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# IN THE BEGINNING

*Bible stories for children*

by Sholem Asch

narrated by Arna Bontemp



BS  
551.2  
A82  
1955  
c.1

MUSIC LP

Contents:

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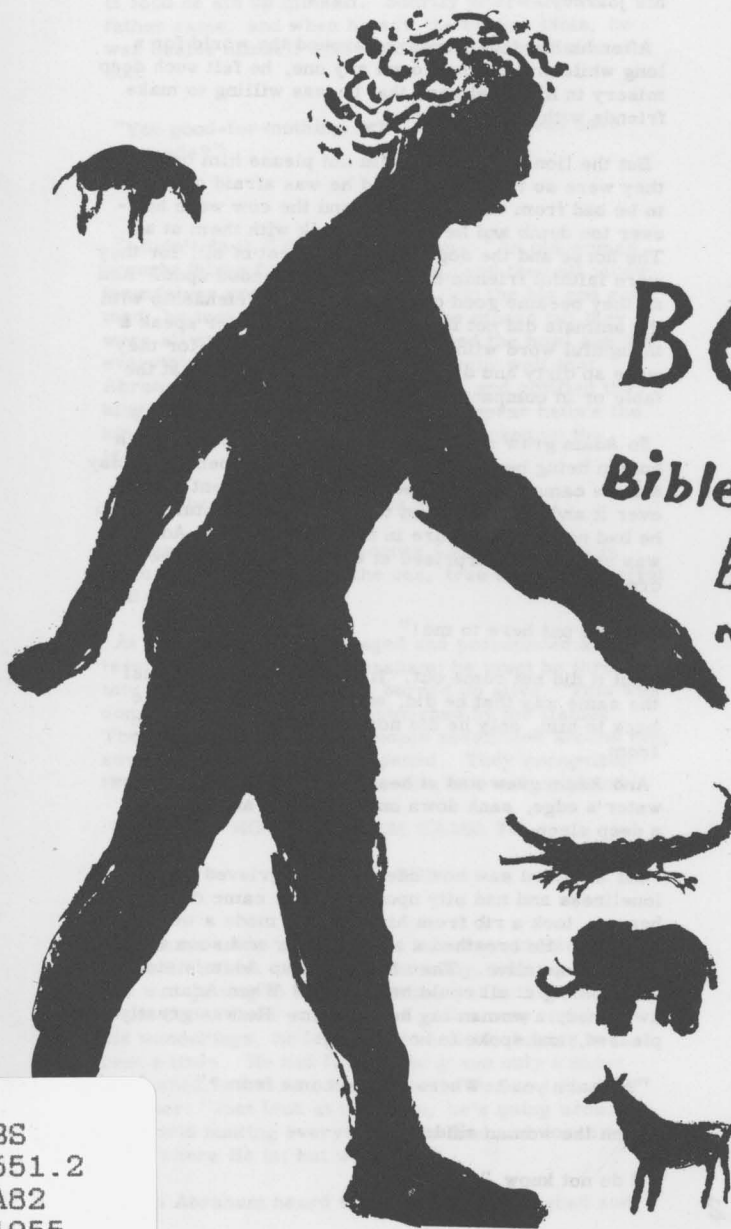
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# IN THE BEGINNING

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God had already made heaven and earth, every kind of grass and herb, fruitful trees and plants in the forest, birds flying in the sky, wild beasts and cattle, and everything that creeps upon the earth; but no one was yet there to be the ruler. There were no buildings on the earth; the cattle ate the grass, but the fruit on the trees and the wheat in the fields were still untouched. Among the animals, however, there was no order and no harmony; and often when they came together to consider some serious matter, they would at once begin making a great uproar, fighting, and beating one another; they grew mad with rage and wild; they did not understand one another and did not know what they should talk about. The small animals were too timid, the wild ones too powerful; the birds squeaked dreadfully and flew backward and forward over the dignified heads of the lions and bears who had gathered together in the woods for counsel.

So God saw that the animals could not rule the world, and He created man to govern them, and to look after everything. All things were to belong to him: the fish in the sea, the beasts in the forest, the birds in the air, and everything that lived in the great world. And God took a piece of earth and formed a man out of it. He breathed the breath of life into him so that he became a living soul, and could see, hear, walk about, and understand everything. And God ordered all the creatures that lived upon the earth to march in front of the man so that they should know their master, and that the man might give names to them. And God said to Adam:

"All the creatures in the world I have made for you; and the names you give to them now, they will keep for all time."

