

MOTHER EVE

Mentor for Today's Woman: A Heritage of Honor

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FEW SUBJECTS EVOKE MORE WRONG IMAGES THAN THAT
OF EVE, THE MOTHER OF ALL LIVING. BECAUSE MEN HAVE
DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES THAN WOMEN, THEY PERHAPS
CANNOT BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IMPACT AN INCORRECT
OR INCOMPLETE UNDERSTANDING OF THE SUBJECT OF EVE
HAS HAD ON WOMEN, ON MEN, AND ON SOCIETY AS A WHOLE.

Some may even wonder why we would suggest Eve as a mentor for today's woman and attribute to her a heritage of honor. After all, aren't her choices responsible for the fact that we must face the travails of this bleak terrestrial proving ground? In the entry on Eve in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, which I was privileged to write, the lead paragraph reads:

*Eve, first woman of earthly creation, companion of Adam, and mother and matriarch of the human race, is honored by Latter-day Saints as one of the most important, righteous, and heroic of all the human family. Eve's supreme gift to mankind, the opportunity of life on this earth, resulted from her choice to become mortal.*¹

Let me tell you how I arrived at that statement. Some years ago, I became aware of the great need for LDS women to lay claim to a clearer understanding of the saving principles of agency and choice in their lives. Because the need was so great, I began researching so that I might write and speak with clarity on the subject. However, in the search for words to shape messages that might stand as a testament of women's innate worth and their foreordained roles as valued and significant contributors to society, an alarming trend became manifest. In much of the literature and in most of the histories referring to women I found an undercurrent of apology, as though there were something not quite "all right" about being a woman.

In looking for its source, I came to recognize that this uneasiness could be traced to the accounts of the creation and to ever prevalent and always negative characterizations, which have spawned equally negative concepts of that first woman who dressed the garden in Eden. To illustrate, a *Newsweek* article begins: "Scientists are calling her Eve, but reluctantly. The name evokes too many wrong images—the weak-willed figure in Genesis, the milk-skinned beauty in Renaissance art, the voluptuary gardener in *Paradise Lost* who was all 'softness' and 'meek surrender.'"²

Images and ideas following these themes are so much a part of our culture that we accept them and laugh at them, barely noticing their offensive inaccuracies. In a recent *New Yorker* magazine a cartoon depicted Eve and the serpent in bed, with the caption, "I thought that while he's in there brushing his teeth it would be a good opportunity for us to talk."³ Funny? Not to women.

In a powerful speech delivered to Collegium Aesculapium in September 1992, Elder Russell M. Nelson taught that understanding the events surrounding the Creation has a direct bearing on our behavior here and now.⁴ Similarly, I might add, does understanding the

truth surrounding the Fall.

A full-page article in *The Washington Post* begins with this statement: "The story of Eve in the book of Genesis has had a more profoundly negative impact on women throughout history than any other biblical story."⁵

It is true that, legally and socially, civilizations have adapted this erroneous and misunderstood story of Eve to fit their concepts of who women are and how they should be treated. Religions have used it as a rationale for canon law and ecclesiastical positioning.

Of all people who need a full understanding of Eve's character and role, LDS men and women surely do. This story is of such import that it is the centerpiece of our most sacred liturgy. It impacts significantly how we perceive one another and, therefore, how we behave towards one another. It shapes and colors our expectations. Limitations are imposed based on faulty premises. Strengths are denied and relationships misarticulated daily because of erroneous assumptions.

We all know that even the smallest error in the foundation of a building can eventually bring it down. The errors in the understanding of the garden story are not small, and until corrected, ignorance of their presence will continue to be manifest in grossly enlarged consequences to our social fabric.

It is a puzzlement! How could the actions of Mother Eve, one of the grandest and noblest daughters of our Heavenly Father, have been so misunderstood? How could her ultimate gift to mankind—mortal life itself—have been overlooked? What do we know about this first woman of creation?

Unfortunately, not much in-depth information is readily available. My research reveals, however, that restoration prophet after prophet have spoken on this subject. Also, Book of Mormon prophets added significant scriptural clarity, as did Joseph Smith's revealed translations from the Book of Moses. They provide us a line here, a precept there, a paragraph, or a chapter containing insightful information as to who Mother Eve was and is and to the significance of her role.

Unfortunately, this information is very hard to ferret out. Nor is it widely known to members or incorporated effectively into the teaching process. The Fall, more often than not when presented, is tainted with secular concepts of guilt, shame, and retribution. Most people begin their study of the garden story burdened with the assumption that these secular concepts are valid.

In several recent informal surveys, men both inside and outside the Church indicated that they perceive Eve as a sinner: the reasoning being that God would have found another, less harsh way for mankind to claim mortality had Eve not partaken of the fruit.

While recently attending meetings at BYU, I saw a

sign on campus that read, "Sidewalk Art Contest." The art was interesting and varied. The very last entry was a chalk art depiction of Adam and Eve. Two earnest, energetic young men were drawing the snake with its tongue lapping up towards Eve. Eve was looking very ashamed. Adam was looking triumphant. I said, "Tell me the story." They said, "You know the story." I said, "No, tell me the story." They said, "Well, you know, she shouldn't have done it." I asked, "Was there another way?" They replied, "Oh, you bet there was. She really blew it, and we're all paying the price." *May I repeat, images and ideas do have consequences.*

In my research, I have identified 15 principles or concepts that are most frequently misunderstood. Each one is key and essential to our purpose and mission. When misunderstood, these concepts compromise our identity, our interrelationships, and *our mission*. When understood properly, they elevate, unite, illuminate, and bring into clear focus our reasons for this earthly existence.

