



**GEORGE
HODGES**

***THE GARDEN
OF EDEN:
STORIES FROM
THE FIRST
NINE BOOKS
OF THE OLD
TESTAMENT***

George Hodges

The Garden of Eden: Stories from the first nine books of the Old Testament

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



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THE GARDEN OF EDEN

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I

THE GARDEN OF EDEN

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THIS is the oldest story in the world. It began to be told when children began to ask questions; and that was very long ago. The children said, "Where did everything come from? Who made the hills and the sea? Who made the sun and the stars?" And their fathers and mothers answered as best they could.

In our time, after long study of the earth, there are wise men who know more about these things than anybody knew when the world was young. They ask the earth itself, and tell us what the earth says. But the oldest story is still the best, because it tells us that the world was made by God. And that is what we want to know.

In the beginning of all beginnings, so the story goes, the world was a wide sea without a shore. Up and down, and here and there, and all across, nothing could be seen but water. And it was all dark, like the ocean at night when there is no moon. And God said, "Let there be light!" And day appeared. And God made the sky; and under the sky, in the new light of day, in the midst of the vast waters, He made the land; and grass began to grow upon it, and then trees, with leaves and fruit.

Then in the sky, the sun began to shine by day, and the moon and stars by night. And in the sea, first little fishes and then big ones, began to swim; and in the air, the birds began to fly; and on the land, all kinds of living things began to move about, lions in the thick woods, sheep in the fields, cows in the pastures. And at last, as best of all, God made man; and to the first man He said, "Behold, the new earth and all that is in it. It is yours. Here you are to live, and over all these living things you are to rule."

Thus the world and man came into being. The story says that God did all this in six days, but the earth says that every one of these six days was millions of years long. Very, very slowly, but no less wonderfully, was the great world made.

"But," the children said, "if God, our Heavenly Father, made the world, how came there to be briars and brambles? Why is the ground so stony? and why do men have to work so hard to make things grow? and why have pain and sickness and sin and death come in to spoil the world?"

In the beginning of beginnings, said their fathers and mothers,—and this is the next oldest story,—the earth was a

mighty plain, on which no rain had fallen since the first hour of time, but a mist blew in from the sea and watered the ground. Out of this damp earth, God made a man, body and legs and arms and head; and when the man was made, God breathed upon him, and, behold, the man lived. The body of earth was changed to flesh and blood, and the man opened his eyes, and rose up and began to walk and speak.

And God planted the Garden of Eden for the man to live in, with great shady trees, and a river singing as it flowed between its flowery banks. Then God brought to the man all the beasts and birds, and the man gave each a name, and they played together in the sunny fields.

But still the man was very lonely. Then God put the man to sleep, and while he slept God took out one of the man's ribs and of it made a woman. And the man waked and saw the woman, and he took her by the hand, and was very glad. The man's name was Adam, and the woman's name was Eve.

Now, God had showed Adam two trees of the Garden. One was a Tree of Life: whoever ate of the fruit of it would live forever. The other was a Tree of Knowledge: whoever ate of the fruit of it would know both good and evil. And God had said that these trees must not be touched. But one time, as Mother Eve was walking in the pleasant shadow of the Tree of Knowledge, she saw a serpent. This, you understand, was long ago, when strange things happened as they do in fairy stories. All the animals were friendly and knew how to talk. So Eve was not afraid, nor was she surprised to hear the serpent speak.

“Eve,” he said, coiling his glittering tail about the tree, “this is good fruit; why do you never taste it?”

“Serpent,” said Eve, “this is forbidden fruit. God has told us not to touch it.”

“But see,” replied the serpent, winking his bright eyes, “see how it shines among the leaves. Surely such fair fruit can do no harm. Indeed, a little taste will make you the wisest woman in the world!”

And foolish Eve listened and was tempted. She looked again at the bright and luscious fruit, and took of it and ate it, and gave to Adam and he ate it.

Then trouble came. That is what always follows disobedience. Adam and Eve began to consider what they had done, and they were sorry and afraid. Now, every day, in the Garden of Eden, God used to come, as the evening shadows lengthened, and walk among the trees in the cool of the twilight; but that day, Adam and Eve hid themselves. So God called, “Adam, Eve, where are you? Why do you hide yourselves? Have you eaten of the fruit of the forbidden tree?”

And Adam came and said, “It was Eve’s fault: she gave it to me.” And Eve said, “It was the serpent’s fault: he tempted me.” As for the serpent, there was nobody else upon whom he could cast the blame.

So God said that the serpent and all serpents after him should crawl upon the ground. He sent Adam and Eve out of the garden, and, at the gate, to keep them from coming back, he set angels with flaming swords. Thus the good world was spoiled. Outside the garden gate, the earth was thick with briars and brambles.