Then the man sat down upon a hill and the animals marched past him.

At first heavy steps were heard as the enormous elephant came along, and when Adam saw him he said:

"He has a long nose like an elephant, so he shall be called Elephant"-- and he was at once so named. Then came the lion, proud as a king, shaking his mane and roaring so loud that everything around began to tremble. Then the man said:

"He roars exactly like a lion, so I will call him Lion" -- and he was promptly given that name. Then the horse came galloping along. He snorted through his nostrils and neighed. And Adam said:

"He neighs and jumps just like a horse, so he shall be called Horse"--and thus he was named immediately.

So God led every living animal before Adam, and Adam gave names to all of them which they have kept to this very day.

But Adam was very sad and lonesome because he was obliged to live utterly alone. The longing for a human being became so strong within him that he could no longer bear it. So he arose and set out into the wide world to search for a creature who would be exactly like himself. He walked and walked, wandering day and night over hill and valley, but he could not find a man; only wild animals, cattle and birds met him on his journey.

After he had thus wandered around the world for a long while and had not found any one, he felt such deep misery in his loneliness that he was willing to make friends with the animals.

But the lion and the bear did not please him because they were so terribly bad and he was afraid of learning to be bad from them. The ox and the cow were however too dumb and he could not talk with them at all. The horse and the dog he liked the best of all, for they were faithful friends and could be depended upon. And so they became good companions. But friendship with the animals did not last long; he could never speak a thoughtful word with them, or sit at a meal, for they were so dirty and did not have polite manners at the table or in company.

So Adam grew more sorrowful and his longing for a human being became still greater. It happened one day that he came to a large pool of water; he bent down over it and discovered on the surface a creature which he had never met before in the whole world. Adam was very much surprised at this and called to the creature:

"Come out here to me!"

But it did not come out. It beckoned to him in just the same way that he did, and his words also came back to him, only he did not know where they came from.

And Adam grew sad at heart; he went away from the water's edge, sank down on a hill-side and fell into a deep sleep.

But the Lord saw how deeply Adam grieved in his loneliness and had pity upon him. He came down from heaven, took a rib from his side and made a woman out of it. He breathed a soul into her and soon after she became alive. Then He healed up Adam's side so that nothing at all could be noticed. When Adam awakened, a woman lay beside him. He was greatly pleased, and spoke to her saying:

"Who are you? Where do you come from?"

Then the woman said:

"I do not know."

"Did you come to me out of the water?" Adam asked again.

"I do not know," answered the woman. "As I opened my eyes, I was lying beside you."

When Adam heard this, he took her by the hand and went with her to the pool of water in which he had seen the strange creature; and this time the mirror showed him two people, for the man in the water had also got a woman. Adam was greatly astonished at this, but he nevertheless was heartily pleased with his own wife; he took her by the hand and went with her through the wide world.

#### NOAH AND HIS ARK

There were many, many people on the earth, but they were bad at heart, corrupt, tricky and violent. So God wanted to destroy them from the face of the earth. Among all the wicked people, however, there was one man named Noah who was pious and good, and God wished to let Noah live. So He called him to Him and said:

"I will destroy every living thing upon the earth and I will cause a great flood of many waters to come. Everything that lives upon the earth shall perish. But with you I will enter into a covenant, because you are pious and good. Build for yourself a great ark out of fir-trees and take up your dwelling within it, you and your wife, your sons and your sons' wives and all kinds of animals. When the deluge comes all the other creatures will perish, but your ark will float upon the water and you will be saved, you and all your house."

When Noah heard these words, he was glad; he went home and planted a very great many fir-trees. But when the people saw this, they laughed at Noah and made fun of him and said:

"What are you doing that for?"

But Noah did not trouble himself over their talk and their ridicule. He thought to himself: "Laugh all you wish; I know what I know."

When the seeds which Noah had planted in the earth had grown up into big trees, he went out and cut them down, and began to build an ark, three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high. On one side of the ark he made a door and at the top a very little window. He filled up the crevices inside and out with pitch, so that no water could get in. And in the middle of the ark Noah placed a precious jewel, large and very beautiful from which came glittering rays that lighted up the whole place.

Then the people laughed again at Noah and his work, and they jeered at him. But this time also Noah did not bother about their talk and their ridicule and thought to himself: "Just laugh all you please; I know what I know."

When Noah had at last finished his ark, God said to him:

"Go into the ark, you and your whole household, and take into the ark with you from all living creatures, two of every kind---one pair, male and female. I will save them together with you, so that after the flood they may multiply and grow and fill the earth."