Let me address a series of questions relating to these concepts. My clarification is based on the above-mentioned research and will rely heavily on the words of prophets and apostles, living and dead.

I. AT THE TIME OF CREATION, WAS EVE AN ACTIVE PARTICIPANT IN THE GRAND PLAN OF SALVATION? IS SHE NOW?

Let me briefly summarize Eve's status and contributions as they relate to the past and the present. Elder Bruce R. McConkie, scribe and apostle, has written much about Eve. He uses words of great strength and power. "There is no language that can do credit to our glorious mother, Eve,"⁶ he tells us. "Eve—a daughter of God, one of the spirit offspring of the Almighty Elohim—was among the noble and great in [premortal] existence. *She ranked in spiritual stature, in faith and devotion, in conformity to eternal law with Michael*" (emphasis added).⁷

In speaking of Christ and Adam as companions and partners in the premortal existence, Elder McConkie states:

Christ and Mary, Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, and a host of mighty men and equally glorious women comprised that group of "the noble and great ones," to whom the Lord Jesus said: "We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell." (emphasis added)⁸

From this we must conclude that Eve's role and her sisters' roles were vital. They were active in the planning

and preparations that shaped our sphere and our mortality.

Further, President Ezra Taft Benson declared, "In the beginning, God placed a woman in a companion role with the priesthood. . . . She was to act in partnership with him."

Doctrine and Covenants 138:38–39 gives us a sense of who Eve has become. In a vision, President Joseph F. Smith sees assembled in paradise those prophets who will be Christ's ministers to the unenlightened of that sphere. He relates, "Among the great and mighty ones who were assembled in this vast congregation of the righteous were Father Adam . . . and our glorious Mother Eve, with many of her faithful daughters who had lived through the ages."

The Prophet Joseph Smith had an understanding of who Eve had become. Zebedee Coltrin relates an incident wherein he and Oliver Cowdery shared a vision with the Prophet:

*The heavens gradually opened and they saw a golden throne, on a circular foundation, something like a lighthouse, and on the throne were two aged personages, having white hair, and clothed in white garments. They were the two most beautiful and perfect specimens of mankind he ever saw. Joseph said, "They are our first parents," Adam and Eve.*¹⁰

These visions tell us much of the rightness of Eve's action and the acceptability of her contribution, for these visions were of Eve *after* her life on earth. She had fulfilled her important assignment gloriously. Exalted, she now continues her reign, side by side with mighty Adam.

2. WHICH TERM MORE CLEARLY DEFINES EVE: "SUBORDINATE," OR "A POWER EQUAL TO"?

Is this preeminent woman the same spoken of in Genesis as a "help meet"¹¹ for him? Society would have us believe that a help meet is a person of lesser stature—a subject, a subordinate.

An examination of the word itself yields an altogether different meaning. The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists its meaning as "even with or equal to." The original Hebrew text is even more enlightening. The word that has been translated as "help meet" is a combination of two root words: *ezer* and *k'enedgo*.¹²

The word *ezer* also combines two roots: the first meaning "to rescue" or "to save" or "as a savior," sometimes coupled with the concept of majesty, and the other meaning "strength" or "to be strong."

The second Hebrew word, *k'enedgo*, is identified as meaning "equal."

Suppose we all, male and female alike, had been raised to read Genesis 2:18 as follows: "It is not good that man

should be alone; I will make a majestic, saving power, equal with him, to be his companion." Surely attitudes, laws, and customs would be different, and the relationships that God intended would more naturally and more easily exist.

I spoke of this one evening by telephone to my septuagenarian sister-in-law, who had recently returned from serving a mission. A few days later I received a letter, which read in part:

I am very excited about what you have found, especially the meaning of the word "helpmeet" and the implication it gives to Eve's position. I sat frozen, actually feeling the blood drain from my face, awed, with a joyous feeling I will never forget, but crying at the same time! I wondered why I should feel all this emotion. Suddenly, this thought came to my mind clearly: "It's true—I am who I always thought I was!"

I think you will find this selfsame emotion resonating in the hearts of most women upon learning of this clarification.

3. WAS THE FALL FOREORDAINED, A NECESSARY ORDINANCE? OR WAS THERE ANOTHER WAY?

We are advised by our modern-day prophets that the three most important events of time and eternity are *the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement*. As Elder McConkie writes, these are *"the three things without which either all things would vanish away, or the whole purpose of existence would come to naught"* (emphasis added).¹³

We are also told that these events are inseparably intertwined, that the Atonement of Christ through which salvation comes is built on the foundation of the Fall of Adam and Eve. It was necessary that Adam and Eve and their posterity become subject to sin that thereby we all might be privileged to work out our own salvation.

That the Fall was foreordained could not be stated more clearly than in these words of Brigham Young: "The Lord knew they [Adam and Eve] would do this, and he had designed that they should."¹⁴

"Adam and Eve did the very thing the Lord intended them to do," Joseph Fielding Smith wrote. "If we had the original record we would see the purpose of the Fall clearly stated and its necessity explained."¹⁵

Simply put, "Fall" is indicative of condition and location. It means that Adam and Eve crossed the line from immortality to mortality.¹⁶

As recorded by Elder Bruce R. McConkie, "Adam, our father, and Eve, our mother, must obey. They must fall. They must become mortal. Death must enter the world. There is no other way. They must fall that man may be."¹⁷

4. IN THE LIGHT OF THIS, IS "TO PARTAKE OR NOT TO PARTAKE" AN AMBIGUOUS COMMANDMENT, OR THE OPPORTUNITY TO CHOOSE A GREATER LAW?

