

Book of Moses Essays #65: Moses Witnesses the Fall: (Moses 4)A Curse for the Serpent(Moses 4:14–21)

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Figure 1. Domenichino, 1581-1641: *The Rebuke of Adam and Eve*, 1626

Jewish pseudepigraphal texts tell of how, after Adam and Eve's transgression, God's "chariot throne [descends and] rests at the Tree of Life and all the flowers come into bloom."^[1] Of this painting, Conisbee writes:

The Rebuke of Adam and Eve perfectly illustrates Domenichino's classical style at the peak of his career. ... The group of God and the angels is derived directly from Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*. ... and should be read as an homage by the seventeenth-century painter to his great predecessor. ... Following Italian tradition, Domenichino shows the Tree of Knowledge as a fig tree, rather than the apple tree which was more usual in northern European art. In a clear narrative sequence, God the Father, borne by cherubim and angels, descends to rebuke Adam, who blames Eve, who in turn points to the serpent as the cause of their fall from grace. Animals still roam freely in their earthly paradise, but the lion at the right is already metamorphosing from a friendly feline to an aggressive beast.^[2]

The change in God's initial question from the KJV "Where *art* thou?" to the JST "Where *goest* thou?" emphasizes the fact that the Lord is not assessing Adam's location but rather requesting him to reflect openly on his intentions—in view of the fact that his feet are now pointed toward the exit of the Garden.^[3] Dennis Rasmussen observes: "From man God does not need information. Man's response must be man's own self."^[4] Umberto Cassuto^[5] further explains:

The commentators who consider the question to be aimed at discovering where the man was hiding have overlooked the words "[and said unto] him." ... The query ... resembles the question the Lord God asks Cain,^[6] "Where is Abel your brother?" when Abel's body is lying on the ground beneath the open sky, and no attempt is made to conceal it. ... We may compare the case to that of a man who comes to chide his little son who misbehaved himself and then hid himself behind the door in order to avoid looking at his father's angry face; the father who is well aware of the child's hiding-place, calls out to him, "Where are you?" meaning: Why are you there? Is that where you should be? Come out and face me! [Adam's] answer is in keeping with this interpretation; he does not reply, "I am in such-and-such a place," but he explains why he is concealing himself.^[7]

God's call, of course, is not issued as an angry threat, but rather as an invitation for Adam to account for his stewardship of the Garden.^[8] To accomplish His objective, God seeks to "draw rather than drive him out of hiding."^[9] Elder David A. Bednar observed that God did not merely lecture Adam, but instead made every effort to help him learn and wisely exercise his agency.^[10] According to Chrysostom, God here "demonstrate[s] his own loving kindness, and ... invites [Adam and Eve] to make admission of their faults."^[11]

Adam's response to the Lord's question is different in the Book of Moses than in Genesis. In Genesis, he is reported as saying simply: "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat."^[12] However, in Moses 4:18 he adds the words: "and commandest that she should remain with me." The phrase provides a defensible rationale for his transgression: he took the forbidden fruit in order to remain with Eve, thus breaking one commandment in order to keep a prior and more important one.

It is supposed that the reason Satan is not interrogated here is because, in contrast to mankind, he “was not and never will be afforded any chance at repentance.”^[13] While he is the only one to be directly cursed,^[14] there is a similarity in the nature of the consequences suffered by each of the three parties: “In each case, the judgment is of a twofold nature: it affects what is of central concern in the life of each entity, and it regulates a basic relationship.”^[15] As for the serpent, it is henceforth restricted to a humiliating diet and form of locomotion, and will be crushed under the heel of the seed of the woman; the woman will suffer in childbearing and in the challenges of a marriage relationship undertaken in the conditions of a fallen world; and the man is consigned to hard labor and to strict obedience to the commandments of the Lord.

In the case of the man and the woman, Cassuto argues that what may seem solely as punishments should be regarded instead as “measures taken for the good of the human species in its new situation.”^[16] Exposed in nakedness, God will clothe them;^[17] subject to temporal and spiritual death, God will bless them with posterity and the eventual possibility of eternal life;^[18] and bereft of the food of the Garden, God will provide Adam and Eve with the seeds of life-sustaining grains.^[19]

The Curse of the Serpent

The cursing of the serpent is described in Moses 4:20-21:

And I, the Lord God, said unto the serpent: Because thou hast done this thou shalt be cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life;

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed; and he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

The *Qur'an* records a passionate exchange of words following Lucifer's expulsion from heaven that could just as easily fit the scene described here. In the account, Satan unleashes a tirade of threats, followed by a summary dismissal by God: “Because ... [Thou hast adjudged me to be erring],’ [the Devil] declared, ‘I will waylay Your servants as they walk on Your straight path, then spring upon them from the front and the rear, from their right and from their left. ...’ ‘Begone!’ [God] said.”^[20] Hugh Nibley^[21] elaborates:

[Satan,] nettled by this rebuke and the curse, ... flares up in his pride and announces what his program for the economic and political order of the new world is going to be. He will take the resources of the earth, and with precious metals as a medium of exchange he will buy up military and naval might,^[22] or rather those who control it, and so will govern the earth—for he is the prince of this world. He does rule: he is king. Here at the outset is the clearest possible statement of a military-industrial complex ruling the earth with violence and ruin. But as we are told, this cannot lead to anything but war, because it has been programmed to do that. It was conceived in the mind of Satan in his determination “to destroy the world.”^[23] The whole purpose of the program is to produce blood and horror on this earth.



