

SUBTRACTION BY ADDITION: LATTER-DAY SAINTS AND THE ATONEMENT

Is Mormonism Christian? The answer to this question has been hotly contested over the course of the last two centuries, generating dozens of volumes contributing to the debate.¹ Chad Owen Brand states that there is no doubt that Mormonism is connected to Christianity, but in order for a faith to truly be Christian it must pass the doctrinal test. In this regard, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter LDS) falls short on a wide variety of fronts, thus, “Mormonism falls outside orthodox Christianity.”²

One of these doctrinal failures is the LDS’s understanding of the atonement, which evangelical scholar R. W. Yarbrough defines as “God’s work on sinners’ behalf to reconcile them to himself. It is the divine activity that confronts and resolves the problem of human sin so that pay may enjoy full fellowship with God both now and in the age to come.”³ Many Mormons might read that definition and give their assent; however, when one explores how Mormons truly understand the atonement, as opposed to evangelicals, the divide is wide indeed.⁴ This paper will seek to explain the atonement and its relation to the fall of Adam as many Mormons see it, then analyze and respond to their views in the light of Christian Scriptures—the Old and New Testaments.

¹Two recent examples of such books actually written in a debate style are *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon & an Evangelical Conversation*, by Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, and *Claiming Christ*, by Robert Millet and Gerald R. McDermott.

²Chad Owen Brand, “Is Mormonism Compatible with the Bible?” in *The Apologetics Study Bible*, ed. Ted Cabal (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2007), 39.

³R. W. Yarbrough, “Atonement” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D.A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy, eds. (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000; reprint, Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2006), 388.

⁴The idea that many Mormons might agree with this definition of the atonement only goes to show how important it is for evangelicals to have a truly Christian understanding of the atonement, and a knowledge of what Latter-day Saints believe, so that effective evangelism can be done.

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The LDS faith finds its roots in evangelical Christianity, but departs from the Bible by appealing to more Scriptures. When analyzing the Mormon view of anything one must keep that in mind. Elder Spencer J. Condie of the Seventy states that “without the knowledge restored through the Book of Mormon, we might never fully understand the Fall and the Atonement.”⁵ Calling the Book of Mormon the keystone of their religion, he states that without that revelation people would not be able to get past “misconceptions such as the belief that Adam and Eve were evil and their fall was a grievous disappointment to Deity” or that because of that, infants are tainted by original sin.⁶ The Old and New Testaments, then, are insufficient in the eyes of Mormon writers to comprehend doctrines such as the fall and the atonement. Therefore, Christians must be ready to defend *sola scriptura*, the authority of the Bible alone, when they both make their defense of the Christian view of atonement and undermine the LDS view.⁷

Mormons and the Fall of Adam

Jeffrey R. Holland writes, “For Latter-day Saints, it is crucially important to see the agreed-upon and understood fall of man only in the context of the equally agreed-upon and understood redemption of man—redemption provided through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.”⁸ Then again, Mormon views of the atonement can only be understood in light of how they view the fall. As with Christianity, the fall and the atonement are closely intertwined in Mormonism, so much so that Brigham Young University professor Robert Millet rightly writes that they are

⁵Spencer J. Condie, “The Fall and Infinite Atonement,” *Ensign* (January 1986), [on-line]; accessed 7 November 2007; available from http://www.lds.org/portal/site/LDSOrg/menuitem.b12f9d18fae655bb69095bd3e44916a0/?vgnnextoid=2354fccf2b7db010VgnVCM1000004d82620aRCRD&locale=0&sourceId=0c1ddbdc370c010VgnVCM1000004d82620a_____; Internet.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Christians seeking to share the gospel with Latter-day Saints would be well advised to inform themselves of what Mormons and the Book of Mormon say, so that they can point out the inconsistencies between the Mormon view and what the Bible says. This paper will seek to point out some of those inconsistencies.

⁸Jeffrey R. Holland, “Atonement of Jesus Christ” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: McMillan, 1992), 82-86.

“a package deal.”⁹ Thus, the writings of the Latter-day Saints on this topic merit consideration. Upon examination, one finds many Mormon writings illustrate vast differences in the understanding of what happened in the Garden of Eden and why it happened.

