



The Truth about Eden: Understanding the Fall and Our Temple Experience

Alonzo L. Gaskill

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The Eden story is your story. In The Truth About Eden, Alonzo Gaskill explains why the Fall and redemption must become our personal narrative. His exploration of the third pillar of eternity shares invaluable insights that will change the way you respond to the Savior's loving directions--and evil's enticements.

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Date : Published July 9th 2013 by Cfi

ISBN : 9781462112531

Author : Alonzo L. Gaskill

Format : Hardcover 253 pages

Genre : Religion, Christianity, Lds, Church, Nonfiction, Inspirational

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From Reader Review The Truth about Eden: Understanding the Fall and Our Temple Experience for online ebook

Paul says

For temple-going LDS readers, this is one of those books that will repay re-reading. It is full of insights to help with understanding the symbolic and figurative elements in the various accounts of the fall and in the temple presentation. Drawing on a wide range of sources, Gaskill helps to unravel some of the misconceptions about the Fall, casts light on symbolic elements and, in doing so, potentially enriches the temple experience. However, I did find the structure of the book unhelpful with some elements discussed multiple times in different parts of the book.

It's not a long book, 251 pages in total including extensive bibliographies and chapter notes, but there is plenty to think about.

Jenalyn says

The first chapter was good. After that, Gaskill gets into his interpretations of the temple which I think is wrong. He was repetitive and contradictory as well. I like his book on symbolism better.

Bonnie Atkinson says

On one hand, I agreed with Robert Millett that this is a book worth reading, and hope that those who struggle with the many levels of interpretation available in the garden story will experience mind widening. 40 years of Sunday School has certainly highlighted an intellectual and spiritual void on the subject.

On the other hand, if you've spent 40 years in wisdom literature and read many of his sources, the book will seem more like a lit review than an elucidation of a heretofore unheard interpretation. In fact, his book suffers from litreviewitis - the tendency to waffle back and forth and be overly influenced by the ideas of others until what emerges is soft and lacking clear edges.

And the title. I'm sure it was the brainchild of an editor, but really, that's pretty audacious for a book that spends 90% of its time summarizing what people with varying holds on truth have said about our most important piece of wisdom literature. When you look into the author's eyes you see a good man, someone you would so enjoy having lunch with and discussing, someone who looks soft-spoken and earnest. I am having trouble writing this review imagining having that conversation. But. That title. It borders on arrogance.

Especially since many of the textual insights that have influenced readings are completely unacknowledged. How about the rich Hebrew of *nasha* (Strong's 5377) of Genesis 3:13? It's translated "beguiled" - one of three entirely different words in Hebrew that gets that translation throughout the Torah and the Prophets - a word that does connote deception but also has tones of lending on interest (a worldly practice the Israelites were challenged not to adopt) or being a creditor (debts and slaves were to be freed after 7 and 50 years).

Moses, who articulated that law for his people and who chose that word did so thoughtfully. In its 15 uses it says much more about the deceiver than the deceived, a textually deep word. Wouldn't that be worth mentioning on such a crucial topic and the foundation of Eve's decision? The author relies on a host of opinions about whether Eve was deceived but doesn't dive into the actual text. Certainly, this is not a midrash.

And while the typology section (Adam and Eve as you and me, the bride [church] and the Bridegroom [Savior]) is appropriately sourced, the author seems to get confused with his sources, who are literally baptized in a culture of "Eve deceived" despite the fact that he's clearly stated his belief (or the consensus) that Eve was not, that she complied with God's intent and kept the law, simply making the choice that God would not force on her. The typology interpretation clearly exists but the author doesn't seem comfortable with it. The dissonance is subtle and it took me some time to pinpoint why I disliked that section. Certainly you can have an allegory with levels of interpretation that work against each other, but you need to spell that out for readers instead of pretending that they don't. If we are fallen and unwise, thoughtless and easily duped (which we are), then you must acknowledge that that's an entirely different thing than what you're saying about Eve when you say that she was not fallen, unwise, thoughtless, or duped. You can't have it both ways without explaining how allegories sometimes do that.

