

THE GARDEN OF EDEN

Genesis 2:8-25

The first seven chapters of Genesis were copied verbatim from the Ancient Word and are in the language of pure symbol in which that Word was written (see SS 103, TCR 279^e, SD 5605). They are especially adapted to the teaching of young children, who love the simple, beautiful pictures they present and retain them deep in their memories. They should be taught with a feeling of wonder and reverence.

Doctrinal Points

In the Word truth from the Lord is adapted to all the different planes of the soul.

We are given freedom to choose good or evil, but we must always look to the Lord and not to self for both knowledge and power.

Notes for Parents

The beautiful parable of the Garden of Eden shows us the happy, innocent state of the first people on earth after they had developed—through the stages described in the Creation story—into a church. At the center of this church was worship of the Lord as the Source of all goodness and truth—the tree of life. The river which watered the garden was truth from the Lord flowing into every plane of life. It was an ideal state.

Do we wonder why it did not last? It was because of that other tree in the garden, the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Mankind, we remember, was created in the image and likeness of God. Man was not to be a mere automaton, carrying out the will of God by instinct like the animals. He was to have the feeling that he was an independent being, and the freedom to choose whether he would serve God or himself. This was the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The Lord warned man not to eat of its fruit, that is,

not to believe that he was really wise apart from the Lord's truth, but he was left free to disobey.

The story of the creation of woman from Adam's rib is, of course, a parable too. The first seven chapters of Genesis were copied by Moses from an Ancient Word which existed before our Bible and which was written in an old style of pure symbolism. We should know that Adam and Eve were not two individuals, for we have already been told that both men and women had been created. *Adam* is the Hebrew word for "man" or "mankind," and *Eve* means "life." The story of the creation of Eve gives us a picture of the Lord's mercy in permitting mankind to see how the lifeless framework which he really is can be brought to life and clothed with beauty by the Lord's spirit. Of ourselves we are nothing, but if we turn to the Lord and obey Him, He can make us angels. And this story also gives us the basis of true marriage, for it is only obedience to the Lord and unselfish devotion to one another that can make a marriage happy.



Primary

Teachers will have no difficulty in talking to young children about the beautiful Garden of Eden. The river, the trees, the fruit, and the animals all connect with the children's own experience. Tell them that the Lord made this beautiful garden on purpose for men to live in long ago when He first created them. He told them to take good care of it—"to dress it and keep it." He told them that they might enjoy all the fruit except the fruit of one tree. If they had obeyed the Lord, they would have been able to go on living in the garden always. In this way prepare the children for the fact that men lost the garden because they did not obey the Lord. When we are selfish with our things and misuse and spoil them, we are spoiling our "garden."

When the Lord created the first people, He gave them a beautiful place to live in. It is called the Garden of Eden, and in our chapter for today the first people are called *Adam*. Let us read the story from the Bible. [Read Genesis 2:8-25.]

You see these first people were taken care of by the Lord just as you are taken care of by your parents. The Lord provided their

food and gave them everything they needed, and they were grateful to Him and loved Him. They had not begun to be selfish or to want their own way. They obeyed the Lord and took care of everything in the garden just as He told them to do.

Where did the Lord put the first people?

Eden means “delight.”

How was the Garden of Eden watered?

Into how many streams did the river divide?

What tree was in the midst of the garden?

What were the first people to do in the garden?

Can you remember what was the one thing the Lord told them not to do? You know that when your parents tell you not to do something, you are likely to think about just that particular thing, and pretty soon it begins to seem just the one thing you most want to do. That is what is called temptation. If we are wise, we do not disobey, but all of us sometimes are foolish instead of wise.

Junior

The details of the story should be impressed on the children with the understanding that this is a wonderful parable which they will understand better and better as they grow older. The correspondence of the Garden of Eden, the river, and the two trees can be given. Be sure to have the class look up and read the references in Ezekiel and in Revelation, and in connection with the tree of life refer again to Revelation 22:2.

What is the name of the first book in the Bible?

What does *Genesis* mean?

What is the first chapter about?

In how many days was everything created?

What did the Lord say which started the development of everything?

What was the last thing created?

What happened on the seventh day?

Our lesson for today is another beautiful parable. A parable is a story which has another meaning within it.

What is our chapter about?

How was the Garden of Eden watered?

Into how many streams did the river divide?