Figure 2. The Harrowing of Hell. The Barberini Exultet Roll, ca. 1087

Historically, Christians have called the prophecy concerning the “seed” of the woman in Moses 4:21 the *protoevangelium*, being the first explicit Biblical allusion to the good news of the Gospel.^[24] The depiction of the “Harrowing of Hell” from the *Barberini Codex* shows the Devil being literally trampled underfoot by the advancing Christ as he reaches out to save the dead who have long awaited the appearance of their Redeemer. The imagery is meant to teach that the Redeemer has crushed the head of the serpent by means of the very heel that was bruised in the pains of the Atonement.^[25]

Just as Jesus Christ will put all enemies beneath his feet,^[26] so the Prophet Joseph Smith taught that each person who would be saved must also, with His help, gain the power needed to “triumph over all [their] enemies and put them under [their] feet,”^[27] possessing the “glory, authority, majesty, power and dominion which Jehovah possesses.”^[28]

Of relevance to the requirement that each Christian follow the same path taken by Jesus Christ is Theodore of Antioch’s account of the “drama of baptism,” enacted as part of the liturgy of the fourth-century church. Note the rich symbolism that links the banishment of Satan to the covenant of baptism. Anderson summarizes:

When Satan hears of the pending enrollment of the *catechumen*,^[29] he shows the same hostility he had formerly shown towards the exaltation of Adam and the resurrection of Christ... [Theodore writes that Satan] “... tries and endeavors to bring us to the judgment hall as if we had no right to be outside his ownership. He pleads that from ancient times and from the creation of the head of our race we belong to him by right. ...” Having pledged to resist Satan, the candidates were urged to “stand with outstretched arms in the posture of one who prays, and look downwards and remain in that state in order to move the judge to mercy.”^[30]



Figure 3. Early Christian Painting of a Baptism, Saint Calixte Catacomb, 3rd century.

As part of this process, candidates sometimes “stood [barefoot] on animal skins while they prayed, symbolizing the taking off of the garments of skin they had inherited from Adam”^[31] as well as figuratively enacting the putting off the serpent, the representative of death and sin, under one’s heel.^[32] Thus the serpent, his head crushed by the heel of the penitent relying on the mercies of Christ’s atonement, is by a single act renounced, defeated, and banished.^[33]

This essay is adapted from Jeffrey M. Bradshaw. *Temple Themes in the Book of Moses*. 2014 update ed. Salt Lake City, UT: Eborn Publishing, 2014. English: <https://archive.org/details/150904TempleThemesInTheBookOfMoses2014UpdatedEditionSR> eading ; Spanish: <http://www.templethemes.net/books/171219-SPA-TempleThemesInTheBookOfMoses.pdf>, pp. 127–130.

Notes on Figures

Figure 1. Department of Visual Services, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 2000.3.1 (PA).

Figure 2. *Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Codex Barberini Latinus 592, 2r.*
https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Barb.lat.592 (accessed July 1, 2021).

Figure 3. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/0a/Baptism_-_Saint_Calixte.jpg (accessed September 11, 2016). No known copyright restrictions. This work may be in the public domain in the United States.

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Endnotes

[1] M. Barker, Temple Theology, p. 89. See G. A. Anderson *et al.*, Synopsis, 44(22):3-4, p. 62E. An Islamic source likewise reports that God's voice of judgment came "from the tree" (G. Weil, Legends, p. 32).

[2] P. Conisbee, Art.

[3] J. M. Bradshaw, God's Image 1, pp. 259-260.

[4] D. Rasmussen, Question, p. 7.

[5] U. Cassuto, Adam to Noah, pp. 155-156.

[6] Moses 5:34.

[7] Rashi draws additional parallels to the Lord's dialogues with Hagar, Balaam, and Hezekiah (Rashi, Genesis Commentary, 1:34). See Genesis 16:8, Numbers 22:9, and Isaiah 39. Compare Ether 3:7: "Arise, why hast thou fallen?"

[8] E. E. Kastler, Commentaire. Cassuto points out examples from elsewhere in the Bible where the verb "call" "is used in the sense of to summon a person to give an account of his

actions” (U. Cassuto, Adam to Noah, p. 155 and, e.g., Genesis 12:18, 20:9, 26:9-10; Deuteronomy 25:8).

[9] V. P. Hamilton, Genesis 1-17, p. 193.

[10] D. A. Bednar, Seek, p. 63.

[11] J. Chrysostom, Homilies on Genesis, 17:22, cited in A. Louth *et al.*, Genesis 1-11, p. 85.