I'm at a loss why the author chose to almost completely ignore the elements of wisdom literature that centuries of writers have crafted in commenting on this foundational story of our relationship to Christ. Eve as wisdom (intellect, reason), born from Adam as obedience (priesthood, authority), gets an almost perfunctory acknowledgment when this is possibly the most important typological element of the allegory. We forge ahead based on our varying interpretations of good and evil as our "sight" improves as a function of wisdom and we receive grace as a function of our obedience and submission to authority. The "marriage" of the two of them in each of us is crucial to our growth through the atonement. I was genuinely disappointed this was so lightly treated.

I've had to back away and believe that this was a beginner's guide. I hope others who are exploring the garden story as rich symbolism for the first time are excited by the possibilities entertained here. While I appreciated a few sources I hadn't read (and his thorough review of commentaries from many eras) I didn't walk away with the fire of an exciting exegesis.

I was unsettled by both the author and my reaction so I went searching for more information. I found a wonderful article by Jeffrey M. Bradshaw ("Was Eve Beguiled?") which looked more deeply at Gaskill's interpretation. The title is misleading here because what I gained was clarity about Gaskill's outlook, something that Bradshaw was able to tease out in emails asking for further information about other questions. Gaskill believes that the *historical* story of Adam and Eve takes a back seat in Moses' story created to tell an allegory about *all of us.* This is the distinction he is trying to make but I think introduces in muddled fashion, hence the confusion in that chapter. Rereading it today I find much more clarity and much less resistance, knowing that is the author's supposition.

I've upped this review to 4 stars because the tension of his reading no longer exists when it's not placed in intimate contact with the historical figures and the multitudinous quotes no longer seem to have muddled his thinking - they are just lending support to a supposition that requires a little more explanation than he has here given it. Even the order of the chapters, which I found odd, makes more sense when understanding the author's pretext. All in all, a very worthwhile interpretation and one I enjoyed much more the second time.

Heather says

I loved this book. It sat on my nightstand as I read it slowly over several months and then began reading all my highlighted notes again! Gaskill has given a ton of sources for this book. None of the ideas are new but all are backed up and many I had never thought of before. A well done book that gives great insight into how the story of Adam and Eve applies to me and thus helps make my temple experience more significant.

Mitchell says

This is my third book of Gaskill's that I've read and I've enjoyed them and learned something from them all. While the first two books focused on Gospel symbolism both writ large in the first book and associated with the Temple in the second. In each previous book Gaskill has gone into a lot of detail to give cultural context to various symbols used throughout the Gospel. Certainly, modern followers can derive their own meanings from symbols, but to gained a deeper appreciation for them, knowledge of how they were used originally is essential. This book is a deeper look at the doctrine of the Fall in particular and its association with the Temple.

The Fall has to be one of the doctrines of Christianity that has provoked the widest range of interpretations, both between sects and within. Yet, the LDS Church maintains that it is one of the three pillars on which the whole Plan of Salvation, basically God's purpose for putting us here on Earth. As such, it is essential that we understand the Fall and its necessity in the Plan. This book is a great indepth look at the Fall with many references to support the points that Gaskill makes.

As always with Gaskill's books, this book made a lot of sense and really made me think about a few things that I had held to be true. I certainly didn't come away agreeing with EVERYTHING that was in this book, but I do believe there is a lot of truth here that can help us understand the Temple and God's purposes better. I look forward to his next book.

Emily Jones says

I learned so much from this book, I'd recommend it to anyone who goes to or who plans to go to the temple.

Karin says

This one had some great insights. But I did not like it as much as Sacred Symbols: Finding Meaning in Rites, Rituals, & Ordinances. Sacred Symbols had many variations of interpretations and an attitude that was also open for personal thoughts and comfort. This book was more authoritarian and it rubbed me the wrong way in many passages. It was well-referenced and had Many Pages of Footnotes, which I loved. It was a good read for this time of my life.

Jeffrey Richardson says

This book had a few good points that I never before realized. For example, it gave me understanding in regards to whether the Geneis story is literal or symbolic, how Adam and Eve represent us, and what other General Authorities have said on the subject. However, I persoonlly like things more in depth which is something I felt this book lacked. I felt that some things were repeated too often and lacked depth. Maybe others didnt feel that way though.

Alex Wheatley says

Great read. I read this one quick and will use it as a reference for the future. I had Professor Gaskill as an instructor for a couple of courses in college, so I was already familiar with his teaching style and reasoning. Lots of good insights, regardless of whether they happen to be true or not.