NOAH'S ARK

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AND then, what happened? After Adam and Eve had disobeyed God, and had been driven out of the Garden of Eden into the world of briers and brambles, then what happened? "Tell us," cried the children, "another story of the beginning of the world." And their fathers and mothers, in answer, told what their grandfathers and grandmothers had told them.

The first disobedience was like the first little flame which is touched to a heap of dry wood. It grew and grew. Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel. Cain became a farmer, and Abel became a shepherd. One time they brought each an offering to give to God. Cain brought fruit from his farm, and Abel brought lambs from his flock. But God looked at their hearts, and He was pleased with Abel's offering, but Cain's He would not take. And Cain was very angry with God and with his brother. Then one day when the two brothers were in the field together, Cain quarreled with Abel and struck him and killed him.

And God said, "Where is Abel thy brother?"

And Cain said, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Thus he sinned both in word and in deed; and God had to send him away into the wild deserts. All this was very terrible for Adam and Eve. Thus while briers and brambles

grew in the ground, evil and sorrow grew in the hearts of men.

Now, after many years, the men and women and even the little children were all so bad that there was no way to make them better. The only thing to do was to destroy them, and begin the world all over again. But there was one good family. Noah and his wife, and their three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth and their wives, minded what God told them. So God said to Noah, "I will destroy all these wicked people, but I will save you and yours. I will wash the whole earth clean with a great flood. You must make a boat, and you and your wife, and your sons and their wives must get into it. And you must take all the animals with you, two of every kind, with which to start the world again after the flood is over."

Noah began, therefore, to build a boat. In the middle of a wide field, he and his sons brought beams and boards together and set to work. The boat was like a box, and it was called the Ark, because that means a box. It had a big door in the side, and all around, near the top, ran a line of windows. And inside all the cracks were filled with pitch, to keep the water out.

Before long, the neighbors came, and said, "What are you doing, Noah?"

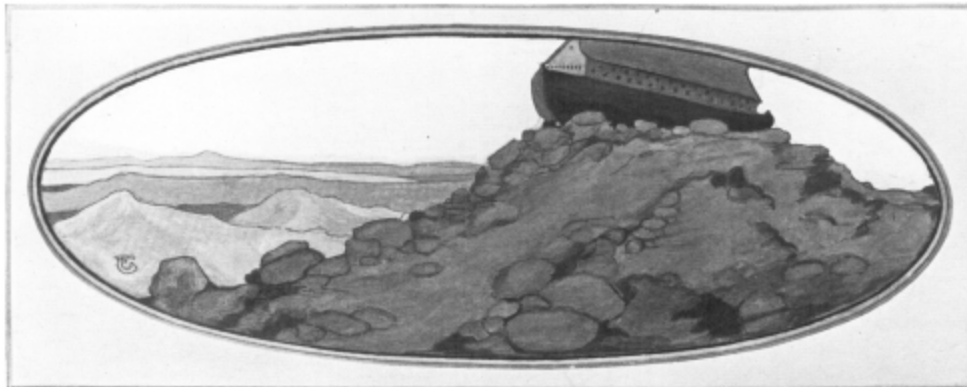
And Noah answered, "I am building a boat."

"But," said the neighbors, "this is no place for a boat. A boat is of no use without water. Who ever heard of a boat in the middle of a meadow?"

But Noah said, "Here, where we stand, in this dry field, the water shall be as deep as the highest hills are high."

Then Noah told them of the coming flood, and tried to get them to stop their bad ways, that they might live, and not be drowned. But the neighbors only laughed at Noah, and said he must be crazy to build a boat on dry land, and so they went back to their wicked lives. Sometimes, when it rained, they thought of Noah, but the rain cleared away, and they laughed again, and were worse than ever.

At last, the great day came, with clouds and thunder. Early that morning, the animals began to come from near and far, lions and bears, and sheep and oxen, camels and elephants, and cats and dogs, two by two they jumped and crawled and ran and flew into the Ark. When they were all in, Noah and his wife, and Shem, Ham, and Japheth and



THE ARK RESTS ON THE TOP OF A MOUNTAIN

their wives went in after them, and the door was shut. And when the door was shut, the rain came.

First, it rained as if a little brook were tumbling down out of the sky, and then the brook changed into a river, and the river into a pond, and the pond into a lake, and the lake into an ocean, and all the air was full of water as the sea is full of waves. The water filled the streets of towns, and crept into the doors of houses, and climbed step after step upstairs, till

all the roofs were covered. By and by, nothing was to be seen in all the earth but the Ark floating on the flood. And when Noah looked out of the window of the Ark, the world appeared as it did in the beginning of beginnings, a wide waste of water. And still it rained, and rained.

