

The Biblical Heritage Center's
DISCOVERING THE BIBLE

*Learning what the words of our Bibles meant to their ancient authors,
and following their historical journey through the centuries to us.*

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The Garden in Eden

By Jim Myers

The events of the garden in Eden are recorded in the first biblical book and are probably some of the best known in history. They are a cornerstone tradition of two major both Christianity and Judaism. Even though the story has been told and retold, religious traditions have crept into it over time and obscure key points and word plays of the ancient author. Let's see what happens when we allow the biblical text to own story, regardless of our personal beliefs and traditions. Two of the first are the chapter and verse numbers that were inserted over a thousand years later. The story begins in the middle of Genesis 2:4.

In a day YAHWEH ELOHIYM made earth and heaven; no plant of the field was in the earth; no grasses of the field had sprouted; for YAHWEH ELOHIYM had not sent rain upon the earth; and there was not a man to till the ground. (2:4b-5)

This is the first time the name YAHWEH appears in the book of Genesis. In the first chapter the author introduced ELOHIYM as the main character. The word ELOHIYM is the Hebrew word that means "god." Yahweh, on the other hand, is the name of the god in this story. It is a mistake to assume that the author or his ancient audience were monotheists and only believed in one god. Yahweh is the central character in this account, and he is a god. The author begins this account with an assessment of the existing conditions before YAHWEH ELOHIYM begins his work.

- (1) No plants.
- (2) No grasses.
- (3) No rain to water plants.
- (4) No man to work.

This is a list of challenges that have to be dealt with in order to accomplish the goals that YAHWEH ELOHIYM had in mind. He began with the one that was and still is of central importance to residents living in the Middle East -- lack of water.

And a mist went up from the earth and watered all of the face of the ground (ADAMAH). (2:6)

Instead of water falling from the sky, it came up from the ground in the form of a mist. Note that the Hebrew word for ground is transliterated as ADAMAH.

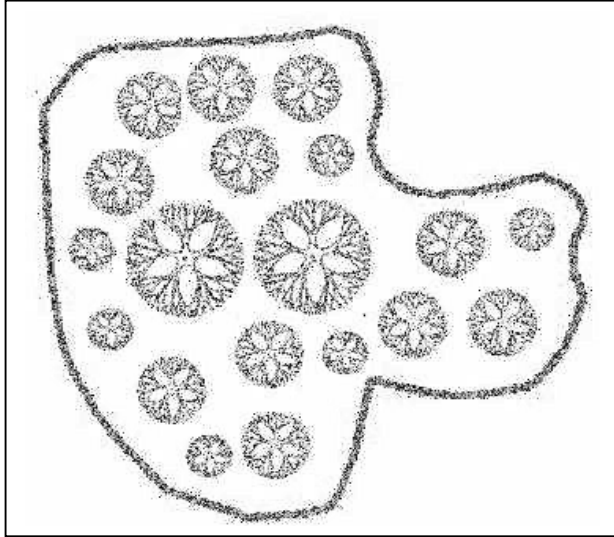
And YAHWEH ELOHIYM formed the man (ADAM) of dirt from the ground (ADAMAH), and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man (ADAM) became a living soul. (2:7)

Ancient audiences would have immediately picked up on the word play of ADAMAH and ADAM. Man's link to the earth is clearly established by his name. After the ground became moist YAHWEH ELOHIYM shaped some of the dirt into the form of a man. He then blew into the nostrils of the dirt figure and it became a living "soul" (NEFESH); a word that appears in the Hebrew Bible 754 times. Translators have assigned a wide range of meanings to it:

soul, self, life, creature, person, appetite, mind, living being, desire, emotion, passion; that which breathes, the breathing substance or being, soul, the inner being of man; living being; living being (with life in the blood); the man himself, self, person or individual; seat of the appetites; seat of emotions and passions; and, activity of mind. (The NAS Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon)

Its etymology links it to the Akkadian word FISH, which has the basic meanings of *throat*, *neck* and *breath*. NEFESH is the basic requirement for anything to be a living being, with the associated appetites, desires, etc.

Now let's take off our religious hats and put ourselves in the newly formed man's place. One moment you were a pile of dirt and the next your eyes pop open and you are a human being. What would have been your first thoughts? Would the first thing you saw have been YAHWEH ELOHIYM blowing in your nose? Everyone seems to assume that the man came fully preprogrammed like a new computer, but was that the case? Let's see what happens next, as the story unfolds.



