

Paradoxes in Paradise

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In the last few decades, two very different interpretive communities, each presumably unacquainted with the other's work, cast aside the millennia-old interpretation¹ of Genesis 3 that found fault with Eve's actions. They adopted the same innovative reading: Eve's choice to eat from the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil was wise—an idea that I will call the Wise Choice Theory. No one would be surprised that one of these groups consists of feminist biblical scholars;² what may be a bit of a shock is that the other group is composed of members and leaders of the LDS Church.³

Obstacles to the Wise Choice Theory

While the appeal of the Wise Choice Theory is obvious in an age of anxiety over women's⁴ nature and roles,⁵ there are many problems associated with this reading. I will explore these difficulties and then consider some other ways in which we might approach this most enigmatic of texts. I find nine major obstacles to the Wise Choice Theory.

Reactions

Note the reactions to eating⁶ the fruit: Adam and Eve hide from God (Genesis 3:8), they are afraid (v. 10),⁷ they are ashamed,⁸ and, most importantly, instead of proudly announcing their act when questioned,⁹ they try to deflect blame (vv. 12–13). Further, when asked why she had eaten, Eve states that she had been tricked (v. 13).¹⁰ These are not the responses of people who think they have just done something wise. Additionally, the consequences¹¹ laid out for Adam, Eve, and the serpent read as if they are anything but a reward for having made a good decision;¹² consider the words directed at Adam: "Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life."¹³ Note the reiteration of the command not to eat, the fact that eating has resulted in increased toil, and that listening to his wife is cast in a negative light. It is very hard to read God's reply to Adam as the response to a wise decision.¹⁴

Disobedience

Note that Eve ate in direct disobedience to a clear commandment:¹⁵ Genesis 2:16–17 reads, "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: 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." It is nearly impossible to understand how direct disobedience to a commandment could have been a wise choice.

Some interpreters have suggested that Adam and Eve faced conflicting commandments and had to choose "the higher law,"¹⁶ but this position has several drawbacks. First, it seems incompatible with the nature of God to think that conflicting commandments could ever be given.¹⁷ Next, the other commandment—to multiply and replenish the earth—comes in Genesis 1, which most scholars believe was written by a different author,¹⁸ implying that neither account originally had conflicting commandments;¹⁹ that conflict came only later when an editor stitched the two stories together.²⁰ Additionally, there is no divine guidance given to Adam and Eve in the text that would lead them to conclude that it was better to eat than to violate the other commandment;²¹ rather, it is not God but a serpent who encourages them to eat. So there is no particular reason to think they made the better choice.

Further, there is a conflict only if one assumes that Adam and Eve could not have had children in the garden,²² but that is a questionable assumption.²³ If God gave them the commandment to multiply (Genesis 1:28), we should presume they were able to fulfill it.²⁴ And it would have been odd if Adam and Eve had been created by God as part of a “very good” creation but had been, in effect, infertile; note that the text never claims they could not have children in the garden, and Eve’s assessment of the fruit does not indicate that she expects to be able to have children only after she eats. Further, the statement that God would “multiply”²⁵ Eve’s childbearing implies a baseline that is not zero. And the fact that Adam is expected to till the garden²⁶ implies that Eve can also complete her primary function—bearing children—in the garden as well. Additionally, some ancient interpreters have understood Genesis 1:28 not as a commandment to multiply and replenish the earth but rather as a blessing to be able to do so.²⁷

What would have happened if they had stayed in the garden and had children? Would one of their descendants have eaten and been cast out?²⁸ Or might all of their descendants have stayed in the garden and experienced a mortality very different from ours?²⁹ What would have happened if Eve had eaten but Adam had refused? Would the plan have really been foiled, or would another woman have been created from another rib? Our inability to answer these counterfactuals presents yet another layer of complication in the effort to interpret the story. Independent of Adam and Eve’s fertility before the fall,³⁰ there are other problems with the theory of conflicting commandments, because it assumes that Adam and Eve were supposed to resolve the conflict on their own and not wait for further light and knowledge from God.

Finally, and perhaps most seriously, if they had conflicting commandments, then there was no path that permitted obedience: either they ate so they could have children (violating the commandment not to eat), or they didn’t eat and didn’t have children (violating the commandment to multiply).³¹ This raises profound concerns about the nature of God to think that humans would be placed in a position where disobedience was the only option. It is frequently argued that conflicting commandments were required in order for Adam and Eve to exercise their agency, but it does not seem that this would be the case: with just one commandment, they still had the choice of keeping it or of violating it, and so agency is preserved.³²

Another explanation that the Wise Choice Theory offers to the problem of the prohibition has to do with finding a distinction between a sin and a transgression,³³ but there are a few problems here as well: there is nothing in God’s commandment that would lead to the conclusion that a violation would be only a transgression.³⁴ Also, the distinction between the two does not appear to exist in all scriptures.³⁵ But even if we were to assume a distinction, it is still not clear that a transgression could ever be deemed wise. So despite arguments that there were conflicting commandments or a distinction between a sin and a transgression,³⁶ there are problems with the Wise Choice Theory stemming from the fact that Adam and Eve were commanded not to eat.

History of interpretation

The Book of Mormon does not appear to support, and many nineteenth-century LDS interpreters did not subscribe to, the Wise Choice Theory.³⁷ The Book of Mormon mentions the role of the serpent in causing mankind to become “lost”³⁸ and emphasizes that the fruit was “forbidden.”³⁹ The most positive statement about the fall in the Book of Mormon is “Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.”⁴⁰ But note that while the Book of Mormon usually speaks of Adam and Eve as a unit, here Adam is mentioned separately. It is

possible that Adam's decision to eat is qualitatively different from Eve's. In fact, there is a long LDS interpretive history, now largely forgotten, rooted in 1 Timothy 2:14⁴¹ (which states that Eve was deceived but Adam was not), arguing that Adam made a wise (or neutral) choice after Eve made a foolish choice.⁴² Nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints often spoke of "Eve's curse,"⁴³ and so in the earliest layers of LDS interpretation, Eve's choice was not seen as wise.⁴⁴ While there are several nineteenth-century voices advocating that we do not blame our first parents,⁴⁵ it would be a stretch to conclude from any of these statements that Eve had made a wise choice, although one can certainly see the trajectory that led future interpreters to the Wise Choice Theory.⁴⁶

The Redeemer's role

The reading of the fall in the Book of Mormon implies another concern with the Wise Choice Theory: where the Book of Mormon writers were able to find anything positive in the fall, it stemmed not from Eve's eating the forbidden fruit but from the mercy God showed to Adam and Eve by sending them a redeemer. A major problem, then, with the Wise Choice Theory is that it draws perilously close to eliminating the need for a redeemer. While the foibles and failures of scriptural characters may make us uncomfortable, they also point to the need for a savior,⁴⁷ and minimizing their faults leads to a minimized need for redemption. Focusing on the role of a redeemer might also help us better understand Eve's words in Moses 5:11, a text frequently used to defend the Wise Choice Theory: "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."⁴⁸ When read in context, what Eve is celebrating is not her decision to eat the forbidden fruit per se, but rather God's decision to provide a redeemer after she ate. To the extent that we make Eve the hero of this story, we risk erasing the redeemer's heroic role.

Accountability

It seems impossible that a decision made before consuming "the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil"⁴⁹ could be regarded as good or evil;⁵⁰ it would, by definition, be morally neutral if Adam and Eve lacked the capacity for good and evil.⁵¹

The serpent's role

The eating is done not at the behest of God but at the prompting of the serpent. How can Satan⁵² be the instigator of a wise choice? Moroni 7:17 seems to address this: "After this manner doth the devil work, for he persuadeth no man to do good, no, not one." Viewing Eve's decision as wise requires us to erase the role of the serpent from the story, an ironic move given that the uniquely LDS accounts of the fall feature a much-expanded role for Satan relative to the Genesis text. If eating the fruit was simply part of the plan, why is the serpent even there? As with the danger of erasing the Redeemer, the Wise Choice Theory risks erasing Satan.