Who lived in the garden?

What was Adam to do in the garden?

Adam is a Hebrew word which means “man.” It is the same word that is used in verse 26 of the first chapter. So you see that this chapter is not about one man and woman but about the human race after it had developed far enough to know and serve the Lord. It was the first church which existed on earth—the Most Ancient Church—and the Garden of Eden is a picture of the beautiful, peaceful state in which its people lived. *Eden* means “delight.” They depended on the Lord for everything, and He could give them all they needed freely because they obeyed Him. You know that when you obey your parents, they can do many more pleasant things for you than they can when you are disobedient.

Last week we learned that light is a symbol of truth. In our lesson today we have another symbol for truth—that is, water. Perhaps you have heard people say of some wise man that he always had “a thirst for knowledge.” Look up and read Ezekiel 47:1-5 and Revelation 22:1-2. These describe the same river that watered the Garden of Eden—that of truth from the Lord. Now read John 4:5-14.

What tree was in the midst of the garden?

What other tree is mentioned?

What one thing was Adam told not to do?

The early people were innocent and happy because they understood that everything they had came from the Lord, and they loved and trusted Him and did not want to have their own way. This happy state is the beautiful garden and the tree of life in the center is the thought that everything comes from the Lord. As long as men obeyed the Lord and took care of all His gifts and used them as they were meant to be used, they could go on living in the happy garden.

The other tree, of whose fruit they were not to eat, is the thought that we can know what is good and wise from ourselves, without learning from the Lord. Very soon we shall learn what

happened when they disobeyed the Lord and ate of the fruit of this tree.

What did the Lord do when Adam was asleep?

What did He make from the rib?

The story of the creation of woman out of the rib of man is a parable, too. One of the things it teaches us is that “it is not good for man to be alone.” Men and women were created by the Lord to help each other. Marriage is a holy state ordained by the Lord from the beginning. You will learn much more about this part of the story and its meaning when you are older.

Intermediate

Begin by reminding the young people of the correspondence of the vegetable kingdom, and take up the correspondence of the river and the tree of life to account for the beauty and fruitfulness of the life of the people of the Most Ancient Church. This is a good lesson in which to point out the value of knowing the meaning of the Hebrew names. Take up the creation of woman in a general way, stressing the principle that the Lord provided the marriage relation to promote unselfishness. If we were allowed to feel complete in ourselves, it would be very much harder for us to be unselfish.

In studying the story of the Garden of Eden we should know first that Adam and Eve were not two individuals but symbol figures, representing the people of the first “church” on earth—the Most Ancient Church. *Adam* is merely the Hebrew word for “man,” and is the same word that is translated “man” in Genesis 1:26. *Eve* means “life.” *Eden* means “delight.” The garden is said to have been “eastward” in Eden because east represents nearness to the Lord. The four quarters—east, west, north, and south—represent states of nearness to or withdrawal from the Lord. The Lord, because He is represented by the sun which rises in the east, is identified with the east. *Eastward*, therefore, pictures a state of closeness to the Lord, and *westward* pictures a lessening of this closeness. *South*, the area which receives light during the greater part of the year, pictures greater understanding of the Lord’s truth, and *north* pictures less understanding.

The river which divides into four heads represents the truth as it comes from the Lord into our minds, and its four “heads” or divisions are the different planes or levels of thought and feeling which divine truth supplies. *Pison* means “overflowing,” and this quality applies to truths relating to the Lord’s Divine love. In the land watered by this river there is gold, the mineral which represents love. The *Gihon*, or river which “bursts forth,” describes the quality of truths about spiritual life. The *Hiddekel* (rapid) portrays the characteristics of the reasoning plane of our minds. And the *Euphrates* (fruitful) pictures truths as they apply to our outward conduct. As you study the Bible, you will find that it contains truth which satisfies the needs of all four of these areas. This river of Eden is the same river seen in vision by Ezekiel (47:1-5, 12) and John (Revelation 22:1-2).

The vegetable kingdom represents our thinking. Trees, the largest and loftiest things in this kingdom, express the ruling thoughts or principles by which we live. The tree of life is the thought or principle that all things come from the Lord. It was in the midst of the Garden of Eden because the people then lived by this principle. The tree of knowledge of good and evil represents the thought that we can be good and wise in and of ourselves without looking to the Lord for guidance and strength. This is the tree whose fruit Adam was commanded not to eat, and the same command applies to us as well.

