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THE FALL OF MAN

ONE OF THE THREE PILLARS OF ETERNITY

Todd B. Parker

ELDER BRUCE R. MCCONKIE WROTE: “God himself, the Father of us all, ordained and established a plan of salvation whereby his spirit children might advance and progress and become like him. It is . . . the system that saves and exalts, and it consists of three things. These three are the very pillars of eternity itself. They are the most important events that ever have or will occur in all eternity. They are the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement. . . .

“We must know how and in what manner these three eternal verities—the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement—are inseparably woven together to form one plan of salvation. No one of them stands alone; each of them ties into the other two; and without a knowledge of all of them, it is not possible to know the truth about any one of them. . . .

“But, be it remembered, the Atonement came because of the Fall. Christ paid the ransom for Adam’s transgression. If there had

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been no Fall, there would be no Atonement with its consequent immortality and eternal life. Thus, just as surely as salvation comes because of the Atonement, so also salvation comes because of the Fall.”¹

The purpose of this paper is to show:

- The Fall was part of the plan of salvation since premortality.
- The Fall was a good thing.
- The Fall can be better understood in the context of the Creation.
- The Fall provided mankind a world of opposites, opportunity, and experience.
- The Fall is inseparably linked with the purposes of the Atonement.

Then we will be able to see how the Fall introduced sin, death, mortality, opposition, and the possibility of immortality and eternal life into the world.

PART OF THE PLAN FROM THE BEGINNING

The fall of Adam was a part of the Father’s plan of redemption from the very beginning. Aaron, one of the four sons of Mosiah, taught this truth to the father of King Lamoni. “And Aaron did expound unto [the king] the scriptures from the creation of Adam, laying the fall of man before him, and their carnal state and also the plan of redemption, which was *prepared from the foundation of the world*, through Christ, for all whosoever would believe on his name” (Alma 22:13; emphasis added). The phrase “from the foundation of the world” has reference to the premortal existence.

Joseph Smith also taught that the entire plan of salvation, including the fall of Adam, was known before the earth was created. “The great Jehovah contemplated the whole of the events connected with the earth, pertaining to the plan of salvation, before it rolled into existence; . . . the past, the present, and the future were and are, with Him, one eternal ‘now;’ He knew of the fall of Adam, the iniquities of the antediluvians, of the depth of iniquity that would be connected with the human family; . . . He comprehended

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the fall of man, and his redemption; He knew the plan of salvation; . . . He was acquainted with the situation of all nations and with their destiny; . . . He knows the situation of both the living and the dead, and has made ample provision for their redemption.”² In other words, there was no mad scramble in heaven when Adam fell. The Fall was part of the plan from the beginning, and those present in the premortal world knew of it and accepted it even before the earth was created.³

THE FALL WAS A GOOD THING

An analysis of Adam and Eve’s retrospective reaction to the Fall, as contained in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Genesis account, clearly shows that the Fall was a good thing for them and for us. “And in that day Adam blessed God and was filled, and began to prophesy concerning all the families of the earth, 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 shall I see God.

“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” (Moses 5:10–11).

Note what blessings Adam realized came to him as a result of the Fall:

1. “My eyes are open.” He became as the gods, knowing good and evil.
2. “I shall have joy.” This was unavailable prior to the Fall (see 2 Nephi 2:23).
3. “In the flesh I shall see God.” The resurrection of Jesus Christ made this possible.

Eve listed some additional blessings that resulted from the Fall:

1. “We . . . should have . . . seed.” Procreation came into the world.

2. "We . . . have known good and evil." Choosing between opposites afforded rewards.
3. "We . . . have known . . . the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient." The Atonement would be provided.

THE FALL IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CREATION

From the writings of Abraham, we know that the earth was created as a place for God's spirit children to come, obtain a mortal body, and be tested (see Abraham 3:24–26). Although the steps of the Creation are listed in the biblical account of Genesis, an explanation of the purpose and importance of the Creation comes only through latter-day revelation (see 1 Nephi 17:36; 2 Nephi 2:11–15; Moses 1:39). The Creation can be viewed as being accomplished in three phases: a celestial, spirit creation; an Edenic, paradisiacal creation; and a telestial, mortal creation. A review of these three phases of the Creation will help us better understand the context and setting of the Fall.⁴

Phase 1 of the Creation took place at a celestial level. We do not have a day-by-day account of this part of the Creation; we only know that it happened.⁵ From the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis, we learn that all things were created spiritually before they were created physically. Speaking of "every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew," the Lord said, "I, the Lord God, created all things of which I have spoken, spiritually, before they were naturally upon the face of the earth" (Moses 3:5). In the Doctrine and Covenants we learn that spirits are "in the likeness of that which is temporal; and that which is temporal in the likeness of that which is spiritual" (D&C 77:2). The temporal creations we observe on earth are like a mirror image of the premortal spirit creations. This spirit creation included the earth itself as well as plants, animals, and all other living things on it (see Bible Dictionary, "Spirit," 776).

