

# Adam's Navel

*Keith E. Norman*

A FEW YEARS AGO ON A CROSS-COUNTRY TRIP, my brother Paul and I detoured from Interstate 70 in western Missouri for some site-seeing. After stopping at the Far West temple site and the town square at Gallatin, we trekked a few more miles north. Our goal was that most esoteric of spots on the Mormon tour, Adam-ondi-Ahman.

The country road ended in the woods, where a marker identified a pile of stones as the spot where the Ancient of Days himself built the first sacrificial altar after his expulsion from paradise. Rumor had it that the local Saints replenished the heap each spring, but I pocketed a souvenir anyway.

Several paths wandered through the trees among the rubble of early Mormon homes, and we soon found ourselves in an oval-shaped clearing. Another, cruder sign affixed to a beech tree was no longer legible, but this, we surmised, must be the place where the great patriarch gathered his posterity to bestow his final blessing and exhortation. The late afternoon sun burnished the already dry grass, and the atmosphere was hushed, inviting reverence.

I could not hold back. "I walked today where Adam walked," I sang, "in days of long ago. . . ." Paul rebuked me for the sacrilege but could not altogether stifle a snicker of his own.

Latter-day Saints who interpret the scriptures literally must exercise great faith when reading the first chapters of Genesis. Here the sacred record tells us not only that the world was created in just six days, but that the lights came on in the morning and it got dark at bedtime, before the appearance of the sun, moon, and stars. The sky is referred to as a hard metallic bowl, aptly named *firmamentum* in Latin, which fit over the earth and held back the flood waters from above — until Chapter 7, that is, when the windows of

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heaven were opened to expedite the deluge. Plant life appeared a little too soon — again, before the sun, but at least the animals waited for the lights to be placed in the firmament before they sprang forth. And it is satisfying to eavesdrop on God when, as his final, crowning work, he creates us, mankind, male and female, in his own image. Never mind that he does this by speaking to himself in the plural. It's the results that count: He appoints us rulers over the entire world — we can spread out and subjugate the whole of it. Very good indeed.

Reading along in Chapter 2, the Creator is enjoying a well-deserved rest, when suddenly we find him starting over. Whereas in Chapter 1 he was a majestic and somewhat distant personality who got results just by giving the word, in the second version he shows up right on the scene and rolls up his sleeves. And is it the same planet? On the first try there was nothing in the beginning but water; this time not a drop is in sight. After irrigating from an underground well, the Lord plasters together our progenitor almost as a mud pie. Without delay he administers CPR, and Adam comes to life. As there isn't much for this first creature to see yet, the Lord sets about planting a garden for him to give him a little responsibility and something to occupy the time. He hires him as gardener and gives him a short course on which plants are not fit for human consumption. This one tree in the middle, he explains, is called the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Never mind why — its fruit means certain death. But it's only a single tree; don't give it a second thought. There's no end of safe food ripe for the picking.

Adam is going to be quite lonely in this setting, and this, the Lord realizes, is not good. So he goes back to the mud and sculpts more living things. Adam duly names the succession of animals, but they don't make good companions for him. Something is still missing. Finally the Lord decides that Adam will require surgery. After putting him under, the Lord extracts a rib, which he uses to build a suitable helper. Adam, when he comes to, is understandably tickled and calls her woman (Hebrew *isha*), because she was taken out of man (*ish*). They get on splendidly.

Of course such a setup can't last, and the next thing you know along comes the villain — a skulking serpent. This is no ordinary snake-in-the-grass, but a talking serpent who apparently still has legs to get around. He persuades the woman to taste the forbidden fruit by assuring her that it won't really kill her; in fact, it will make her wise. God, the archetypal patriarch, he adds, is just trying to keep her in her place. Being quite naive about serpents, she bites, and lo and behold, it works! *Now* she gets it. Adam, come here, she says, I've got something to show you. Some villain! Some fruit!

Not surprisingly, their first big discovery is that they are stark naked. When the Lord comes by for his daily stroll, the couple hide in the bushes. Being very astute, the Lord senses that something is amiss, so he summons and questions the pair. They cower modestly in their fig leaves, but neither is willing to take the rap. The Lord is understandably upset and curses everyone involved. The snake suffers amputation, the woman has to stay home with the kids, and the man is demoted to dirt farmer. The dirt is struck barren.

Finally, the Lord, in a fit of jealousy, evicts the humans from their home in Eden. They may have become smart like us, he tells himself (in the plural), but we will keep immortality to ourselves. So he sets a couple of dragons with a revolving, fiery sword to bar them from the tree of life. This tree is another one of the unusual species in the garden, and *its* fruit could actually make them — but that's another story.

#### APPROACHES TO CREATION ACCOUNTS

##### *Biblical Literalism*

Although the account of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden makes for a great read and is the one Bible story that is known the world over, even a true-blue literalist must swallow hard to accept it as a documentary of how the world and the human race really began. Heaven and earth in six days? A talking snake? Fruit that can make you wise or immortal? In the words of Alice, "There's no use trying, one *can't* believe impossible things."