Alternatives

Some readers support the Wise Choice Theory because there was no other way for humanity to be introduced into the world.⁵³ There are two problems here. One is that performing a necessary but sinful task does not make one wise: one of the immediate causes of Jesus's death was Judas's betrayal, but this would not lead anyone to think that Judas had made a wise choice.⁵⁴ Second, thinking there was no other way to enter the world means adopting the serpent's assumptions, not God's—it is the serpent who implies there was no other way; God is silent on the matter. But since God is in the garden with Adam and Eve, they will presumably gain more knowledge in the future. Perhaps another choice would have presented itself had they just been patient.⁵⁵ There may be a helpful parallel⁵⁶ to the near sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22: in that story Abraham's willingness to keep the

commandment that he was given led—but only at the last possible minute—to divine intervention that eliminated the need to violate a commandment. Had Adam and Eve refused to eat, would they have similarly had their eyes opened to a ram in the thicket that would have made progression without disobedience possible? One wonders if, once more time had passed and Adam and Eve had been taught more, they would have been offered the fruit by God. This is speculative, but it is also appealing because it makes better sense of God’s prohibition; forbidding them to gain knowledge of good and evil and to be like the gods is difficult to understand if it were a permanent prohibition, but makes more sense as a temporary restriction. It is also possible that some other way of obtaining mortality that did not involve eating the fruit could have been introduced; perhaps the fruit is something of an illegitimate shortcut—a “magic pill”—that claims to offer the benefits of knowledge but in fact does not. (Note that the extent of their newfound knowledge seems to be nothing more than the shame-filled awareness that they are naked.) Another possibility is that they ate not too soon but from the wrong hand—not eating was a test of obedience that they failed; at any point, God could have offered them the fruit and it would have been acceptable to eat it. Our inability to know what would have happened had they chosen not to eat constitutes another interpretive conundrum.

Parallels to Genesis 4

There are important parallels between the fall and the very next chapter in Genesis, the sad story of Cain and Abel, with over a dozen thematic and verbal similarities.⁵⁷ For example, God says to Eve, “Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee,”⁵⁸ and to Cain, “Unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.”⁵⁹ Given these similarities, it is difficult to see Eve’s decision as wise unless one is willing to view the murder of Abel in the same way.

The message

Finally, the Wise Choice Theory creates enormous problems for the normative use of the story.⁶⁰ One can appreciate the problem by imagining explaining to a Sunday School class of sixteen-year-olds that sometimes it is better to listen to what Satan wants you to do, even if it is in direct conflict with a specific commandment from God. We may choose to abandon the prescriptive value of the story, but it is difficult to imagine how we can maintain it if we argue that disobedience can be wise.⁶¹

Assessing the paradox

For these nine reasons, I find the Wise Choice Theory to be unsatisfactory. Yet viewing Eve’s choice as morally neutral or as sinful is just as problematic. If we try to view the choice as neutral, we still need to grapple with the fact that it is in direct violation of a commandment. How can violating a commandment be morally neutral? And how can a neutral action lead to such a negative outcome?⁶² On the other hand, if we view eating the fruit as sinful,⁶³ it seems incongruous that the signal act of the first humans—people who will later be described as “glorious”⁶⁴ and “great and mighty”⁶⁵ and who, in Mormon teaching, are not mere mortals—was a sin. It would also be difficult to explain why human progression would require a sin. And in terms of Latter-day Saint thinking about the plurality of worlds,⁶⁶ we would find it inexplicable that each world would have required the same inaugurating sin.⁶⁷

Further, wouldn’t God be in some sense responsible for the sin, since Adam and Eve were left alone with a wily serpent⁶⁸ and an unguarded tree?⁶⁹ And how could they sin before they had knowledge of what was good and what was evil?

There is a paradox at the center of this story since there is no satisfactory determination as to whether Eve's choice was wise, neutral, or sinful. No interpretation of her act can make sense of all the data. This state of affairs is particularly striking given that Latter-day Saints have not only the Genesis text but additional accounts of the fall unique to the restoration of the gospel: the Book of Moses,⁷⁰ the Book of Abraham,⁷¹ and the temple ceremony.⁷² Not one of these accounts eliminates the paradox.⁷³ One suspects that if the goal had been to remove the tension, at least one of the four accounts would have done it;⁷⁴ the fact that the tension remains weighs in favor of reading it as intentional. Biblical scholar Robert Alter suggests that Genesis 3 is a carefully designed work, purposefully presenting the audience with multiple, incompatible viewpoints because that is the best way to tell a story about a world composed of incompatible facets, a world where truths are in tension.⁷⁵ Perhaps the story invites us to accept the idea that we cannot understand everything that God can understand.⁷⁶ Maybe it is like Heisenberg's uncertainty principle: as soon as we decide that Eve made a wise choice, we are left wondering what role the serpent is playing. But if we begin with the role of the serpent, it is difficult to understand why God set the situation up this way. Because both aspects of the story cannot make sense at the same time, we enter into Eve's role, facing two trees but allowed to eat from only one of them. Our own efforts to make sense of the universe are inadequate; human reason ultimately fails. Given our limited understanding, we need to have faith that the story is something that God understands. We hope that someday an explanation will be made manifest. We have been given an opportunity to exercise charity as others unfold interpretations that seem inadequate to us since no single interpretation can embrace all of the data.

Note that the story never asks us to assess Eve's act; we are the ones who have decided that we must determine what is good and what is evil. But isn't the point of this story that making such a determination is God's job, and that it is only under the influence of Satan that Eve sets aside God's assessment of the fruit to make her own judgment?⁷⁷ Are we doing the same thing when we attempt to judge her act?⁷⁸ And doesn't the story itself suggest that good and evil are bound together and cannot be separated?⁷⁹

A text with a conundrum at its core points to the inadequacy of texts to solve problems, which prevents us from making idols out of texts and acknowledges the reality of what Joseph Smith called "the little, narrow prison, almost as it were, total darkness of paper, pen and ink;—and a crooked, broken, scattered and imperfect language."⁸⁰ It suggests an awareness of the complications of the world we live in. It also allows an interpretive flexibility that permits the text to be relevant to more than one situation.⁸¹ No one text can encapsulate all truth. This one contains that truth precisely because of its inability to contain all truth.

This may sound a little too postmodern for an ancient text. But it is the very same message found in the book of Job, which has several compelling parallels to the story of the fall, not the least of which is a rare appearance of "the adversary"⁸² and a story that demands to know whether the protagonist has done something wrong.⁸³ After Job has begged God for an explanation of his suffering despite his innocence,⁸⁴ God's response is as simple as it is unexpected: it is not for Job to know. The solution belongs to God, and Job will not be given the information⁸⁵ that will explain the paradox of a righteous person suffering. Job must accept the uncertainty. This is the lesson of Eden's paradox as well.