At last, after days and days, nobody knows how long, the rain ceased, and the sun came out, and the flood began to go down. And one day, there was a grinding noise as if the Ark had touched the ground, and Noah looked, and, behold, the Ark had landed on the top of a mountain, which was like a little island in the deep sea. By and by, Noah sent out a dove, and the dove flew here and there and found no rest for the sole of her foot, and so came back. And again, after a week, Noah sent the dove a second time, and now she brought back a leaf plucked from an olive tree. Thus Noah knew that the water had gone down below the treetops. Once more he sent the dove, and this time she found a place to make a nest.

Then Noah opened the wide door of the Ark, and all the world was green and fresh and shining in the sun. And there on the top of the mountain, which is called Ararat, Noah and his family thanked God for their deliverance, and all the beasts and birds, each in his own way, said Amen. And across the sky was a gleaming rainbow, from one hill to another over the glistening earth. And God said to Noah, "Behold the bow! It is the sign of my promise that I will never again destroy the earth. When the rain falls and men begin to be afraid, then shall the sun shine through the wet clouds, and the bow shall be painted in the sky." Thus, with

the prayers of Noah and with the promise of God, the life of man began anew.

II

THE ADVENTURES OF LOT

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ONCE upon a time, when the world was still young, there was a lad named Lot. His father and mother were dead, and he lived with his Uncle Abraham and his Aunt Sarah.

In the place where Lot lived, the people believed that the moon was God. They looked up into the sky at night, and saw the shining moon, and it seemed to them the most beautiful and most wonderful sight in the world, and they said their prayers to it. But Abraham knew better than that. He knew that God who made the earth made the moon also. Because Abraham would not go to the moon-church, his neighbors disliked him. So at last he made up his mind to move away. One night, in a dream, he heard the voice of God, and God told him to go. And, the next day, he took Sarah and Lot, and started out to find a better place to live in. Thus Lot got his first look at the wide world.

Abraham and Sarah and Lot rode on the backs of camels, but they had to go very slowly because they took with them all their sheep and cows. So they journeyed and they journeyed till by and by they came to a great river, called

the Euphrates. And then they journeyed and they journeyed till by and by they came to another river, called the Jordan, in a deep valley. And there, between the Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea,—the place is on the map,—they found a pleasant land which they liked much. On account of their flocks and herds they could not settle down and stay long in one place, so they wandered here and there over the green country, stopping to rest now under a spreading oak, and now in the shadow of a great rock; and they slept in tents.

But, after a while, they had so many sheep and lambs, and cows and calves, that it was hard to find a pasture big enough to feed them all. When they came to a spring of water, and all wanted to drink at the same time, there was great confusion; and sometimes the herdsmen fought about it. So one day Abraham said to Lot, “There are now so many cattle that we had better divide them into two companies, and pasture them in different places. You take yours and go your way, and I will take mine and go my way. Here is a high hill, from which we may see all the land. Let us climb up and look, and you shall choose which part you will take.” So they climbed up the hill, and looked out over the land. To the north were rocky hills, to the south were wild deserts, to the west was the sea, but to the east was a green plain. In the plain were rich pastures, and groves of trees with the white houses of little towns among them, and a river flowing by, so that it looked like the Garden of Eden. This pleased Lot. He said to himself, “My Uncle Abraham has given me my choice, and I will choose the best there is.” So he chose the plain, leaving Abraham the stony hills.

Now, people who think only of themselves, and take the best without regard to others, sometimes get the worst. And this is very likely to be the case with those who choose that which is easy instead of that which is hard. So it was with Lot. The plain was not so pleasant as he thought. It had once been the bed of a salt sea, and in some places the salt lay upon the ground, and there were salt springs. And near by there was a dreadful swamp where the mud was mixed with oil. Before Lot had been long at Sodom,—for this was the name of the town in which he lived,—there came four kings with long names and fierce soldiers, and they drove the people out of their houses, and back into the swamp, and they captured them and carried them away. Abraham, when he heard of it, took all his herdsmen, and armed them with swords and clubs, and they attacked the four kings by night when they were asleep, and rescued Lot and his neighbors. But it was all very unpleasant for Lot.

The people of Sodom had never been good people, but after this they were worse than ever. It troubled Lot greatly. Sometimes he thought of moving away, but his wife liked the place, and so did their two daughters: so he stayed. He reproved his bad neighbors, but that did no good; he only made himself unpopular.

At last, one hot day, as Abraham sat in the door of his tent under the shade of the oaks, he saw three men coming. And he rose up and ran to meet them, for he was very kind to strangers. “Come,” he said, “and rest here in the cool shade, and my wife shall get you something to eat.” So the strangers stopped, and Sarah made a fire and baked some cakes and broiled some meat, and brought out curds and