Then Noah said to God:

"But where shall I get them all? There are creatures that live far, far away from here, on distant islands where no man has ever set his foot, and birds that soar high in the air, animals that stay in the dark depths of the forests, and fish hidden deep in the sea, worms squeezed in the heart of stones,--tell me, dear Lord, where shall I get them all?"

And God answered:

"I will send them to you."

On a beautiful morning, as Noah was sitting at the door of his ark, and the sun was shining brightly over the earth, they all arrived, a pair of every kind, male and female. They bowed respectfully before Noah and said:

"Noah, we have come to ask you to take us into your ark with you, because we have learned that a great flood is to come upon the earth."

Then Noah did as God had told him; he led them into the ark and assigned a place to each one.

When they were all in the ark, the windows of heaven were opened and rain fell upon the earth; it rained forty long days and forty nights without stopping. The waters rose and swirled till the highest peaks of the mountains were covered. Then everything that lived upon the earth was destroyed. And round about there was nothing to be seen except water and sky. But upon the water floated the ark with Noah, his family, and all the living creatures that God wished to save.

In those days, Noah had a great deal to do, for he had to feed the animals and provide them with everything which they needed. This he did to please God, in order to preserve the lives of all the creatures that God wished to save.

When the forty days were over, God remembered Noah and his ark; He shut the windows of heaven, and sent a wind down to earth to dry everything. The wind had scarcely arrived when the rain stopped and the waters fell. But only after a hundred and fifty days did the peaks of the mountains appear, and Noah's ark came to rest upon Mount Ararat. Then Noah opened the tiny window and sent out a raven to see how far the waters had fallen. The raven flew here and there, and came back into the ark. Noah waited another seven days, and then he opened the little

window again and let a dove fly out. But the dove could not find a dry place to rest anywhere, so it flew back and perched on the roof of the ark. Noah reached his hand out and brought the dove inside. After that Noah waited once more for seven days and again sent out the dove. At evening it came back, and in its beak there was an olive leaf. This was a good sign, and then Noah knew that the waters had fallen.

#### THE TOWER OF BABEL

When God had allowed the flood to pass and when the waters had dried up from the earth, Noah opened the door of his ark and let all the living creatures that had been saved along with him, go wherever they pleased. They scattered over the whole earth. The people had children, increased in number and soon the big world was again inhabited.

But they were always afraid that God might send down another flood upon them, so they came together to consider among themselves what they could do about it. And some of them said:

"Do you know what we'll do? We'll build a tower so high that its top will reach to heaven. Then if God sends punishment upon us, we can climb from it into heaven and beg Him for mercy."

Such words pleased every one very much, and soon the people began to build the tower. However, as they had neither stones or lime, they used bricks and pitch instead.

They were very industrious and worked constantly, and the tower rose higher and higher. But the Lord was not pleased that people wanted to climb so high; He grew exceedingly angry over this vain idea and determined to punish their pride. So one night He came down to earth and confused their speech. The next morning when the men began to work, each one spoke a different language, and they could not make one another understand anything at all. From that time on things went very strangely: if one of them called another to pass him the bricks, he brought him pitch; if he asked for pitch, he received bricks. . . . And so it went on and on continually, and no matter what they did, nobody understood what the others said. Everything went upside down, whatever they did was always wrong.

Soon discord arose among them, and they quarrelled and struck one another. They no longer worked at the tower but let it stand unfinished. Since that time all men speak different languages and no one understands the words of another until he has mastered them by hard study and diligence.

#### OUR FATHER ABRAHAM

It came to pass in those days that men did not know the real God, and believed in many, many gods, and in idols which they themselves made out of stone and wood; they served these gods and brought gifts to them. A man was living then, named Terah, who dealt in idols. The rich and the poor came to him when they wanted any, and bought according to their means---the rich buying big idols and the poor, small ones. One fine day a little son was born to the idol-merchant and he was named Abraham. The child grew to be a very wise boy; he was always serious and thoughtful and soon formed his own opinions about everything. He saw how people prayed to the idols which his father made, and this did not seem right to him. He thought to himself that the true God could not be made by men's hands---He must be mightier and more powerful than men, He must be everywhere by day and by night. Thus thought little Abraham, and he never stopped seeking for the dear Lord.