According to Millet, Mormons view the events of the Garden of Eden more optimistically than do Catholics and Protestants.¹⁰ He cites John Wesley, who believed that because the fall impels men and women to seek after God, it was a good thing. Joseph Smith and his successors taught that the fall of Adam and Eve was *not* rebellion against God. Their choice to take the fruit was not selfish or self-serving, and not man’s first attempt at a power grab.¹¹ Perhaps the most foundational passage in LDS Scripture that speaks to this is 2 Nephi 2:25, which says, “Adam fell that man might be; and men are, that they might have joy,” making a case that the fall was actually a good thing. The Christian might argue that because the will of God worked itself out in the saving work of Christ on the cross, which remedies the fall, then the fall actually *was* a good thing. Mormons go much further, however, claiming not only that the atonement was a positive consequence, but that which befell Adam and Eve as a result were as well.

Bruce McConkie paints a picture of Adam that suggests that, even though he was “an immortal being” whose “coming was the crowning event of creation,” the Adam that lived after the fall was somehow more complete than the Adam that lived in the Garden before.¹² The Book of Mormon teaches that he and Eve would have stayed in the Garden and that everything created would have remained in the state it was in. Furthermore, they were not able to procreate in the Garden, remaining in a state of innocence. The Book of Mormon further asserts that because they were in a state of innocence they could not know joy because they did not know misery.

⁹Robert L. Millet and Gerald R. McDermott, *Claiming Christ* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2007), 94.

¹⁰Robert L. Millet, *The Mormon Faith* (Salt Lake City: Shadow Mountain, 1998), 32.

¹¹Millet and McDermott, *Claiming Christ*, 93.

¹²Bruce McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958), 249.

They could not do good because they did not know sin (2 Nephi 2:22-25). Therefore, through the fall of Adam sin entered the world, yet somehow man progressed to a more mature state. James Talmage writes,

Our first parents are entitled to our deepest gratitude for their legacy to posterity--the means of winning title to glory, exaltation, and eternal lives. But for the opportunity thus given, the spirits of God's offspring would have remained forever in a state of innocent childhood, sinless through no effort of their own; negatively saved, not from sin, but from the opportunity of meeting sin; incapable of winning the honors of victory because prevented from taking part in the conflict. As it is, they are heirs to the birthright of Adam's descendants--mortality, with its immeasurable possibilities and its God-given freedom of action. From Father Adam we have inherited all the ills to which flesh is heir; but such are necessarily incident to a knowledge of good and evil, by the proper use of which knowledge man may become even as the Gods.¹³

So in Talmage's view, the knowledge of good and evil that Adam and Eve obtained when they ate the fruit is somehow better than the paradise in which they were created. Mortality, then, is in a sense better than immortality. Millet adds, "Though our parents transgressed the law of God, their partaking opened the way to mortality, to trial and testing to be sure, but to happiness that comes from overcoming."¹⁴ According to McConkie, God ordained Adam to fall so that he could introduce mortality and "all that attends to it, so that the opportunity for eternal progression and perfection might be offered to all the spirit children of the Father."¹⁵

That eternal progression finds its substance in what Millet calls "moral agency, to yield either to the persuasions of the world or to the enticings of the Holy Spirit."¹⁶ Millet asserts that Mormons do not believe in the depravity of men and women, but believe that individuals have the ability to do good or evil because there is no original sin in Mormonism. The first man and woman were forgiven for their transgression in Eden so there is "no guilt or taint entailed upon Adam and Eve's posterity. Children are conceived in a world where sin

¹³James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1972), 70.

¹⁴Millet, *The Mormon Faith*, 32.

¹⁵McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 249.