"I dare say you haven't had much practice," replied the White Queen. "When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast" (Carroll 1962, 233). Today, of course, an early-rising saint can get in two sessions before a late breakfast and thus easily top Her Majesty from Wonderland's prodigious feat.

An unquestioning biblical literalism was the norm in Mormonism's formative years. For some time now, and especially since Darwin, the debate has raged over whether the biblical version of creation and fall is history. Was Adam a real person, the first man on earth? Or is this all just a myth, the product of a primitive mind trying to explain how things came to be? I think it was Mark Twain who wondered whether Adam had a navel. It does give one pause.

I contend that these questions of science versus creation and history versus myth, framed in such either-or terms, obscure the real meaning of the Genesis text. They produce plenty of heat, but very little light, precisely because they are set up as alternatives with the assumption that only one version can be true. On the one hand, if the scientific theory of evolution over eons of time is accurate, then the Genesis account of the origins of man cannot be true. If it does not recount actual historical events, the story of Adam and Eve is "mere" myth or fable. The opposite view holds that *because* the biblical account is inspired by God, it is necessarily true history; God cannot lie. Modern science is mistaken in this case and should be ignored.

Of course, a third alternative attempts to resolve the tension by compromise. Proponents of this view would reconcile the scientific and biblical accounts by explaining away the differences as arising from misinterpretations. They often express confidence that future discoveries or better analysis will show that both versions are saying the same thing: the order of creation in Genesis 1 follows the broad outlines of the scientific version; the "days" are not twenty-four hour periods but seem to correspond to geological eras (or at

least should be understood as 1,000 years each according to the Lord's calendar); Adam was the first man with a full-sized brain, or perhaps the first man to hold the priesthood . . . and so on. This approach requires its proponents to dismiss a disturbingly large number of specific details as mistranslations or corruptions of the original text.

All three positions — the literal, the scientific, or some blend of the two — suffer from the attempt to impose modern standards of science and history on a text written thousands of years before those standards were invented. Our value system insists that for something to be true it must correspond to objective reality. Indeed, such correspondence is the classical philosophical definition of truth. Consequently, we equate myth with the false, the made-up, the naive, and the superstitious. Because we prefer our history sanitized and documented, we refuse to acknowledge the obvious mythological elements in the opening chapters of Genesis in order to protect its authority.

Such cultural chauvinism is unfortunate, because it tends to obscure the deeper meaning and richness of the text. A narrow focus on the particularity of historical incidents not only restricts our vision to a surface, superficial understanding, but also distorts the message of the opening chapters of Genesis. Recognizing the function of myth removes those blinders and opens us to the universal, symbolic truths crucial to the text's spiritual import.

### *Two Creation Accounts: Source Criticism*

The first step in getting past misconceptions about the biblical creation story is to recognize the setting in which the first chapters of Genesis were written. We have already noted that Chapters 1 and 2 offer two differing accounts of the creation story with conflicting details. Further analysis of style, vocabulary, theology, and purpose has allowed scholars to date Genesis 1 through 2:4a to the time during or immediately after the exile in Babylon. The writer is concerned with preserving and restoring the religion of Israel in a time of great uncertainty, and his themes are stability, legitimacy, and the proper performance of ritual. He is known anonymously as the priestly (P) writer or writers. P's magnum opus was the book of Leviticus, but he contributed to other parts of the Bible, including the genealogical lists of Genesis (Gottwald 1985, 140, 170). It is not surprising that P ends his account of creation with the summary statement, "These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth" (Gen. 2:4). Even the ground we stand on has a pedigree.

The King James version of Genesis, following the manuscripts available at the time, obscures the transition to the second account by running P's conclusion into the new statement, which is now numbered 2:4b. A better translation of this opening might read, "In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, before there were any plants in the earth or herbs growing in the fields . . ." (Speiser 1982, 14–15). This is another way of saying, "In the beginning," but this dry, barren world awaiting the Creator is a very different scenario from the chaotic deep P describes. We note right off that this second writer calls the deity "Lord," while P referred to him as "God"

(Hebrew *Eloheim*). Lord is the English equivalent of *Adonai*, the Hebrew circumlocution used to avoid pronouncing the sacred name of God, YHWH, from which we derive the name Jehovah (scholarly consensus now vocalizes this as Yahweh). According to P's version, this name was first revealed to Moses (Ex. 6:3), and any use before then would be an anachronism. The liberal use of the name Yahweh (or Jehovah) has earned for the author of Genesis 2:4b–4:27 the designation of J. He is a masterful storyteller but a less careful scholar. J's is actually the earlier of the two creation accounts by several hundred years. He reflects the national self-confidence and less restrictive theology of David and Solomon's reigns (Gottwald 1985, 137; Speiser 1982, xxvii).

Conspicuous by omission from this discussion of authorship is Moses. Although the traditional ascription of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, to the great Hebrew prophet is no longer tenable among scholars, much of the oral, if not written, tradition used by the later authors can be traced back to Moses' time, or even earlier. Nowhere, however, does the text itself claim Moses as the author, and it tells his story in the third person, including an account of his death. Several passages in Genesis, for instance the phrase "even to this day" (19:38) or the list of the kings of Edom down to the time of David (36:31), clearly point to a much later author.