When we give something a name, it means that we know what the thing is, its nature and uses. The early people saw everything in nature truly, each thing as a particular expression of the Lord’s love for them. So in the parable Adam was able to give names to everything.

The story of the creation of woman from the rib of man is a parable, too. As man developed, he was not content to “live alone” with God in his heart. He wanted to feel independent, just as a little child does very early in his development. Then he had to be taught to love something outside himself in the world, to keep him from being wholly selfish. In true marriage husband and wife love

each other more than self. Verse 24 is often used in marriage services, for it tells us that marriage is a holy state, ordained by the Lord from the beginning, and to be cherished above all other human relations. Notice that in the parable a deep sleep fell upon Adam. This is a picture of a time in the development of the human race when men began to be so interested in the natural world around them that they forgot that their souls were more important than their bodies. We are likely to forget this, too. The rib which the Lord took from Adam showed how lifeless man is in himself. It is only as the Lord's spirit enters into us that we become really alive and lovely.

Basic Correspondences

a river	=	truth as it comes from the Lord into our minds
trees	=	general principles
the tree of life	=	the principle that all good and truth come from the Lord
the tree of knowledge of good and evil	=	the principle that we can be good and wise of ourselves
the four points of the compass	=	our relation to the Lord
east	=	nearness to the Lord from love
west	=	a state of less love to the Lord
south	=	a clear understanding of the Lord's truth
north	=	less understanding of the Lord's truth
the mineral kingdom	=	the basic things of life
gold	=	love

Senior

Give attention to the suggestions in the Intermediate section, but use more of the class time for the discussion of the creation of woman. This lesson is our first opportunity for a discussion of marriage, which is so important with this class.

Even among those who know nothing of the language of correspondences the Garden of Eden has always been a symbol of a state of innocence and happiness. This is because it is in fact the Lord's own picture of such a state.

The Garden of Eden was not a material garden. But the spiritual state which it pictures was actually the state of the men and women of the earliest church on earth, which Swedenborg calls the Most Ancient or the Adamic Church. These people knew that they lived from the Lord. That was the central principle of their thought, the tree of life in the midst of the garden. Because they knew this the Lord could cause to spring up in the "ground" of their minds "every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food," and because of it the people of this church—called *Adam*—could "name" or distinguish the true character of all their experiences, both natural and spiritual. They did not have to study and learn as we do. Their hearts were open to the Lord and He could instruct them by an inner influx—the river of truth, whose four streams watered the four divisions or planes of their minds. We sometimes like to think that we have such inner influx, that we can trust the impulses of our hearts to tell us what is right; but this is not so. We shall see why in our next lesson.

Swedenborg says that the people of this first church had open vision into the spiritual world and scarcely thought about their natural surroundings. This is a very different concept from historians' ideas of the crude and savage beginnings of the human race. Instead, it supports the idea of the "Golden Age" handed down through mythology. It was indeed a "golden" age, the age when men were led by the Lord through love, which gold represents.

But men were not animals, to be governed by unchanging instincts. They were to be free to choose their own way, because only in freedom could they really respond to the Lord's love and be happy. Because they were made in the image and likeness of God, they must be able to think of themselves as independent beings free to choose what they would think and do. The dawning

of this sense of individual independence—the *proprium*, as Swedenborg calls it—is pictured in the story of the creation of Eve. This proprium was a part of the original structure of the human soul, one of the “bones” which protected the very life of the human will and understanding, as the ribs protect the hearts and lungs of the physical body. But man must become conscious of it, and see it as beautiful and necessary to his happiness and usefulness. It is the feeling of our own separate existence as individuals, of our own independence, which is the basis of our free choice of right or wrong. We must be able to look at ourselves objectively, to see ourselves in relation to other men and to the Lord. We must feel our thoughts and decisions to be our own. So, if we think justly and choose rightly, we can come more and more into the image and likeness of our heavenly Father. In the story Eve was created in the Garden of Eden because this faculty is part of our true human nature and capable of heavenly usefulness.

There is also, of course, the lesson in this story that true marriage is ordained by the Lord for the purpose of taking our thoughts out of ourselves and centering them on another. The Lord saw that it was “not good that the man should be alone.” The complete “man,” as Swedenborg saw in the other world, is not a man or woman but a married pair. Marriage is the highest and most sacred relationship into which we can enter. But the basis of a happy marriage is belief in the Lord and the desire and effort to learn His will and do it together. And a true marriage is eternal. We should all want such a marriage and be careful to do nothing which will unfit us for one.