We all understand that Adam and Eve's calling as the progenitors of the human race could not be accomplished unless they had mortal bodies. Why, then, did the Lord command them not to partake of the tree of good and evil, the gateway of mortal life?

We find much of the answer in the frequent reminders by our prophets that there must needs be opposition in all things. Lehi tells us why this is paramount: "If not so... righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad."¹⁸

Elder Boyd K. Packer points out that "there was too much at issue to introduce men into mortality by force. [Such an action] would contravene the very law essential to the plan."¹⁹

In the Pearl of Great Price we read that wonderful sermon of Eve wherein she speaks of the transgression not with shame, but with worshipful praise, saying: "Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy, and again in the flesh I shall see God."²⁰

Because of these statements I began to wonder if the word *command* used in the Creation stories was the same root word as *commandment* as used in the Ten Commandments. I had heard a Hebrew scholar, Dr. Nehama Aschkenasy, speak on the subject of Eve. I telephoned her and asked if she was aware of any difference in the root of these two words. She agreed to research them for me. Subsequently Dr. Aschkenasy advised me that to her surprise they were not the same. She found the *command* used in the Creation story was from a different verb form. Its usage seems to indicate a strong, severe warning, perhaps a statement of law. The warning was possibly temporary in nature, implying that at some future, unspecified time it might not apply.

As I was thinking of this I thought of the warning we give our small children who, in their tender years, must be protected as to matters that involve life and death or injury. Such a warning might be, "Do not, under any condition, touch the stove." "Do not ever cross the street alone." Do we mean that they are never to cross the street, or use a stove? Of course not! What we intend is that until they have learned enough to make appropriate decisions, the stern warning, indeed prohibition, applies. However, we also know that as our children are prepared, they must step out into the larger world and make choices.

If God intended that there would be a time when such a law was not to be in effect, this would clarify the account in Moses wherein Adam and Eve are advised by

Him that nevertheless they might choose for themselves.

This concept seems to have been known in the early Church, for in the Gnostic Gospel of Philip we read: "This garden [is the place] where they will say to me, . . . eat this or do not eat that, just as you wish."²¹

Elder Bruce R. McConkie matter-of-factly advises that in all of this, Adam and Eve simply "complied with the law which enabled them to become mortal beings, and this course of conduct is termed eating the forbidden fruit."²²

5. WAS EVE ACTIVELY OR PASSIVELY INCLUDED IN GOD'S DISCOURSES TO ADAM IN THE GARDEN?

As we read scripture wherein Adam is addressed by the Lord, many presume He speaks only to or of the man, Adam. Such an assumption would lead to the belief that Eve stood by throughout the entire garden period without a voice or a significant role.

President Spencer W. Kimball spoke of this by referring to the phrase "And I, God, created man . . . and I, God, blessed *them*" (emphasis added).²³ He points out that in this phrase "man" is always in the plural and it was plural from the beginning.²⁴

In Moses 6:9 we read: "In the image of his own body, male and female, created he them and blessed them, and called *their* name Adam" (emphasis added).

Elder McConkie clarifies this, explaining "both their names mean the same thing . . . they are both called Adam." He explains further that "throughout the Book of Mormon, the transgression is almost always referred to as Adam's, suggesting that Adam was used in the Hebrew sense to designate the first couple as a unit. Thus the name of Adam and Eve as a united partnership is Adam."²⁵

An understanding of the above would clarify the entire Genesis text. To the unenlightened the phrase "Adam fell that men might be" has come to mean "poor dear man had to fall because of Eve's foolish choice." Correctly it and all other like texts should read, "Adam and Eve together fell that men might be." Think how this clarification changes the entire dynamics of the story.

6. DID THE MOTHER OF ALL LIVING UNDERSTAND HER MISSION?

To begin, Eve's name was a title conferred upon her by God himself, which title meant "the mother of all living."²⁶ Adam did not name Eve but merely called her by her correct title. By that carefully defined title she knew of her foreordination. As God bestowed this title on Eve, we are also told he bestowed knowledge upon Adam and Eve as well. God the Father took upon himself the responsi-

bility to be the purveyor of much of this knowledge. He often walked and talked with them in the garden.

People often say that Eve knew nothing, that she was "blindsided." Really now, what did God come to the garden to speak with his children about? Could each meeting have been less than a time of instruction and learning? The entire purpose of the garden experience was to be a school, a place of preparation where knowledge and wisdom were acquired. God intended the garden to be no more than an interim stop, or else the Plan of Salvation would be thwarted.

In Doctrine and Covenants 93:13 we are told that Jesus was taught, that he went from "grace to grace" until he received a perfect knowledge of his mission. Would Eve and Adam, whose mission was a cornerstone of that grand plan of salvation, have been less lovingly and carefully prepared?

Titled by God as the mother of all living into whom *lives* (the translation into the plural form of the word is a correction made by Joseph Smith himself)²⁷ had been breathed, it became clear that she, Eve, had to make the choice. The success of this mission rested on *her* shoulders. She must be the one to first exercise agency.

7. WAS EVE DECEIVED? IF SO, BY WHAT— THE MESSAGE OR THE MESSENGER?

Orson Pratt, Hugh Nibley, and others have suggested that there were also others in the garden, and that Adam and Eve were tempted on numerous occasions, not only by the serpent but by other beings who had been angels of light and truth in the premortal existence and then became followers of Satan. In the Hebrew version of the garden story the tempter is not a snake but an angel of light who says he is authorized of God to do this thing. One thing we do know is that Satan has been present and has attempted to thwart the mission of *all* the principal participants in the grand plan of salvation as they have sought to fulfill their divine missions.