Latter-day Saints have a tougher time than most dismissing Moses as the author of Genesis. Joseph Smith's revision of the opening chapters is now canonized by the LDS church as the book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price, and the RLDS use the revised or inspired version as the standard text. However, I regard the Prophet's work here as primarily doctrinal correction rather than textual restoration or historical reconstruction. The Mormon canon adds significant dimensions to the creation accounts, but it is important to deal with Genesis on its own terms first.

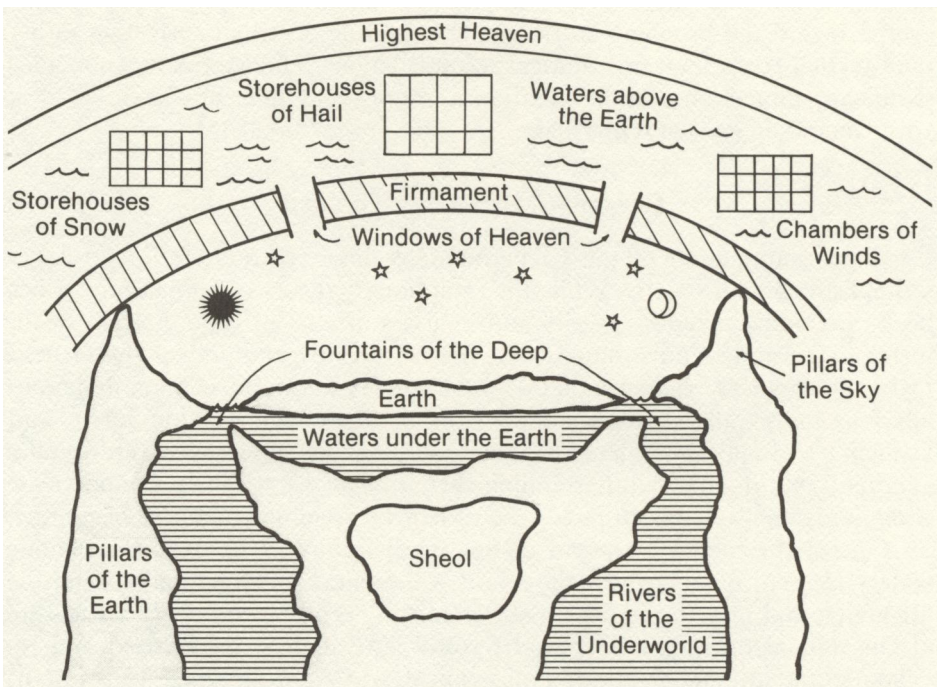
### CREATION MYTHS AND GENESIS

Close examination of the background to these creation stories precludes a simplistic, literalist view. While the evolutionary theory of human origins has been developing, new discoveries and analyses of ancient Near Eastern documents and artifacts have illuminated the cultural background of the Genesis text. Scholars now recognize that the biblical creation stories contain numerous allusions and parallels to earlier myths from Mesopotamia, Babylon, Egypt, and Canaan. Virtually every detail in Genesis 1–3 has some reference to these tales (Gaster 1969, 3–50). Understanding these similarities will help us appreciate what is distinctive and inspired about Israel's recounting of the beginning.

One of the most widespread mythic motifs refers to the dark and chaotic watery element out of which the world was formed. The battle between the life-giving god and the serpent monster of the deep was the principal feature of the annual or seasonal renewal/fertility festivals that dramatized and revalidated the original creation: in Canaan, Baal fought the sea serpent Lotan; in Babylon, Marduk slew Tiamat. *Tiamat* is thought to be a cognate with

the Hebrew *tehom*, translated as “the deep” in Genesis 1:2. P sees creation out of chaos (formless and void) as a process of separation: light is separated from darkness, land from water, and plants and animals from the earth. Chaos and darkness are pushed back but not destroyed, and the chaotic floods surround the earth above and below, as well as on all sides (Anderson 1962, 730). In the Old Testament conception of the world exemplified in P, the sun, moon, and stars are suspended under the firmament, a solid barrier resting on the pillars of the sky to hold back the waters above. Sheol, where shades of former mortals dwell, is encased in a kind of underground island. The whole cosmic structure is designed to protect against the breakout of the chaos represented in the surrounding waters (Gaster 1962; Gottwald 1985, 474–76).

The mythic personification of chaos as a sea monster, although only hinted at by P, is perhaps the most widespread creation motif in the Bible. It is variously referred to as Rahab, Leviathan, Tehom, or Yam in the Psalms (18:5; 74:12–14; 77:16–19; 89:9–10; 104:5–9), Isaiah (44:27; 50:2; 51:9–11), Job (9:8; 26:11–13; 38:8–11), and elsewhere (Nahum 1:4; Habakkuk 3:8, 10). This formless monster from the depths, like the “undertoad” of Garp’s world (Irving 1979, 474–75), is capable of breaking out in a destructive rampage at any time. When God loses patience with his creatures, he need only step back to loosen the floods from above and below (Gen. 7:11). Israel celebrates its victory over Pharaoh in the “Song of the Sea” (Ex. 15:1–18) after *tehomot* (compare with Tiamat), the floods, cover the Egyptian army. Christ affirms his