And YAHWEH ELOHIYM planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there he placed the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground YAHWEH ELOHIYM caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the middle of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (2:8-9)

A point that is often overlooked is the location of the garden. It was located in a place named Eden. What was Eden? Were there other places around that were like Eden? Did Eden have other gardens in it? Since the author won't provide the answers, we will have to move along and see what he does reveal to readers.

Notice that he didn't speak and suddenly a complete garden magically appeared. Unlike with the man he didn't form each individual plant from the dirt. We are not told if he transplanted full grown plants or planted seeds that had to sprout and grow. All we know is that he planted a garden in a place named Eden.

An interesting point is that the focus is only on trees – "He caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food." It sounds more like an orchard than what I would picture as a typical garden. It seems like there were lots of fruit trees, but two were unlike any we have ever seen:

- (1) The tree of life.
- (2) The tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

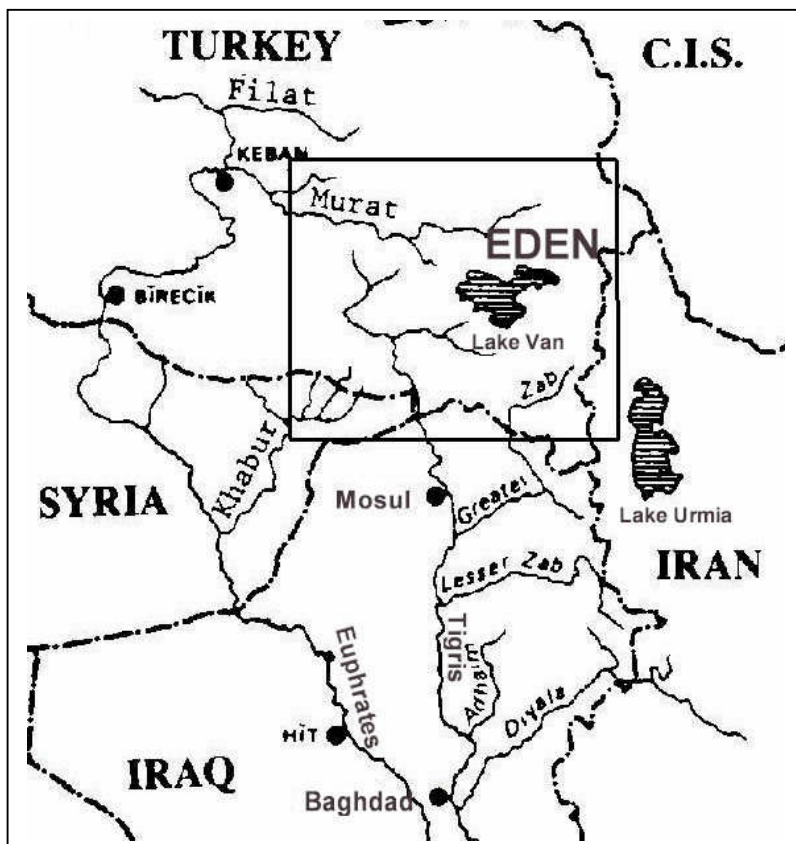
Notice that the first tree isn't the "tree of the knowledge of life," and the second isn't the "tree of good and evil." Keep that difference in mind. We know even less about the man than about the trees. For example, the general assumption seems to be that he will live forever, if he doesn't eat from the forbidden tree.

But, if that was the case, why was there a tree of life? Would he have died anyway, regardless of whether he ate the forbidden fruit, without the tree of life?

Would it take just one bite of the fruit from the tree of life to give him eternal life or would it have to be part of his regular diet?

Surely if YAHWEH ELOHIYM had wanted to create an immortal man, all he needed to do was instruct the man to eat from the tree of life and simply not have planted the forbidden tree. However, either YAHWEH ELOHIYM or the author must have had something else in mind. But, before we find out about that, the author wants us to know about something else.

