

by Robert M. Bowman Jr.

Copyright © 2010 Institute for Religious Research

“Because of the Fall, we are blessed with physical bodies, the right to choose between good and evil, and the opportunity to gain eternal life. None of these privileges would have been ours had Adam and Eve remained in the garden” (*Gospel Principles*, 29).

Adam—the Untold Story?

- *Does the Bible anywhere support the view that Adam and Eve were valiant, noble spirits?*
- *Does the teaching that Adam is Michael the archangel and the Ancient of Days clarify or confuse what the Bible teaches?*

Adam and Eve are among the most familiar names in the Bible. The LDS Church accepts the Bible’s teaching that Adam and Eve were the first literal human beings on earth (Genesis 2). They also accept as historical fact the account in Genesis of Adam and Eve eating of the forbidden fruit, with the result that all human beings are mortal (Genesis 3). In a day when skeptics outside Christianity and even liberals within many Christian churches widely question the creation account in Genesis, the Mormon acceptance of a literal Adam and Eve is commendable.

“...the Bible teaches that Adam’s existence as a living being began when God created him as a physical, human being. This means that Adam could not have been Michael the archangel living in heaven before God made the earth.”

From this significant point of agreement, however, the LDS teaching about Adam and Eve vectors away from the traditional Christian understanding in some surprising ways. *Gospel Principles* describes Adam and Eve as “valiant spirits” who “were among our Father’s noblest children” (27). Adam was Michael the archangel (D&C 27:11; 107:54; 128:21), “chosen by our Heavenly Father to lead the righteous in the battle against Satan (see Revelation 12:7-9).” Of the billions of spirit children preexisting in heaven, the Father chose Adam and Eve to be our first earthly parents. God promised Adam that he would be the patriarchal “head” and “prince” over the multitude of nations that would come from him (D&C 107:55).

Although Mormons view these claims about Adam as new revelations that supplement what the Bible says, in reality they do not comport with the biblical teaching. As we have discussed in [previous installments of this series](#), the Bible teaches that Adam’s existence as a living being began when God created him as a physical, human being (Genesis 1:26-27; 2:7). This means that Adam could not have been Michael the archangel living in heaven before God made the earth.

Furthermore, what the Bible says about Michael does not really fit Mormon doctrine about Michael. According to the Book of Daniel, Michael was one of the heavenly “chief princes” and was assigned specifically to protect Israel (Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1). This position as national “guardian angel” is what the designation “archangel” (Jude 9) means in its biblical context. (In ancient Judaism, there were multiple archangels, not just one, as modern readers commonly and mistakenly suppose.) The war in heaven between forces led by Michael and Satan the Dragon in John’s apocalyptic vision is a battle between Israel’s guardian angel and the devil, who sought to destroy Israel, the “woman” from whom came the male child (Jesus) who would rule all nations (Revelation 12). The Mormon interpretation that the war took place before God even made the earth simply does not fit the passage.

The LDS Church’s leaders have made other surprising, even shocking, statements about Adam.

According to Joseph Smith, Adam was “the Ancient of Days” of whom Daniel speaks (D&C 27:11; 116:1; 138:38). In Daniel’s vision, however, the Ancient of Days represents God, not Adam. We know this because the Ancient of Days is the divine figure sitting on the throne who gives to the figure of “one like a son of man” everlasting, universal authority over all peoples (Dan. 7:9-14). The New Testament reveals that Jesus is that Son of Man and God the Father is the one who gives him that divine authority (e.g., Matthew 16:28; 28:18; Mark 14:62; Philippians 2:9-11; Revelation 1:13-18).

Adam—God?

- *How important is it that we have an accurate understanding of who is, and who is not, God?*

Brigham Young added further confusion to the issue of the identity of Adam by repeatedly describing Adam as God. Here is perhaps the most famous example, from a notorious sermon he preached on April 9, 1852. Notice how Brigham’s doctrine built on Joseph Smith’s teachings about Adam as Michael and the Ancient of Days:

“When our father Adam came into the garden of Eden, he came into it with a *celestial body*, and brought Eve, *one of his wives*, with him. He helped to make and organize this world. He is MICHAEL, *the Archangel*, the ANCIENT OF DAYS! about whom holy men have written and spoken—*HE is our FATHER and our GOD, and the only God with whom WE have to do*” (*Journal of Discourses* 1:50; emphasis all in original).