Adult

The interpretation of the creation of woman from the rib of man is perhaps the best discussion topic for this class, although the general correspondences of the Garden of Eden should be covered first.

We have seen that the Creation story is the account of the orderly development of the race or of the individual. The first

people did in general develop in this way, so that the first church on earth—the Most Ancient Church—was composed of a very high type of people, “celestial people,” who loved the Lord supremely, had open communication with the heavens, and cared for the things of this world only as they were related to and could serve spiritual things. The Lord instructed them directly through their affections. We know that we cannot trust our desires to tell us what is true and good because so many of our desires are evil. But the early people had only good and innocent desires because they were content to be led entirely by the Lord and did not care to guide themselves or to imagine that they knew anything apart from the Lord’s teaching. In various parts of the writings Swedenborg tells us many things about these people, of their simple, happy life, their high ideal of marriage, their love for each other and for children, their worship. Love was the keynote of everything, and for this reason the traditions of this period have come down to us—aside from the symbolic stories of the early chapters of Genesis—in the myths of the “Golden Age,” for gold has always been recognized as the symbol of love. The Word describes this civilization as a garden which the Lord planted “eastward in Eden,” *Eden* meaning pleasure or delight, and *eastward* always meaning near the Lord. The garden was watered by the river of wisdom from the Lord’s love, and in it were all trees “pleasant to the sight and good for food,” which mean all the knowledge necessary to make men happy and useful. And in the center was the tree of life, which is the knowledge that man lives from the Lord alone. Man was placed in this garden “to dress it and keep it”; that is, he realized that all the good things he had belonged to the Lord and were to be used in His service.

Everyone loves a little baby because of the beautiful sphere of innocence and trust which surrounds him. The infancy of the individual is like the infancy of the race, before the development of self-consciousness and self-seeking. He is close to the Lord and the angels, and is without anxiety or fear. In this sense the life story of the individual begins in the Garden of Eden. The four *heads*

into which the river was divided picture the Lord's provision for the enlightenment of all the planes of the mind: the Pison is symbolic of the highest intelligence, which is from love; so there was gold in the land compassed by that river. The Gihon pictures "the knowledge of all things that belong to the good and the true" (AC 116). The Hiddekel stands for "reason, or the clear-sightedness of reason" (AC 118), that plane or faculty which connects the internal with the external mind and enables us to relate the two. And the Euphrates represents memory knowledge, all that we learn of the externals of things, which serves as a basis for the higher planes. All good and useful knowledge is open to us, and all good things are given us to use and enjoy. To eat of every tree is "to know from perception what is good and true" (AC 125). As long as men were content to be led solely by the Lord, they had this perception. Very little children retain something akin to such perception; they are given to sense the quality of those about them, feeling "instinctively" whether a person is really kind and loving or merely pretending an affection he does not feel.

But there is another tree in the garden of which the man in the story was commanded not to eat—the "tree of knowledge of good and evil." In reading this story people sometimes wonder why the Lord put anything in the garden which men should not eat, and they sometimes even feel that the Lord must have put it there on purpose to tempt men, just as people sometimes blame the Lord for their troubles and say, "How can the Lord be a God of love when He permits people to be unhappy?" The tree of knowledge of good and evil was man's ability to think of himself as independent of the Lord. The presence of this ability in the garden of the human soul is necessary to man's being man. The Lord created man to make him happy, but happiness can come only from love freely given; so man could not be a mere mechanical agent of the Lord's love as other created things are. He must have a type of independence, the power to decide for himself whether he wishes to return the Lord's love or not. Therefore, although all life and power actually come to man moment by moment from the Lord,

man is allowed to feel this life and power as his own and to use it as he pleases. This tree had to be in the garden, but the Lord warned man not to eat of its fruit, that is, not to depend on himself for knowledge of what is good and true, because if he did he would be cutting himself off from the real source of goodness and wisdom and would become spiritually dead. As Swedenborg puts it (AC 126), “We are not to inquire into the mysteries of faith by means of the things of sense and of the memory, for in this case the celestial of faith is destroyed.” In one of our New Church Books of Worship this prohibition is put in the form of simple doctrine to be acknowledged by those who wish to be confirmed in the New Church: “In abstaining from evil and doing good we are to act as of ourselves; at the same time believing and acknowledging that the will, the understanding, and the power to do so are of the Lord alone.”