¹⁶Millet, *The Mormon Faith*, 33.

exists. Adam and Eve do not pass down a *sinful* nature; however, they do transmit a *fallen* nature, mortality, which Millet says is what Paul meant when he used the term *flesh*.¹⁷ Thus, as early LDS apostle Orson Whitney put it, “The fall had a two-fold direction—downward, yet forward.”¹⁸

Joseph Smith did not believe that children were born into sin, but he did teach that the fall had a *powerful pull* on individuals:

And the Lord spake unto Adam, saying: Inasmuch as thy children are conceived in sin, even so when they begin to grow up, sin conceiveth in their hearts, and they taste the bitter, that they may know to prize the good. And it is given unto them to know good from evil; wherefore they are agents unto themselves, and I have given unto you another law and commandment. (Moses 6:55-56)

Thus, for the Mormon sin and death are “potentialities at conception” which “become actual parts of our nature as we grow up.”¹⁹ Their purpose is that individuals might, through their freedom of agency, believe in Jesus Christ and obey the laws and commandments. However, as a result of Adam and Eve’s transgression, even though their original sin was forgiven, both physical and spiritual death entered the world, separation from the body and spirit and separation from God. Their posterity would be able to choose between good and evil, but the *powerful pull* needed to be remedied.²⁰

Now in a state of mortality, subject to both physical and spiritual death, man was now “in a position to be examined relative to his worthiness to inherit eternal life.”²¹ Death is not a result of the curse, because for Mormons there is no curse. However, it is the natural result of

¹⁷Ibid., 33.

¹⁸Millet and McDermott, *Claiming Christ*, 94.

¹⁹Robert L. Millet, *A Different Jesus?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 87.

²⁰The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Chapter 12: The Atonement,” *Gospel Principles* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997), [on-line]; accessed 8 November 2007; available from http://www.lds.org/portal/site/LDSOrg/menuitem.b3bc55cbf541229058520974e44916a0/?vgnnextoid=32c41b08f338c010VgnVCM1000004d82620aRCRD&locale=0&sourceId=8cea7befabc20110VgnVCM100000176f620a____; Internet.

²¹McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 249-50.

taking the fruit. Therefore, spiritual and physical death are in the world.²² This is, then, where the need for a atonement enters LDS theology.

Mormons and the Atonement

Mormons appeal that their Scriptures shed new light on the atonement that is lacking in the Old and New Testaments. As a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Elder Russell M. Nelson wrote,

While the words *atone* or *atonement*, in any of their forms, appear only once in the King James translation of the New Testament, they appear 35 times in the Book of Mormon. As another testament of Jesus Christ, it sheds precious light on His Atonement, as do the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price. Latter-day revelation has added much to our biblical base of understanding.²³

Gerald R. McDermott points out that LDS writers correctly place an emphasis on the suffering and death of Jesus Christ as the events that save.²⁴ However, there is more to their story. Latter-day Saints teach that the atonement of Christ began at His baptism and was culminated with the final phase, which began at Gethsemane and ended at Golgotha.²⁵ Great emphasis is placed upon what happened in the garden after Christ's last supper with His disciples, in particular the event described in Luke 22:44, in which it is said of Jesus, "And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground."²⁶

Jesus knew what He had to do but had never experienced it. The agony of the garden came from the fact that the atonement was worse than He thought it would be. Jesus had never known emptiness, alienation, disappointment, or disapproval, which according to Millet are

²²Millet and McDermott, *Claiming Christ*, 110.

²³Russell M. Nelson, "The Atonement," *Ensign* (November 1996), [on-line]; accessed 6 November 2007; available from http://www.lds.org/portal/site/LDSOrg/menuitem.b12f9d18fae655bb69095bd3e44916a0/?vgnextoid=2354fccf2b7db010VgnVCM1000004d82620aRCRD&locale=0&sourceId=0c1ddbdc370c010VgnVCM1000004d82620a_____; Internet.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 103.

²⁵Millet, *A Different Jesus?*, 90.

²⁶All Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update.

manifestations of a loss of the Spirit.²⁷ Therefore, Latter-day Saints teach that it was in the garden that the Father withdrew the Holy Spirit from Jesus Christ, an event that lasted for three or four hours (Alma 34:35; D&C 19:20). Brigham Young, the foremost successor of Joseph Smith and President of the LDS, wrote,

God never bestows upon this people or upon an individual, superior blessings without a severe trial to prove them, to prove that individual, or that people. . . . For this express purpose the Father withdrew His spirit from His Son, at the time He was to be crucified. . . . consequently at the very moment, at the hour when the crisis came for him to offer up his life, the Father withdrew Himself, withdrew His Spirit, and cast a vail [sic] over him. That is what made him sweat blood. If he had the power of God upon him, he would not have sweat blood; but all was withdrawn from him, and a vail was cast over him, and then he pled with the Father not to forsake him.²⁸

This emphasis is derived from Mosiah 3:7, which says that Jesus’ “blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and abominations of his people.” Thus, when Jesus experienced this in the garden He did so without the Spirit and the power of God.

