

98-03-15b Genesis Chapter 4 Presence Of God--The East Custom

We're ready now to resume in Genesis chapter 4. And we've taken just a brief look at the significance of the presence of the Lord. What a privilege and an opportunity it is to enter the presence of the Lord, to enjoy the presence of the Lord. What it is that keeps us from the presence of the Lord.

And again, it's our choice. There is nothing to hinder us. Jesus Christ, when you go to the book of Hebrews, there's a wonderful section there in chapter 10, where it talks about the fact that Christ has made a new and living way for us.

The veil has been pulled aside so that we can enjoy the very presence of God through Christ. And it's our confidence in Him and our confidence in what He has done on our behalf that enables us to take those bold steps that Moses took. Cain doesn't do that in verse 16.

Cain went out from the presence of the Lord and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden. The land of Nod, as I noted last week, Nod is the Hebrew word for wandering. It is a place of no rest.

It is a place of no permanent dwelling, impermanence and instability. That's where he goes. And the east of Eden, this has cropped up from time to time in literature.

I think there's been a book and a movie called East of Eden, talking about the sort of sad plight of humanity after the fall. No longer in the garden, no longer in the presence of God out there east of Eden. And it's easy to just go right on through and say, well, obviously He's gone away.

But the directions, the cardinal directions in Scripture also have significance. And I want to take just a brief look at what it means when the Bible talks about the east. There is a significance beyond the fact that it's the direction of the rising of the sun.

And this will be helpful because you will run across this. This is used dozens of times. If you read Ezekiel, you can't go two paragraphs without hitting the cardinal directions, and east in particular.

I think it's used more in Ezekiel than anywhere else. But let's take a look at just a couple of passages, and I think you will begin to see what the east represents as a concept in the Old Testament Scriptures especially, and actually throughout biblical revelation. Turn just a few pages over to Genesis chapter 13.

You know where we're going. Most of us are familiar with the broad structure of the story in Genesis. You remember Abraham, and he leaves Ur, and he goes to the land of promise.

He has a nephew, Lot. And remember Lot goes to live in Sodom and Gomorrah, and then you have the big fire and brimstone episode, and the pillar of salt with his wife, and so forth. But in Genesis 13, you have for a period of time prior to this, Lot and Abram dwelling together.

And then Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him to the south. Now this is not to the south of Egypt. This is the land of the south.

This is the southern part of the land that God had promised to Abraham. It's the Negev, literally. And the Negev even today specifies that southern region.

Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold, and he went on his journey from the south as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place of the altar which he had made there at first. And there Abram called on the name of the Lord. That's a significant phrase.

We're going to see just a few verses forward in Genesis chapter 13. Lot also, who went with Abram, had flocks and herds and tents. Now the land was not able to support them that they might dwell together, for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together. And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot.

The Canaanites and the Perizzites then dwelt in the land. So Abram said to Lot, Please let there be no strife between you and me, between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me.

If you take the left, I will go to the right. If you go to the right, I will go to the left. So Lot lifts up his eyes and sees all the plain of Jordan.

It was well watered everywhere before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. Like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as you go towards Zoar. So Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east.

And they separated from one another. Now remember, Abram is dwelling in the place where he built the altar to the Lord, the place where he has encountered the Lord and talked with the Lord and received the covenant promise from God. And Lot leaves there and goes east, because it's attractive to him.

It looks desirable to go that way. But he goes east. He departs from the presence of the Lord east.

And you know the trouble that Lot is going to get into in Sodom and Gomorrah, because that is the land of the east. If you flip a few pages forward in Genesis to chapter 19, verse 6, we find that Abram, in addition to having his first son Ishmael and the son of

promise Isaac, also has concubines. One of them is Keturah.

We tend to forget about Keturah and all of her offspring. But in chapter 25, Abraham again took a wife, and her name was Keturah. And she bore him Zimron, Jokshon, Midan, Ishbak, and Shuah.

Jokshon begot Sheba and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asherim, Latushim, and Leumim. The reason these are important is these became peoples.

These became national or racial entities in the land. And later on, they would come back to haunt Israel. The sons of Midan were Ephah, Ephur, Hanuk, Abida, and Eldahah.

All these were the children of Keturah. Look at verse 5. Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. But Abraham gave gifts to the sons of the concubines which Abraham had.

And while he was still living, he sent them which direction? Eastward. Away from Isaac his son to the country of the east. The country of the east is the place of dwelling for those who don't enjoy a relationship with God.