The last part of our chapter treats of the first step in the descent of man from this high state, the awakening of the desire for independent life, and of the way in which the Lord’s providence recognizes and meets this desire. Swedenborg tells us (AC 139) that throughout the Word “to dwell alone” signifies to live wholly from the Lord and so not to be subject to the influence of mere externals, which are the source of evils. The first men dwelt alone in this sense, and so does a little baby. But when the Lord sees that man is beginning to be more consciously interested in external things, He provides a way by which man may, if he will, develop this external consciousness and still not become absorbed in self. First He shows us all the things which are within us and teaches us their character. This is described by the Lord’s bringing all the living creatures to Adam to see what he would call them. So a little child, in the course of his everyday experience, learns a great many things about himself and the world about him. Then comes a time when through all this knowledge he develops a feeling of self-importance which dulls his interest in higher things. This is the deep sleep which fell upon Adam. The rib which the Lord took is the picture of this selfhood—the *Own*, or *proprium*—of each one

of us as it really is, merely the dead framework of a human being. Only when this selfhood is seen in its true relation to the Lord and the Lord's spirit is allowed to work through it does it become clothed with flesh and living. There is a deep psychology in this lesson. To make progress in character we must be able to "get outside of ourselves," to "see ourselves as others see us," and especially as the Lord and the angels see us. Then we begin to look at our selfhood as a tool given us to fashion for the Lord's service, and to love ourselves only for the use we can be to the neighbor. In this way our dead selfhood becomes a beautiful living thing, like the woman fashioned by the Lord from the rib of the man. The writings say: "The Own of man, when viewed from heaven, appears like something which is wholly bony, inanimate, and very ugly, consequently as being in itself dead, but when vivified by the Lord it looks like flesh" (AC 149). Only the Lord's Own was living; so He said: "A spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have" (Luke 24:39).

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia, n. 129: "Every one may know that man is governed by the principles he assumes, be they ever so false, and that all his knowledge and reasoning favor his principles; for innumerable considerations tending to support them present themselves to his mind, and thus he is confirmed in what is false. He therefore who assumes as a principle that nothing is to be believed until it is seen and understood, can never believe, because spiritual and celestial things cannot be seen with the eyes, or conceived by the imagination. But the true order is for man to be wise from the Lord, that is, from His Word, and then all things follow, and he is enlightened even in matters of reason and of memory knowledge. . . . For it is by no means forbidden to learn the sciences, since they are useful to his life and delightful; nor is he who is in faith prohibited from thinking and speaking as do the learned of the world; but it must be from this principle—to believe the Word of the Lord, and, so far as possible, confirm spiritual and celestial truths by natural truths, in terms familiar to the learned world. Thus his starting point must be the Lord, and not himself; for the former is life, but the latter is death."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. Whose Book is the Bible? *God's Word*
- P. What is the name of the first book in the Bible? *Genesis*
- J. What does *Genesis* mean? *the beginning*
- J. What is the first chapter about? *creation*
- P. In how many days was everything created? *six*
- J. What was the last thing created? *man*
- I. In whose image and likeness was man created? *God's*
- J. What did the Lord do on the seventh day? *rested*
- P. Where did the Lord place the first people? *Garden of Eden*
- P. What name is given to them in our chapter? *Adam*
- J. What does *Adam* mean? *mankind*
- J. What was Adam told to do in the Garden of Eden? *dress it and keep it*
- P. What tree was in the midst of the garden? *life*
- P. How was the garden watered? *river*
- P. Into how many streams was the river divided? *four*
- J. Of what tree were the people told not to eat? *knowledge of good and evil*
- J. To what did Adam give names? *animals, birds*
- J. What did the Lord take from Adam while he slept? *rib*
- J. Into what did He make the rib? *woman*
- I. What does the Garden of Eden picture? *state of nearness to and complete trust in the Lord*
- I. What is symbolized by the river? *truth as it comes from the Lord into our minds*
- S. What do the two trees represent?
life—principle that we live from the Lord
knowledge—ability to think of self as independent from God; hence that we can know what is good and wise without God's help