The garden is described as the hour of crisis for Jesus Christ, the place where He was so overwhelmed by the enormity of the Father’s wrath coming upon Him that blood poured out as sweat. Yet, Jesus was not simply looking forward to the agony of the cross at this point, but going through the atonement right there and then. Millet states that what He went through was

not only anticipatory but actual, that the Lord’s anguish in the garden was the beginning of his passion, the early stages of his atoning sacrifice. . . . [which] began in the Garden of Gethsemane. It was there that he suffered for our sins, our pains, and our infirmities. And it was on the cross, during the hours of darkness, that all of the agonies of the night before *re-occurred*. . . . what began in Gethsemane was finished, was climaxed on Golgotha.²⁹

McConkie adds that “we know he sweat great goutts of blood from every pore as he drained the dregs of that bitter cup his Father had given him. . . . We know that he lay prostrate upon the ground as the pains and agonies of an infinite burden caused him to tremble and would that he

²⁷Millet and McDermott, *Claiming Christ*, 97-98.

²⁸Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F.D. Richards & Sons, 1851-56), 3:205-06.

²⁹Millet and McDermott, *Claiming Christ*, 98-99.

might not drink the bitter cup.”³⁰ Thus, these Mormon writers assert that the wrath of God was being poured out on Jesus Christ in Gethsemane, before He was found guilty in the sight of Annas and Caiaphas and finally condemned to death by Pontius Pilate.

Gospel Principles, an official Sunday School teaching tool for Mormons, states,

The Savior atoned for our sins by suffering in Gethsemane and by giving his life on the cross. It is impossible for us to fully understand how he suffered for all of our sins. In the Garden of Gethsemane, the weight of our sins caused him to feel such agony and heartbreak that he bled from every pore (see D&C 19:18–19). Later, as he hung upon the cross, Jesus suffered painful death by one of the most cruel methods known to man.³¹

Placing the events of Gethsemane on par with Golgotha, McConkie implies that what Jesus suffered on the cross was no worse than that which He suffered in the garden. He writes, “For while he was hanging on the cross . . . all the infinite agonies and merciless pains of Gethsemane recurred. . . . as pertaining this perfect atonement, wrought by the shedding of blood—I testify that it took place in Gethsemane and at Golgotha.”³²

Ezra Taft Benson, former President of the LDS Church, calls what Jesus did “an infinite and eternal atonement.”³³ One then must explore what makes them so. If the atonement is perfect, as the LDS Scriptures affirm, yet there is no original guilt transmitted from the sin of Adam to his posterity, one is left to wonder what the atonement of Christ accomplished (D&C 76:69). The answers begin to be revealed through the Mormon understanding of *agency*, which Adam and Eve possessed once they left the Garden of Eden. Still, with spiritual and physical death in the world and the powerful pull of the fall making it common for all men and women, through their individual choices, to sin, something had to remedy the situation.

³⁰Bruce McConkie, “The Purifying Power of Gethsemane,” *Ensign* (May 1986), [on-line]; accessed 9 November 2007; available from http://www.lds.org/portal/site/LDSOrg/menuitem.b12f9d18fae655bb69095bd3e44916a0/?vgnnextoid=2354fccf2b7db010VgnVCM1000004d82620aRCRD&locale=0&sourceId=e88b8949f2f6b010VgnVCM1000004d82620a_____; Internet.

³¹The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Gospel Principles*, 1997.

³²*Ibid.*

³³Millet and McDermott, *Claiming Christ*, 100.

