

Two-part article

The Garden of Eden (1)

Andrew E. Walker

The Garden of Eden is generally assumed to have been in Mesopotamia. This two-part article shows that later references to Eden in Scripture indicate a location in Israel, and various references to the Kingdom, which is based on the land of Israel, and to the tabernacle, associated with the land of Israel, have important links with the Genesis record of the events in the Garden.

WE DO NOT know for certain where the LORD planted the Garden of Eden. Any suggestions fall into the realm of 'uncertain detail', not 'true principles', as Brother Robert Roberts once wrote. However, the traditional view of a garden somewhere in Mesopotamia leaves us with one great question. Why did God change the centre of His purpose with the earth from Mesopotamia to the Land of Israel? From Abraham onwards, Israel, and Jerusalem in particular, are the places the Lord cares for. At the end of the book of Revelation, the Kingdom of God is clearly described as Eden restored. So why do we assume it was in a geographically different spot? Unless . . . the Garden was not planted in Mesopotamia but in what would later become the Land of Israel, which is what this two-part article suggests.

The record in Genesis 2:8-14 is as follows:

"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".

Geographical evidence

Most writers place the Garden of Eden somewhere in the Euphrates basin. For example:

"I suspect . . . it lay somewhere between the Gulf of Persia, and the junction of the Euphrates and the Tigris";¹

"Calvin. . . and others believed the river of Paradise to have been the united streams of the Tigris and Euphrates called the Shat-el-Arab, which flow by Bassora [Basra]. Its four heads, on their shewing, would have been, on the north, the two separate streams of the Tigris and Euphrates, on the south, Gihon, the eastern, and Pison, the western channels, into which the united stream again branches out below Bassora, before it falls into the sea";²

"In the east appears to locate Eden somewhere in Mesopotamia or Arabia";³

"Eden . . . a term used as a geographical designation for the plain between the Tigris and Euphrates in southern Mesopotamia".⁴

There are two reasons for these conclusions. One is the description of the rivers in 2:11-14, the second is the fact that the garden is stated to have been "planted . . . eastward in Eden", which is taken as meaning 'in the east'.

Of the rivers we know the following:

Pison means 'increase', and is found only here in Scripture. It comes from a root *puwsh*, meaning 'to jump', 'to run to and fro'.

Gihon means 'bursting forth', and comes from a root *giyach*, meaning 'to come forth'. Gihon is mentioned as the name of the spring outside the walls of Jerusalem. It was the

1. John Thomas, *Elpis Israel*, p. 61.
2. *Speaker's Commentary*, p. 40.
3. G. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary, Genesis 1-15*, p. 61.
4. V. Hamilton, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Genesis 1-17*, p. 161.

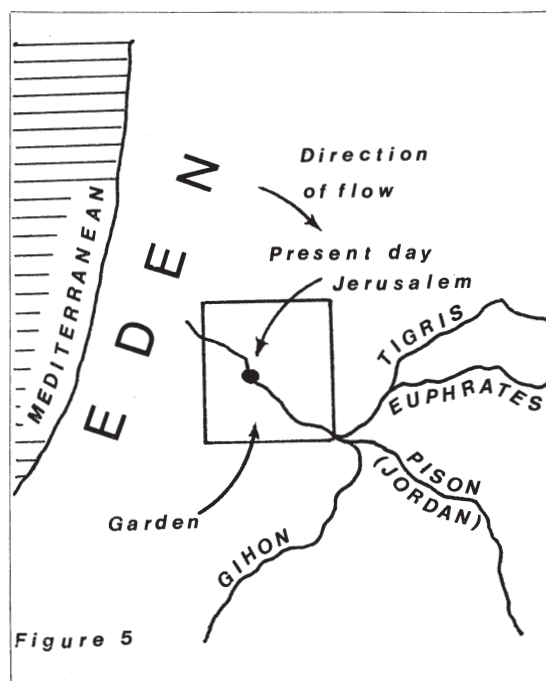


Figure 5

One suggestion as to how the rivers of Eden might have flowed. Reproduced from "Where was the Garden of Eden?", G. Booker, December 1981, p. 379.

nearest source of 'living waters' to Jerusalem, which had none within the city walls ('Zion' means 'a parched place'), and hence has great spiritual significance. It was where Solomon was crowned (1 Kgs. 1:38,39), and was the watercourse redirected by Hezekiah (2 Chron. 32:30).

Hiddekel means 'rapid', and refers to the river Tigris (as the Septuagint translates it). It is found only here and in Daniel 10:4.

Euphrates means 'fruitfulness'.

