

Asleep In the Land of Nod

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By Dave Butts

One of the more disturbing verses in Scripture concerns Cain, the second man to ever live – the eldest son of Adam and Eve. After Cain killed his brother Abel, he is put under a curse that makes him a wanderer. The ground, which received his brother Abel's blood, will no longer produce for Cain. A worker of the soil, Cain is cut off by his own actions from his means of livelihood.

Following his conversation with God after Abel's murder, comes an action that foreshadows much of future human history. It is found in Genesis 4:16: "So Cain went out from the Lord's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden."

We don't know where Nod was. There is no recollection in any historical account of where this land was. But the Hebrew meaning of the word "nod" tells us much about the spiritual condition of Cain. Nod means "wanderings" in the original Hebrew. Cain went out into the land of wanderings... wanderings apart from the presence of God.

We don't know if Cain had a choice here. Maybe he was driven from the Lord's presence, though the text does not clearly state that. It seems more likely that Cain chose to leave the Lord's presence because of his sin and feelings of guilt. It certainly seems that way when you consider the resultant generations and their wickedness and rebellion against God.

What Cain did physically, mankind since has done spiritually. We have left the presence of the Lord, wandering off in our

ways, doing what seems right to us. Ignoring our Maker, we live in the land of Nod.

It is easy to understand how those who have never encountered the grace and mercy of God through Jesus Christ can wander off. It is almost beyond belief that Christians can do the same. But I would suggest to you with sorrow that much of the Church today is asleep in the Land of Nod. They have left the presence of God for a life of wandering apart from Him.

Harsh words? Perhaps! But consider the warnings of Scripture about just such a possibility. Jesus asked if He would find faith on earth when He returned. The Apostle John in the letters to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation warns about the danger of a church failing to remain a church. The author of Hebrews warns against the danger of drifting away from the faith: "We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away" (Hebrews 2:1). Perhaps that phrase "drifting away" may be helpful to us as we try to understand the dangers here. We may not be like Cain and simply leave God's presence. It may be more of a drifting away. Less time with Him today...even less time tomorrow. Suddenly it seems we are so far away that it might not be worth the effort to try and return.

Have you ever been in a rowboat on a good-sized lake? The boat isn't far from shore, so it wouldn't take long to row back to the dock. But the sun is hot and it feels so good beating down on you that you decide to close your eyes and take a bit of a nap. You awake from your nap, astonished at how far away the dock is now. It's no longer a short row, but a long distance requiring strenuous effort. You didn't so much decide to leave the shore as you simply decided to let things drift.

The third verse of the old hymn, "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing" speaks much to us of this tendency toward drifting:

O to grace how great a debtor

*Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to Thee:
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love:
Here's my heart, O take and seal it;
Seal it for Thy courts above.*

– Robert Robinson

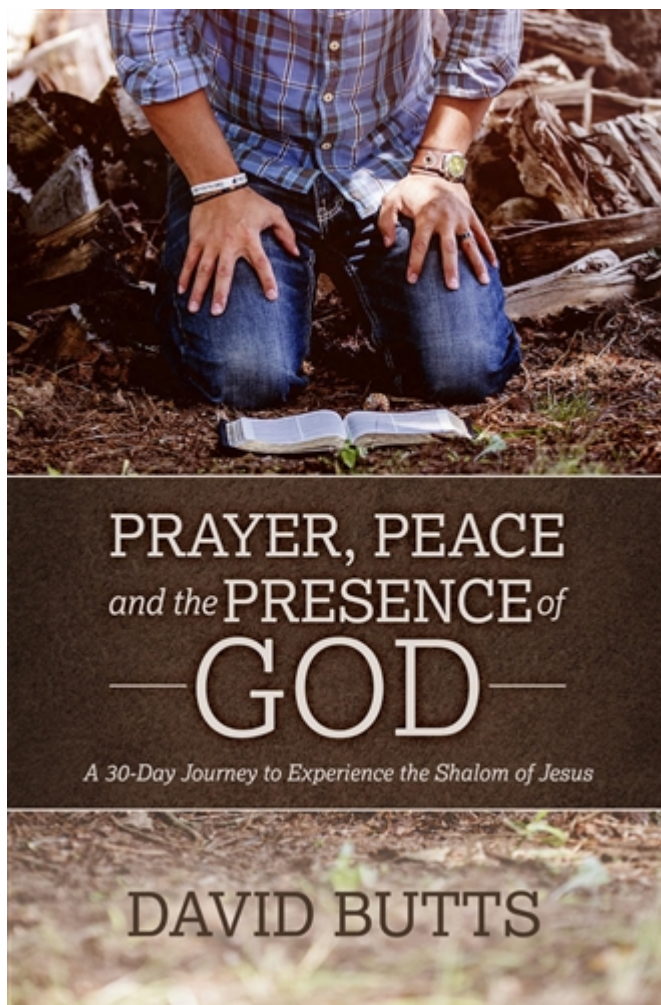
This leaving the presence of the Lord can obviously happen to an individual, but it is of great concern that it can happen to a body of believers as well. The Lord's warning to the Ephesian Church in Revelation 2 is directed at the whole congregation. Together they had served the Lord and held on to the right doctrines, but had lost their first love. As a church, they had left the Lord's presence and were dwelling in the land of Nod.

How many congregations today are asleep in the land of Nod? Isn't it interesting that there are outward similarities in the Hebrew word for wanderings (nod) and our English word "nod"? Webster's dictionary defines the English word "nod" as: "a quick downward motion of the head as one falls off to sleep." Sleepy churches drift off to sleep, moving away from the presence of God, not so much by intention, as by inaction.

These spiritually sleepy churches may in fact be very noisy – filled with loud songs and much activity. But in fact, a spiritual drowsiness has come over them as they drift away from any true interaction with the Christ who is their Head.

What will wake up sleepy Christians in the Land of Nod? Only a fresh awakening to the presence of Christ in their midst! This is not a call to a new program for waking the sleeping. Enough of our programs! It is a call for repentance and a return to the presence of Christ.

This happens as pastors and church leaders lead their congregations in prayers of humility and repentance for trying to do the Lord's work apart from His strength and empowerment. It happens as preachers covenant to preach Christ and Him alone! It happens as individual believers resolve to seek His face in a fresh, new way. It happens as our hearts join with the heart of David as he prays: "My heart says of you, 'Seek his face!' Your face Lord, I will seek" (Psalm 27:8).



PRAYER, PEACE, and the PRESENCE of GOD by David Butts

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The author, David Butts (1953-2022), started writing this book

and 10 days into it he got word that he was in stage 4 with a rare form of lymphoma. God allowed him to live in a greater way for five additional years of full-strength ministry. Dave has challenged readers in *Prayer, Peace and the Presence of God* to seek after His best life, no matter what it holds.

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