Mormons affirm that Christ is the answer, but how He is the answer differs from the Bible. Christ's death on the cross remedied the problem of physical death for all mankind. Millet writes, "All who take a physical body—good or bad, evil or righteous—will be resurrected. This is, all will one day rise from death to life, their spirits reuniting with their bodies, never again to be divided."³⁴ In the sense that all will have immortality, this aspect of salvation is a universal gift. However, Christ's death does not alleviate the problem of spiritual death for all.

Instead, in the atonement Christ willing went to the cross to make a way for salvation, so that through *agency*, the ability of each man and woman to choose to do good or evil. LDS writers place tremendous emphasis on this concept. Agency, which is a "sovereign principle" according to Elder Boyd K. Packer. Citing the Pearl of Great Price, he writes that "according to the plan, agency must be honored. It was so from the beginning, from Eden" (Moses 7:32).³⁵ Agency is such an integral part of the Mormon purpose of atonement that Holland states it was part of the reason God foreordained the fall of Adam. Without opposition man would not be in a position to choose good or evil, thus not experience joy when he is eventually saved.³⁶

Therefore, salvation for the Mormon ultimately comes as a result of human choice. Latter-day Saints have something in common with many professing Christians in this regard. Stephen E. Robinson, in his critique of Calvinism, acknowledges that the LDS view is thoroughly Arminian.³⁷ On this front, Mormons do not define predestination in terms of individual salvation, with God determining in eternity past who would and would not be saved.

³⁴Millet, *The Mormon Faith*, 52.

³⁵Boyd K. Packer, "Atonement, Agency, Accountability," *Ensign* (May 1988), [on-line]; accessed 10 Nov 2007; available from http://www.lds.org/portal/site/LDSOrg/menuitem.b12f9d18fae655bb69095bd3e44916a0/?vgnextoid=2354fccf2b7db010VgnVCM1000004d82620aRCRD&locale=0&sourceId=916dd7630a27b010VgnVCM1000004d82620a_____; Internet.

³⁶Holland, "Atonement."

³⁷Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), 146.

Instead, predestination refers to God’s decision that all who would be saved would be saved through Christ’s atonement and obedience to the gospel.³⁸

This is where man’s part in salvation comes into play. The works that man do through their own free agency make the spiritual ramifications of the atonement personally effective. Millet writes, “Though salvation is available through the goodness and grace of Christ, there are certain things that must be done in order for divine grace and mercy to be activated in the lives of individual followers of Christ.”³⁹ Belief is but the first positive choice one makes. “Persons must come to him, accept him as Lord and Savior, and have faith in his name. The products of that faith include repentance, baptism, the reception of the Holy Spirit, and dedicated discipleship until the end of one’s life. Eternal life comes to those who believe and obey.”⁴⁰

Upon believing that Jesus atoned for sins humans now have a choice to make. Orson Pratt wrote that “the atonement of our Savior, which is the gift of God to the fallen inhabitants of this creation, lies at the foundation of all the other gifts given unto the children of men. It is because of this gift that we are permitted to repent of our sins.”⁴¹ The atonement is the foremost of blessings given to all by God, and upon belief in Jesus Christ one can then turn from their sins and follow the commandments. Millet describes the gospel as a covenant with God, in that He promises to save individuals and they choose to obey Him.⁴² In the atonement God has blessed everyone with immortality, but the spiritual aspect of salvation (exaltation and godhood)—the removal of personal sins—conditional. It is available to those who, through self-effort, prove they are worthy of the reward. The result is a “practical universalism” in which nearly everyone winds up in some kind of heaven/kingdom, whether it be telestial, terrestrial, or celestial.⁴³

³⁸Millet, *A Different Jesus?*, 95.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 95.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 95.

⁴¹N.B. Lundwall, *Masterful Discourses of Orson Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1962), 256.

⁴²Millet, *A Different Jesus?*, 97.

⁴³Richard Abanes, *Becoming Gods* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2004), 204.