We do not know with any certainty where the first two of these rivers were, and many and varied are the suggestions put forward. Cassuto⁵ makes the point that they are given Hebrew names in Genesis 2 and that these names have the same grammatical structure. In contrast, the names of the third and fourth rivers are given in the language of their country.

What is clear is that the courses of these four rivers, as originally formed by God, have been radically changed at some time in history, possibly at the time of the Flood, when rain fell for the first time. Therefore any conclusions about the position of the Garden of Eden that are based on

the current locations of the Tigris and Euphrates must be tentative.

Another way of looking at them is to see two groups of rivers (Cassuto suggests this), one in Mesopotamia—the Tigris and the Euphrates—and another in the land of Israel—the Gihon and the Jordan (Pison). From this we are led to see the beginnings of the two areas which would dominate the Old Testament, and the two cities, Jerusalem and Babylon, which would be in conflict from Genesis to Revelation. The water of life flowed out to each of these areas, but it was rejected in Mesopotamia until Abraham alone was found faithful. It would be in the land of Canaan that God's people would find the water of life and drink of it.

We must now turn to the idea of "eastward". The word used in Genesis 2:8, *qedem*, has its origins in a root meaning 'to be in front of'. It is used in an interesting way of the tabernacle in Numbers 3:38:

"But those that encamp before the tabernacle toward the east [*qedem*], even before the tabernacle of the congregation eastward [*mizrach*], shall be Moses, and Aaron and his sons, keeping the charge of the sanctuary for the charge of the children of Israel; and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death".

Why use two different words here? Is the meaning that the tabernacle faced eastwards (*qedem*) and that Moses and Aaron camped there, on the east side (*mizrach*, literally 'the place of the sun-rising')? If this is the case then Genesis 2 simply tells us that the Garden of Eden faced eastwards (just like the tabernacle), and we know from 3:24 that the entrance was on this east side.

Other references to Eden

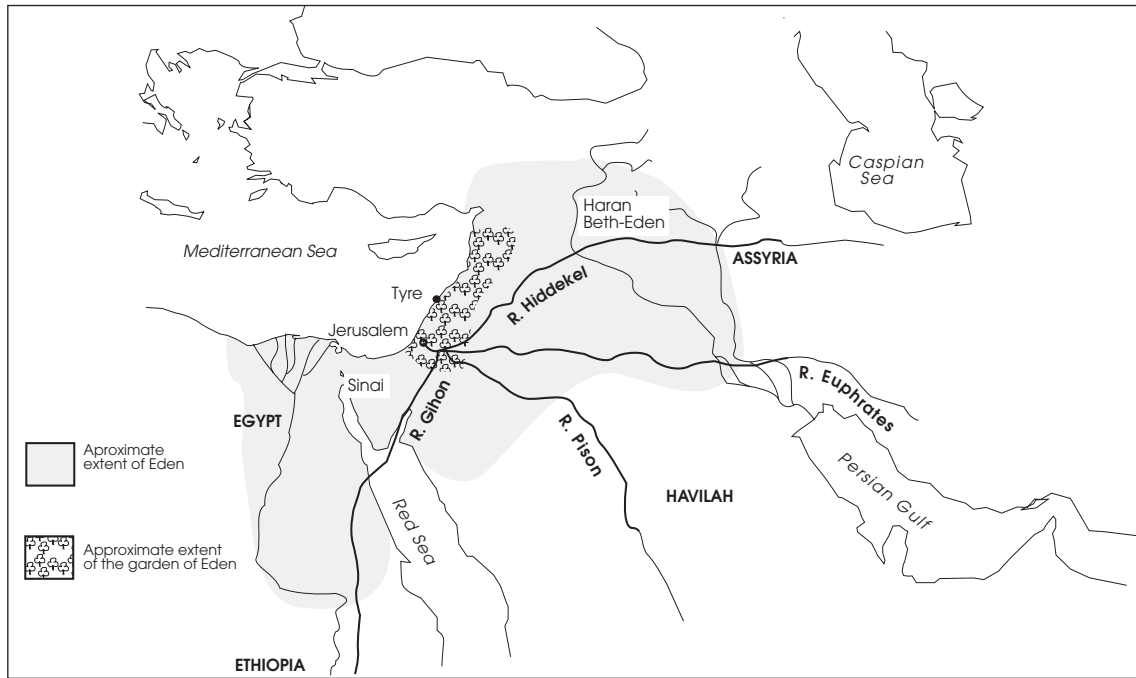
It is worth listing some of the references to Eden in Scripture, apart from those in Genesis 1–3, to see if they have anything in common:

"And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden" (4:16).

Here are the beginnings of the children of men and the cities they built, further east than the Garden of Eden. If the garden was in the Euphrates basin then it is difficult to see where Cain went.