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creative power in calming the raging sea (Mark 4:39–41) and compares his coming death to Jonah being swallowed by the monster of the sea (Matt. 12:40). When God's work is finally complete, the sea will be no more (Rev. 21:1); the dragon will be slain at last (Isa. 27:1). It is significant that in the creation cycle of the opening chapters of Genesis, the forces of disorder or chaos return in the form of a serpent to undermine the Creator's work. This animal was considered particularly cunning because of its seemingly effortless mobility. The snake's ability to shed its skin and perpetually renew itself appeared to give it the secret of immortality (Gaster 1969, 36). Casting the serpent as villain may also reflect a polemic against the Canaanite fertility cult, in which the snake as a phallic symbol represented life, death, and wisdom. The cult long held a certain fascination and temptation for Israel (Vawter 1956, 64).

Another widespread myth is that of a god forming the first humans from mud or clay. This ancient motif often involves breathing life into the creature. Creation in the image of the god is also common in oriental myths. In Egypt and Babylon, the king was regarded as the image, and thus the representative or viceroy of God on earth (Westermann 1984, 152–54). The creation of mankind in God's image in Genesis 1 is followed by the commission to subdue and have dominion over the rest of creation: the royalty metaphor is transferred to all mankind (compare with Psalm 8:4–6).

A number of the mythical features in Genesis 1–3 are conspicuous because they seem superfluous to the narrative. The tree of life recalls one of the most common myths in ancient cultures (Vawter 1956, 54; Westermann 1984, 213). Here it is mentioned but briefly and is connected only to other overtly mythological motifs — the jealous god who prevents man from grasping immortality and the guardian creatures or magical weapon that cut off access to the treasure. These elements would hardly be missed from the story. On the surface their inclusion seems arbitrary, as if J were juggling the contents of a creation grab bag.

One of the most fascinating parallels to Genesis is found in the Babylonian Gilgamesh epic, from about 2000 B.C. — long before even the time of Moses (Pritchard 1958, 40–75). Enkidu, the prototype human hero, is created as a wild man, naked and uncivilized. He lives with animals until the god Ana sends a woman to seduce him. This encounter results in the loss of his super-human agility and strength but gives him wisdom and understanding, “like a god.” He thus becomes fully human, dons clothes, and the animals flee from him. When Enkidu faces death, he curses the woman who brought him awareness of his mortality. In a later episode, his companion Gilgamesh is in quest of the plant of life, but just as the means of immortality is within his grasp, he loses it to a serpent. If J was not directly familiar with the Gilgamesh cycle, he was certainly influenced by similar tales (Westermann 1984, 51–52; Anderson 1975, 210). Sumerian literature contemporary with the Gilgamesh epic speaks of a blissful paradise garden where there is no sorrow. Some versions specify that the garden is watered from a source that divides into four streams flowing into the four corners of the world, strongly suggesting the later geographical description in Genesis 2:10–14 (Von Rad 1972; Gaster 1969, 27).

But, although the authors of the Israelite creation stories drew upon the mythic cultural background of the ancient Near East, their focus is entirely different. In fact, the thrust of the early chapters of Genesis to demythologize this common heritage. The decided monotheistic emphasis retains only an echo of the pantheon of gods in the earlier stories. P's concluding statement, that *these* are the generations of the heavens and of the earth (Gen. 2:4a), seems to mock the theogonies that depict creation as a process of sexual generation from the pagan deities, as when the earth mates with the sky to produce plants and animals. Similarly, the heavenly bodies are no longer astrological deities that rule human fate but only govern the days and seasons under God's direction. The garden is planted to provide food for humans, not as a resort for the gods with men as their slaves.

The thrust of this demythologizing was to disassociate Israel's religion, which was grounded in God's mighty acts in history, from the ritualized mythical nature cycles celebrated by her neighbors. Creation, as it functions in the Old Testament, is not a timeless, mystical drama that must be repeated periodically to ensure fertility or avert the wrath of the gods. It is, rather, the prelude to history and establishes the basis of humanity's relationship to God (Anderson 1962, 726–27).

#### MYTH AND RELIGIOUS HISTORY IN GENESIS

If the biblical writers wanted to ground their religious faith in history and experience, why did they make such extensive use of the myths of the surrounding cultures? Again, this question falters on the modern assumption that myth and history are alternative categories, representing, respectively, the fanciful and the real. We need to expand our definition of myth to encompass the understanding of those cultures who created and used it.

Historians of religion define myth as a specialized category of literature which communicates otherworldly or metaphysical concepts in the language of this world. Myth uses poetry and symbolism to express truth indirectly. Thus "the dragon-killing creation myth, for example, found in so many Near Eastern mythologies, appears in the Bible too, not as a matter of belief or ritual but of poetic imagery" (R. Frye 1983, 92). The poetic meaning of these Old Testament texts is not just "something read in later on the basis of more sophisticated philosophies. These implications are inherent in the myths and usages from the beginning" (Gaster 1969, xxxiv). In other words, biblical writers used myth consciously and intentionally, not because they didn't know any better. Our recognition of this literary fact by no means detracts from the value of the narrative. "Legends are not lies," as Hermann Gunkel recognized almost a century ago, but "a particular form of poetry," and it is this literary form that makes the stories of Genesis among "the most beautiful and profound ever known on earth" (1964, 3).