All will enter the next life (except for a few, the most horrible sinners) and inherit one of the three degrees of glory, the lowest of which, the telestial, has a glory that “surpasses all understanding” (D&C 76:89). Faithful Latter-day Saints will be the ones who inherit the greater kingdom, achieving the highest degree of glory.⁴⁴ Elder Russell M. Nelson describes a strong connection between the work done in LDS temples and creation, fall, and atonement. He writes,

The earth was created and the Church was restored to make possible the sealing of wife to husband, children to parents, families to progenitors, worlds without end. This is the great latter-day work of which we are a part. That is why we have missionaries; that is why we have temples—to bring the fullest blessings of the Atonement to faithful children of God.⁴⁵

The outworking of Mormon faithfulness is bound to the ordinances of the temple. Millet states that they are sacred, and all one needs to do to participate is fulfill the prerequisites of faith, repentance, baptism, confirmation, and good standing in the Church.⁴⁶ Thus, the fall and the atonement find their end in those who keep the commandments—doing their part—by faithfulness within the Mormon mission.

A Christian Critique of the LDS Position

The LDS position on the package deal of fall and atonement is grounded in extrabiblical revelation. Condie’s assertions that the Book of Mormon and other LDS Scriptures fill in the gaps of understanding undermines the sufficiency of the Old and New Testaments. The LDS asserts that the gospel was lost in the days after the apostles were killed off and error crept in, filling the Church. Robinson asserts that entire books were lost from the canon.⁴⁷ However, there is “not a shred of solid historical evidence to support this claim.”⁴⁸ They credit Reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin with attempting to bring about change, but

⁴⁴Francis Beckwith, Carl Mosser, and Paul Owen, eds., *The New Mormon Challenge*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 46-47.

⁴⁵Nelson, “The Atonement”

⁴⁶Millet, *The Mormon Faith*, 173.

⁴⁷Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?*, 63.

⁴⁸Beckwith, Mosser, and Owen, *The New Mormon Challenge*, 321.

contend that without *priesthood authority* the gospel could not be recovered; that is, until it was restored through Joseph Smith.⁴⁹ Therefore, it is imperative that the Christian be ready to defend the truth of the Bible undermining attempts by Mormons to deem it insufficient in light what they assert was the Great Apostasy.⁵⁰

As for the view of Mormon writers concerning the fall of Adam, there are several logical problems that must be addressed. First, if the fall was not rebellion on the part of Adam and Eve—but instead a step downward, yet forward—it begs the question: Why were Adam and Eve punished by God?⁵¹ It seems they were just doing what was necessary for the progression of humanity. If no original guilt was passed down to the posterity of the first man and first woman, and man is able to choose to do good, the powerful pull argument for the atonement seems weak at best. In Mormon theory, because of the lack of original guilt and agency, it logically follows that sinless perfection is possible, a byproduct of the step forward. Beyond that, it is an absurdity to argue that Adam and Eve did not rebel against God when it is clear from Genesis 3 that they transgressed a direct command.

Second, if the fall was necessary for Adam and Eve to have free choice, then the fall was not the result of a choice. The Mormon definition of predestination precludes God from having determined that they would make the choice. Who, then, is responsible for Adam and Eve doing whatever it is they did? Remember, we cannot call it rebellion and we cannot call it choice. And if the fall was not a choice, how did it make further choices possible?⁵²

⁴⁹Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, “The Restoration of Truth: The Great Apostasy,” [online]; accessed 9 November 2007; available from http://www.mormon.org/mormonorg/v/index.jsp?vgnextoid=b4f4055b23710110VgnVCM1000003a94610aRCRD&locale=0&sourceId=39226db0580a1110VgnVCM100000176f620a____&hideNav=1; Internet.

⁵⁰The legitimacy of the LDS Scriptures is not the focus of this paper, but if engaging in any conversation with a Latter-day Saint, Christians are well-advised to be informed on the circumstances surrounding The Book of Mormon, The Doctrine and Covenants, and The Pearl of Great Price, along with evangelical claims against its authenticity. Thomas J. Finley and David G. Shepherd do an admirable job illustrating the shortcomings of the Book of Mormon in *The New Mormon Challenge*. By showing that the LDS Scriptures (excluding the Bible) have no objective historical or archaeological support, Christians can undermine assertion of the Great Apostasy.

⁵¹Millet and McDermott, *Claiming Christ*, 104.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 104.