And a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it divided and became the four heads. The name of the first is Pishon; it flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is TOV; the bdellium and the onyx stone are there. And the name of the second river is Gihon; it flows around the whole land of Cush. And the name of the third river is Tigris; it flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. (2:10-14)



The first two rivers are unknown today, but the last two are very well known to modern readers – Tigris and Euphrates. Follow their paths from the bottom to the top of the map. In the area enclosed by the box is the proposed location of Eden. I am sure that many archaeologists would love to have the freedom to do extensive work in this area. Hopefully, the political situation will make this possible at some point in the near future.

Ground penetrating radar has been used to locate buried river beds that are in the area, which is in the immediate vicinity of the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates. The area around Lake Van has been a primary candidate for the location of the garden.

The audience has learned that the garden is the source of two major rivers which play important roles in their lives. Now that the garden has water and there is a worker, YAHWEH ELOHIYM turns his attention to his next task.

And YAHWEH ELOHIYM took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to till it and guard it. And YAHWEH ELOHIYM commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you (singular) may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you (singular) shall not eat, for in the day that you (singular) eat from it you (singular) shall surely die." (2:15-17)

The man is taken to his new home and told his purpose in life. It is to till the ground and guard his new home. We do not know what he may have been told before or after the above command, but isn't it interesting that the first divine commandment is a negative dietary one. As far as his guard duty is concerned, it appears that the forbidden fruit is the only immediate threat to his safety. In a garden where he is the only resident that shouldn't be much of a problem. All he has to do is stay away from one tree.

You may be sure that the two trees haven't escaped the attention of members of the ancient audience. They were well aware of other stories where food played a pivotal role in a struggle for eternal life. Paul Watson, in his article [The Tree of Life](#) notes:

However, if no tree of life *per se* is found in the literature, notice should be taken both of the Gilgamesh epic and the Adapa creation myth.

In the latter story Adapa, following the orders of his father Ea, unwittingly refuses the "bread of death" and "water of death" offered to him by the gatekeepers of heaven, not knowing that had he accepted their offer he would thereby have gained immortality. The epic of Gilgamesh is even more instructive. In it the Noah-like figure Utnapishtim tells Gilgamesh of a magical, life-renewing plant at the bottom of the sea and says, "If thy hands obtain the plant (thou wilt find new life)." Gilgamesh does a bit of deep-sea diving, secures the plant, and tells Urshanabi, his boatman, "Its name shall be 'Man Becomes Young in Old Age.' I myself shall eat (it) and thus return to

the state of my youth." Gilgamesh's plans are thwarted, however, by a serpent(!) who steals the plant while Gilgamesh is taking a bath.

Thus the concept of a life-giving tree in the garden of Eden . . . What is a bit surprising is the fact that relatively few subsequent references to the tree of life are found in the Bible. (http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/Ted_Hildebrandt/OTeSources/01-Genesis/Text/Articles-Books/Watson_TreeLife_RestQ.pdf)

The fact that YAHWEH ELOHIYM failed to point out the tree of life would have really caught their attention! However, the story is able to become much more interesting as the garden receives some new residents.

And YAHWEH ELOHIYM said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." And out of the ground the YAHWEH ELOHIYM formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought *them* to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. And the man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for *the* man there was not found a helper suitable for him. (2:18-20)

The man was alone with God, however, even though YAWHEH ELOHIYM is there, it isn't considered a good thing by that God. But, the way that YAHWEH ELOHIYM goes about solving that problem seems a little strange. He seems to think that the man needs a pet, based on the first things he makes for him - animals, birds and cattle. YAHWEH ELOHIYM then does something unexpected to those who have already read the first chapter of Genesis; he brings them to the man to see what he would name them.

In the first chapter ELOHIYM named everything that he made. He also made the animals first and then made the man, as well as his mate apparently at the same time. The order is reversed in this account and the resulting situation is not called very good, like in the first. Did YAHWEH ELOHIM really think that any of the animals could have fulfilled the needs of the man? Or, was this done to teach the man a lesson?

And YAHWEH ELOHIYM caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh at that

place. And YAHWEH ELOHIYM fashioned into a woman the rib which he had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. (2:21-22)

Unlike the man, the woman was not formed from the dirt. Just as the man is linked with the earth, she will be linked to the man as the source of her being. Of course, we have the advantage of knowing just what took place, since he was asleep during her formation. The first time he saw her was when she was brought to him, just like the animals and birds had been. Did she where she came from when she came to the man? This was their first time to see another human being and readers now hear the first words ever spoken by one human to another.