By looking beyond everyday experience, myth takes us where history dares not tread. It infuses ordinary events with a significance beyond the mundane by assimilating them to archetypal models. "Myth, or *mythopoeia* . . . en-



visages and expresses things in terms of their impact, not of their essence; it is impressionistic, not analytic, and it finds expression in poetry and art rather than in science. Its concern is with experience, not with categorization; it [translates] the real into the ideal" (Gaster 1969, xxxiv).

In this sense, the issue of history versus myth is not a concern of the biblical writers. Both categories are concerned with past events but view them from different perspectives. Myth is not antihistorical or ahistorical, but suprahistorical. It focuses on inner reality, the meaning of the past, and on those issues which are decisive for the present. Historical accounts of actual events are subject to external criteria of truth, but a poetic form such as myth has a broader scope. "Poetry expresses the universal in the event, the aspect of the event that makes it an example of the kind of thing that is always happening. In our language, the universal in the history is what is conveyed by the *mythos*, the shape of the historical narrative. A myth is designed not to describe a specific situation but to contain it in a way that does not restrict its significance to one situation" (N. Frye 1982, 46). Historical accuracy in this frame of thinking is not an end in itself, and events are recounted or reshaped in terms of their spiritual profundity. Nephi advocates a similar editorial bias in record keeping when he emphasizes the spiritual history of his nation in preference to political events (Jacob 1:2; 1 Ne. 19:6; 9:4). Our cultural prejudice, which devalues myth, fable, or fiction as "not really true," is directly at odds with the biblical mindset. The presence of myth in the scriptures by no means precludes inspiration or revelation in producing the text; God speaks to us according to our ability to understand, and myth can be a very powerful means of conveying truth.

Jesus understood this fact, and his own literary skill was quite sophisticated. The truths taught in the parables clearly do not depend on their historicity. Christ began the story of the Good Samaritan with the characteristic phrase, "a certain man," roughly equivalent to our "once upon a time." Although the details of this tale are quite realistic, acknowledging that the Good Samaritan is a fictional character does not seem to bother us. In fact, the parables' non-specificity allows us to identify more closely with the characters.

Similarly, by re-presenting Israel's early and prehistory in mythical terms that universalize the events of the past, Genesis involves us in the drama. Many scholars believe that the creation stories in Genesis, as well as numerous references to creation in the Psalms (24, 47, and 93–100), reflect the liturgy of the temple rites in Jerusalem (Eliade 1971; Nibley 1963). In common with the customs of most of their neighbors, the ancient Jews used recitation or even dramatic reenactment in their New Year festival to commemorate the triumph of God over darkness and chaos. Although the Jewish version was not explicitly a fertility rite, weddings were often celebrated in this context, and the new couples participated in the blessing bestowed on the first human pair. The New Year was preceded by the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), with its fastings, confessions, purification rites, and purges, culminating in the expulsion of a scapegoat, which carried the community's sins off into the desert. Having thus annulled his own history, the worshipper suspended time and could return

to the primal moment, free to participate in the regeneration of the cosmos and begin a pure existence each year (Eliade 1971, 35, 52–74, 158). Our own New Year's resolutions are but a watered down version of this impulse.

For Christians, the real renewal festival is Easter. Not only does it herald the regeneration of the earth (in the northern hemisphere), but it celebrates the renewal and triumph of Christ, the new Adam, the first of a new humanity. Eliade points out that Easter and New Year's Day were traditionally the foremost baptismal occasions for Christians. "On the cosmic level [baptism] is equivalent to the deluge" (Eliade 1971, 59), with the water symbolizing the chaos out of which a new creation emerges.

This background makes it evident that the view of the creation and structure of the physical universe set forth in Genesis does not reflect an attempt to objectively document a historical or scientific creation. As Claus Westermann points out, "It is clearly not P's intention to describe creation in such a way as we can imagine how it took place" (1984, 116). No eyewitnesses took notes; no cameras were on the scene. Hollywood's attempts to reconstruct the narrative on film are misleading precisely to the extent they achieve realism. The biblical writers strove to universalize, not to particularize. "Genesis 2–3 is not concerned with two individuals but with the primeval representatives of the human race" (Westermann 1984, 278).

Both P and J support this interpretation. P does not mention an individual at all: God created mankind (Heb. *'adam*), male and female, as a species, just as the animals before them, "each according to their kind." The text in most English translations of Chapters 2 and 3 give Adam, and eventually Eve, as proper names. However, the Hebrew word *'adam* means mankind or humanity and is translated accordingly in Genesis 1:26–27. J's account in Genesis 2:7 brings out the pun on the cognate *'adamah*, ground or soil: the Lord formed *'adam* from the dust of the *'adamah*. Furthermore, the text in the Garden of Eden narration almost always uses the word in the generic form, with the article, *ha-'adam*. Translating this as "the man Adam" is redundant and inaccurate. Not until the end of Chapter 4, relating the birth of Seth after Adam and Eve enter the world as we know it, does J drop the article, indicating a shift to a proper name. Similarly, Eve is a rough transliteration of the Hebrew *hawu*, and here the author's etymology as "the mother of all living" pointedly recognizes her representative or universal status. The focus of the story is not to give us historical information about the original man and woman as individuals, but to help us identify with them, and so to recognize both our maker and our responsibility for our alienation from him. Our goal should be to restore our intended relationship and present ourselves before him in innocence, stripped of worldly concerns.