Third, if the fall was not rebellion against God, and makes choices possible, such as choosing to believe and follow Jesus, why would there be an atonement in the first place? If Adam and Eve did not sin, what exactly needed to be covered in the atonement?⁵³ Since the Latter-day Saints still affirm that the New Testament is Scripture, they should know that the apostle Paul clearly states that Adam was an offender whose transgression brought about the death of many (Rom 5:14-15). Likewise, Jesus did not come to *make* a way for salvation—say, through keeping commandments—but He said that He *is* the way (John 14:6). He did not give His life as a ransom for a way, but as a “ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). People are cleaned only through the blood of Christ, which did much more than permit us to repent of our sins.⁵⁴ Christ became sin that those who believe would be seen as righteous in the sight of God (2 Cor 5:21). Men and women are not forgiven their sins based on following the commandments, but based only by the shed blood of Christ (Heb 9:22). However, for Mormons the cross of Christ only paves the way to a salvation merited by obedience to the law. The atonement is what makes faith, repentance, baptism, receiving the Holy Ghost, and keeping the commandments possible.⁵⁵

There are also several biblical problems that the LDS view of the fall and atonement present. First, the LDS teaching that procreation would have been impossible without the fall is inconsistent with the book of Genesis. Second Nephi 2:23a says, “And they would have had no children.” Yet God commanded Adam and Eve to “be fruitful and multiply” *before* Adam and Eve took of the fruit (Gen 1:28).⁵⁶ Being created complete and good in the eyes of God, this implies that they would have been able to enjoy all of the benefits of their union (Gen 1:31). Millet accuses evangelicals of an argument from silence on this issue, but that is illogical.⁵⁷ The

⁵³Ibid., 104.

⁵⁴N.B. Lundwall, *Masterful Discourses of Orson Pratt*, 256.

⁵⁵Millet, *A Different Jesus?*, 101.

⁵⁶Millet and McDermott, *Claiming Christ*, 104.

⁵⁷Ibid., 110.

command of God in Genesis 1:28 occurs before the sin. If anything, it is Millet from argues from silence, because nowhere in the actual account of the fall does it say that procreation would have been impossible without it.

The Book of Mormon states that mankind would not have been able to experience joy had there not been a fall, but this too is inconsistent with the biblical account (2 Nephi 2:23). In the pre-fall state there is no evidence whatsoever of any negative feelings whatsoever. On the contrary, the scene is one of joy. Adam rejoices upon the sight of the woman God fashioned from his rib (Gen 2:23). God saw that His creation was very good (Gen 1:31). Adam and Eve were naked and not ashamed (Gen 2:25). On the other hand, the scene after Adam and Eve transgress God's command is one of shame and sorrow (Gen 3:7-11). Rather than mankind taking a step *forward*, when Cain is punished for his sin he declares, "My punishment is too great to bear!" (Gen 4:13). The agency that Mormons claim man gained from the fall produces the exact opposite of joy. Moreover, if what Adam and Eve needed to be to move humanity forward, why did they sew for themselves fig leaves and hide from God in shame (Gen 3:8)? Far from being worthy of our deep gratitude, as Talmage suggests, the New Testament references to Adam never paint him in a positive light and always point to Christ as the answer to his failure.⁵⁸ The Book of Mormon, then, proves itself incompatible with the Bible.

LDS writers and official teaching go beyond the bounds of Scripture, and thus, minimize the cross for the sake of maximizing the garden. Evangelicals believe that the atonement took place exclusively on the cross.⁵⁹ It was at the cross that "He bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness" (1 Pet 2:24). It was at the cross that He reconciled the church, making peace through His blood (Col 1:20). The Old and New Testaments, books Christians and Mormons agree on, make no reference to the atonement occurring in Gethsemane.

⁵⁸Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 70.

⁵⁹Abanes, *Becoming Gods*, 186-87.

Packer makes the case that Gethsemane is where the atonement began because that is where He first began to bleed, tying it to the shed blood of the Passover lamb as a symbol of what would later come.⁶⁰ However, the Passover lamb's blood was sacrificed, having its blood shed by an external source (Exod 12). If that serves as the type of what would later come, the analogy makes no sense in Gethsemane. Jesus' blood poured out as sweat as a result of anguish regarding what He was *about to* endure. His dread was summed up in the fact that He knew He would bear the full fury of the wrath of the Father, becoming a propitiation for the sins of the people (Rom 3:25; Heb 2:17).