Eve's immediate response, after partaking of the fruit, gives a most lucid accounting of her understanding. In our most sacred liturgy, Eve affirms that it is better for mankind to endure sorrow (hardship) in order to know joy.

It is only then that Eve tells us by what she was deceived: she was deceived not by the message but only by the identity of the messenger. She later identifies him as Satan.

This scriptural sequence adds further credence to the proposition that Eve had retained knowledge of the Plan, its correctness and its consequences, even after the veil of mortality had been drawn.

Nibley hails Eve's actions as he writes: "She takes the initiative, pursuing the search for ever greater light and

knowledge while Adam cautiously holds back.... It is she who perceives and points out to Adam that they have done the right thing after all."²⁸

After long discussions of this crucial point, a question arises: Did Eve partake of the fruit with the understanding that she must do so to inaugurate mortal life—or was she deceived? My valued colleague, Clare Hardy Johnson, sent me a powerful and compelling epistle, which I quote in part:

To suggest that Eve acted out of ignorance, on impulse, with shortsighted or petty motives or actually accepted Satan's half-truth (you shall not surely die) delimits her free agency. It is to suggest that Eve took this momentous step for mankind without knowledge and considered judgment, that she was tricked, that she succeeded in spite of her foolish self.

Her knowledge is denied, her wisdom ignored, her unselfishness rejected, her faithfulness impugned, and her courage mocked. It is to suggest that mankind's passage into mortality was not the result of the free and informed choice of a noble parent, but a fortunate accident.

8. "LEST YE DIE"—A PHYSICAL OR SPIRITUAL THREAT?

Certainly we cannot believe that Genesis teaches that physical death is a punishment for sin or that it is the great challenge of this mortal sphere, since such death merely offers us the necessary transition to eternal life. Indeed, the sole purpose of placing "cherubim and a flaming sword" is to "keep the way of the tree of life" that man will not live forever in his sins.

Julian, an enlightened young Catholic bishop living and writing in Rome in the early part of the century 400 A.D., seeks to convince his contemporaries, who believe that physical death is punishment brought on by Adam's transgression, that such is not the case. He writes with great fervor on the subject, stating that physical death is surely a natural process having nothing to do with human

choice—and certainly having nothing to do with "original" sin. While we are all helpless before physical death, he notes that spiritual death *is* a matter of choice. It is our free will that engages us in the sphere of the *voluntary* and the multiple possibilities available to individual choice.

He concludes that although death is necessary and universal, each of us has the means—indeed, the responsibility—to choose the response we take to our mortal

condition. Each of us holds in our hands our spiritual destiny, which destiny depends upon the choices we make.²⁹

This choice, akin to the great choice offered in the Council in Heaven, must be made! Adam and Eve could stay in the garden, live in peace and ease, and know neither good nor evil—or they could enter the lone and dreary world and allow all those spirits who choose to enter that same world *to work out their own salvation.*

Can you imagine how interested you and I were in the outcome of this great drama? Indeed, how interested all of heaven was?

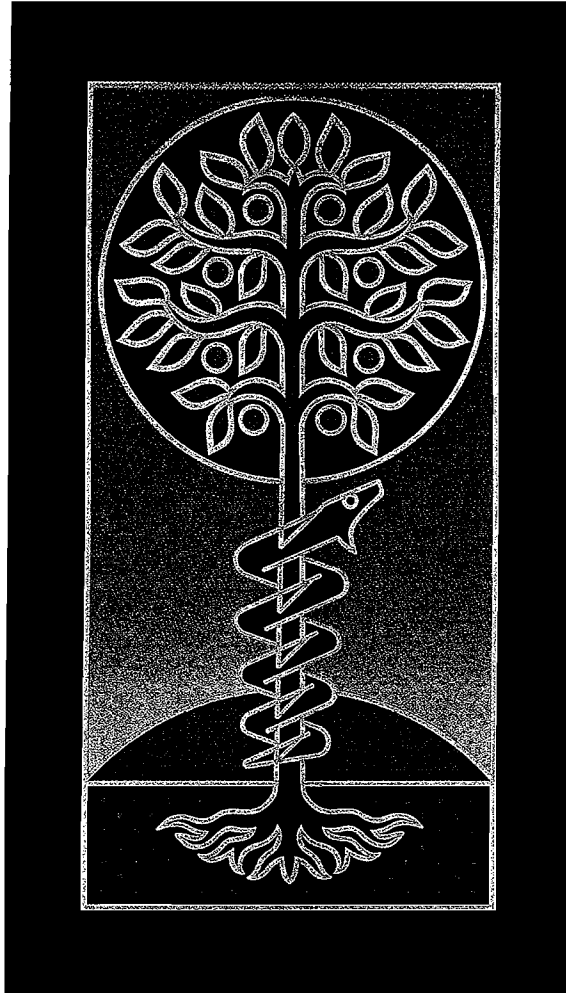
Obviously then, physical death was not the rub; it was spiritual death that was damning. Eve was aware of this. It is at this point in our sacred liturgy that she cries from the depth of her soul, seeking to know *if there is no other way.* Is such a cry a

"type and shadow" of the cry we hear later from our Lord Jesus Christ as he is faced with his act of atoning sacrifice?

Surely Eve's cry, just as the Savior's cry, was not to her tempter but to her God.