[12] Genesis 3:12.

[13] G. A. Anderson, Perfection, p. 138. Cf. Jubilees: “the Lord cursed the serpent and he was angry with it forever” (O. S. Wintermute, Jubilees, 3:23, p. 60). The penalty placed upon the serpent symbolizes the curse placed upon those that followed Lucifer in the premortal life: “Throughout eternity [those who followed Lucifer in premortal life] will remain lower than the cattle or the beasts of the field, for even the beasts have bodies of flesh and bone and enjoy the privilege of resurrection, whereas the Devil and his angels remain unembodied spirits forever” (J. F. McConkie *et al.*, Revelations, p. 271). Even in the millennial day, when all the rest of Creation will enjoy peace and plenty, “dust [still] shall be the serpent’s meat” (Isaiah 65:25). In cultures where the serpent was worshipped, this curse also proclaimed the eventual humiliation of all false gods, and the firm requirement of submission to the Lord as the only object of worship (T. Stordalen, Echoes, p. 470).

Nibley elucidates the symbolic meaning of the figurative indignity imposed on the serpent by his loss of legs: “The loss of limbs and organs guarantees that the rebel will never rise anew in his full powers, which he will never possess again. He may never more progress, being... bound in one place” (H. W. Nibley, Message (2005), p. 317).

In an early Christian text, the Savior is portrayed as discussing the results of Lucifer’s intransigence at the time of his fall from heaven. The text echoes the theme of Satan’s loss of powers as the result of his rebellion:

And when My Father saw [Satan’s] pride and arrogance, and knew that his wickedness and evil-doing were as great as his pride, He commanded the hosts of heaven, saying: “Take away the writing from the hand of this arrogant one, strip off his armor, and cast him down to the earth, for his time has come. He is chief of the rebels and is like a king to them, and he commands them as a captain commands his troops; and the names of the rebels are written in the list which is in his hand.” And the angels gathered themselves together, but they hesitated to take the list from the rebel’s hand. Then My Father commanded them to bring a sharp reaping knife, and to thrust it into his sides and through his body, and to sever the bones of his back and shoulders; and he was unable to stand. Then My Father commanded a mighty angel to smite him and to cast him out of heaven, because of his pride; and the angel crushed in his ribs, and broke his wings, and he and those angels who were with him became devils.
(Timothy of Alexandria, Abbaton, p. 199)

In unrepentant rebellion, Satan has committed the unpardonable sin and cannot be redeemed. In the text, he is portrayed as having been stabbed and cut from shoulder to shoulder with a knife in ritual fashion. Other traditions mention a specific angel or cherub

whose wing becomes the weapon by which Satan is smitten and rendered helpless (G. A. Anderson, Ezekiel, pp. 142-143).

[14] Jolene Edmunds Rockwood explains: "God... pronounces what have traditionally been called the curse of Adam and the curse of Eve. The serpent, however, is the only agent who is directly cursed and then, apparently, for usurping the role of deity and reversing the words of the deity" (J. E. Rockwood, *Redemption of Eve*, p. 20).

[15] N. M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 27.

[16] U. Cassuto, *Adam to Noah*, p. 163.

[17] *Moses* 4:27.

[18] *Moses* 4:22.

[19] *Moses* 4:25.

[20] N. N. J. Dawood, *Koran*, 7:11-18, pp. 109-110; cf. 15:32-44; 17:61-63; 38:74-85. See also M. Herbert *et al.*, *Irish Apocrypha*, p. 11.

[21] H. W. Nibley, *Gifts*, p. 92.

[22] See S. C. Malan, *Adam and Eve*, 1:57, p. 65.

[23] *Moses* 4:6.

[24] A related theme also appears in the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, where "the cat who split the *ished-tree* and released the god also beheads the god's mortal enemy, the *Apophis* serpent, beneath the same *ished-tree*," its paw resting heavily on the head of the serpent in accompanying illustrations (H. W. Nibley, *Message* (2005), pp. 311-312).

[25] The *Targum Yerushalmi* preserves a unique reading when it has God saying: "For them [i.e., the posterity of Adam and Eve]... there will be a remedy, but for you [i.e., the serpent] there will be no remedy; and they are to make peace in the end, in the days of the King Messiah" (M. Maher, *Pseudo-Jonathan*, 3:15, pp. 27-28); cf. *Targum Yerushalmi* (J. W. Etheridge, Onkelos).

[26] 1 Corinthians 15:25-26.

[27] J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, 14 May 1843, p. 297. See also 17 May 1843, p. 301; 21 May 1843, p. 305.

[28] L. E. Dahl *et al.*, *Lectures*, 7:9, p. 98. See also 7:16, p. 101. Note that authorship of the *Lectures* is uncertain.

[29] = candidate for baptism.

[30] G. A. Anderson, *Perfection*, pp. 183-184.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 184.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 131.

[33] For additional discussion, see V. P. Hamilton, *Genesis* 1-17, pp. 197-200. See also J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image* 1, pp. 96, 661ff..