"And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and

5. U. Cassuto, *Genesis Part 1, From Adam to Noah*, p. 116.



One suggestion regarding the location of Eden and the Garden of Eden. Reproduced from “The Garden of Eden”, C. Barbaresi, March 1993, p. 101.

Gomorrhah, even as *the garden of the LORD*, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar” (13:10).

It was well watered; the verse uses a word for irrigation that has its roots in the language used in 2:6,10 of the river that watered the garden.

“For the LORD shall comfort Zion: He will comfort all her waste places; and He will make her wilderness *like Eden*, and her desert like *the garden of the LORD*; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody” (Isa. 51:3).

There is at least a suggestion here that this restoration of the Land of Israel will be Eden restored. Songs had originally been sung in worship in Eden, and then later in Israel when the ark was brought to Zion by David (compare the introduction of the formal singing of the Psalms by David in 1 Chronicles 16). No doubt music was absent when Adam was cast out of the garden; perhaps there was weeping and gnashing of teeth (cf. Mt. 8:12). We know also that songs would not be sung while Israel was in exile in Mesopotamia (Ps. 137:4).

“Thou hast been in *Eden the garden of God*; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the

emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created” (Ezek. 28:13).

The king of Tyre is described as a political Adam, he is depicted as being in the same place as Adam and falling into the same error as he did—seeking equality with God.

“A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as *the garden of Eden* before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them” (Joel 2:3).

It is Israel, in its time of prosperity under Hezekiah, which has flourished as the garden restored. The Assyrian invaders are like locusts destroying it.

In each case above, there is a strong link between the Land of Israel and Eden. Why use such language consistently if there was no geographical correlation between the two?

The meaning of ‘Eden’

The word Eden means ‘pleasure’. The garden was situated in the land of Eden and was the very centre of God’s creation, of which Scripture says: “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for Thou hast created

all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created" (Rev. 4:11). One of the key things for us to think about, therefore, is, In what way did God seek pleasure from His creation in this garden?

We know that the commandment to Adam and Eve was to be fruitful and multiply and to fill the earth. It is Malachi who tells us that they were to do this by having "a godly seed" (2:15). This is picked up in the promises made to Abraham, for the angel appeared to him on God's behalf, saying:

"I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God . . . And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her" (Gen. 17:6-8,15,16).

When Sarah becomes aware of this promise she says: "After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" (18:12). Sarah is not just talking about the natural pleasure of having children; she is a deeply spiritual woman and links the idea of pleasure with the commandment God made to the first man and wife and their life together in the Garden of Eden. But, in the promises, that land promised to Abraham is the land of Canaan.

Or again, consider Psalm 36:

"How excellent is Thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust

under the shadow of Thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house; and Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures. For with Thee is the fountain of life: in Thy light shall we see light" (vv. 7-9).

Here the psalmist speaks of the Kingdom of God, which will be established in Israel, and where the house of God will be. Yet the language is unmistakably looking back to Eden and the river of life that watered it.

We are told that on the seventh day God "rested, and was refreshed" (Ex. 31:17). This is an idea picked up by Peter in Acts 3, when he says, "the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (v. 19). But it is of the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel and the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham of which he speaks. Once again, the Land of Israel and the Kingdom to come are linked with events in Eden. This seventh day was the first full day together in the lives of Adam and Eve. It was not spent in dressing the Garden but in rest, and in worship and praise of the One Who had made them. There was "joy and gladness . . . thanksgiving, and the voice of melody" (Isa. 51:3). On this day the principles of the sabbath were laid down, and in the keeping of them the Lord was refreshed.

However, it is Psalm 132 that brings all of these ideas together. Here we find David seeking out a place for God's rest, a place for the tabernacle, and it is Zion He has chosen.

In the Septuagint, the Greek word *paradeisos* is used for the English 'garden'. This is picked up three times in the New Testament. Jesus tells the thief on the cross that he will be in paradise (Lk. 23:43), Paul is caught up to paradise (2 Cor. 12:4) and John tells us that the tree of life is in the midst of the paradise of God (Rev. 2:7). All of these, of course, are references to the Kingdom, centred on Jerusalem, yet they refer to it in 'Eden' language.

[\(To be concluded\)](#)

100 years ago

After a year in which Russian persecution of its Jews was prominent, Brother C. C. Walker wrote: "A troubled year is drawing to a close, and apart from the light of prophecy there is nothing but trouble visible ahead. The Russian Empire and the Jews are in the thick of it. 'Cursed is he that curseth thee' is the text to be written up over this year's history of Russia; while of the Jews themselves it must be said that they are the terrible monument of the impartial 'severity' of the Lord God of Israel. Yet there is hope in their end [for] the remnant shall return".

The Christadelphian, Dec. 1905