At first, when he saw the sun rise over the world, shining so brilliantly, he thought for a while that the sun was the real God, and he was very glad. But the sun sank and disappeared, and then little Abraham knew that it could not be God. When night came and the moon glittered over the world in her silvery glory, and the golden stars sparkled so gaily down from above, he believed again for awhile that they were real gods. But the moon also faded with approaching day and the stars grew dim. Then Abraham knew again that these were not real gods; he grew very sad and cried bitterly. However, he was soon comforted with the thought: "God must be still higher than sun, moon and stars and must be ruler over the whole big world."

It happened one day that his father gave him a basket full of idols and sent him with it to the marketplace. The rich and the poor came there and wanted to buy the idols from him. They asked little Abraham if his idols performed miracles, and Abraham answered:

"Yes, they perform miracles, but only after you have paid the price."

Then the people paid the price for the idols, and took them away. Little Abraham, however, when he had the money in his pocket, laughed aloud, made fun of the purchasers and said:

"How can you expect these gods to do wonders, gods which my father made with his own hands out of wood and stone?"

Then the people grew very angry, demanded their money back and threw the idols into Abraham's basket.

And Abraham got all his wares together and took them back to his father.

Old Terah then saw that his son was no merchant, and he set him to watch over the idols. But while Abraham kept watch, people came and brought gifts and sacrifices. One day an old woman reached out a bowl full of dainty food to the gods. Little Abraham waited a minute till he was all alone, then set the plate out of the way, took a stick and smashed the idols to pieces. He spared only one very big idol and put the stick in its hand, but the nice morsels of food he ate up himself. Shortly afterward his father came, and when he saw the broken idols, he was beside himself with rage and screamed at his son:

"You good-for-nothing, what kind of a mess have you made?"

"I didn't do it," replied Abraham. "An old woman brought things for the gods to eat, and they all threw themselves greedily at the bowl. So the big god got mad, he took the stick and beat the others till they were all smashed. Then he grabbed the bowl and ate everything up." The father knew very well that Abraham had done all this himself, and notified the king. Abraham was summoned to appear before the king and had to explain why he had broken up the idols.

Then Abraham answered the king:

"I destroyed the idols because I do not believe in them. I believe only in the one, true and all-powerful God!"

At this the king was enraged and pronounced a terrible judgment upon Abraham; he must be thrown into a fiery furnace and be burned up alive. This was done. But Abraham was untouched by the flames. Then the king and all the people assembled around him saw that a miracle had happened. They recognized that the God of Abraham was the true and only God.

#### HOW ABRAHAM CAME TO

#### KNOW GOD

Abraham arose and went out into the wide world to search for God. He wandered many, many years and was getting to be an old man, yet he had never found God. Once when he had grown very tired on his wanderings, he lay down in a field, hoping to rest a little. He had lain in the grass only a short time when he heard a heap of little worms talking together: "Just look at that man, he's going around the world hunting everywhere for God and doesn't know where He is; but we know."

When Abraham heard these words, he laughed and said:

"You're certainly a conceited little people. Men know nothing as yet about God, and you think you know everything!"

But the little worms let him talk and did not trouble themselves about him, because they knew what they knew. And Abraham continued on his way and meditated upon the thought of how long he still must wander until he found God.

Then all at once there was a whirring in the air--- a flock of birds flew by and sang a song in their flight praising God and His goodness.

And Abraham laughed again at the innocence of the birds and said:

"You, too, are a conceited little people. Men know nothing at all about God and you think you know everything!"

But the little birds let him talk; they did not trouble themselves about him and flew away, because they knew what they knew. Abraham, however, went his way. He had not gone very far, when he met a herd of animals. It was early morning. With uplifted heads, they lay stretched out in the forest and sent forth a song. Then Abraham spoke to them and said: "What are you singing?"

"We are singing a song of praise to God," the animals answered him, "and every living creature does this every morning when it wakes from sleep--- each in its own way."

And Abraham asked again:

"How do you really know that there is a God?"

The animals were astonished at such words and they said:

"Who would take care of us if there were no God? He alone sees even the tiniest creature, thinks of it and sends it its daily bread; nothing is hidden from His eyes. A very small worm among our kinsfolk, living in the dark depths of the rocks---God cares for it, too, and sends it food. You need only to split open the rock and you will see that what we say is the truth."

Abraham broke a crevice in the rock and saw the little worm creeping inside. And he asked it:

"Where do you get anything to eat? Who knows that you live hidden in there?"

Thereupon the little worm answered:

"The Lord in heaven is the Father of all creatures. He knows also that I live here and He provides me with food."

Then Abraham saw that the animals spoke the truth and rejoiced that he at last had found God