

The Fulness of the Gospel: The Fall of Adam and Eve

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A continuing series examining doctrines unique to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Most Christian churches teach that the Fall was a tragedy, that if Adam and Eve had not partaken of the forbidden fruit, they and all their posterity could now be living in immortal bliss in the Garden of Eden. But truth revealed to latter-day prophets teaches that the Fall was not a tragedy—without it Adam and Eve would have had no posterity. Thus, the Fall was a necessary step in Heavenly Father’s plan to bring about the eternal happiness of His children.

No Death, No Posterity, No Progress

“If Adam had not transgressed,” Lehi taught his son Jacob, “he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. ...

“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 knoweth all things.

“Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy” ([2 Ne. 2:22–25](#)).

After Adam and Eve partook of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, their eyes were opened, and Eve expressed gladness at the opportunity their transgression made possible: “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](#)).

Partaking of the fruit brought mortality, with its many opportunities to choose between good and evil, and enabled Adam and Eve to bear children. Thus the Fall opened the door for Heavenly Father’s children to come into the world, obtain physical bodies, and participate in “the great plan of happiness” ([Alma 42:8](#)). “Therefore this life became a probationary state,” a time to learn and grow, to repent and overcome weakness, “a time to prepare to meet God” ([Alma 12:24](#)).

Transgression, Not Sin

President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972) 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!” [1](#)

Regarding this distinction, Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles observed: “This suggested contrast between a *sin* and a *transgression* reminds us of the careful wording in the second article of faith: ‘We believe that men will be punished for their own *sins*, and not for Adam’s *transgression*’ (emphasis added). It also echoes a familiar distinction in the law. Some acts, like murder, are crimes because they are inherently wrong. Other acts, like operating without a license, are crimes only because they are legally prohibited. Under these distinctions, the act that produced the Fall was not a sin—inherently wrong—but a transgression—wrong because it was formally prohibited. These words are not always used to denote something different, but this distinction seems meaningful in the circumstances of the Fall.” [2](#)

Even though Adam and Eve had not sinned, because of their transgression they had to face certain consequences, two of which were spiritual death and physical death. Physical death came to Adam and Eve at the end of their earthly lives, but spiritual death occurred as they were cast out of the Garden of Eden, being cut

off from the presence of God (see [Alma 42:9](#)).

Original Sin

The result of our first parents' transgression, explained President Smith, "was banishment from the presence of God and bringing ... physical death into the world. The majority ... [of Christians] maintain that every child born into this world is tainted with 'original sin,' or partakes of Adam's transgression in his birth. The [second Article of Faith](#) contradicts this foolish and erroneous doctrine." [3](#) All descendants of Adam and Eve inherit certain effects from the Fall, but because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ we are held accountable only for our own sins. Children who die before the age of accountability are "alive in Christ" ([Moro. 8:12](#)) and have no need of repentance or baptism (see [Moro. 8:8–11](#)).

Commandments in the Garden

The Lord gave Adam and Eve commandments in the Garden of Eden, two of which were to multiply and replenish the earth (see [Gen. 1:28](#)) and to not partake of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (see [Gen. 2:17](#)). These two commandments were designed to place Adam and Eve in a position where they had to make a choice. President Smith taught: "The Lord said to Adam that if he wished to remain as he was in the garden, then he was not to eat the fruit, but if he desired to eat it and partake of death he was at liberty to do so." [4](#) Faced with this dilemma, Adam and Eve chose death—both physical and spiritual—which opened the door for themselves and their posterity to gain knowledge and experience and to participate in the Father's plan of happiness leading to eternal life.

[illustration] *Adam and Eve in the Garden*, by Stanley Galli

[illustration] Detail from *Christ in Gethsemane*, by Heinrich Hofmann, courtesy of C. Harrison Conroy Co.

Notes

1. *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (1954–56), 1:114–15.
2. "The Great Plan of Happiness," *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 72.
3. *Answers to Gospel Questions*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., 5 vols. (1957–66), 1:82.
4. *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 4:81.

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