Alternative templates

This is not to suggest that we abandon efforts to interpret the fall, only that we redirect our gaze from the question of good and evil and look in other directions, at the other trees in the garden. And there are many other templates through which we might consider Genesis 3:

1. It is a symbolic representation of the premortal experience of each human.⁸⁶ In this reading, eating the fruit is the choice to come to earth, made by each person. And perhaps our inability to weigh Eve's decision indicates that we simply don't have enough knowledge about the premortal life to understand how these decisions were made.⁸⁷
2. The story presents the maturation of every human being, from a child who uses language to name animals, to awareness of sexual differentiation, to what we might today call teenage rebellion, to the effort to establish oneself as an adult free from parental influence.⁸⁸ In this reading, eating the fruit is not primarily the one-time act of a historical woman but is, rather, emblematic of the effort all people individually make to differentiate themselves from their parents.
3. The garden is the first temple; there are several Hebrew words that strengthen this connection.⁸⁹ In this view, eating the fruit amounts to violating one's priestly stewardship;⁹⁰ this is why Adam and Eve are replaced as temple guardians by the cherubim and tasked with reestablishing the temple in a mortal realm. Here, eating the fruit is clearly a violation, but God mercifully provides an opportunity to be redeemed from it.
4. Adam and Eve represent Israel, permitted to live in the holy land so long as they follow God's commands but banished to Babylon when they are disobedient.⁹¹ This reading makes sense of the story in the history of Israel.
5. Eve is a symbol for the church, and Adam is a type of Christ. This reading emphasizes the distinction between their acts: Eve eats out of rebellion while Adam, as Christ, deliberately and righteously chooses the incarnation in order to stay with Eve.⁹² This approach has the benefit of making Christ central to the temple endowment.⁹³
6. The story reflects the conflict that exists within each person. In this reading, the desire for obedience and the desire for advancement wrestle within each soul.

Each of these templates presents its own panoply of possibilities.⁹⁴ All of them turn down the heat on the gender issues that typically boil over in discussions of the fall.⁹⁵ In addition to thinking about various templates for the story, we find fertile ground in considering other scriptural texts that resonate with the fall. It is frequently noted by interpreters that Adam and Eve are not mentioned again in the Hebrew Bible after the first few chapters of Genesis,⁹⁶ but this does not imply that there are no allusions to the story or intriguing intertexts. The list of passages that might be intertexts for the fall is extensive:

1. Genesis 4 (Cain and Abel), which is discussed above.
2. Genesis 9 (Noah and his sons) involves nakedness and a curse.
3. Genesis 11 (the Tower of Babel) features the theme of transgressing boundaries to become "like God."
4. Numbers 22 (Balaam) is the only other canonical account of an animal with the power of speech; intriguingly, this story also features the opening of eyes and concern as to what constitutes evil and sin.⁹⁷
5. 1 Samuel 3–5 (Eli's sons) features temple workers who should be symbolically in the presence of God but who eat forbidden fruit and die for it.
6. Ezekiel 28 (prophecies against kings and kingdoms) seems to refer to the garden story and has some interesting comments about sin.
7. 2 Samuel 11–14 (David and Bathsheba) can be read as David's fall with regard to Bathsheba.⁹⁸
8. Proverbs 9 explores themes of wisdom, good, and evil, and it also features a woman who invites others to eat (Proverbs 9:5; where the KJV has bread, the underlying word could be translated as "food"). Might we see Eve in the wise woman of Proverbs?

9. The Song of Songs has been thought to be a commentary on Genesis 2–3.
0. There are also several stories in the scriptures that place women in the role of providers of food (Sarah, Abigail, the widow of Zarephath, Mary and Martha), which might make for some interesting comparisons to the fall.
1. There appears to be a pattern in the Hebrew Bible where males are usually the main actors but females usually initiate actions; this pattern might include Eve, Sarah, Hannah, Tamar, Deborah, and others. The genealogy of Jesus in the book of Matthew might fit as well,⁹⁹ along with the overall scriptural pattern of women being present whenever there is a story narrated of someone being raised from the dead.
2. Matthew 4 (the temptations of Jesus) appears to have some resonances with Eve’s threefold assessment of the fruit.¹⁰⁰
3. Luke 15 (the parable of the prodigal son) might be compared with the fall; we might see Eve as the prodigal child who must reject parental authority, live in a fallen world, and then choose to come home.
4. Luke 24 (the road to Emmaus) features disciples who have “their eyes opened” when they consume food; there may be deliberate allusions to the story of (an inverted?) fall there.¹⁰¹
5. Revelation 21–22 (the new heaven and earth) features many resonances with and inversions of the fall.¹⁰²
6. 1 Nephi 4 (Nephi beheads Laban) may be parallel to the Genesis account of Adam and Eve since both narratives feature “conflicting commandments” at the beginning of a volume, setting the tone for an entire text.
7. 1 Nephi 8 and 11 (Lehi’s and Nephi’s visions) feature trees, eating fruit, and issues of good and evil choices.
8. Alma 30 (Korihor) features a person through whom Satan is speaking in an attempt to deceive others.
9. Noncanonical ancient accounts might also shed more light on the story.¹⁰³

It may also be fruitful to think about “the missing mother” in this account: the fact that Adam gives birth to Eve calls attention to the fact that there is no Mother God in the story. At the same time, it is also possible to read Genesis 2:24 as a reference to a divine female, the mother whom Adam leaves. If they hadn’t eaten, would Adam and Eve have had some connection with their Mother in Heaven?¹⁰⁴ Could the serpent even be read as a symbol for the divine female, guiding her daughter? Some scholars have suggested that the tree of life is a symbol for female divinity,¹⁰⁵ given that Eve’s name means “life,” the connections here are thick and tempting. Considering other templates, other scripture texts, and the role of the divine feminine might help us better consume the story, without the distraction of assessing good and evil.

By way of conclusion, I share an incident from the life of David O. McKay, as related by Boyd K. Packer:
 [blockquote]When he was in his nineties, perhaps 94, he came to a temple meeting with all of the General Authorities. . . . On this occasion, President McKay . . . stood and put his big, bony hands across his chest, and he began to quote the endowment in the temple. . . . Then he stopped, and he looked at the ceiling for quite a few minutes, and he said, “I think I am finally beginning to understand.”¹⁰⁶

What I see in President McKay’s statement that he was “finally beginning to understand” is the recognition that the interpretation of the fall is neither easy nor obvious. In fact, there is no other story in the canon that permits so many possible interpretations yet so resists all interpretations. While the advancement of the Wise Choice Theory has perhaps been a necessary corrective to a tradition that blamed and shamed Eve, and therefore all women, it unfortunately cannot account for several key features of the text. I argue that no one interpretation of the fall can

accommodate all of its facets, so we will be better off reveling in the ambiguity of the text and considering other templates through which to view the account.

NOTES

1. For a general history of the interpretation of this passage, particularly in regard to women's roles, see Jolene Edmunds Rockwood, "The Redemption of Eve," in *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective*, ed. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).
2. See the pioneering work of Phyllis Trible, "A Love Story Gone Awry," in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978).
3. An excellent history of LDS interpretations of the fall can be found in Rico Martinez's "Adam Fell That Men Might Be: An Exegetical History," a paper presented at the eighth annual meeting of the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology, September 22, 2012. Perhaps the classic statement of the Wise Choice Theory comes from Elder Dallin H. Oaks: "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' (2 Nephi 2:25). 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. Joseph Smith taught that it was not a 'sin,' because God had decreed it. Brigham Young declared, 'We should never blame Mother Eve, not the least.' 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!' " Dallin H. Oaks, "The Great Plan of Happiness," *Ensign*, November 1993, 72. For an LDS feminist application of the Wise Choice Theory to exonerate Eve (and, by extension, all women), see Alison Walker, "Theological Foundations of Patriarchy," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 23/3 (1990): 77–89.
4. In LDS thought the emphasis normally is on Eve as the one who made the wise choice, presumably because she was the one who assessed the fruit (Genesis 3:6) and ate first. However, in some articulations of the theory, Adam is given equal credit for his wisdom. (If we assume that Adam was offered the fruit first but refused it, we might ask if he was initially not as wise as Eve.)
5. The Wise Choice Theory may perform the laudable work of removing the foundation for much of the misogyny that has historically been heaped upon women, oftentimes specifically rooted in this very story. (The classic example of this is found in the Wisdom of Sirach [a second-century-bce collection of teachings that may be alluded to several times in the New Testament]: "From a woman sin had its beginning and because of her we all die" [Sirach 25:24].) At the same time, the theory promotes a brand of feminism that many find inadequate, inasmuch as it can be read to put Eve on a pedestal and to reinforce the legitimacy of men's leadership and women's maternal roles. (It is curious that Eve becomes a major model in LDS thought for women when Adam is rarely characterized as such for men.) Note that while most LDS interpretation since the mid-twentieth century has found a more expansive and positive role for Eve, there has been some retrogression as well: in the hymn "Sons of Michael, He Approaches," a line addressing Eve, "endless with thy Lord preside," was changed in the 1985 hymnbook to

“endless with thy seed abide.” See Douglas Campbell, “Changes in LDS Hymns: Implications and Opportunities,” *Dialogue* 28/3 (Fall 1995): 65–91.