Phase 2 of the Creation, identified as the Edenic, paradisiacal creation, followed the celestial, or spirit, creation. During this phase,

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things were tangible, or physical, although they were not yet mortal. Since the term *immortal* is usually used to indicate a resurrected status, things during Phase 2 will be referred to as being “nonmortal” (see Bible Dictionary, “Flesh,” 675–76).

The prophet Lehi described this phase of the Creation and the conditions that would have prevailed upon the earth if Adam had not fallen:

“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” (2 Nephi 2:22–23).

Hence, during Phase 2, there was no death, no corruption, no aging, no blood, no pain, and no procreation.⁶ It was an Edenic, paradisiacal, nonmortal condition. Adam’s transgression, or fall, caused a shift to a telestial existence (Phase 3). The following chart

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
<i>Spirit Creation</i>	<i>Physical/Spiritual Creation</i>	<i>Temporal Creation</i>
<i>Celestial State</i>	<i>Paradisiacal State</i>	<i>Telestial State</i>
<i>Spiritual</i>	<i>Nonmortal</i>	<i>Mortal</i>
<i>No Detailed Scriptural Account (Moses 3:5)</i>	<i>Accounts of Six Creative Periods (Genesis 1; Moses 2, 3)</i>	<i>Accounts after the Fall (Genesis 3; Moses 4, 5)</i>
	Conditions (before the Fall):	F Conditions (after the Fall):
	1. No death	A 1. Spiritual, physical death
	2. No procreation	L 2. Reproduction
	3. No blood (not mortal)	L 3. Blood (mortal)
	4. Innocent (not accountable)	L 4. Accountable,
	5. No joy, no sin, yet no good (no alternatives)	5. Joy, good, evil, sin present choices
	6. No corruption, aging, pain	6. Corruption, aging, pain
	7. In God’s presence	7. Out of God’s presence

may help to summarize and clarify the relationship between the Fall and the three phases of the Creation (see 2 Nephi 2:23–26).

Confusion in understanding the Fall often comes from a misunderstanding of Phase 2. Every mortal comes from Phase 1 to Phase 3, while only Adam and Eve experienced Phase 2. We must realize that the terrestrial, Edenic era was a very different world. It was unlike anything any of us has ever experienced. We should remember that the scriptures describe another terrestrial era, the Millennium, as being far beyond our terrestrial experience (see D&C 133:45; Isaiah 64:4). Thus, it is not surprising that we do not have a complete and adequate description of what it was like in Eden. Try to imagine and describe a world in which there was no joy, no misery, no corruption, no death, and no procreation. Opposites as we know them did not exist. The common trials of mortality—pain, sorrow, guilt, and sin—were not part of life in Eden.

How different is Phase 3! There are numerous evidences in our present world that mankind is in a fallen condition. We live in a world of disease, death, corruption, and evil. Through revelation we know that mankind is the literal offspring of Deity. However, a review of history shows an astounding amount of war, hatred, inhumanity, and evil. Two alternatives present themselves: either man is not the offspring of Deity, or we are fallen. Truly, “all mankind [is] in a lost and in a fallen state” (1 Nephi 10:6). Not only man, but the entire earth lost its paradisiacal glory because of the Fall. For this reason, we believe “that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory” (Articles of Faith 1:10). During the millennial era, the whole earth will be renewed to its former Edenic glory. Truly, as Lehi said, “all things” (2 Nephi 2:23) were affected by the Fall.

THE TWO DEATHS

The prophet Jacob taught that unless there was an infinite atonement the “first judgment which came upon man must needs have remained to an endless duration” (2 Nephi 9:7). The “first

judgment” to which he had reference was “thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:17).⁷ This judgment included both spiritual and physical death. Alma taught that “the fall had brought upon all mankind a spiritual death as well as a temporal [death]” (Alma 42:9). These two deaths brought by the Fall affect everyone and everything. A brief examination of these deaths introduced by Adam and how the Atonement unconditionally overcomes them will improve our understanding of the Fall.