Approaching the text in this way destroys the rationale for an opposition between the Bible and scientific research into the origins of the human species. The Genesis accounts are interested in theology, not science. "All efforts to reconcile biblical cosmogony with modern science," writes Gaster, "rest . . . on a fundamental misunderstanding of its purpose and intent, and on a naive confusion between two distinct forms of mental activity" (1962, 702). Modern

scientific creationists refuse to understand this and end up being false to both science and scripture. Recognizing that Genesis uses poetic and mythical literary forms to communicate its theological message exposes the conflict between science and religion as a red herring.

Without the distraction of irrelevant concerns, Genesis 1–3 reveals a profound insight into the human condition and our relationship to God. The wisdom of the editor who combined the P and J narratives becomes apparent. The accounts are complimentary: their discrepancies fade into the background in the sweep of the tale. We can only touch on the highlights here.

In contrast to many ancient religions, biblical faith is anthropocentric. The world exists for humans; we are not mere playthings or slaves to the gods. J makes this point immediately by having the Lord form man as the first of his works; all else is ancillary. P accomplishes the same thing by placing us at the climax or pinnacle of God's creations. To be in the image of God means that we have a familial relationship to him, as Genesis 5:1–3 makes clear. Only we, among all the creatures, can hold a dialogue with the Creator. We are assigned dominance and given responsibility as partners, or counterparts, to God on earth. Surrounding cultures made their kings or heroes the sons and representatives of God, but Hebrew thought exalted all mankind to this status, describing us as crowned with glory and honor, only a little lower than God (Ps. 8:5; Anderson 1962, 729). We are thus freed from polytheism, materialism, and fatalism.

Such an optimistic picture, however, seems at odds with everyday existence, and Genesis gives us a striking account of how we got into our present mess. Both narratives exonerate God from the evil and imperfection in the world. At the end of the first section, God pronounces his work "very good"; he had brought order and beauty out of formless chaos. The motif of creation through struggle, which lies behind P's account, is continued in J's saga of humanity and indeed throughout the Old Testament. God continually must contend with the wickedness and disorder of humanity. He is the Lord of hosts; his prophets are embattled heralds. The tempter serpent in Genesis 3 represents a new breakout of chaos, a resistance to the order and tranquility established by God. Humans compound the problem by misuse of free choice, thus increasing spiritual entropy. The blame for moral evil rests squarely on us, not on some outside force; God interrogates the man and the woman, not the serpent. The tranquility and abundance of the garden represent both the bounty of God's gifts to us and the peace of an unspoiled relationship to him. Even after we alienate ourselves from God, he strives for our welfare, typified by the gift of clothing to protect us from the harshness of the real world.

The ambiguity of the choice faced by Adam and Eve, however, makes this more than a simple fable of good versus evil. The woman chooses the godlike wisdom of experience over the naive innocence of a sheltered existence. In this sense, expulsion from the garden represents cutting the apron strings as well as rebellion, a necessary step in attaining maturity and full human potential. The conditions of mortality are not so much a punishment as a statement of the human condition. Fallibility, shame, and suffering are inseparably linked with

pleasure, knowledge, and fulfillment. Opposition and paradox are the terms of our existence; the joys cannot be separated from the ills. Westermann describes the woman's "punishment" in terms of the irony: "just where the woman finds her fulfillment in life, her honor and her joy, namely in her relationship to her husband and as mother of her children, there too she finds that it is not pure bliss, but pain, burden, humiliation and subordination" (1984, 263). Similarly, man's work in the field, producing life-giving food, is beset with trouble, sweat, and thorns. That the woman transgresses first does not degrade her but shows how the man's helper ironically becomes a hindrance.

In fact, Genesis 2 is unique among creation myths of its era in granting woman fully human status and partnership with man. The King James Bible, which describes woman as "an help *meet* for man" (v. 18), is often misunderstood as a help-*mate*, a subordinate maid to do his bidding. The word "meet" here means proper, suitable, corresponding to; in other words, one of his own kind — "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh" (v. 23), compared to the animals, who were not suitable partners. "What is meant," writes Westermann, "is personal community of man and woman in the broadest sense — bodily and spiritual community, mutual help and understanding, joy and contentment in each other" (1984, 232).

A major theme of the Genesis myth is the sanctification of family life and the relation between the sexes, as Jesus reiterated in Matthew 19:4–6. The text makes no suggestion that the transgression had anything to do with sex. It is true that the knowledge gained from their choice entailed an awareness of the man and woman's sexuality — they were ashamed to be found naked — but this shame is not associated with lust or sexual sin. That Eve is granted her name or title as mother of all living after the sentence is pronounced emphasizes that the punishment did not nullify the blessing of procreation.

