



CONTEXT FOR THE CHRIST EVENT:

## Canaanite I

FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS the world has been enthralled with the concept of Paradise — the Garden of Eden. Several New Testament authors believed that Paradise is in heaven. For example, the apostle Paul declared, “I knew a man . . . [who was] caught up to the third heaven . . . into paradise . . .” (2 Corinthians 12:2, 4; cf. Luke 23:43; Revelation 2:7). Nevertheless, contemporary scholars have been searching for evidence of the Garden of Eden on earth — in India, Mongolia, Iran, Turkey, the Persian Gulf and Ethiopia.<sup>1, 2</sup> Some years ago archaeologists uncovered a fresco painting of the Garden of Eden dating to the second millennium BCE. The fresco was found on a palace wall in the ancient city of Mari (Tell Hariri), located in what is now southeastern Syria.<sup>3</sup> When God called Abraham (Abram) from the provincial city of Haran, near the capital at Mari, Abraham “went forth to go into the land of Canaan” (Genesis 12:5). And the Lord said to Abraham, “Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt [Nile = Pison] unto the great river, the river Euphrates . . .” (Genesis 15:18).

On the bed of the Nile River in the south, just beyond Elephantine Island, lay the mythical entrance to hell, guarded by the serpent god, Apophis.<sup>4</sup> Near the Euphrates River in the north rose the mythical entrance to heaven — the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). According to the Genesis account, two other rivers flowed forth from Eden — the Hiddekel (Tigris) and Gihon (Genesis 2:10-14). While Genesis locates the river, Gihon, in Ethiopia, other biblical texts place Gihon (“stream”) in a Jerusalem valley (Genesis 2:13; 1 Kings 1:33; 2 Chronicles

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32:30). It was therefore the land of Canaan which was regarded as the paradisaical Garden of Eden, with Jerusalem at its center.<sup>5</sup>

On Abraham's first visit to Jerusalem, Melchizedek, the king and priest of Salem (Jerusalem), gave his blessing to Abraham, and Abraham responded by giving Melchizedek "tithes of all" (Genesis 14:18-20). Later, God told Abraham to return to Mount Moriah (Jerusalem) with his son, Isaac, and offer him there as a burnt offering. Abraham obeyed the Lord, but as the patriarch raised the knife to slay Isaac, the angel of the Lord called to him out of heaven and said, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, . . . for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me" (Genesis 22:12). After offering a ram instead of his son as a burnt offering, Abraham "called the name of that place Jehovah-Jireh" — "YHWH will provide [the covenantal sacrifice]" (Genesis 22:14). Again, these events occurred in the center of Paradise — the Garden of Eden.

Centuries later, David placed the wilderness Tabernacle on the mount in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:16, 17). It was here that Solomon erected and dedicated the Temple (1 Kings 8). The veil between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place of the Temple represented the archetypal Creation and thus typified the Garden of Eden. Each year, when the High Priest entered the Most Holy Place, he was therefore entering the paradisaical garden and the presence of God.<sup>6</sup>

Interestingly, several biblical passages employ the "garden" as a metaphor for a person or persons. Thus: "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse . . ." (Song of Solomon 4:12). ". . . [A]nd thou shalt be like a watered garden . . ." (Isaiah 58:11). "For the Lord [YHWH] hath redeemed Jacob . . . and their soul shall be as a watered garden . . ." (Jeremiah 31:11, 12).

It was in this context that Jesus, as the human manifestation of YHWH, rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and was proclaimed King (Matthew 21:1-11; cf. Zechariah 9:9). It was in this context that Jesus Christ came to the Temple and cleansed it (Matthew 21:12, 13). It was in this setting that Jesus hung on the "tree"

on Golgotha's hill (Acts 5:30).<sup>7</sup> It was at the moment of his crucified death that the veil of the Temple, symbolizing Paradise, was rent from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51).<sup>8</sup> It was in the "garden" that the resurrected Lord first appeared to Mary (John 19:41; 20:15).

These metaphors signify that the Risen One is King and Priest "for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (Hebrews 7:17). Furthermore, he is himself Paradise. He is the Garden of Eden. So he says, ". . . [L]o, I am with you always . . ." (Matthew 28:20).

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## Endnotes

1. See Dora Jane Hamblin, "Has the Garden of Eden Been Located at Last?" at [www.ldolphin.org/eden/](http://www.ldolphin.org/eden/).

2. See "The Garden of Eden Discovered," at [www.biblicalheritage.org/Archaeology/eden.htm](http://www.biblicalheritage.org/Archaeology/eden.htm).
3. See Herschel Shanks, "The History behind the Bible: BAR Interviews Avraham Malamat," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 29, no. 1 (January/February 2003): 40-44, 46.
4. See Jean-Francois Pecoil, "Les Sources Mythiques du Nil et le Cycle de la Crue," *BSEG* 17 (1993): 97-110.
5. See Lawrence E. Stager, "Jerusalem as Eden," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 26, no. 3 (May/June 2000): 36-47, 66.
6. See Margaret Barker, "Beyond the Veil of the Temple: The High Priestly Origin of the Apocalypses," at [www.marquette.edu/maqom/veil](http://www.marquette.edu/maqom/veil).
7. Golgotha and Calvary both mean "skull." ". . . Golgotha was situated at the center of the world, since it was the summit of the cosmic mountain and at the same time the place where Adam had been created and buried. Thus the blood of the Saviour falls upon Adam's skull, buried precisely at the foot of the Cross, and redeems him" (Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return, or Cosmos and History* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954], p. 14).
8. Note also Hebrews 10:19, 20: "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh . . ."

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