Physical death. Physical death is the separation of the body and the spirit. Everyone who comes to earth and gains a body, including sons of perdition and translated beings, will suffer physical death as a result of the Fall (see 2 Nephi 9:6; 1 Corinthians 15:22). Thus, the Fall places the reality of physical death squarely before each of us. Jacob says that without an atonement our flesh would “rot” and “rise no more” (2 Nephi 9:7). Consequently, all of us should appreciate our need for redemption from death. In addition, we must recognize that death is a vital part of the “plan of happiness” (Alma 42:16). The great blessing that comes to us because of death is the Resurrection. In truth, the Resurrection comes to us because of the Fall. Jacob taught that “to fulfill the merciful plan of the great Creator, there must needs be a power of resurrection, and *the resurrection must needs come unto man by reason of the fall*” (2 Nephi 9:6; emphasis added). As Elder McConkie said, “Many among us have no difficulty envisioning that the atonement is infinite and eternal and applies to all forms of life. . . . But some among us have not yet had it dawn upon them that all things fell and became mortal so they could be resurrected.”⁸ How grateful we should be that the Fall provided the way for us to be resurrected! Christ’s atonement unconditionally overcomes physical death for everyone through the Resurrection (see 2 Nephi 9:11–13; Alma 11:42–45; Helaman 14:15–17).

Spiritual death. The spiritual death brought about by Adam is a separation from God (see Bible Dictionary, “Death,” 655). The Fall allowed us to leave God’s presence and come to earth. This is the “first death” (D&C 29:41). Christ’s atonement overcomes this spiritual death, or separation, brought about by Adam because all

mankind will be brought back into God's presence to be judged. Nephi, Jacob, Amulek, Alma, Samuel the Lamanite, Jesus, and Moroni all taught this doctrine.⁹ For example, Samuel the Lamanite taught, "Yea, behold, [Christ's] death bringeth to pass the resurrection, and redeemeth all mankind from the first death—that spiritual death; for all mankind, by the fall of Adam being cut off from the presence of the Lord, are considered as dead, both as to things temporal and to things spiritual. But behold, the resurrection of Christ redeemeth all mankind, yea, even all mankind, and bringeth them back into the presence of the Lord" (Helaman 14:16–17). Hence, the spiritual death brought about by Adam is unconditionally overcome for all mankind because they will be returned to God's presence for judgment. If a person is then found unworthy to remain in God's presence, he will suffer a "second death" (Helaman 14:18) and be removed from the presence of God. Thus, people are accountable only for their own actions as "men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression" (Articles of Faith 1:2).

In short, each death brought into the world by Adam is unconditionally overcome for all mankind through the Atonement. Physical death is overcome through a universal resurrection, and spiritual death is overcome through a restoration to God's presence for a final judgment. The Fall brought about a mortal life that allows us to progress by experiencing temporal and spiritual death. However, we are ultimately responsible only for our own individual choices (see Alma 41:3–5).

AGENCY, OPPOSITION, AND EXPERIENCE

Before the Fall, Adam and Eve were in a state of innocence. Although sin had not yet entered the world, they had agency (see Moses 7:32). Our first parents were introduced to the two trees in the garden to allow them to experience the use of their agency. Lehi explained:

"And to bring about his eternal purposes in the end of man, after he had created our first parents, and the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and in fine, all things which are created, it must needs

be that there was an opposition; even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life; the one being sweet and the other bitter.

“Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other” (2 Nephi 2:15–16).

Remember that Lehi said there was “no joy” before the Fall because Adam and Eve “knew no misery” (2 Nephi 2:23). Opposition is a necessary prerequisite for man to experience true joy. Pain is required for man to appreciate pleasure. Difficulties are necessary to help us develop courage. Death is necessary to help us understand eternal life. In Genesis we read of the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:17). More than just intellectual understanding is involved here. The word translated as “knowledge” comes from the Hebrew *yāda*. One meaning of this word is to “*know by experience*.”¹⁰ This implies a kind of knowledge that is gained by firsthand, intimate experience. Thus, *yāda* is also used to describe marital intimacy, such as “Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived” (Genesis 4:1). Through the Fall Adam and Eve entered a world where they could learn to distinguish between good and evil by their own experience. Hence, we also experience firsthand a world of opposites where we “taste the bitter, that [we] may know to prize the good” (Moses 6:55). This process is a great blessing. “For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things” (2 Nephi 2:11) so that “all these things shall give [us] experience, and shall be for [our] good” (D&C 122:7).