6. It is difficult to determine which parts of the story should be understood literally, which parts symbolically, or which parts as both. Brigham Young famously described the creation of Adam from the dust as “baby stories” (in *Journal of Discourses*, 2:6 [23 October 1853]), and Spencer W. Kimball taught that “the story of the rib, of course, is figurative” (“The Blessings and Responsibilities of Womanhood,” *Ensign*, March 1976, 73; the of course in that statement is particularly interesting). One presumes that the actual sin was not eating per se (although some scholars have toyed with the notion of the fruit as poisonous or as a mind-altering substance; see Adam Miller’s paper in this volume), but that the eating was, rather, symbolic. At the same time, LDS leaders have been adamant that Adam and Eve were literal, historical people. See “The Origin of Man,” *Improvement Era*, November 1909, 75–81. This leaves us in the odd position of having historical people in symbolic stories; it is as if Jesus had stepped into one of his parables.

7. Only Adam is mentioned here, but I assume that Eve is also afraid since she has also hidden.

8. Compare Genesis 3:7 with Genesis 2:25. The possible symbolism of nakedness includes sexual awareness, awareness of sexual differentiation, lust, vulnerability, and shame. (There may also be a play on words, given that the word used to describe the serpent [subtil in Genesis 3:1] is virtually identical to the word translated as “naked.”) But while the meaning of Adam and Eve’s nakedness may be difficult to pin down, it does seem to be the result of having their eyes opened and obtaining the knowledge of good and evil. Is this what it means to be wise—to be aware of one’s nakedness? Note also that, before the fall, God provides them with food and they do not require clothing; after the fall, God provides them with clothing but requires them to procure their own food. There is an intriguing inversion here. The inability to definitely pin down the symbolism of nakedness is another level of interpretive potential in this story.

9. Note that Adam and Eve are asked about their actions, but in the Genesis account the serpent is not. The reason for this lacuna is not made clear, but some interpreters have tied it to the fact that the story is not ultimately concerned with the origins of evil; presumably, asking the serpent what he had been doing would have given the reader more information about this origin. If this reading is correct, it implies that the author of the account is not particularly concerned with the ultimate origin of evil.

10. The KJV uses beguiled, a word normally translated as “deceived” when it occurs elsewhere (see, for example, 2 Kings 18:29 or Isaiah 19:13). Also note that deceive or beguile in relation to Eve’s action is used in multiple other scriptures across the canon (see 2 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Timothy 2:14; 2 Nephi 9:9; Mosiah 16:3; Ether 8:25; and Moses 4:19); nowhere is her decision described in clearly positive terms. It is difficult to determine precisely what the deception was, given that all the serpent did was ask a question (with, admittedly, an incorrect premise) and then make what appears to be a truthful statement regarding the consequences of eating the fruit. Perhaps the problem is that the serpent mentions only the positive consequences, not the negative ones, and also casts aspersions on God’s motives. (David Bokovoy’s reinterpretation of Satan’s work to destroy agency as removing the consequences of human action instead of the choices presented to humans may be helpful here. See his paper “Agency in LDS Theology: A Misunderstood Concept?” at <http://www.withoutend.org/agency-lds-theology-misunderstood-concept/>.) It is also difficult to understand why God would prohibit Adam and Eve from gaining the knowledge of good and evil and becoming like the gods; we would assume that both of those things would be what God wanted for Adam and Eve. It is difficult to understand how someone who was deceived could have been making a wise choice. Even if the choice itself was a good one, the person would not deserve any credit for it.

11. These are traditionally called “curses,” but note that only the serpent is cursed (Genesis 3:14); the ground is cursed for Adam’s sake, but Adam himself is not cursed (v. 17), and the word cursed is not used in association with Eve (v. 16). Further, a reason is given for the consequences bestowed on Adam (“because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree,” but note that the account in Genesis does not involve Eve actually saying anything to Adam) and the serpent (“because thou hast done this”), but there is no explanatory clause when Eve’s consequences are presented. Does that imply that what she has done wrong should be self-evident, or does it imply that she has done nothing wrong (but the serpent and Adam have)?

12. Although the curse that the serpent is given—particularly the enmity between the serpent and the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15)—may be presented formally as a curse, it is in fact something of a blessing for Eve. (Why is the enmity between the serpent and the seed of specifically the woman and not the seed of both Adam and Eve? One interpretation is to read it as a reference to the only child who would be the seed of a woman but not a mortal man: Christ. If this is the best reading, it raises interesting questions about the text because it requires us to view Eve as a symbol for Mary and thus advances a much less literal interpretation of the text.) But note that it is still difficult to find justice in the serpent’s being cursed for doing something that was necessary and appropriate and that led to a wise decision on Eve’s part.

13. There is an obvious sense in which the consequences for eating are very different for Adam and Eve, but it is also—paradoxically—true that the consequences have a deep similarity. Hugh Nibley explains, “Now a curse [sic] was placed on Eve, and it looked as if she would have to pay a high price for taking the initiative in the search for knowledge. To our surprise the identical curse [sic] was placed on Adam also. For Eve, God ‘will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception. In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children.’ (Genesis 3:16.) The key is the word for sorrow, *atsav*, meaning to labor, to toil, to sweat, to do something very hard. . . . Both the conception and the labor of Eve will be multiple; she will have many children. Then the Lord says to Adam, ‘In sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life’ (that is, the bread that his labor must bring forth from the earth). The identical word is used in both cases; the root meaning is to work hard at cutting or digging; both the man and the woman must sorrow and both must labor. . . . If Eve must labor to bring forth, so too must Adam labor (Genesis 3:17; Moses 4:23) to quicken the earth so it shall bring forth. Both of them bring forth life with sweat and tears, and Adam is not the favored party. If his labor is not as severe as hers, it is more protracted. For Eve’s life will be spared long after her childbearing—‘nevertheless thy life shall be spared’—while Adam’s toil must go on to the end of his days: ‘In sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of the life!’ Even retirement is no escape from that sorrow.” See Hugh Nibley, “Patriarchy and Matriarchy,” in *Old Testament and Related Studies*, ed. John W. Welch, Gary P. Gillum, and Don E. Norton (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 89–90. There are additional similarities between the two: in Genesis 4, Eve will engage in naming and birthing activities similar to what Adam has done in Genesis 2–3. Similarly, immediately after Eve is created, what Adam focuses on is how very similar (“flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone,” Genesis 2:23) she is to him. It is difficult to know where to draw the line on the similarities between Adam and Eve; for example, if Adam is created out of the ground and is to serve the ground (Genesis 2:5–7), does this imply that because Eve is created from the man that she is to serve the man? If so, does she serve him by convincing him to eat of the fruit (note that her creation immediately follows the the command not to eat of the tree), or does she serve him after the fall, and, if so, how?