9. IS "BEGUILED" AS USED IN THIS TEXT A NEGATIVE OR POSITIVE WORD?

Wondering how this magnificent woman whom I had come to revere so deeply could have been "beguiled," I came to sense that some of that word's true meaning must have been lost in the translations. Once again I spoke with Dr. Aschkenasy, who explained that the Hebrew



word used in the Genesis story that has come to be interpreted as “beguiled” is a rare verb form of unusual depth and richness. As it is a form no longer in use, it is almost impossible to translate. “It is safe to say that it indicates an intense multilevel experience which evokes great emotional, psychological and/or spiritual trauma.”

Dr. Aschkenasy writes of this, stating that the use of this word in the biblical narrative “makes it clear that Eve was motivated by a complex set of inner drives, anchored not only in her physical but also in her intellectual and spiritual nature.”³⁰

She further suggests that because of this intense multilevel experience, Eve is caused to step back, reevaluate, reassess, and ponder the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

We are given some insight into Eve’s thought process by the next verse in the biblical text, which indicates that this exchange (or series of exchanges) has evoked in Eve a vision of the *total range* of the human experience. “And when the woman *saw* that the tree was good for food, and that it became pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make her wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat” (emphasis added).³¹ (Note the term *saw* is used—not *thought* or *believed*.) Eve recognizes that the gifts offered by the symbolic fruit were essential gifts of mortal life.

Many Biblical scholars believe that a long period of time passed as Eve, along with Adam, evaluated and reevaluated the two conflicting commandments that forced such a considered use of their power of agency. Could it have been one decade, one century, even more? Certainly there must have been impassioned pleading with God by Adam and Eve, jointly and separately, as to the right choice. Was God’s promise to them any less than it is to us? “Ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.”³² They, too, were surely learning line upon line and precept upon precept.

As God is addressing Enoch in the Moses account, he states clearly, “I gave unto *them* their knowledge, in the *day* I created them; and in the Garden of Eden, gave I unto man his agency.”³³

Ancient lore tells us it is Eve “who outwits the serpent and trips him up with his own smartness.” This lore again indicates that Eve was aware of what partaking of the fruit would mean.³⁴

We must next look at Moses 4:6 if we are to understand the multilevels of this story. This profound restored scripture takes away all the mystery, erases all the blame, and puts the matter into the proper context.

- “And he [the serpent] sought also to beguile Eve,
- *for he knew not the mind of God,*
- wherefore he sought to destroy the world”
(emphasis added).

Could anything be stated more plainly? Satan does not

know, never did know, and never will know the full mind of God, for he, Lucifer, was cast out of the Council in Heaven. He sought to trick or fool Eve in order to destroy the world. Instead, the adversary became the *catalyst* that caused Eve’s significant reevaluation of this mission and brought its purposes and necessity into clearer focus. Eve *saw* that it was good.

Can you imagine Satan’s anger when he found it was he, not Eve, who had been duped, that he was but a tool used to trigger the plan of mortality?

Hugh Nibley postulates that ever since then, Satan has “had it in for women.” She thwarted his plan of destruction and she recognized him. He further suggests that this grudge, which at times rages as a pitched battle, continues today.³⁵ Could this help explain why through the ages there has been such a need among the unenlightened to subjugate women? Society often needs little prodding. Dominance and power are heady by themselves.

10. DOES “BONE OF MY BONE” MEAN FROM ADAM’S RIB?

Perhaps the most familiar of all Biblical stories having to do with Adam and Eve is the story of woman coming from “Adam’s rib.” It is on this belief (that Eve was the product of “spare parts”) that the Talmud hangs its assertion that Eve is inferior and subject to Adam. The same pattern is extant today. Our modern-day prophets have spoken plainly and positively to put this into perspective. President Spencer W. Kimball has stated that the account of the rib “*is, of course, figurative*” (emphasis added).³⁶

Let us look at this portion of the story once again to see if we can gain a bit more insight into its true significance and meaning.

The Genesis account begins by telling us that “the Lord caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam.” After the creation of Eve, Adam then is awakened. In the Gnostic gospels, Eve, or the feminine spiritual power she represented, is depicted as the source of this awakening, which is *a spiritual awakening for mankind*.

Recognizing that the gnostic gospels reflect only bits and pieces of selective truth, it is nonetheless informative to see the theme, prevalent in much of the Apocrypha, of Eve bringing light and awakening mind and spirit.³⁷

The Secret Book of John suggests that Adam “suddenly awakens to the presence of the spirit hidden deep within,” which is embodied in the newly physical presence of Eve. This book concludes as Eve, “the perfect primal intelligence, calls out to Adam [and in effect to you and me, the readers] to wake up, recognize her, and so receive spiritual illumination.”³⁸

Is this not evocative of, and does it not give new insight into, our own sacred liturgy?

Adam and Eve Step into Mortality with Eyes Opened

We find Adam and Eve as mortal beings, their bodies having experienced a mighty change: "After the [F]all... the forbidden fruit had the power to create blood and... mortality took the place of immortality."³⁹ The first Biblical verse relating to Adam and Eve's awareness of the change of their condition states that "the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked."⁴⁰

Naked, as used here, has an additional connotation. It also refers to their intellectual vulnerability, their innocence, their inexperience in an earthly sphere, and their susceptibility to temptation.