PARTAKING OF THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT

To effect the change from an Edenic, paradisiacal world to a fallen, telestial world, Adam and Eve had to undergo a change of state or status. That change is recorded in scripture as the partaking of the forbidden fruit. Elder McConkie has suggested that Adam and Eve’s partaking of the fruit was figurative. “Again the account is speaking *figuratively*. What is meant by partaking of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is that our first parents complied with whatever laws were involved so that

their bodies would change from their state of paradisiacal immortality to a state of natural mortality.”¹¹ In a later work, Elder McConkie explained this as follows: “As to the fall, the scriptures set forth that there were in the Garden of Eden two trees. One was the tree of life, which *figuratively* refers to eternal life; the other was the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which *figuratively* refers to how and why and in what manner mortality and all that appertains to it came into being.”¹² Although we do not fully know the details of the scriptural record concerning the forbidden fruit, in some sense the partaking of the fruit was symbolic.

TRANSGRESSION VERSUS SIN

Adam, Eve, and Lehi all refer to the Fall as a “transgression” rather than a “sin” (see Moses 5:10–11; 2 Nephi 2:22). The word *transgress* means “to step beyond or across; . . . to go beyond limits set.”¹³ The words *transportation*, *transcontinental*, and *transmigration* all connote the moving from one place to another. Adam’s “transgression” was a “crossing over” from an Edenic, terrestrial state to a fallen, telestial state. This transgression included leaving a state of paradisiacal laws and crossing over to a condition of mortal, temporal laws.

Since Adam and Eve were in a “state of innocence” (2 Nephi 2:23) prior to the Fall, their accountability was similar to that of little children. Because of their innocence, little children “are not capable of committing sin” (Moroni 8:8). King Benjamin taught that such transgressions are automatically covered by the Atonement (see Mosiah 3:16). Lehi explained that there was “no sin” (2 Nephi 2:23) in the world prior to the Fall. Hence, since Adam and Eve could not sin, their “transgression” of terrestrial law brought sin and telestial law into the world. Apparently, Joseph Smith did not believe that Adam’s transgression was a sin. “Joseph said in answer to Mr. Stout that Adam did not commit sin in eating the fruits, for God had decreed that he should eat and fall. . . . [That] he should die was the saying of the Lord therefore the Lord appointed us to fall and also redeemed us.”¹⁴

CONFLICTING COMMANDMENTS?

The first commandment given to Adam and Eve in the garden was to “be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Genesis 1:28). However, the Lord also gave to Adam and Eve the command: “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). These two statements made by the Lord in Genesis have become known as the “conflicting commandments.” How is it possible to reconcile these two statements?

The Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis 2:17 helps clarify the Lord’s intent by adding an important phrase: “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). Surely this commandment is different from other commandments. Nowhere else does God use this same wording. For example, the Lord did not say, “Thou shalt not commit adultery” or “Thou shalt not kill” and then say, “Nevertheless thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee.” Why the unusual wording? The key may lie in the interpretation of the word *it*. When the Lord said, “I forbid it,” to what was He referring? President Joseph Fielding Smith explained: “Just why the Lord would say to Adam that he forbade him to partake of the fruit of that tree is not made clear in the Bible account, but in the original as it comes to us in the book of Moses it is made definitely clear. It is that 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.”¹⁵ The Lord was explaining to Adam the consequences associated with the use of his agency. A parenthetical addition of the consequences to the Lord’s commandments to Adam as recorded in Moses 3:16–17 may be helpful:

“Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat.” (You may use your agency to choose.)

“But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt

not eat of it, nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself.” (You may eat from the forbidden tree if you want the consequence that you will fall and man will come into mortality.)

“The day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” (You will experience the consequences of becoming mortal, leaving the garden, and experiencing death.)

Hence, Adam could not remain as he was in the garden if he partook of the fruit.