14. The same argument could be made for the consequences articulated for Eve and the serpent.

15. The situation is complicated by the fact that, in the Genesis account, Eve has not yet been created when this commandment is given (see Genesis 2:16–18). There are several ways to interpret this: (1) Adam or God later relays the commandment to Eve; (2) Eve and Adam form a unified human prior to her separation (although if this is

true, how is it possible that Adam is “alone” [Genesis 2:18]?), so she is given the commandment in Genesis 2:17; or (3) Eve is not guilty of violating the commandment because it was never given to her. (Note that the second person singular form of the verb is used when the commandment is given.) This reading is further complicated by the idea that it appears to be possible for Adam to fulfill his life’s work, tilling in the garden, while Eve, apparently, will need to leave the garden in order to have children. (There is perhaps room for interesting interpretive work in this misalignment of needs between Adam and Eve.) Before evaluating these options, we should note that (1) when Eve restates the commandment in Genesis 3:2–3, she makes several substantive changes to it and (2) the Hebrew of the Genesis account implies strongly that Adam was with Eve when she was speaking to the serpent and then eating the fruit. See *Nahum Sarna, JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 25. (The story feels very different if one envisions Adam standing there, a silent partner, neither objecting nor leading, while Eve talks to the serpent, evaluates the fruit, eats, and then offers Adam the fruit.) Further, the meaning of die (Genesis 2:17) is very difficult here, since Adam and Eve do not literally die in the day that they eat (which is doubly awkward since the serpent informed them correctly that they would not die when they ate; see Genesis 3:4) and would apparently not have died if God hadn’t taken the additional step of cutting off their access to the tree of life (see Genesis 3:22–24; Alma 12:23 and 42:5–7 also seem to support this reading). Additionally, when Eve speaks to the serpent, neither she nor the serpent ever refers to the “tree of knowledge of good and evil,” but simply to the tree “in the midst of the garden” (Genesis 3:3). The inability to determine (1) Eve’s relationship to the commandment, (2) Adam’s presence (or absence) at the scene, and (3) the meaning of die are three more paradoxes hiding behind the main paradox, which makes the story even more challenging to interpret.

16. This idea appears to have originated with John A. Widtsoe. See Martinez, “Adam Fell That Men Might Be” (n. 3 above). It has also been advocated by Delbert L. Stapley: “As we advance toward perfection, there will be higher laws revealed to our understanding and benefit that will replace those of a lower order. This truth was first taught to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, when the Lord gave them two choices: (1) not to partake of the forbidden fruit (Genesis 2:16–17) and (2) to multiply and replenish the earth (Genesis 1:28), which choices call for obedience to a lesser law or a higher one. They chose to fulfill the higher law.” See Delbert L. Stapley, “The Pangs of Unlearning,” *Conference Report*, April 1967, 30–34.

17. See Orson Pratt, “Celestial Marriage,” *The Seer* 1/3 (Washington, DC, 1853), 45–47.

18. Most scholars believe that Genesis 1 was written by the “priestly” source and Genesis 2–3 by the “Jahwist” source. See Robert Alter, “Composite Artistry,” in *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

19. Interestingly, there is no reference at all to the commandment to multiply and replenish the earth in the Book of Mormon. Credit for this insight belongs to Rico Martinez.

20. Some scholars point out that the conflict between the texts must not have been perceived as overwhelming, else the redactor would not have been willing to place the texts side by side. See James E. Faulconer, “Adam and Eve—Community: Reading Genesis 2–3,” *Journal of Philosophy and Scripture* 1/1 (Fall 2003): 2–16. See also Yamin Levy, “Fiat and Forming: Genesis 1 & 2 Revisited,” *Tradition* 27/1 (September 1992): 20–33. The redactor either did not notice the apparent contradiction or else was not bothered by it.

21. In other texts where conflicting commandments are present, there is clear divine guidance as to which commandment should be prioritized; see Genesis 22:2 and 1 Nephi 4:11.

22. The argument was made by Orson Pratt. See Pratt, “Celestial Marriage,” 45. The argument that Adam and Eve could have had children in the garden was presented in an LDS Church magazine in 1974. See Daniel H. Ludlow,

“Q&A: Questions and Answers,” *New Era*, September 1973, 13–14. And there is evidence when comparing revisions of LDS Church manuals to suggest that the church may be moving away from the view that Adam and Eve were able to have children only after they had left the garden. (The sentence “they were able to have children,” which was included in the 1997 Gospel Principles manual as one of the results of the fall, was not included in the 2009 edition.)

23. One obstacle to this view is texts such as 2 Nephi 2:22–25 that seem to suggest that Adam and Eve could not have had children. One way to read these texts is that they apply only to the brief period when Eve had eaten but Adam had not, because her separation from Adam would have made it impossible for them to have children. Also note that 2 Nephi 2:23 says that they would not have had children, not that they could not. Interestingly, in this reading it is Adam who makes a “wise choice,” and one profoundly different from the one that Eve makes. Hers is based on deception and focused on self-fulfillment, while his is made rationally and focused on the needs of their progeny. This reading highlights the fact that the *Wise Choice Theory*, when applied to Eve, seems to imply that Adam was foolish not to eat (although note that the Genesis text does not show Adam refusing the fruit at any point).

24. See 1 Nephi 3:7: “The Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them.”

25. Genesis 3:16.

26. See Genesis 2:5.

27. It should be noted that there is a long and strong tradition in LDS interpretation to view God’s words in Genesis 1:28 as a commandment.

28. Perhaps the inverse of the principle articulated in Esther 4:14 (“For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place”) is relevant here: had Adam and Eve not eaten, someone else—one of their children—would have.

29. Many purposes of mortal life—such as being tested and tried (after all, the fruit and the serpent were there), forming families, and having a body—could all have been accomplished in the garden, assuming that Adam and Eve could have had children there. (The one thing they would not have needed was a Redeemer, however.)

30. Note that the Hebrew Bible does not call this story “the fall”; the case could be made that this title overinterprets the text, but I use it because it compensates in pithiness for what it lacks in accuracy.

31. The tensions here are well articulated as a question in Answers to Gospel Questions: “Was the ‘Fall’ inevitable and necessary to the human race? Our whole hope of salvation rests on the character of God the Father, does it not? If he is just and consistent we are secure. If he is unfair or changeable we have no security. If God ever gave man contradictory commandments did he not at that point rob man of his free agency? We are repeatedly told we are free to choose between good and evil; between obedience and disobedience; but if a situation was set up in which two commandments contradict each other, then man [Adam] was free to choose only between two disobediences. Is that fair? If God ‘framed’ man and then cursed him and punished him for something he could not help doing, what assurance have we that when we do our very best we won’t find ourselves cursed and cast out for doing the very thing God meant us to do? Is this justice? Is that free agency?” *Joseph Fielding Smith, Answers to Gospel Questions* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 2:211.

32. Would Adam and Eve have been tempted to eat had the serpent not been there? The story functions perfectly well without Genesis 3:1–5.

33. This idea was articulated by Orson F. Whitney in his *Saturday Night Thoughts*, part 3 (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1921), 92. It has also been taught recently by Dallin H. Oaks. See his article “The Great Plan of Happiness,” *Ensign*, November 1993.

34. As Rico Martinez explains, “Further complicating [this interpretation] is the fact that the legal concept . . . historically appealed to Natural Law or divine law. What could be more ‘divine’ than God commanding Adam not to eat of the forbidden fruit? How can an express command by God be given the same status as a municipal ordinance? This is an odd ripple in a nascent Mormon jurisprudence.” See Martinez, “Adam Fell That Men Might Be.”

35. See, for example, Ezekiel 18:30, Isaiah 59:12, Psalm 32:1, 2 Nephi 9:46, Mosiah 2:40, Acts 1:25, D&C 109:34, and especially 1 John 3:4 for instances where there appears to be no distinction between a sin and a transgression. This analysis is, admittedly, complicated by the various languages behind these texts. And note that even those who advocate the distinction between a sin and a transgression, such as Dallin H. Oaks, acknowledge that not all scriptures make a distinction between the two terms. See Oaks, “Great Plan of Happiness.”

