as they commonly speak) an intrinsic good, but proceeds from God.’

Also in the garden was ‘the tree of knowledge of good and evil.’ Exactly what this tree was we cannot be sure, but it was a tree that actually bore some kind of fruit. Was it supernaturally enhanced? Or, was it symbolic of something? What was the purpose of this tree? This is a question that will be addressed when we reach verse 17.

Verses 10-14: In these verses we are given what amounts to the exact location of the Garden of Eden. The only problem is that as a result of the flood later on in Genesis, the geography of the earth was altered greatly, so trying to now pinpoint the exact location of Eden by using this description is virtually an impossibility and an exercise in sheer speculation. Yet if the areas mentioned are in the same general vicinity as those lands today, then the garden was clearly a very large place and a general location can be arrived at. Given that this book was originally written to the early nation of Israel, it seems to indicate that they must have had a fair idea of just where the area of Eden was located and this description obviously meant something to them.

Though there was yet no rain, verse 10 tells us that the river coming out of Eden actually kept the garden well watered. The four rivers mentioned each had their source in one immense water supply coming out of Eden (without rainfall). The four rivers identified appear to be the Pison, Gihon, Tigris (Hiddekel) and Euphrates rivers. Not all of these rivers can be accurately located today.

The area at the time of the garden’s origin was clearly an amazing place. It was a place that had an abundance of gold, bdellium and onyx stones.

NOTE: INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY QUESTION HERE: How was man to dress and keep the Garden of Eden?
**Verse 15:** Man was placed in the Garden of Eden by God Himself. This was to be the place of his dwelling. But it was not only a place of dwelling, it was also to be the place of his employment, ‘to dress and to keep it.’ So man’s job in the garden was to look after it - in a time when there was no need to labour to produce results, no weeds, no diseases, etc.

**Verse 16:** This verse speaks of God’s incredible generosity in blessing man with such a wonderful variety of plants for his use as food. Man could make use of every plant for food, except one only, that being the tree mentioned in the next verse. By commanding man to observe this prohibition, God clearly displays Himself as man’s sovereign.

**Verse 17:** Once again we come across ‘the tree of knowledge of good and evil,’ a tree which was planted in the garden as a test of obedience for man. If man were to eat of this tree it would in fact be an act of disobedience toward God. The consequences of eating would therefore be not only knowledge of evil, but also the loss of immortality and the judgment of death.

**QUESTION:** What did God mean by death as the punishment for disobedience to Him in the garden? Explain.

**INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY**

What did it mean for Adam to have a ‘help meet?’