And I use enjoy there in both sense of the word. They don't enjoy it in terms of personal satisfaction, and they don't enjoy it in terms of the privilege that attaches to it. So the land of the east is essentially a place of evil.

It's a place where the presence of God does not make itself available. A few pages further forward, Jacob in Genesis 29 is going to sojourn outside the land of promise. He's been there, and he departs.

And he goes to the area where Laban is. His distant uncle, so to speak. And in Genesis 29 it says, Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the east.

These are the pagans. These are the people who don't care about God. This is the land of Laban.

And this is where he sees a well, and there are flocks of sheep, and it's well watered and so forth. It looks like an inviting place, sort of like what Lot saw. So he's going to dwell there.

And he's going to sojourn there. And God's going to bless him. Many of his children are going to be born in the land of the east, but it's not their permanent residence.

They sojourn there. They spend time there, but God's purpose for them is to return to the land. And they're going to come back from the land of the east to the land of promise.

It's not their permanent dwelling. And the reason is there are no altars to God there. That is the land of Laban.

It's the land of the children of the east. In Genesis 41, verse 6, this is in Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream. Pharaoh has a dream.

In Genesis 41, he stands by the river. Suddenly there came up out of the river seven cows, fine-looking and fat, and they fed in the meadow. Then, behold, seven other cows came up after them out of the river, ugly and gaunt, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the river.

The ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven fine-looking and fat cows, so Pharaoh awoke. I would too. That's got to be a strange sight, if you could imagine the process by which a cow would eat another cow.

He slept and dreamed a second time, and suddenly seven heads of grain came up on one stalk, plump and good. Then, behold, seven thin heads, blighted by the east wind, sprang up after them. The seven thin heads devoured the seven plump and full heads, so Pharaoh awoke, and indeed it was a dream.

But these evil wheat stalks are blighted by the east wind, and the east wind, as always in the ancient Near East, is considered to be an evil wind. You find this many places. You find it in Exodus 10, verse 13.

This is during the account of the plagues on Egypt. The Lord said to Moses, Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come upon the land of Egypt and eat every herb of the land, all that the hail has left. So Moses stretched out his rod over the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought an east wind on the land all that day and all that night.

When it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts. Well, this ought to be fresh in our mind from last week. And you recall that it was a hot east wind that shriveled the grain there when we were reading about the Engels and their farm.

It was a hot east wind that came and ruined the grain, and shortly after came the locusts. The east wind is an evil wind. It brings disaster.

It shrivels the crops. It blows in the locusts. Interestingly, in Exodus chapter 14, when Pharaoh does finally let the children of Israel go, and they are cornered against the Red Sea, the chariots of Pharaoh are pursuing them, and they're backed up against the sea.

Verse 21, Exodus 14, 21, Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that day and all that night, and made the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided. So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. And later on, of course, the armies of Pharaoh attempt to pursue them, and the wind stops blowing, and the water returns and overthrows them.

But it's a dry, hot east wind that prepares the path of deliverance. And there's an interesting irony there that this evil wind works together for good. It turns out to be the means of deliverance.

In Jonah, the book of Jonah, we always remember Jonah being swallowed by the great fish. But you recall afterward, he goes and preaches to Nineveh like he was supposed to do in the first place, and yet 40 days, and Nineveh will be destroyed. And he preaches that message, and then he goes and he wants to watch the destruction of the city.

Forty days have passed, and he figures, okay, God has said in 40 days the city will be destroyed, so I'm going to watch the spectacle. So he goes out to sit on a hill and watch this. And in Jonah chapter 4, all the people in Nineveh have repented and so forth, and so God relents from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

That's the last verse of chapter 3 of Jonah. So then in Jonah 4, it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. So he prayed to the Lord and said, Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? This is the reason I fled to Tarshish.

This is the reason I went through that whole boat and fish episode. I knew that it was pointless to come out here and be a prophet to these people. I know that you are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness, one who relents from doing harm.

The principle we saw in our first session this morning. God is a merciful and gracious God. This is interesting.

Jonah is angry about this. He says, I knew it. I went to all this trouble.

I got spit out by the fish. I came here. I preached for 40 days.

And now I knew this was going to happen. I knew you were a merciful and gracious God. You were going to relent.

It was never going to happen in the first place. And he's upset. He's very angry about it.

Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live. Now this is not the attitude that we explored in the first session, is it? Even when he witnesses the compassion and the grace of God, Jonah, instead of availing himself of it, is disgusted over it. So the Lord says, is it right for you to be angry? You see the pattern of divine interrogation when someone is in the wrong, don't you? This is very similar to what God does with Cain.

Is it right for you to be angry? Why are you angry and your countenance downcast? If you do well, is there not a lifting up of sin? But if you do not do well, the croucher is at

the door. Jonah here is doing the dance with the croucher. So look at verse 5. The Lord said, is it right for you to be angry? And Jonah gives basically the same answer that Cain did, which is no answer at all.

So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. He is following the same path as Cain. He's heading east.

He sits out on the east side of the city. The east side is the evil side. The east side is the place outside the presence of God.

He made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, so he might see what would become of the city. The Lord God prepared a plant, made it come up over Jonah. You remember the worm and the gourd episode here.

It made a shade to deliver him from his misery, and Jonah was very grateful for the plant. Compassion of God there. But as morning dawned the next day, God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered.

And it happened when the sun arose that God prepared a violent east wind, an evil wind. The sun beat on Jonah's head so that he grew faint, and he wished death for himself and so forth. Then God asks him again in verse 9, is it right for you to be angry about the plant? And Jonah is still shaking his fist at God.

It is right for me to be angry, even unto death. And then God teaches that valuable lesson. Jonah, Yonah in Hebrew, the dove, represents Israel itself and their fickle attitude toward God.

Even when God displays His grace and His compassion, they are unwilling to avail themselves of it. And Jonah, in his career and in his dealings with Nineveh, pictures the nation, and that is the key to understanding that whole book. But once again we see that the east, and understanding the principle that the east represents is essential to understanding the story.

In the camp of the Israelites, as they sojourn in the wilderness, God sets out an order. They are not just a big random mass of people out there in the wilderness. God organizes them and sets them in order centered on the tabernacle.

And if you look in Numbers chapter 2, you find that God is very specific about where the various tribes are to camp. And there is a reason for it. In Numbers chapter 2, God speaks to Moses and tells him to go to the people and explain to them what this order is.

The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, Every one of the children of Israel shall camp by his own standard, his own flag, beside the emblems of his father's house. See, there are tribal flags and there are clan flags. Within the tribes you have clans.

And they've got markers, they've got a flag they fly. They shall camp some distance from the tabernacle of meeting, the place where God dwells. On the east side, toward the rising of the sun, those of the standard of the forces with Judah shall camp, according to their armies.

And Nashon, the son of Amminadab, shall be the leader of the children of Judah. Judah, which is a significant tribe in Israel, Judah is the tribe which inherits the rulership that initially was supposed to go to Reuben. But you recall that the first several sons of Jacob disqualified themselves from the inheritance.

And why is it that David is of the tribe of Judah? Why is it that the Lord Jesus Christ is from the tribe of Judah? Because the rulership that should have gone to Reuben as the eldest son, Reuben forfeited it. He slept with his father's concubine. And the next couple of sons, if I remember right, it's Simeon and Levi, because of the slaughter that they inflicted on animals in, what do you call that, where you cut the tendons of the legs of the oxen? There's a name for that.

Anyway, they did that and they were also disqualified. And so that blessing or that privilege of inheritance fell to Judah. So Judah is the rulership tribe.

They are in the place of privilege. You say, wait a minute, I thought you said the east was the evil side. Well, the door of the tabernacle and the gate to the outer court of the tabernacle and later of the temple faces east.

So this is the place where you can look into the entrance and see. This is the place you want to be if you're going to enter. If you're going to enter the tabernacle, if you're going to enter the place of worship, you come in on the east side.

So they've got the first shot at that. They are closest to the door. Why does that door face east, do you think? If you had to guess, somebody gave you a little pop quiz, why does the door of the tabernacle, why does the door of the temple face east? What would God be communicating to man about coming into his presence? Where does man come from? He's coming from the place of the east.

He's coming from the place of evil, coming from the place of wandering into the place of God, into the presence of God. And it communicates something, it means something, it has significance. It's especially significant later on when you think about the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you've ever looked at a map of Jerusalem, where is the Mount of Olives relative to Jerusalem? It's due east. You can sit on the top of the Mount of Olives and look right through the east gate of Jerusalem and look right through the east gate into the court of the temple. And if your angle is just right and your position is just right and your eyes are good enough, you can actually look right into the door of the temple and see the curtain

hanging in the separating wall between the holy place and the most holy place.