ACCORDING TO GOD’S DESIGN

The Lord ultimately intended that Adam and Eve partake of the fruit. “Adam fell that men might be” (2 Nephi 2:25). If Adam and Eve had not partaken, they would have remained in the garden, and we would still be existing as spirits in the premortal world. President Joseph Fielding Smith taught that Adam did what the Lord intended him to do. “Adam did only what he had to do. He partook of that fruit for one good reason, and that was to open the door to bring you and me and everyone else into this world. . . . If it hadn’t been for Adam, I wouldn’t be here; you wouldn’t be here; we would be waiting in the heavens as spirits.”¹⁶ Similarly, President Brigham Young said: “Did [Adam and Eve] come out in direct opposition to God and to his government? No. But they transgressed a command of the Lord, and through that transgression sin came into the world. The Lord knew they would do this, and he had designed that they should.”¹⁷

THE FALL AND THE ATONEMENT

Moroni declared that because of the Fall, Jesus came into the world, and because of Jesus came the redemption of mankind. “Behold, [God] created Adam, and by Adam came the fall of man. And because of the fall of man came Jesus Christ, even the Father and the Son; and because of Jesus Christ came the redemption of man” (Mormon 9:12–13). Moroni’s statement helps us see the fundamental reason for the Fall and its relationship to the Atonement. Adam fell “that men might be” so that we “might have joy” (2 Nephi

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2:25) through the Atonement. The Fall provides the way for us to become like the Father and the Son and “receive a fulness of joy” (D&C 93:33). As Jacob said, “O how great the plan of our God!” (2 Nephi 9:13).

CONCLUSION

The Fall is one of the three greatest and most important events in the history of the world. Along with the Creation and the Atonement, it is one of the three pillars of eternity. The Fall was part of the Father’s plan of salvation from the beginning. We exist because of the fall of Adam. Without the Fall, all mankind would still be premortal spirit children of God yet to take upon themselves mortal tabernacles and live upon this earth. The blessings of mortality, earth life, and opposition all resulted from the Fall. While death had its beginnings with the Fall, both the temporal and spiritual deaths brought by Adam provide a mortal world full of invaluable experience for God’s children. Without the Fall, Jesus could not have been born. If Jesus had not been born, immortality and eternal life would not be available. As Lehi said, “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 Nephi 2:24–25).

NOTES

1. Bruce R. McConkie, “Christ and the Creation,” *Ensign*, June 1982, 9.
2. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 220.
3. In the premortal council Lucifer proposed that he would “redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost” (Moses 4:1). This suggests that the knowledge of a fall and the need for redemption were known to God’s spirit children before the creation of the earth.
4. The statements in this paragraph are taken from Robert J. Matthews, *Teaching the Doctrine of the Fall in an Old Testament Course*, CES Symposium Handout, Brigham Young University, 1995.
5. See Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56), 1:75–76.

6. See Bible Dictionary, “Fall of Adam,” 670, and Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:76–77.

7. Robert J. Matthews, “The Atonement of Jesus Christ,” in *Second Nephi, the Doctrinal Structure*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989), 182.

8. Bruce R. McConkie, “The Three Pillars of Eternity,” 17 February 1981. *Brigham Young University 1981 Fireside and Devotional Speeches* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1981), 31.

9. Everyone who leaves God’s presence as a result of Adam’s fall will return to God’s presence to be judged. If one person were not brought back to God’s presence, the Atonement would be incomplete.

2 Nephi 2:9–10: All men come unto God and stand in His presence to be judged.

2 Nephi 9:15, 22, 38: All are resurrected and stand before Him, even the wicked.

Alma 11:43–44: We shall stand before God. This restoration comes to all.

Alma 12:12–15, 24: All are brought before the bar. We must prepare to meet God.

Alma 42:23: The Atonement restores men to God’s presence according to the law.

3 Nephi 26:4: All nations, tongues, and people shall stand before God.

Mormon 9:12–13: All are brought back into the presence of the Lord. This is wherein all men are redeemed.

10. F. Brown, S. Driver, C. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 393.

11. McConkie, “Christ and the Creation,” 15; emphasis added.

12. Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 86; emphasis added.

13. *Websters’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, s.v. “transgress.”

14. Joseph Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 63.

15. Joseph Fielding Smith, “Was the Fall of Adam Necessary?” *Improvement Era*, April 1962, 231; emphasis added.

16. Joseph Fielding Smith, in Conference Report, October 1967, 121–22.

17. Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1966), 103.