It is not entirely clear that Brigham Young meant that Adam was the person that Christians traditionally call God the Father. Later in the same sermon, Brigham had this to say:

“It is true that the earth was organized by three distinct characters, namely, Eloheim, Yahovah, and Michael, these three forming a quorum, as in all heavenly bodies, and in organizing element, perfectly represented in the Deity, as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost” (1:51).

The above statement clearly treats Michael as just one of three divine “characters” and distinguishes him from “Eloheim,” who is presumably God the Father. Yet Brigham also appeared to teach in this sermon that Adam was the father of Jesus in the flesh:

“When the Virgin Mary conceived the child Jesus, the Father had begotten him in his own likeness. He was *not* begotten by the Holy Ghost. And who is the Father? He is the first of the human family; and when he took a tabernacle, it was begotten by *his Father* in heaven.... Jesus, our elder brother, was begotten in the flesh by the same character that was in the garden of Eden, and who is our Father in Heaven” (1:50, 51, emphasis in original).

If you find this confusing, you are not alone. Brigham’s teaching on this subject was confusing and controversial to Mormons at the time, and after his death in 1877 there was considerable debate about what to make of it. LDS theologian Stephen Robinson admits that “the Latter-day Saints have never been able to understand” Brigham’s statements on the subject (Robinson, *Are Mormons Christians?* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991], 19). The LDS Church for over a century has clearly rejected the “Adam-God” doctrine, but it has never explained how its second President and Prophet could have taught such a confused, false doctrine.

- *Could a true prophet of God proclaim false or confusing teaching as to the identity of the Father of Jesus Christ?*

The Fall: Source of Blessing?

- *Did the Fall result in a blessing or a curse for humanity?*

Besides teaching some surprising ideas about the identity of Adam, the LDS Church has a rather different take on the fall of Adam and Eve. Historically, Christians have understood the Bible to teach that Adam and Eve committed the first human act of sin, a terrible act of disobedience against God that brought all humanity under the curse of sin, corruption, and death. Mormon theology, on the other hand, teaches that what Adam and Eve did was a noble deed that was necessary for the blessing of the human race.

The basic reasoning behind this interpretation of the Fall is explained in a statement that the LDS scripture Pearl of Great Price quotes Eve as 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” (Moses 5:11)

The Book of Mormon gives the same explanation:

“And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end. 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. But behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who oweth all things. Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:22-25).

This argument assumes, as the above passage also states, that “it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things.” In other words, good things cannot exist without their opposites. There cannot be good without bad, or life without death, or happiness and joy without misery (2 Nephi 2:11). Based on this premise, these LDS scriptures reason backwards as follows:

- We cannot experience real joy without also first experiencing misery.
- We cannot know righteousness and goodness without first knowing sin and evil.
- We would not be able to change from sin and misery to righteousness and joy if we were already immortal beings.
- Therefore, we must first be mortal beings experiencing sin and misery before we can become immortal beings experiencing righteousness and joy.
- In order for us to become mortal beings, we must be born of mortal parents.
- In order for our first parents to be mortal, they needed to transgress God’s commandment.
- Therefore, our first parents needed to transgress God’s commandment in order for us to experience real joy.

By this chain of reasoning, Mormons conclude that it was really a good thing that Adam and Eve disobeyed God’s command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil:

“Some people believe Adam and Eve committed a serious sin when they ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. However, latter-day scriptures help us understand that their Fall was a necessary step in the plan of life and a great blessing to all of us” (*Gospel Principles*,

29).

Mormons do not believe that Adam and Eve *sinned* in eating of the forbidden fruit, even though they disobeyed God's command. The Book of Moses restates God's command not to eat of the tree to allow for this distinction. In the Bible, God tells Adam:

"But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17).

The Book of Moses expands this same statement as follows:

"But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, *nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee; but, remember that I forbid it,* for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Moses 3:17, emphasis added).