And this was Jesus' favorite spot with his disciples, was to sit on the Mount of Olives and look right through that gate. And you remember a time or two in the past we've looked through Ezekiel. When the glory of God departs reluctantly from Israel, it starts at the Ark of the Covenant and it is heading east.

It leaves and pauses at the threshold and it pauses at the gate and it pauses at the gate of the city and it goes across the valley and goes up and pauses over the Mount of Olives, over the very spot where Jesus will sit with his disciples, and then it disappears heading east. And in Ezekiel it says that God has caused his glory to depart from Israel and he will set his glory out among the nations. What an insult to Israel, what a shame and embarrassment to Israel that the glory of God is more comfortable among the children of the east than it is in Israel.

It's their fault because they have made the choice that Cain makes. They don't appreciate and they don't cultivate, they don't desire the presence of God. And God says, I'm not going to stay where I'm not wanted and he leaves.

And he goes to the land of the evil ones, he goes to the nations, to the Gentiles. He says, I'm going to set my glory there until the time when Israel will say, Blessed be the name of the Lord. And then prophetically over in Ezekiel, in the early 40s of Ezekiel, 43 or 45, along in there, he predicts the return of the glory of God and it will come from the east rapidly.

It will coast over the Mount of Olives and it will come rapidly back through the gate, back through the entrance, back through the door, back across the threshold and resume God's proper place, God's choice of place for his name to rest there in the Holy of Holies in the temple. So the east is highly significant in scripture. Its symbolic value is great.

If you look in Numbers chapter 3 and verse 38, you don't necessarily have to turn there, but in addition to the tribe of Judah, Numbers 3.38 says, Moreover, those who were to camp before the tabernacle on the east, before the tabernacle and meeting, were Moses, Aaron and his sons, keeping charge of the sanctuary to meet the needs of the children of Israel. But the outsider who came near was to be put to death. Being on the east side is the place of privilege.

The east side of the tabernacle, that part of the camp of Israel is the privileged place. That's where Moses lives. That's Aaron's neighborhood and that's where the priests live.

The priests and the Levites are going to live there on that east side. So that is the closest point of access to the presence of God and a great privilege to live there. In Leviticus chapter 1 and verse 16, if you look closely, it's not laying right on the surface there, but we find in analyzing the sacrifice here that the east side of the altar is the place where

the unusable portions of the sacrifice are discarded.

In Leviticus 1.16, after the priest has brought a burnt offering of birds and so forth, he wrings off the bird's head, burns it on the altar, its blood shall be drained out of the side of the altar. Then in verse 16, he shall remove its crop with its feathers and cast it beside the altar on the east side into the place for ashes. The old ashes from the altar are dumped on the east side of the altar.

The feathers and the crop, the unused, unsacrificed portion of this bird offering, the awful, if you will, the cast aside portion, goes to the east side of the altar. Why? That's the evil side. That's the discard side.

When Israel enters the land of promise, this is one you can answer for yourself. Remember, when Israel is going to finally enter the land, they're going to cross the Jordan. What direction do they come from to enter the land of promise? You can guess, even if you didn't know, it's from the east.

They come in from the east. Now, they've left Egypt, right? And if you remember the geography there, you've got the Mediterranean Sea and so forth. What's the most direct route from Egypt into the land? It's north or just slightly northeast.

You just kind of hook around the edge there and go straight in. You can go by the way of the sea and be there in a couple of weeks at most, even on foot. But God guides Israel down into the Sinai Peninsula and up beside the land and then they enter crossing the Jordan from the east.

And there's a reason for that. There is a symbolic value in entering the land from the east, crossing the Jordan from the east, taking the very same path. This place where they enter the land is very close to where John the Baptist is going to baptize in the Jordan River, due east of Jerusalem, very near to Jericho and Ai.

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho travels east. That's the road that the priest and the Levite and the Samaritan man encounter the fellow that got mugged and put into the ditch. The Good Samaritan story happens on that east-west road between Jerusalem and Jericho.

God takes the long way around with Israel and has them come in from the east because you're leaving the land of no presence of God into the land flowing with milk and honey, and that direction is significant. There are many other passages. If you want an interesting study to meditate on sometime, just get an English concordance and look up some of the other passages that talk about the east.

You'll find passages in Isaiah, such as Isaiah 43, verse 5, when God predicts the regathering of Israel. He says, I'm going to regather the seed of Jacob from the east and bring them into the land. They're scattered out amongst the evil nations in the

dispersion.