36. There also appears to be a contradiction between both the “conflicting commandments” theory and the “it was a transgression, not a sin” theory and D&C 29:34–35, where the Lord explains, “Not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal; neither any man, nor the children of men; neither Adam, your father, whom I created. Behold, I gave unto him that he should be an agent unto himself; and I gave unto him commandment, but no temporal commandment gave I unto him, for my commandments are spiritual; they are not natural nor temporal, neither carnal nor sensual.” While there are many ways of interpreting the words temporal, spiritual, carnal, and sensual, most interpretations would not permit the concept of a “transgression” or the idea of conflicting commandments, especially given the language used later in this passage that seems to prohibit the notion that the fall was a wise decision: “The devil tempted Adam, and he partook of the forbidden fruit and transgressed the commandment, wherein he became subject to the will of the devil, because he yielded unto temptation. Wherefore, I, the Lord God, caused that he should be cast out from the Garden of Eden, from my presence” (D&C 29:40–41).

37. In other words, this is an innovative theory. That does not make it automatically wrong, especially in a church that believes in continuing revelation, but it does mean that the Wise Choice Theory is not an inherent or integral part of the restoration. And while it is widely taught now and appears in most official church publications that mention the fall, it does not appear to meet some of the more commonly used criteria for what constitutes “official” Mormon doctrine, given that it has not been authoritatively taught by a prophet. On the other hand, it might be considered official if the criteria are (1) repeatedly taught by members of the Quorum of the Twelve and (2) present in multiple official church publications.

38. Mosiah 16:4.

39. See 2 Nephi 2:15, 18–19; Mosiah 3:26; and Helaman 6:26. Alma 30:25 can also be interpreted to suggest that the Nephites taught the idea of original sin.

40. 2 Nephi 2:25.

41. Contra 1 Timothy 2:14, several Book of Mormon texts (2 Nephi 9:9; Mosiah 16:3; Ether 8:25) seem to imply that Adam was also “beguiled.” The previous verses in 1 Timothy appear to argue that Eve is inferior because she was created second (some subscribers to the Wise Choice Theory have argued that 1 Timothy is inaccurate [see, for example, Beverly Campbell, *Eve and the Choice Made in Eden* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 2003), 73]). Contrast this view with Gordon B. Hinckley’s statement that he liked “to regard Eve as [God’s] masterpiece after all that had gone before” (see Gordon B. Hinckley, “Daughters of God,” *Ensign*, November 1991) for a sense of the variety of competing interpretations that this text has been marshaled to support. There’s also an interesting echo here with LDS discourse contra the larger tradition of biblical studies: in the world of biblical studies, the first text is usually presumed to be more accurate, but given the belief in modern revelation, Latter-day Saints make no such assumption—it may well be the later text that better reflects the will of the Lord. Sequence is thus no guarantor of superiority in a text, or in order of creation.

42. For example, Orson Pratt said, “Did Adam partake of this forbidden fruit, being deceived as Eve was deceived? Or did he partake of it knowingly and understandingly? I will give you my views upon this subject. Adam very well knew that his wife Eve, after she had partaken of the forbidden fruit, having transgressed the law of God, must die. He knew this; he knew that she would have to be cast out of the garden of Eden, from the presence of her husband; she could no longer be permitted to dwell with him. Hence, inasmuch as there was a great separation threatened between husband and wife—the wife having transgressed—he concluded that he would not be separated from the woman, and hence he was not deceived, but the woman was deceived; he partook of the forbidden fruit to prevent a separation between the two, and fell, even as the woman fell, and both were cast out together. If one only had transgressed and been cast out, the great command that had been given prior to that time—to multiply and replenish the earth—could not have been fulfilled, because of the separation. In order, therefore, that the command first given might be fulfilled, Adam, though not deceived, partook of the forbidden fruit, was cast out with Eve, and hence began, as far as possible, to fulfil the command, and to multiply his species upon this earth.” See Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26:290–91 (18 July 1880). See also George Q. Cannon, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26:182–93 (28 September 1884). See also Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 6:142–49 (27 December 1857). Adam’s choice would be justified in part by the language of Genesis 2:24–25, which affirms Adam’s duty to “cleave” unto his wife, and perhaps this explains why, when God asks him what he has done, Adam refers to the fact that “the woman whom thou gavest to be with me” ate (Genesis 3:12, emphasis added), forcing him to eat if he wanted to stay with her. If this reading is correct, Adam is the one more concerned with progeny than Eve, which is an interesting challenge to current gender norms and the aspects of the Wise Choice Theory that make Eve primarily focused on having children. Adam’s decision would also have been substantially different from Eve’s if he had watched Eve eat without dying; that puts the Lord’s promises and the serpent’s claims in an entirely different light by providing empirical evidence to support the serpent’s claims but not the Lord’s.

43. See Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 12:93–98 (30 June 1867) and 15:129–35 (18 August 1872). In both of these instances, Brigham Young uses the concept of the curse of Eve (particularly the idea of the woman’s desire being toward her husband) to argue that women should accept polygamy. See also Susanna Morrill, *White Roses on the Floor of Heaven: Mormon Women’s Popular Theology, 1880–1920* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 59. See also George Q. Cannon, in *Journal of Discourses*, 13:197–209 (9 October 1869).

44. Brigham Young said, “The Lord knew they would do this and he had designed that they should.” See Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 10:307–14 (10–13 June 1864). Note that the Lord’s foreknowledge of an event doesn’t necessarily imply approval of it. Also, there remains a conundrum: How could it have been part of the Lord’s plan for them to disobey God and follow Satan?

45. One such example is Brigham Young, who taught, “I will not blame Adam or Eve.” See Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 10:312 (10 June 1864).

46. John Taylor said, “I have no complaints to make about our father Adam eating the forbidden fruit, as some have, for I do not know but any of us would have done the same.” See John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses*, 1:223 (8 April 1853). This is clearly a move away from blaming Adam and Eve, but not quite the same as regarding the decision as wise.

47. For an example of how the idea that Adam and Eve had done something wrong is necessary to the need for a redeemer, consider this statement from Spencer W. Kimball: “Our first parents, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God. . . . In order for Adam to regain his original state (to be in the presence of God), an atonement for this disobedience was necessary. In God’s divine plan, provision was made for a redeemer to break the bonds of death. . . . Jesus of Nazareth was the one who, before the world was created, was chosen to come to earth to perform this service, to conquer mortal death. This voluntary action would atone for the fall of Adam and Eve and permit the spirit of man to recover his body, thereby reuniting body and spirit” (Spencer W. Kimball, “The True Way of Life and Salvation,” *Ensign*, May 1978). Had Adam and Eve not done anything “disobedient” or “forbidden,” there would be no need for an atonement.

48. While this statement is usually accepted as accurate, one wonders if that is a safe assumption. Is Eve completely reliable here? Did she not have a veil drawn over her when she left the garden?

49. There are various possibilities for what the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil might symbolize: moral knowledge, “the experience of everything,” omniscience, the consequences of obeying (that is, Eve knows good if she obeys and she knows evil if she does not), sexual knowledge (which is one of the few possible dimensions to the story that LDS readers have consistently dismissed). See Gordon Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 1–15* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 63. See also Deuteronomy 1:39 and 2 Samuel 19:36. Regardless of the forbidden fruit’s precise connotation, there are several thorny issues here: (1) It is difficult to understand why God would not want Adam and Eve to have the knowledge of good and evil. (2) As Reuven Kimelman explains, “Did she lack such knowledge? In actuality, before she ate, Eve was capable of telling the serpent about the interdiction, who prohibited it, and the dire results. Now, if one knows what is wrong, the authority behind it, and the consequences, where is the deficiency in the knowledge of good and evil?” See Reuven Kimelman, “The Seduction of Eve and Feminist Readings of the Garden of Eden,” *Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 1/2 (1998). (3) Contemplating eating the fruit becomes functionally the same as eating the fruit, inasmuch as it represents a choice with good and evil dimensions; as Leon Kass explains: “To reach for the forbidden fruit is already to have tasted it.” See Leon Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 65. (4) Why isn’t this tree called “the tree of death,” which would nicely parallel “the tree of life” and which seems to be a good explanation for its effects? The inability to get an adequate grasp on what the fruit symbolizes is one of many paradoxes underlying the main paradox in the story.