Joseph Fielding Smith commented:

"The fall of man came as a blessing in disguise, and was the means of furthering the purposes of the Lord in the progress of man, rather than a means of hindering them.... 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 in the strict sense, for it was something that Adam and Eve had to do!" (*Doctrines of Salvation* 1:114, 115).

This remains the LDS understanding of the Fall, as the following comments in 2009 by Tom Perry, one of the LDS Church's apostles, illustrate:

"The Fall was not a disaster. It wasn't a mistake or an accident. It was a deliberate part of the Lord's plan of salvation. As a result of the Fall, we are subject to temptation and misery as a price to comprehend authentic joy. Without tasting the bitter, we would never be able to understand the sweet (see 2 Nephi 2:15). We required mortality's discipline and refinement for the next step of our development to become more like our Father" (L. Tom Perry, "The Great Plan of Our God," *Ensign*, February 2009, 64).

The LDS understanding of the Fall not only goes beyond the Bible, it makes assumptions that are contrary to what the Bible teaches. For example, it is not true that the Fall was necessary for Adam and Eve to have children. We know this for two reasons.

First, before Adam and Eve had disobeyed God, he told them to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:28). The command presupposes that it was possible for Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply without violating any of his other commands. The Mormon doctrine of the Fall requires us to think that God gave two conflicting commands to Adam and Eve, forcing them to disobey one in order to fulfill the other.

Second, after Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden tree, God told Eve that her pain in childbearing and birth would be increased as part of the curse of the Fall: "I will greatly multiply your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children" (Genesis 3:16 NRSV). Far from saying that Eve would only now be able to conceive (because of her transgression), God tells Eve that because of her disobedience she will now experience greater discomfort and pain in pregnancy and giving birth.

Furthermore, the Bible flatly contradicts the doctrine of a necessary "opposition in all things." When God had finished making the universe and the living things on the earth, including the first man and woman, "God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was **very good**" (Genesis 1:31, emphasis added). There was nothing yet bad or evil about anything in God's creation. He had created everything and it was all "very good." Thus, it is not true that there must be bad before there can be good. God himself has been God from eternity past, unchangeably good and perfect in his nature (Psalm 90:2; Malachi 3:6; James 1:17; 1 John 1:5). Jesus Christ, who is God incarnate, lived a sinless life, perfect in

holiness and love (Luke 1:35; John 8:29; 15:10; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22; Hebrews 4:15; 7:26; 1 John 2:1). Therefore, it is possible to have good without evil, as well as joy without misery.

Finally, the LDS claim that Adam and Eve's disobedience to God's command was a transgression but not a sin is a hair-splitting distinction that is impossible to sustain biblically. In Romans 5, the apostle Paul calls Adam's act transgression, trespass, disobedience, *and sin* (Romans 5:14-19). Adam, Paul says, is "the one who sinned" (verse 16), in contrast to Jesus, who is the one through whose obedience we receive God's gracious gift of eternal life. According to the apostle John, "sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4) or, as the KJV translates it, "sin is the transgression of the law." Any violation of God's law, any disobedience to his command, is sin.

As Christians, we certainly rejoice and thank God for the gift of forgiveness, reconciliation, and eternal life through the ultimate sacrificial death of his Son Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 9:15; Philippians 4:4; 1 Peter 1:8). This was truly an act of mercy toward the human race, because Adam and Eve's act of disobedience against God was not a noble act cooperating with his plan but an act of rebellion against him. God sent his one and only divine Son into the world, not to make good children even better, but to make enemies into friends, objects of wrath into objects of mercy, wayward servants into adopted children.

"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life" (Romans 5:8-10).

"But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Galatians 4:4-7).

For further study:

Where Does It Say That? Numerous pages from LDS sources organized by subject, including documentation of what LDS Church leaders have taught about God.

Questions for Further Discussion

1. Can you think of any situations where you would desire or expect your children to go against your commands so they would ultimately make the best choice for their lives?
2. Mormon doctrine teaches that it was necessary for Adam and Eve to disobey God so we could eventually become Gods ourselves someday. Does that more closely resemble God's instruction or Satan's?