#### LATER DOCTRINES

The foregoing description of theological motifs in Genesis 1–3 is by no means exhaustive. Many of the doctrines associated with these creation stories, however, were developed by later exegetes and rely to a great extent on a literal, historical interpretation. The most prominent are teachings about the fall of man, original sin, and the origin of death.

##### *Jewish and Christian Contributions*

It is striking that the Old Testament never mentions the Fall or any concept relating to it. There is no lament over a lost golden age or blame for the primeval man for spoiling things. Jewish thought tends to value man as good and capable of communion with God. Only in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha is Adam's original stature greatly magnified and the cosmological significance of his sin emphasized (II Enoch 30:8ff; Ecclesiasticus 49:16; Life of Adam 12ff; Apocalypse Baruch 17:3; II Esdras 3:4–21, 4:30, 7:11–12; Jubilees 3:28–29). This trend is continued in rabbinical literature and Philo, which also influenced the New Testament, especially notable in Paul's writings

(Luke 3:38; Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:22, 45–47). The development of the atonement doctrine was the major impetus for the prominence of the Fall in Christianity. If the account of the Fall is taken as a figurative expression of our alienation from God, the atonement may need to be understood in a more subjective manner as well (Norman 1985).

Although inspired by Pauline thought, the principal features of the original sin dogma were outlined by Augustine in the late fourth century. In spite of the fact that DNA had not yet been discovered, Augustine developed a theory implying that Adam's guilt and corrupt nature are biologically passed on through the seed in procreation (Lampe 1978, 162; Pelikan 1971, 300). The logical if extreme conclusion was reached in the Calvinistic teaching of the total depravity of man. This classic doctrine of original sin requires a literal interpretation of Genesis 3. Recognizing the mythical nature of the account, however, exposes the absurdity of the idea that we inherit the guilt and responsibility of a progenitor's sin. Rather, the mythical understanding points to our *psychological* affinity with the characters in the story: they represent humanity and illustrate the contradictions of our existence.

The issue of death in Genesis 2–3 is more puzzling. Traditionally, Adam's transgression has been blamed for bringing death into the world, but this is never explicit in the text. The Lord's warning is not that partaking the forbidden fruit would introduce death, but that it would result in death on the same day. Thus the serpent's refutation of this as an idle threat turns out to be correct. The tree of life further complicates matters, since it was not forbidden before expulsion from the garden. Understanding the story as myth rather than as a historical account makes such narrative lapses unimportant. On one level, the message is that eternal life is inaccessible to humans because they are formed out of the dust of the earth. Physical death is unavoidable. On a higher plane, it tells us that disobedience or defiance of God means spiritual death, exclusion from fellowship with God, who is the source of life. Misuse of our agency to choose has grave consequences.

### *Mormon Contributions*

The position and contribution of Mormonism on this topic is somewhat complex and deserves separate treatment. I will only suggest some preliminary observations and conclusions here.

LDS statements on the literalness of the creation and Garden of Eden stories are somewhat schizophrenic. Adam is almost always seen as a historical figure, however, and the historicity of Genesis is intensified for Mormons by such peculiar features in their tradition as Adam-ondi-Ahman, the temple endowment, and the Adam-God theory. On the other hand, Mormons are explicitly told in the temple that the formation of the man from the dust and of woman from the man's rib is only figurative. In addition, there is a strong impulse in Mormonism to universalize the Adam and Eve story — to invest it with mythical dimensions. The temple ritual instructs participants to consider themselves to be Adam or Eve as the drama unfolds. Mormon scripture also seems to recognize that Adam is more than a proper name for a single indi-

vidual: “the first man of all men have I called Adam, which is many,” the Lord explains in Moses 1:34.

Although Joseph Smith’s earlier writings largely accept the traditional language of the Fall, the doctrine of original sin was repudiated from the first. Without Adam’s transgression and fall, there would have been no procreation and no opportunity for growth or joy (2 Ne. 2:22–25; Moses 5:10–11). Opposition is a metaphysical necessity for existence itself, and we could not progress without experiencing evil (2 Ne. 2:11–13).

The prophet’s two attempts to rework the Genesis creation story, found in the books of Moses and Abraham, provide a fascinating study of the evolution of his own doctrinal thinking. In his 1830 revision of the opening chapters of the Bible, later published as the book of Moses, Joseph did soften the overt mythology of a talking serpent by specifying that it was possessed, so to speak, by Satan. But he made little attempt to update the scientific details: the firmament still divides the waters above and below, and the events occur in the same skewed order as in Genesis 1. Doctrinal correction is evident, however. When God says “let us,” in Moses 2:26, he is explicitly addressing his “Only Begotten.” The discrepancies between Chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis are resolved by making the first version a spiritual creation (Moses 3:5). It is this feature of Mormon scripture — the insistence that the description of creation in Genesis 1 is spiritual rather than physical — that belies the attempt to reconcile Genesis 1 with the scientific version of creation.

However, the succeeding description in the book of Moses, based on what we have attributed to J, is not clearly physical either. Of the garden the Lord just planted and made to grow, he says, “it was spiritual in the day that I created it; for it remaineth in the sphere in which I, God, created it,” implying that only with the Fall did the earth as we know it come into being (Moses 5:9). Such an interpretation, of course, would support a mythical view: it takes place in a realm where the rules of history are not yet operative.