When God comes to walk in the garden, Adam and Eve hide. When God asks them what they have done, Adam thinks as a separate *one* and begins to explain his actions by focusing attention on the other. He tells the Lord he was offered the fruit by the woman, whom "thou gavest me, and commandest that she should remain with me."⁴¹

Aschkenasy explains that in the original language this reply uses the verb from the stem *ntn*, which implies that his actions were quite mechanical, seeming to say, "I did what I was supposed to do." Eve, when asked by the Lord what she has done, "on the other hand, uses the unusual, richly connotative verb [beguiled] from the stem *ns*." With the use of this verb, the Lord would understand clearly her thought process. Aschkenasy further indicates that use of such a verb form would indicate an unusually intelligent person who has a rich vocabulary and one who is accustomed to playing a central role.⁴²

II. WHOM DOES GOD PUNISH AFTER THE FALL?

As the dialogue continues, we learn not only about Adam and Eve but also about the nature of God. We are shown a kind and loving Father who first seeks to protect his children and then sets about teaching, reminding, and admonishing with instructions, which I suspect are similar to those we received as we left our heavenly home to begin our sojourn here.

God's First Act is to Mete Out Punishment to the Adversary

"Because thou hast done this thou shalt be cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life."⁴³ Nibley believes that the punishment was because of Satan's attempt to insert himself into the Plan and thereby gain authority over the minds, souls, and bodies of mortal man.

God's Next Act is to Bless Eve and Her Posterity

As we are aware, choice and agency are key to God's plan for man's second estate. Satan unchecked would thwart

this exercise of agency, so the Father next sets about placing a protective armor on Eve and on all her posterity. "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed; and he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."⁴⁴

What a freeing and ennobling concept this is. Because of this, we, all of us, come to this earth life with a natural abhorrence for and a protection against evil and all things evil. Satan has only the control over us that we ourselves allow. With this natural abhorrence for embracing evil, agency once again reigns. It is by *our* choice, not his, that Satan enters our lives. Mankind is born into mortality with a mortal body, subject to mortal drives, desires, and temptations. However, *mankind is neither born in sin nor to love sin.*

12. ARE EVE AND HER FEMALE POSTERITY CURSED?

God's daughter and son have done what had to be done: they have used their agency to enter mortality "that men might be." They are now embarking on an extraordinarily difficult journey, fraught with trials and hazards, a life ruled by the natural laws of the sphere in which they now dwell and of which they have little knowledge. Before departing their paradisiacal Eden, a concerned Father counsels and teaches his beloved children about the challenges and realities that their newly mortal bodies will face in a mortal existence.

God tells Eve what she will experience as she embraces her destiny to be the mother of all living and as she complies with his command to multiply and replenish the earth. (These teachings were surely meant as instruction for all Eve's daughters who will follow after her.)

The Father's language on its face seems very harsh: "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception. In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children."⁴⁵ (Note that he does not say *in* thy conception but *and* thy conception, a blessing that there may be many children.)

The Hebraic word for "sorrow" is *astav*, meaning "to labor," "to sweat," or "to do something very hard."⁴⁶ God did not mean that childbirth would be a cause for sadness. What God seems to be alerting Eve to is that in mortality childbirth will be very difficult; that in childbirth she will sweat and toil and there will be pain. To "multiply" does not mean to add to or increase; in this context it means to repeat over and over again, such as saying multiple words in repetitious prayers.⁴⁷

The Father is *not* cursing or causing pain to be inflicted on Eve; he is making her aware that her newly mortal body will experience pain in the process of childbirth, a pain that will come and go and repeat itself many times. Is he also counseling as to the necessity of this particular

kind of labor as children are born in this sphere?

As physicians, you may be aware of an article that appeared in *Scientific American* entitled “The Stress of Being Born.”⁴⁸ It points out that the “stress-recovery” aspect of labor (birth pains that occur, cease, and occur again multiple times) is key to the emergence of a healthy child. During the birth process, this “stress-recovery” pushing of the fetus through the birth canal causes the production of unusually high levels of adrenaline and noradrenalin. It is important for the fetus to undergo the stress of this type of delivery for the level of catecholamine to be elevated sufficiently to enhance the infant’s ability to survive outside the womb. The article indicates that infants who do not experience this type of birth are at a distinct disadvantage.

In this light, labor (sorrow) in childbirth comes to be seen as essential to healthy life. In reality, such labor is a blessing, not a curse.

“Thy desire shall be to thy husband” is coupled with the concept of bearing children. I find such a promise to be weighted heavily in the blessing column. How difficult it would be for a woman to bear and rear children in this lone and dreary world if her desire was not towards her husband.

As part of that same scriptural statement we are told that “he shall rule over thee.” The sting is taken from such a pronouncement by the clarifying words of our beloved Prophet Spencer W. Kimball: “I have a question about the word ‘rule.’ It gives the wrong impression. I would prefer to use the word ‘preside’ because that’s what he does. A righteous husband presides over his wife and family.”⁴⁹ An unrighteous husband has no call on this spiritual authority.

13. WHAT EMOTIONS DID ADAM AND EVE FEEL AS THEY RECOGNIZED THEIR MORTALITY?

Their statements in Moses 5:10–11 reflect pure joy:

And in that day Adam blessed God... saying: Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy....

And Eve, his wife, heard all these things and was glad, saying: Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient.

As President J. Reuben Clark stated, “They [Adam and Eve] recognize the great blessing of mortality—that it is in this sphere that they will fulfill the measure of their creation. They are happy!”⁵⁰

“Mother Eve rejoices that the Fall had occurred and that the Plan of Salvation is progressing on its fore-

ordained way,” reminds Elder Bruce R. McConkie as he pronounces it “one of the most profound doctrinal declarations ever.”⁵¹

Both Adam and Eve heard the voice of the Lord and *both* of them were commanded to worship and serve their creator. “And Adam and Eve blessed the name of God, and they made all things known unto their sons and their daughters.... And Adam and Eve, his wife, ceased not to call upon God.”⁵²

No longer in Eden, where the name Adam was all-inclusive, the language in this account takes care to identify and include Eve as a full participating partner and to include the mention of daughters as well as sons, to whom Adam and Eve made all things known. As Elder McConkie says, “God wanted us to be acutely aware that all that transpired was a joint enterprise that took into account both Adam and Eve.”