50. Second Nephi 2:5 reads, “Men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil.” But would this have been true before the fall?

51. See Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979), 735.

52. Note that the Genesis text does not make any association between the serpent and Satan; the serpent is just another animal created by God (although, according to Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, snakes are unclean). Later interpretations, including those in the Book of Mormon and the Book of Moses, do make the connection (see

2 Nephi 2:18; Moses 4:6). Some readers have suggested that Eve's inability to recognize that Satan—and not just another friendly animal—was actually speaking to her lies behind the deception. (Another variation of this theme is that Eve thought she was speaking to Jesus Christ, who is sometimes symbolized by a serpent, as in Helaman 8:14–15; in this reading, Christ tells Adam and Eve that because he will atone for them, they will not die. This is certainly contrary to the Book of Mormon's understanding of the story [e.g., Mosiah 16:3] and cannot explain why God would forbid them to eat, but it does present one coherent explanation for the role of the serpent under the Wise Choice Theory.) Yet this feels like an insufficient vindication of Eve, given that she clearly recognizes in her dialogue with the serpent that she has been commanded not to eat of the fruit (see Genesis 3:3). Further, it is difficult to understand why God would leave two innocent beings alone in the garden with the serpent. (For more on the paradoxical role of Satan in Mormonism in general and particularly in this story, see Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and Ronan James Head, "Mormonism's Satan and the Tree of Life," *Element* 4/2 [Fall 2008]: 1–52.) Another difficult issue: How is it possible that this serpent is permitted to be in the garden before the fall, but Adam and Eve are not allowed to stay in the garden after the fall? The ambiguity of the serpent's status combined with God's permission for the serpent to tempt the humans is yet another conundrum in the Genesis text.

53. See, for example, Campbell, *Eve and the Choice Made in Eden*, 27.

54. As James E. Talmage wrote, "The sacrificial death of Christ was ordained from before the foundation of the world, yet Judas who betrayed . . . the son of God [is] none the less guilty of the awful crime" (James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1899], 63).

55. There may be a parallel to Sarah's insistence on solving her fertility problem by giving Hagar to Abraham (which the Genesis account seems to present as a mistake, although D&C 132:34 takes a different approach) instead of waiting for God to fulfill the promise.

56. See "Eve and Abraham," <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/faithpromotingrumor/2011/11/eve-and-abraham/>, although that author draws different conclusions from the parallel than I do here.

57. See Thomas L. Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 144. See also Kimelman, "Seduction of Eve," 2.

58. Genesis 3:16.

59. Genesis 4:7.

60. Which parts of the story should be treated as normative—and what norms they advance—is complicated. Note that the only explicitly normative statement is in Genesis 2:24: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." Is this verse included because it is the only part of the story meant to create a norm? (The fact that there is no evidence for matrilocality in ancient Israel makes this passage all the more intriguing.) Are the consequences of the fall (painful childbirth, hard labor, men's rule, etc.) meant to be normative, or are humans supposed to try to overcome them and live as they did in God's presence?

61. Similarly, if one argues that eating the fruit was a one-of-a-kind situation in its requirement for disobedience, then the normative use of the story has implicitly been abandoned.

62. Perhaps Adam and Eve's innocence meant that the entire blame should be placed on the serpent, but the serpent is there only because God permitted Adam and Eve to be alone with it, and so we are then in effect blaming God. That idea is obviously an uncomfortable one and is augmented by the fact that the serpent is more of a truth teller than God is (God does not tell them that their eyes will be opened if they eat; the serpent does, and God later verifies that this is indeed the case). Ultimately, there are only four characters—God, the serpent, Adam, and Eve—upon whom blame (if “blame” is indeed what we have here) can be bestowed. Yet neither individually nor in any combination can an adequate apportioning of blame be made. There are also interesting questions related to the fact that God puts Adam and Eve into a position where they are, in effect, left alone with a smooth talker and a really appealing but forbidden tree (which God created!), and yet they also lack the awareness to assess either the messenger or the consequences of their actions. How can that be part of a good creation? Why would God permit the serpent to dwell in paradise in the first place? (On the other hand, Leon Kass suggests that there was no way to have the garden without the tree—humans could not be created without agency. See Kass, *Beginning of Wisdom*, 68. In fact, it is immediately after the command not to eat is given that God announces the need for Adam to have a “help meet”; one wonders if the entire purpose of Eve's creation (at least in the narrative) is related to the issue of eating the fruit. (But is her job to help him eat the fruit or to prevent him from eating the fruit?) The issue of what our interpretations of the story reveal about the nature of God is another moving part that makes the meaning of the text difficult to pin down.

63. Feminist readers might object to seeing the first act of the first woman as sinful. But it is also true that the reading of Eve as brave and wise (and yet subjugated and maternal) is problematic. Our ability to see Eve as committing a sin and then being redeemed makes her into a normal human, one with agency and autonomy. By way of analogy, a society that can only accept members of a formerly oppressed minority being portrayed in the media as virtuous doctors and lawyers, and not the full spectrum of human endeavor and occupation (including criminals, low-status workers, etc.), is a society that has not yet fully integrated that minority into society but rather feels the need to compensate for past (and current?) injustices by placing the minority in a privileged position.

64. D&C 138:39.

65. D&C 138:38.

66. See Hollis R. Johnson, “Worlds,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1595.

67. However, if the same script, as it were, had been playing out on multiple worlds, one wonders why Satan would agree to keep playing the same role that permits the plan to move forward, especially if we consider the idea in the Book of Moses that Satan acted only because “he knew not the mind of God” (Moses 4:6). (Possibly, Satan regarded Adam and Eve as pawns whom he would need to sacrifice in order to have a chance to influence their children. If this is true, it is a further problem for the Wise Choice Theory because it would mean that Eve made a “wise choice” for her that left her children in a terrible position.) In the context of a plurality of worlds, we have yet one more paradox in this story.

68. Some readers point to D&C 29:39–40 (“And it must needs be that the devil should tempt the children of men, or they could not be agents unto themselves; for if they never should have bitter they could not know the sweet—wherefore, it came to pass that the devil tempted Adam”) as evidence that the serpent was merely playing the role that God had assigned to it. To the extent that this is true, it raises difficult and interesting questions about God's ultimate culpability (and Adam and Eve's lack thereof) for the decision to eat the fruit. Also, this verse does not

seem to require that Adam and Eve eat, only that they be tempted. Presumably their agency would have been preserved in the presence of a temptation that they resisted.

69. Contrast the unguarded tree of knowledge of good and evil with the tree of life, in which cherubim and a flaming sword physically prevented Adam and Eve from eating its fruit (Genesis 3:24). One wonders why similar measures were not taken to prevent them from eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

70. See Moses 4.

71. There is not a complete account of the fall in the Book of Abraham, but Abraham 5:13 does present an opportunity (that was not taken) to eliminate the paradox.

72. For a comparison of the various accounts, see Anthony A. Hutchinson, "A Mormon Midrash? LDS Creation Narratives Reconsidered," *Dialogue* 21/4 (Winter 1988): 11–74. Keith Meservy suggested some of the benefits of having multiple accounts of the creation; see his article "Four Accounts of the Creation," *Ensign*, January 1986.

73. Joseph Fielding Smith wrote, "Adam and Eve therefore did the very thing the Lord intended them to do. If we had the original record, we would see the purpose of the fall clearly stated and its necessity explained." Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1963), 4:80. One wonders why one of our four accounts—including the three that are products of the restoration—did not restore the parts of the record that clearly explained the fall.

