

## Lecture 3

### THE ATONEMENT OF JESUS CHRIST

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#### Introduction

From the scriptures we learn that Jesus Christ is the Only Begotten Son of the Eternal Father, the creator of worlds, who was chosen of the Father in the premortal world to become the Redeemer and Savior of mankind. The great missionary Amulek told us the condition mankind would be in without the Savior's atonement:

For it is expedient that an atonement should be made; for according to the great plan of the Eternal God there must be an atonement made, or else all mankind must unavoidably perish; yea, all are hardened; yea, all are fallen and are lost, and must perish except it be through the atonement which it is expedient should be made.  
(Alma 34:9.)

Joseph Smith explained the condition of those who are exalted through Jesus' redemptive act:

These shall dwell in the presence of God and his Christ forever and ever. . . .  
These are they who are just men made perfect through Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, who wrought out this perfect atonement through the shedding of his own blood. (D&C 76:62, 69.)

#### The Father's Covenant

By modern revelation we know that in the premortal world a plan of salvation for the spirit sons and daughters of God was accepted by the majority of his children; one-third, however, rebelled and followed Satan. (Moses 4:1-4; Abraham 3:24-26.) In God's plan provision was made for his faithful children to return to his presence by obedience to the principles and ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Eternal Father was bound by the provisions of this plan, and his obedient sons and daughters had faith in working out their salvation. The apostle Paul expressed his conviction that God's promise would be fulfilled. "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began." (Titus 1:2.)

#### Adam in the Gospel Plan

The real meaning of the gospel plan was lost to the Christian world through the apostasy. For many of the clergy and laity, Jesus is simply a man, a human being who is merely a great

example of righteousness. In contrast to this belief, Latter-day Saints know Jesus Christ to be their Atoner and Redeemer, the literal Son of God, and therefore, "We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved. . . ." (Third Article of Faith.)

Latter-day Saints also know that Adam and the early prophets of the Old Testament period were historical beings, contrary to some existing ideas in the Christian world. The Lord has revealed that Adam was the first man and that he is the father of all mankind. (Moses 3:7; D&C 29:34; 84:16.) The manner in which Adam, the earth, and all living creatures were created has not been revealed, but in a day of righteousness this information will be revealed by the Lord. (D&C 101:32-34.) Furthermore, the gospel of Jesus Christ was given to Adam in the beginning, and from Adam to Moses the fulness of that gospel was on the earth. (Moses 6:51-68; D&C 107:40-56; 84:18, 23, 25.)

### Conditions Requiring the Atonement

To work out their salvation Adam and Eve used their free agency, as must all of the sons and daughters of God who come to earth life.

They received commandments which, if lived, would lead to eternal life. (D&C 20:19, 25-26.) Satan, after being cast from the Father's presence in the beginning, became the instigator of evil, and led Adam and Eve to transgress the laws given to them in the Garden of Eden. Temptation was necessary that man might choose between good and evil, but transgression brought about conditions which prevented them from returning to God when earth life was completed. (D&C 29:35-38; 2 Nephi 2:16-19.) These conditions were inherited by all of their posterity; however, their children were not responsible for their transgression. (Second Article of Faith.)

#### Class Discussion

Should Adam and Eve be condemned because of their transgression?

#### Answer

President Joseph Fielding Smith, knowing that the fall of Adam and Eve was necessary as a part of the plan of salvation, wrote:

I never speak of the part Eve took in this fall as a sin, nor do I accuse Adam of a sin. One may say, "Well did they not break a commandment?" Yes. But let us examine the nature of that commandment and the results which came out of it.

In no other commandment the Lord ever gave to man, did he say: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, *nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself. . . .*" [Moses 3:17.]

I am sure that neither Adam nor Eve looked upon it as a sin, when they learned the consequences, and this is discovered in their words after they learned the consequences.

Adam said: "Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression *my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy, and again in the flesh I shall see God.*"

Eve said: "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; emphasis added.]

We can hardly look upon anything resulting in such benefits as being a sin, in the sense in which we consider sin. (DS 1:114-115.)

## Adam and Eve before the Fall

In what condition were Adam and Eve before their transgression and their fall? President Joseph Fielding Smith tells us (*DS* 1:107)

- (1) They were not subject to death. (2 Nephi 2:22.)
- (2) They were in the presence of God. (2 Nephi 9:6; Alma 42:7-23; Moses 5:10.)
- (3) They had no posterity. (Moses 5:11.)
- (4) They were without knowledge of good and evil. (2 Nephi 2:23.)

## The Fall and Its Effects

Adam and Eve were beings of flesh and bone, but they were spiritual without blood in their bodies. They could become mortal, subject to death, only by transgression or breaking the law of God. (*DS* 1:76-77.)

What did the fall consist of? In different ways, by joke or sincere belief, some have construed the fall of Adam and Eve as being a violation of the law of chastity. Elder James E. Talmage inveighed against this falsehood in a general conference of the Church, as follows:

Here, let me say, that therein consisted the fall—the eating of things unfit, the taking into the body of the things that made of that body a thing of earth; and I take this occasion to raise my voice against the false interpretation of scripture, which in some instances has been adopted by certain people, and is current in their minds, and is referred to in a hushed and half-secret way, that the fall of man consisted in some offense against the laws of chastity and of virtue. Such a doctrine is an abomination. What right have we to turn the scriptures from their proper sense and meaning? What right have we to declare that God meant not what He said? The fall was a natural process, resulting through the incorporation into the bodies of our first parents of the things that came from food unfit, through the violation of the command of God regarding what they should eat. (*JC*, p. 29; *CR*, October, 1913, p. 118.)