McConkie says that He was prostrate in Gethsemane overcome by the burden of the cup He was about to drink. But if the atonement was going on in Gethsemane, would not He be drinking the cup in the garden?⁶¹ The fact of the matter is that He did not cry out "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" until He was on the cross (Matt 27:46). If the atonement began in the garden, why did the cries to the Father, fulfilling Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, not begin there? Mormonism is forced to rely on extrabiblical writings and supercede the Scriptures in order to support claims that Gethsemane is part of the atonement (D&C 19:18-19).

The idea that the atonement began in Gethsemane and then re-occurred on the cross also betrays the biblical concept of a once for all sacrifice. The writer of Hebrews states, "By this will we be sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb 10:10). The earliest one could consider Jesus having offered is body, even in the most liberal use of the word "offered," is when He identified Himself to the Roman cohort and officers of the chief priests and Pharisees (John 18:5). His physical suffering at the hands of others did not begin until after that, yet the LDS writers continue to distinguish between Gethsemane and Golgotha and do not view the atonement as a *once for all* event.

⁶⁰Packer, "Atonement, Agency, Accountability."

⁶¹McConkie, "The Purifying Power of Gethsemane."

Atonement According to the Bible

Biblical Christianity's definition of the atonement of Jesus Christ is altogether different from the LDS view.⁶² Christians believe the fall of Adam to be outright rebellion against the revealed will of the Creator, the clay pots refusing the orders of the Potter and forming something different, according to their own desires (Rom 9:20-21). Because of their sin they were sentenced to death, spiritually and physically (Gen 2:16-17; 5:5; Eph 2:1). That death is transmitted to all of the descendants of Adam (1 Cor 15:22). How can a holy God then dwell with sinful people? The holiness of God demands that sin be punished; therefore, His righteousness is satisfied only through proper propitiation. For Old Testament believers it was a system of atoning sacrifices that looked forward to the work of Christ, who would mediate a new covenant, "where God's wrath was propitiated by the once-for-all substitutionary death of His Son."⁶³ This only occurs in Jesus Christ (Rom 3:25).

Jesus, the eternal Second Person of the Trinity (John 8:58; 10:30-33; Col 1:15-20), took on flesh and dwelt among man without sin (John 1:14; Heb 2:17; 4:15). He fulfilled the perfect righteousness requirement of God, then went to the cross, suffered, and died in the stead of the many He came to ransom (Mark 10:45; John 17:4). Jesus took on the sins of those He was saving, so that they could be credited with His perfect righteousness; therefore, God is just because He has punished sin once for all at the cross, and He is the justifier of those who have faith in His Son Jesus Christ (2 Cor 5:21; Rom 3:21-25). He is the substitute of those He came to save; therefore, the biblical view of the atonement is grounded in a view of penal substitution.

Conclusion

The Mormon view is rife with logical, biblical, and theological problems. Their errant views concerning the fall of Adam blossom into more error when you get the events

⁶²Giving a comprehensive definition of the atonement from a Christian perspective is not within the purview of this paper; however, this *very* short summary of the doctrine is in order.

⁶³Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2007), 52.

surrounding Jesus' death. The result is a soteriology based on the meritorious works of men and an atonement of Jesus that merely makes a way for salvation, but does not affect salvation itself. The atonement is extended from the cross back into the garden of Gethsemane, thereby minimizing what took place on Golgotha. The LDS view is one that is reliant on an authority outside of the Bible. Mormons add to the cross of Christ when they define the atonement; thus, they subtract from the richness and absolute necessity of the atonement, diminishing the cross so that it has very little meaning. Continuing revelation in Mormonism makes it extremely difficult for the Christian in an evangelistic setting. Still, believers are called to give a defense for the hope that within in them, to hold fast to sound doctrine, and refute those who contradict (1 Pet 3:15; Titus 1:9). Christians must remember that it is God who works both to will and to do according to His good pleasure (Phil 2:13), and if He can use the voice of a donkey to accomplish His purposes, He can use His people to proclaim His truth, that His sheep might hear His voice and follow (Num 22; John 10:27).

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