Lewis Van Osdel says

This book explains a lot of the symbolism for the Garden of Eden narrative. It explains the differences between the different versions. Definitely recommend if you want learn more about the temple.

Tyler says

This book is a very thoroughly researched exposition of the Doctrine of the Fall. The main point that he proposes and explains is how the story of the Fall as recounted in Genesis, Moses, Abraham, and the temple experience is a highly figurative account designed to teach us about ourselves and should be understood and read as such, rather than as a highly literal historical account of Adam and Eve and the Fall of Man as it actually occurred. His points are very convincing and answer a lot of questions and resolve points of potential misunderstanding about the Fall, and I found it excellent. I believe his major conclusions are correct, and I would recommend the book to anyone who wants to understand the Fall, the Plan of Salvation, and the Temple experience better.

Michael West says

A paradigm-shifting book about the fall! Great resource on learning more about the fall and the creation from an LDS scholar's point of view. Bro. Gaskill clearly explains why the accounts of the fall we get in the scriptures and LDS temple are mostly figurative and there is hardly any historical fact. Most of the book is him going verse by verse through the fall accounts and explaining the symbolism of each one as it relates to us and Christ's church. The information presented is very well backed up by teachings of latter day prophets and general authorities.

Bro. Gaskill does do some conjecturing (which he admits to...so that's something) and I didn't quite agree with everything he theorizes about, but that can be overlooked based on what other information is presented.

He also tends to repeat himself a bit and feed the reader the same information twice.

Other than that, a very good book and HIGHLY recommended for anyone who wants to learn more about the fall and especially those that are LDS and/ attend the temple.

Alex says

Typos aside, I really enjoyed learning more about Adam and Eve... and myself. I enjoyed seeing the stories I had grown up reading, become something so much deeper. Thanks for helping me see it all so differently. PS - If it weren't for the typos it would have gotten 4 stars from me, but I just couldn't bring myself to do it. I know... petty.

Dear Emily S. Chambers,
There are so many freakin' typos in this book. Seriously! It's a bit ridiculous. Did you even read it when you 'edited' it?

So. Many. Typos.

This book is pretty awesome.

I love how it has made me look at the story of Adam and Eve so differently... but in a way that still make sense. It has made me see their story in ways I would have never been able to see with my logical it-is-what-it-is mindset.

But... because I always have a but... the author made me feel like quite an idiot within the first chapter for not grasping the whole everything is a metaphor bit. How was I supposed to know that everything was a metaphor? The logical person that I am never thought that it could be anything more than what it read to be. But... I have now realized how amazing it is to look at a story I felt I knew and see it so differently! Another issue... typos. So many typos.

Scribs says

"...the scriptural story of the Fall is primarily designed to teach us about ourselves."

"Adam... is Everyman and therefore Representative Man. He is the representative of both our original parents and of all humankind."

"We are to see the story of the Fall as the story of our fall."

I wish I had read this book many years ago, before I went to the LDS temple. Of course it wasn't published until 2013, but now that we have it, I think this book should be taught as part of temple prep. Gaskill exhaustively documents (hundreds and hundreds of citations) the symbolism and meaning of the Fall. I've never understood WHY this story was so important until I read this book. Of course, I learned years ago why Eve's choice was misunderstood, but now I feel like I understand her place in history so much better. I also gained greater insight into Christ's role and the compassion and love permeating the story, and our mortal experience.

My particularly favorite concept he explored was why we try to find happiness without God, and what the results are. He quotes CS Lewis:

"What Satan put into the heads of our remote ancestors was the idea that they could 'be like gods'—could set up on their own as if they had created themselves—be their own masters—invent some sort of happiness for themselves outside God, apart from God. And out of that hopeless attempt has come nearly all that we call human history—money, poverty, ambition, war, prostitution, classes, empires, slavery—the long, terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make him happy."

This is not a book to be read in one sitting. It is one to be read, pondered, and then read some more. It is a staggering amount of information and insight. Highly recommended.

Rae says

Gaskill's book is tailored for anyone who wants to know more about the content of both the scriptures and the temple. Careful readers will be challenged, regardless of their level of understanding and spirituality. Although I read it from cover to cover, I will keep it as a resource to dip into when I have forgotten things and need to refresh my mind.

I enjoyed this one immensely. Even the chapter notes are insightful, which is not always the case.