The effects of the Fall were spiritual death or banishment from God's presence and temporal death or the separation of the spirit and body. In this condition they were fallen. (*D&C* 29:41; *Alma* 42:6-7.)

### Class Discussion

Was the "Fall" inevitable?

### Answer

In an article of that title Elder John A. Widtsoe answered this question:

According to the plan of salvation, accepted by the hosts of heaven in the great preexistent council, Adam and Eve were placed on earth to become the parents of the human race. They could not, however, perform this mission, unless they themselves became subject to mortality. Why, then, did the Lord command them not to partake of the tree of good and evil, the gateway of mortal life? There has seemed to be a contradiction between God's purpose as embodied in the plan of salvation, and this command to Adam and Eve.

Perhaps a full explanation is not possible with our knowledge, yet modern revelation has shed light upon the subject.

First, there is the certain knowledge that without the "Fall," Adam and Eve would have remained in a condition in which children with earthly bodies, for whom the earth was made, could not have been begotten by them. The plan of salvation would have been defeated.

This is the emphatic view of the prophet Lehi. His terse statement leaves no other meaning. "Adam fell that men might be." (2 Nephi 2:25)

Equally direct are the words of Alma: "... if it had been possible for Adam to have partaken of the fruit of the tree of life at that time, there would have been no death.... They would have been forever miserable, having no preparatory state; and thus the plan of redemption would have been frustrated." (Alma 12:23, 26)....

This view of the "Fall" is confirmed by the scriptures. For example, "... If Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the garden of Eden... forever.... 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)

The role of Satan in this drama is not difficult to understand. He seeks to overthrow the work of God. By inducing Adam and Eve to disobey the Lord, he thought to have them in his power. He forgot, or did not know, that by their very "disobedience" the purposes of the Lord with respect to his spirit children would be accomplished. The temptation of Eve turned upon him to the defeat of his evil designs. This often is the fate of evil.

The Lord himself in these latter days has spoken of the place and mission of Adam: "... Michael, or Adam, the father of all, the prince of all, the ancient of days." (D. & C. 27:11; 88:112; 116:1) "The Lord God... hath appointed Michael your prince, and established his feet, and set him upon high, and given unto him the keys of salvation under the counsel and direction of the Holy One." (D. & C. 78:15-16) These are eloquent words, which could not well have been spoken of a sinner; only of one who has filled his mission well. Indeed, in the true gospel of Jesus Christ there is no original sin.

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

Considering our full knowledge of the purpose of the plan of salvation, and the reason for placing Adam and Eve on earth, the apparent contradiction in the story of the "Fall" vanishes. Instead the law of free agency, or individual choice, appears in distinct view. God's command is qualified by his great purpose to bless his children. Adam and Eve rise to the position of helpers in initiating the divine purpose on earth. They become partners with the Lord in making eternal joy possible for the hosts of heaven.

We, the children of Adam and Eve, may well be proud of our parentage. (*E & R*, 1960, pp. 192-95.)

## Summary

By way of summary, after the transgression in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve's condition changed in these ways:



- (1) From not being subject to temporal death to being subject to it. (2 Nephi 9:6-7; Mosiah 16:7; Alma 12:22-24; Helaman 14:16; Mormon 9:12-13.)
- (2) From enjoying God's presence to banishment therefrom. (2 Nephi 2:5; 9:8-9; Mosiah 16:3-6; Alma 42:6-11.)
- (3) From having no posterity to the begetting of children. (2 Nephi 2:23; Moses 5:10-11.)
- (4) From being without the knowledge of good and evil to living in a world where they were beset with conditions which allowed them to exercise free agency in choosing between these opposites. (2 Nephi 2:23, 27.)

### Class Discussion

Where was the Garden of Eden?

### Answer

When created, Adam and Eve were not subject to death, but were spiritual beings of flesh and bone. Though they were spiritual beings in not having blood in their bodies, they could by transgression of the law become mortal and therefore subject to death. They were not immortal or resurrected in the sense of being incapable of dying. (*DS* 1:76; Moses 3:9; *also see* Lecture 4.)

The Garden of Eden into which Adam and Eve were placed was upon the American continent; the Prophet Joseph Smith taught that it was located in Jackson County, Missouri. (*DS* 3:74, *E & R*, 1960, pp. 395-96.) In other words, the American continent is the first Old World, although where Noah and the ark settled has long been called the "Old World." Because of this fact and also the little information about the Garden of Eden provided in the Bible, man's search to locate it has failed. Revelation is the source of Latter-day Saint knowledge concerning the Garden of Eden. Adam-ondi-Ahman, Daviess County, Missouri, is the place where Adam blessed his posterity. (*D&C* 107:53-57.) This is also where Adam will convene a great council of the prophets, ancient and modern, in a future day. (*D&C* 116.) The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that the Garden of Eden was located in Jackson County, Missouri. (*E&R* p. 394.)

### The Need for a Redeemer

In the premortal world, provision was made for Jesus Christ to atone for fallen man. (Moses 4:1-4; Abraham 3:22-28; Moses 5:57.) Adam and Eve came under the two-fold penalty of their transgression—spiritual death and physical death. (*D&C* 29:41; 2 Nephi 9:6.)

What would happen if there were no Redeemer? The two penalties would have taken effect forever. Man would have remained in spiritual death, or perpetual banishment from the presence of God, and his body would have remained in the grave throughout all time. But what would this mean? Jacob, the Nephite prophet, has given the answer to this question:

... If the flesh should rise no more our spirits must become subject to that angel who fell from before the presence of the Eternal God, and became the devil, to rise no more.

And our spirits must have become like unto him, and we become devils, angels to a devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God, and to remain with the father of lies in misery, like unto himself. . . . (2 Nephi 9:8-9.)

To permit this condition would have brought total victory to Satan and doomed all of God's