Further, we are reminded in the Moses account that Adam and Eve ceased not to call upon God. Why? Because prayer is the lifeline to the Father.

14. WAS THERE AN INVESTITURE CEREMONY IN THE GARDEN?

Many Hebrew scholars state that “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” is an ancient covenant pledge. These are Hebrew words symbolizing power and weakness. (In essence it is a marriage vow.) It seems that Adam and Eve are pledging to be bound together for better or worse. We cannot question “that Adam and Eve were joined together in marriage for time and for all eternity by the power of that everlasting priesthood,” advises Elder Russell M. Nelson.⁵³

God also, at that time, provided a shield: the robe of the holy priesthood to protect them against evil. One of the most evocative verses in Genesis is just one sentence long; it clearly shows the compassionate nature of God’s love for Adam and Eve and subsequently for all his children: “Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them.”⁵⁴ Imagine, the royal robes of the holy priesthood, crafted by the hand of God, placed on his chosen Adam and Eve that they might be properly protected throughout their sojourns here on earth. What a grand expression of infinite love!

The world pauses to watch the investiture ceremonies of kings and queens, popes, and Supreme Court justices. Yet these worldly ceremonies surely pale beside that glorious event. Do you not suppose the angels in heaven paused to watch and that heavenly choirs sang as these protective robes of the royal priesthood were placed on Adam and Eve by a loving father?

The significance of this investiture should not be overlooked. It should often be recalled to our minds, for the

Lord offers that same divine protection today to each man and woman who enters the temple to claim the blessings of the endowment.

15. IS THE "BATTLE OF THE SEXES" SATAN'S WAR?

Throughout the whole garden story we find that a consistent element in Satan's attempts to thwart the designs of God is his desire to disrupt the eternal, vital, and delicate balance of male-female relationships.

If he (Satan) can make men and women see one another, not as empowering partners, but as individuals who are of unequal worth or as competitors, seeking gifts the other has, he can cause great pain and anguish. He can distort the concepts of deity, spiritual powers, and the priesthood and thereby distort our response to each other.

As men and women we need to recognize and validate the primary and many roles of women as well as those of men. We should strive to see that opportunities are provided and that equity abounds. Motherhood and those women who sacrifice for it, must be elevated in society above other life careers. There are many seasons to our lives. Intellectual, spiritual, or career choices of women and the right and need to make those choices in the appropriate seasons should be fostered, respected, and valued.

Satan knows that celestial (eternal) marriage is a basic principle on which all eternal promises hinge, and that its destruction is the only way whereby he can truly frustrate the purpose of the Father.

That principle has not changed since the creation of the earth; today Satan seems to be making great headway in this battle to separate man and woman. He has been very successful in causing individuals to place greater priority on their separateness than on their togetherness. Individual needs and desires, rather than the combined welfare of the couple, often seem to be paramount in contemporary life. Because of this, many relationships do not come to fruition. Because of this, many marriages are not able to endure.

CONCLUSION

In closing let us return to the truism that images and ideas have consequences. Erroneous perceptions concerning the nature and role of any one of the key players in any of the three events on which the grand plan of salvation rests—the Creation, the Fall, or the Atonement—would distort and sow confusion and discord.

The errors in the garden story have been a source of real confusion and have caused significant misuse of law and authority. Throughout the ages, expectations have

been skewed, strengths and weaknesses have been misperceived, roles have been blurred or ill-defined, and talents wasted. Many are being misled and are seeking answers in the wrong places to the wrong questions.

A review of the 15 specific concepts previously discussed is as follows:

1. Eve and her sisters were active participants in the design and execution of the grand plan of creation.
2. Eve's role is as "a power equal to."
3. The Fall was foreordained. There was no other way.
4. Partaking of the fruit was in response to the *greater* law.
5. When the term *Adam* is used in Genesis and in the restored scriptures it refers to "them"—Adam and Eve together.
6. God walked and talked with Eve in the garden to prepare her for her mission.
7. *Beguiled* as used in the Genesis text is a richly descriptive, positive word.
8. Eve was deceived by the identity of the messenger, not the message.
9. The death we have to fear is a spiritual death.
10. Eve was created spiritually and physically in the same manner as was Adam.
11. God curses Satan for his attempt to insert himself into the grand plan.
12. Eve, Adam, and their posterity are not cursed.
13. Eve and Adam expressed joy as they entered mortality.
14. God crafted and placed on his beloved son and daughter the robes of the holy priesthood.
15. Satan is a key architect of the battle of the sexes, which battle can frustrate the work of the Lord.

What then is the message of the garden story? The whole story of mother Eve, the garden experience, and all that transpired is a story of *exercised agency*: of *courageous choice*. John A. Widtsoe advises that with "full knowledge of the purpose of the plan of salvation, and the reason for placing Adam and Eve on earth, the apparent contradiction in the story of the 'Fall' vanishes. Instead the law of free agency, or individual choice, appears in distinct view."⁵⁵

Widtsoe rejoices in this, saying, "It is a thrilling thought that Adam and Eve were not coerced to begin God's work on earth. They chose to do so, by the exercise of their free agency. It is the lesson for all their children: Seek the truth, choose wisely, and carry the responsibility for our acts."⁵⁶

The garden story was designed to bring into clearer focus the dilemma and choice we all faced in pre-earth life and that we will face in mortality. We each, by ourselves and for ourselves, made the decision to forego static secu-

riety and embrace the promise of an earthly body with all its risks. We elected to suffer pain, guilt, disappointment and temporal death, not to mention the appalling risk of permanent spiritual death, that we might fulfill our potential to become as the gods. To do this, we had to be in a position to confront evil directly and on our own, apart from God's presence.