74. Defenders of the Wise Choice Theory point to two changes that the Book of Moses makes to the Genesis text to support their position. The first is Moses 4:6, which states that Satan sought to beguile Eve, "for he knew not the mind of God." While this explains Satan's role in furthering God's plan (something that we would not normally expect him to do), it does not exonerate Eve. (And one still wonders what "the mind of God" was in this instance.) The second is the addition of "nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee" (Moses 3:17) to the commandment not to eat the fruit. (See James E. Faust, "What It Means to Be a Daughter of God," *Ensign*, November 1999, as an example of using this verse to argue that eating the fruit was "a choice with consequences" and not "forbidden," an argument frequently made by defenders of the Wise Choice Theory.) This addition, however, is not sufficient to negate the basic prohibition of the commandment; it is easier to see this if we imagine the same verbiage applied to a different commandment: "Do not kill; nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee." The phrasing serves only to emphasize the existence of agency and not to imply tacit permission to violate the commandment.

75. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 145–46.

76. See Mosiah 4:9.

77. Some feminist interpreters have pointed to Genesis 3:6, where Eve's threefold evaluation of the fruit is presented as evidence of her logical and careful thinking, but we should not forget that she is making this assessment contrary to the assessment of God. A wrinkle to the story is added by the Book of Moses, which has the fruit becoming pleasant as Eve ponders it (see Moses 4:12), as opposed to the Genesis text, where the fruit simply was pleasant (Genesis 3:6). This change might simply reflect Joseph Smith's penchant for eliminating italicized words in the KJV, but it might indicate that Eve's act of evaluating the fruit for herself (instead of relying on God's evaluation) made the fruit seem more pleasant than it was initially. Also, many advocates of the Wise

Choice Theory think of Eve as selflessly willing to fall in order to have children, but her analysis of the benefits of eating the fruit does not support this notion.

78. The near-obsession with judging Eve's act may be due to the story's centrality, but it may also reflect a willingness to judge women in ways that men are normally not judged. For example, Luke 7:39 ("for she is a sinner") has generated many discussions about the nature and extent of the woman's sins, while a similar comment regarding a man in Luke 5:8 ("depart from me, for I am a sinful man") generates minimal discussion about the nature and extent of Peter's sins.

79. It is really most curious that this is the tree of good and evil, when so many scriptural texts work hard to present good and evil as opposing or divergent forces.

80. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:299.

81. The history of LDS interpretations of the fall illustrates this, from Brigham Young's reading of Eve's curse as a justification for female submission to polygamy to the Wise Choice Theory as evidence that the LDS Church exalts women, at least when they fulfill certain roles.

82. See Job 1.

83. See Job 4.

84. See Job 31.

85. See Job 37:1–40:2.

86. This interpretation is perhaps supported by this statement from Gordon B. Hinckley: "We have sketched before us [in the temple ceremony] the odyssey of man's eternal journey from premortal existence through this life to the life beyond." See Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Salt Lake Temple," *Ensign*, March 1993. This reading makes sense of the serpent being in the presence of God (as Satan in the premortal realm). It also may explain why, before the fall, the serpent (contrary to the usual artistic representation) did have legs—it is only after he is cursed that he moves about on his belly; this may be read symbolically to suggest that the serpent lost something (such as the ability to have a body) as a result of his role in the fall (symbolizing the war in heaven).

87. It is somewhat troubling to think that we would have had to disobey a commandment in order to come to earth, so the tension in the story is definitely still there in this template.

88. See Hutchinson, "A Mormon Midrash?," for more on this idea of reading the temple ceremony in particular as the journey of "every(wo)man": "Clearly, the Adam and Eve of the endowment were intended as mythic personages in the strictest sense: in representing Everyman and Everywoman's search for religious truth and authority, they symbolically mediate the meaning and value—indeed, the truth—that Joseph's theology of revelation, priesthood order and authority, and exaltation to Godhood attempted to phrase propositionally." In the "human maturation" reading, the fact that Eve eats first probably signifies nothing more than the fact that females usually physically mature before males.

89. For example, regarding the commandment in Genesis 2:15, Bruce Waltke notes, "Elsewhere in the Pentateuch this expression describes activity only of priests." See Bruce Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI:

Zondervan, 2001), 87.

90. In this reading, we have a logical explanation for Eve's addition of a prohibition on touching the fruit to the original command: it fits in with the holiness codes, where one must not touch something unclean. See P. Wayne Townsend, "Eve's Answer to the Serpent: An Alternative Paradigm for Sin and Some Implications in Theology," *Calvin Theological Journal* 33/2 (1998): 399–420. See also Gregory K. Beale, "Eden, the Temple, and the Church's Mission in the New Creation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48/1 (March 2005): 5–31.

91. A benefit of this reading is that it explains where Cain's wives came from: there is no assumption that Adam and Eve were the first and only people but rather the first and only people in the promised land. Exile (out of the garden, out of the promised land) is "death"; being created from the dust means being people "of the land." The abundance and freedom of the garden symbolize "the land flowing with milk and honey." See Peter Enns and Jared Byas, *Genesis for Normal People: A Guide to the Most Controversial, Misunderstood, and Abused Book of the Bible* (Patheos, 2012), Kindle edition.

92. See Alonzo L. Gaskill, *The Savior and the Serpent: Unlocking the Doctrine of the Fall* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 110–25.

93. It also changes the implications of Adam "ruling" over Eve and Eve "desiring" Adam; these are no longer commentaries on the husband/wife relationship but rather on the Christ/church relationship.

94. This perhaps isn't an entirely separate template, but note that, in the Genesis account, we are told that Adam is put to sleep but not that he awakes. This has led one scholar to interpret the entire fall account as a dream or vision. See Dan E. Burns, "Dream Form in Genesis 2:4b–3:24: Asleep in the Garden," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 12/37 (February 1987): 3–14.

95. Perhaps given the current upheavals concerning gender roles, there is no way to escape inflicting our anxiety into discussions of the fall. But note that it is not required by the text that there be a commentary on male and female and/or husband and wife roles; after all, no one looks at Cain and Abel in the next chapter as a template for sibling relationships.

96. Technically, Adam is mentioned in 1 Chronicles 1:1, but this is only a brief mention in a genealogical list.

97. See George W. Savran, "Beastly Speech: Intertextuality, Balaam's Ass and the Garden of Eden," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 19/64 (December 1994): 33–55.

98. See P. G. Camp, "David's Fall: Reading 2 Samuel 11–14 in Light of Genesis 2–4," *Restoration Quarterly* 53/3 (2011): 149–58.

99. See Julie M. Smith, "Why These Women in Jesus' Genealogy?," *Segullah: Writings by Latter-day Saint Women* (Spring 2008).

100. See C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishers, 2006), 186–88.

101. See Dane C. Ortlund, "'And Their Eyes Were Opened, and They Knew': An Inter-canonical Note on Luke 24:31," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53/4 (2010): 717–28.

102. See Julie M. Smith, “The Beginning and the End: Echoes of Genesis 1–3 in Revelation 21–22,” in *Apocalypse: Reading Revelation 21–22*, ed. Julie M. Smith (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2016), 15–30.

103. For a comparison of Genesis with the story of Gilgamesh, see John A. Bailey, “Initiation and the Primal Woman in Gilgamesh and Genesis 2–3,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 89/2 (June 1970): 137–50. For a comparison with the Qur’an, see Torsten Löfstedt, “The Creation and Fall of Adam: A Comparison of the Qur’anic and Biblical Accounts,” *Svensk Missionstidskrift* 93/4 (2005): 453–77. Perhaps the most important insight from the noncanonical intertexts is that no other ancient Near East creation account mentions the creation of women.

104. Is Isaiah 50:1 (“for your transgressions is your mother put away”) relevant here?

105. See Daniel C. Peterson, “Nephi and His Asherah,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/2 (2000): 16–25, 80–81.

106. Boyd K. Packer, “A Teacher of Teachers,” *McKay Today Magazine*, Fall 2006, 5.