I'm going to regather his seed from the east and bring them into the land. Isaiah 46, verse 11, God pictures a ravenous bird that comes in, in discipline and in judgment. It's a ravenous bird from the east that comes to pick apart the dry bones of the foe and so forth.

So this is significant. Think about your New Testament passages. If you think about the Gospels, the early part of Matthew or the early part of Luke or something, the birth of Christ.

Can you think of anything that has to do with the east there? Like where the wise men come from? Wise men from the east. There's a reason why they're from the east, and they're not from up north in Asia Minor someplace, or they didn't travel around from ancient Rome or somewhere. There's a reason why they come from the east.

This is an indictment of Israel, because here are men in the east who recognize that it's the time of the birth of Messiah. They know the prophecies of Daniel. They understand about the 69 weeks.

They understand the prophecy in the Oracle of Balaam that says that a star will arise in Jacob and smite the brow of Moab. They have seen that star in the east. They know the signs.

They know the season. And these men from the east travel in and say, where is the King of the Jews? It's time for Him to be born. And we figured there would be big celebrations, and there would be signs and billboards, and CNN would be over here covering the birth of the Messiah.

Where is He that is born King of the Jews? We've seen a star in the east, and we've come to worship Him. And Israel is oblivious, with a few exceptions. Nobody is aware that Christ has come, and that the Messiah has come.

And it's an indictment of Israel, and it foreshadows their misunderstanding and their rejection of Christ, because they don't know the time of their deliverance. They don't know the day of their visitation, Jesus says. He stands over the city and weeps, and He says, you did not know the day of your visitation.

Men from the east did. And like Jesus says in another place, in the Day of Judgment, the Queen of Sheba is going to rise up in condemnation of this generation, because she had a better understanding of wisdom than you do. Men from other places are going to rise up in condemnation of this generation.

They come from the east. And Jesus also reminds the Pharisees of this in Matthew 8-11, when He says, many will come from the east and west and north and south, and sit down

with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom, and you will find yourselves thrust out. They're going to come from the east and sit down and enjoy the blessings of the inheritance.

Why is that? There's no reason to dwell in the east. There's no reason to not cross into the land of promise. It is a choice.

Cain makes the choice to dwell eastward. Lot makes the choice to dwell eastward. We make the choice to dwell in the land of the east, instead of enjoying the presence of God and the blessing of God.

It isn't a sovereign, elective decision that God makes, over which we have no control. It's our responsibility to avail ourselves of the wonderful grace of God. He is a God of mercy.

He's a God of compassion. There is no excuse for Cain. There's no excuse for Lot.

There's no excuse for Israel. Going back across the Jordan, if you study the later days of the occupation of the land by Israel, you find that some of the tribes wanted to go back across the Jordan and live on the other side, and it is ruination. The opportunity that we have to enjoy the personal presence of God is illustrated by Jesus over in John 15, where he talks about the opportunity that we have by having his words and keeping them, of enjoying the personal presence of Jesus Christ, the personal presence of God the Father.

I will come to him. I and my Father will come, and we will make our home with him. We have that wonderful, often misapplied verse in Revelation 3.20, Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

If any man will hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and I will sup with him and he with me. It is fellowship, it is enjoyment of the personal presence of God, specifically in the person of Christ that is being illustrated there, and it is a choice. There is no reason to miss it.

There is no reason to avoid it, and there is no reason to fear it. It takes confidence in God. It takes faith in his mercy and in his compassion, faith in his ability to forgive and to cleanse, but the privilege that attaches when we take that step of faith is enormous.

God has the power to cleanse us. God has the power to eradicate from us the things that trip us up and cause us to fail. He can transform our thinking.

He can transform our priorities. He can transform our desires, if we are only willing to trust him and to let him do that. And the wonderful result is enjoying the presence of God, both now and in the age to come, when we are promised the privilege of walking with Christ, sitting with Christ, partaking at the table with Christ when he serves manna in the coming kingdom.

It is a wonderful present opportunity. It is a wonderful bright hope for the future. All it requires is our desire and our decision to claim it.

Let's close in prayer. We thank you, Father, for the tremendous opportunity that we have to avail ourselves of your grace and to enjoy these wonderful privileges we have studied this morning. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will remind us and encourage us in these things, that the power of your word will transform us and light our way to see clearly how to enter in and remain in your presence, both now and in the age to come.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.