The message of the restored gospel as related to the doctrine of the Fall is that the Fall was planned for. It is the greater law. Our first parents chose wisely. Their act enabled mankind to enter mortality and seize the hope of eternal life.

The promise given to each of us and reinforced by the garden story is that if we will ask, and open our ears, God will counsel and bless and see us safely and joyfully through this time of mortality. We must courageously seek truth and act on those truths, whatever the cost, for that is our foreordained mission. The greater must be chosen whether it be law or thing!

Mother Eve bestowed upon her daughters and upon her sons a heritage of honor, for she acted with wisdom, love, and unselfish sacrifice.

AFTERTHOUGHTS

"Wherefore, by the words of three, God hath said, I will establish my word."⁵⁷ At the October 1993 general conference of the Church, three apostles affirmed the necessity and correctness of Eve's actions.

Elder Russell M. Nelson said:

*Adam and Eve were the first people to live upon the earth. They were different from the plant and animal life that had been created previously. Adam and Eve were children of God. Their bodies of flesh and bone were made in the express image of God's. In that state of innocence, they were not yet mortal. They could have had no children, were not subject to death, and could have lived in Eden's garden forever. Thus, we might speak of the Creation in terms of a **paradisical** [Nelson's emphasis] creation.*

If that state had persisted, you and I would still be stranded among the heavenly host as unborn sons and daughters of God. "The great plan of [happiness] would have been frustrated" (Alma 42:5).

That leads us to the fall of Adam. To bring the plan of happiness to fruition, God issued to Adam and Eve the first commandment ever given to mankind. It was a commandment to beget children. A law was explained to them. Should they eat from "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen. 2:17), their bodies would change; mortality and eventual death would

come upon them. But partaking of that fruit was prerequisite to their parenthood.

*While I do not fully understand all the biochemistry involved, I do know that their physical bodies did change; blood began to circulate in their bodies. Adam and Eve thereby became mortal. Happily for us, they could also beget children and fulfill the purposes for which the world was created. Happily for them, "the Lord said unto Adam [and Eve]: Behold I have forgiven thee thy transgression in the Garden of Eden" (Moses 6:53). **We and all mankind are forever blessed because of Eve's great courage and wisdom.** By partaking of the fruit first, she did what needed to be done. Adam was wise enough to do likewise. Accordingly, we could speak of the fall of Adam in terms of a **mortal** [Nelson's emphasis] creation, because "Adam fell that men might be" (2 Nephi 2:25).*

Other blessings came to us through the Fall. It activated two closely coupled additional gifts from God, nearly as precious as life itself—agency and accountability. We became "free to choose liberty and eternal life... or to choose captivity and death" (2 Nephi 2:27). Freedom of choice cannot be exercised without accountability for choices made.⁵⁸

Elder Boyd K. Packer stated:

A choice, it might be said, was imposed upon Eve. She should be praised for her decision. Then "Adam fell that men might be."

Elder Orson F. Whitney described the Fall as having "a twofold direction—downward, yet forward. It brought man into the world and set his feet upon progression's highway."⁵⁹

Elder Dallin H. Oaks explained:

To the first man and woman on earth, the Lord said, "Be fruitful, and multiply" (Moses 2:28; see also Gen. 1:28; Abr. 4:28). This commandment was first in sequence and first in importance. It was essential that God's spirit children have mortal birth and an opportunity to progress toward eternal life. Consequently, all things related to procreation are prime targets for the adversary's efforts to thwart the plan of God.

When Adam and Eve received the first commandment, they were in a transitional state, no longer in the spirit world but with physical bodies not yet subject to death and not yet capable of procreation. They could not fulfill the Father's first commandment without transgressing the barrier between the bliss of the Garden of Eden and the terrible trials and wonderful opportunities of mortal life.

For reasons that have not been revealed, this transition, or "fall," could not happen without a transgression—an exercise of moral agency amounting to a willful breaking of a law (see Moses 6:59). This would be a planned offense, a formality to serve an eternal purpose. The Prophet Lehi explained that "if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen" (2 Ne. 2:22), but would have remained in the same state in which he was created.

"And they would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin" (v. 23).

But the Fall was planned, Lehi concludes, because "all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things" (v. 24).

It was Eve who first transgressed the limits of Eden in order to initiate the conditions of mortality. Her act, whatever its nature, was formally a transgression **but eternally a glorious necessity to open the doorway toward eternal life**. Adam showed his wisdom by doing the same. And thus Eve and "Adam fell that men might be" (v. 25).

Some Christians condemn Eve for her act, concluding that she and her daughters are somehow flawed by it. Not the Latter-day Saints! Informed by revelation, we celebrate Eve's act and honor her wisdom and courage in the great episode called the Fall (see Bruce R. McConkie, "Eve and the Fall," *Woman*, [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979], pp. 67–68). Joseph Smith taught that it was not a "sin," because God had decreed it (see *The Words of Joseph Smith*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook [Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980], p. 63). Brigham Young declared, "We should never blame Mother Eve, not the least" (in *Journal of Discourses*, 13:145). Elder Joseph Fielding Smith said: "I never speak of the part Eve took in this fall as a sin, nor do I accuse Adam of a sin.... This was a transgression of the law, but not a sin... for it was something that Adam and Eve had to do!" (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56], 1:114–15).⁶⁰

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