Perhaps the most far-reaching difference in the creation account in Moses as compared to Genesis is the connection with the preexistence in Moses 4:1–4. This new motif was extensively developed in the account found in Abraham 3, which dates from 1842. Here the preexistent intelligences were organized and assigned to leadership roles, and a plan to further their progression explained. This plan had risks, since it involved the freedom to choose evil as well as good, the possibility of damnation as well as exaltation. The choice was not obvious at all, and many opted for Satan’s safer alternative.

Linking this preexistence scenario with the Adam and Eve story is important in terms of its mythical significance. The literary category of myth or prehistory in Genesis 2–3 corresponds to the doctrinal category of preexistence in the book of Abraham. The Garden of Eden story recapitulates the dilemma and choice we all faced in pre-earth life: whether to remain in static security or risk all and suffer pain, guilt, disappointment, and death in order to realize our full humanity and fulfill our potential to become as the Gods. This constitutes the meaning of the Fall for Latter-day Saints and is the reason we reject the original sin dogma’s pessimistic view of humanity. There is no other way

to progress, to gain knowledge of good and bad, than to confront and experience evil directly and on our own, apart from the God's presence. However, it is our choice; we cannot hold God responsible for the plan of salvation's negative aspects or our failings in the struggle.

The book of Abraham version reflects a distinct attempt to make the creation story more rational and update its doctrinal points. The creator "Gods" here do not get instantaneous results from a mere word: they "cause" things to be formed and watch to see that they are obeyed (4:4, 10, 18). Creation does not happen in just seven days but in eras or "times" (4:8, 13, 19, 23, 31; 5:2-3). When the lights are set in place during the fourth time, the Gods again divide the day from the night, a specification that seems to recognize the problem of day and night preceding the creation of the sun.

The most striking aspect of the Mormon belief system concerning the creation myth is the temple endowment. This ritual presents the Genesis text in dramatic form reminiscent of ancient creation-new year ceremonies. It contains virtually all of the classic elements — purification, expiation of sin, dramatic reenactment of the creation and struggle between the forces of order and chaos, sanctification of marriage and the blessing of progeny, and even association with dead ancestors (Eliade 1971, 52; Nibley 1963). The endowment is clearly not intended to recite literal history. Except for replacing the serpent with Satan and the aside about the creation of Adam and Eve as figurative, little attempt is made to soften the mythological elements of Genesis 1-3. In contrast to the rest of biblical history, where communication with Deity is through visions or revelation, here everything takes place in direct confrontation between humans and God. The temple version goes beyond even Genesis, adding such anachronisms to the Garden of Eden scenes as the Apostles Peter, James, and John and a nineteenth-century Protestant minister. Temple worshippers, most of whom are acting as proxy for deceased predecessors, switch from being Adams and Eves to being members of an apostate congregation and back again. In true mythic fashion, time is thus abolished, as is space: the temple is where heaven, earth, and hell meet, and all mankind — past, present, and future — convenes there. Only in this setting do we learn the true meaning of life.

What, then, shall we say about Missouri? After all, Adam-ondi-Ahman is canonized in D&C 116. There's even a song about it, number 49 in the new hymnal. However, despite my souvenir procured from the very spot, I contend that the significance of this, too, belongs to the realm of mythical truths. Just as Brigham Young and the Mormon pioneers reenacted the Israelite trek through the wilderness, Joseph Smith's designation of the beginning, the original sacred space, the center (or navel!) of the world, as being in America reinforces the idea of the New World as the promised land, the latter-day Zion. It is an elaboration of Book of Mormon doctrine: God has established his covenant anew among the Gentiles in a pristine land, a second Eden. As the tenth article of faith adds, this will be where the Lord returns at the last day, to renew the earth to its paradisiacal glory. The end is to be a restoration and fulfillment of the beginning: creation redeemed.

Myth, properly understood, is a powerful means of religious expression and should not be dismissed as though it were the antithesis of truth. Myth is an important element of our religious heritage. To recognize the creation story in Genesis 1–3 as myth rather than history is not to denigrate its value, just as we do not reject the truth of Lehi's vision of the tree of life because it is only a dream or disregard the parables of Jesus because they are fictional. Rather, these literary forms make the truths they teach all the more relevant to each of us. "Adam and Eve . . . are . . . man and woman in general; we are all expelled from our Edens and sacrifice our [innocent or naive] happiness" to our selfish ambitions (Gaster 1969, xxxiv).

Because myth and history deal with different levels of reality, it is still possible to consider Adam and Eve as actual historical figures, while recognizing that the account of creation in Genesis is mythical in nature. In that sense the question of historicity is irrelevant. It is not necessary to believe in a literal Adam to keep the faith, and insistence to the contrary is shortsighted. Nor is a belief in creationism required of Latter-day Saints. Biblical faith and scientific evolution are not mutually exclusive but are two different approaches to truth. Science investigates the mechanisms of creation; Genesis discusses its purpose. We can learn from both if we don't confuse the two. Just as a literal reading of Genesis smacks of superstition, history completely demythologized is ultimately devoid of meaning.

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