And the man (ADAM) said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ISHAH (woman), because she was taken out of ISH (man)." (2:23)

The man clearly establishes a link between himself and the woman, but he does it in a very strange way. Up to this point, the Hebrew word that has been used for man is ADAM. It is just the common Hebrew word for "man." But, now the man refers to himself by a new word, ISH. The Hebrew feminine singular noun forming suffix is "-AH;" so by adding it to his new word for man he creates the word for woman – "ISH + AH." These are the first uses of ISH and ISHAH in the biblical text. Their names would link them together forever.

Thus a man (ISH) shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his woman (ISHAH); and they shall become one flesh. (2:24)

Commentators are divided over who said the above words. Some attribute them to the man and include them as part of the quote from verse 23. Others, however, argue that they are the narrator's words because the man wouldn't have known what a father or mother was. An interesting point is that this verse is used in many wedding ceremonies and the way it is usually understood is that the bride will leave her home and cleave to the bridegroom. But, in fact, the verse says just the opposite. It is the man who must leave his home and cleave to his bride. The basic meaning of the word translated "cleave" is to be "to be glued," which would literally make them one flesh.

And the man (ADAM) and his woman (ISHA) were both ARUMIYM and were not shamed. And the NACHASH (serpent) was more ARUM than any beast of the field which YAHWEH ELOHIYM had made. (2:25-3:1a)

The relationship of the two Hebrew words ARUM and ARUMIYM is completely lost. ARUMIYM is the same root word as the first, it just has a plural suffix (-IYM) attached ARUM + IYM. English translations usually have "naked" for ARUMIYM and "subtle" for ARUM. The basic meaning of ARUM is "clever."

The ancient author sets the stage for what is to come. The man and woman are both clever, but the serpent is the cleverest animal of the field. I imagine that everyone in the ancient audience knew what was coming next; the question was who would win. We will have to wait until the next issue to find out. **BHC**

October Memorials

In Loving Memory

**JEWELL G.
PATTERSON**

March 14, 1907
October 1, 1995

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*



In Their Remembrance

*May their memories inspire us to
seek those qualities of mind and
heart which they shared when we
walked life's journey together.*

*May we help to bring closer to
fulfillment their highest ideals and
noblest strivings.*

*May their memories deepen our
loyalty to those things which we
valued and shared --
faith, love, peace and devotion and
our biblical heritage.*

*As long as we live, they too will live;
for they are now a part of us, as we
remember them.*

(Inspired from prayers found in Yitzhor
Reflections - The New Mahzor - The Prayer
Book Press)

In Loving Memory

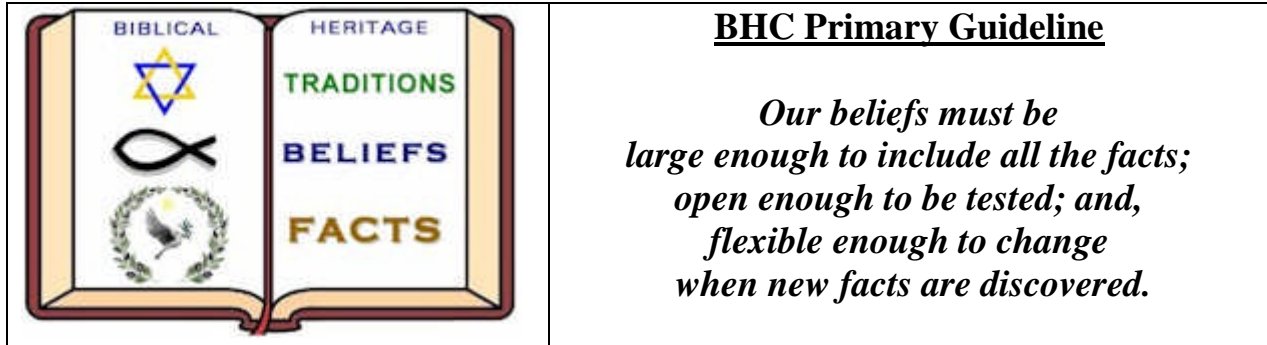
**C. P.
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OF BHC**

1914
October 17, 2003

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

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