

For those who took the Tree of Life to be a representation within the Holy of Holies, it was natural to see the tree itself as the locus of God's throne:<sup>671</sup> "[T]he Garden, at the center of which stands the throne of glory, is the royal audience room, which only those admitted to the sovereign's presence can enter."<sup>672</sup> Recall the book of Esther, which recounts the law of the Persians that "whosoever... shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, [shall be] put... to death."<sup>673</sup> Properly dressed in her royal apparel as a "true queen"<sup>674</sup> however, Esther is, against all odds, granted safe admission to the presence of the king.<sup>675</sup>

According to Brock, Ephrem's answer for "why God did not from the very first grant to Adam and Eve the higher state he had intended for them... illustrates the very prominent role which he allocates to human free will."<sup>676</sup> In his *Commentary on Genesis*, Ephrem writes:

God had created the Tree of Life and hidden it from Adam and Eve, first, so that it should not, with its beauty, stir up conflict with them and so double their struggle, and also because it was inappropriate that they should be observant of the commandment of Him who cannot be seen for the sake of a reward that was there before their eyes. Even though God had given them everything else [in the Garden of Eden] out of Grace, He wished to confer on them, out of Justice, the immortal life which is granted through eating of the Tree of Life. He therefore laid down this commandment. Not that it was a large commandment, commensurate with the superlative reward that was in preparation for them; no, He only withheld from them a single tree, just so that they might be subject to a commandment. But He gave them the whole of Paradise, so that they would not feel any compulsion to transgress the law.<sup>677</sup>

How should one regard Eve's decision to eat of the forbidden fruit? In light of the LDS understanding that the Fall was a divinely foreseen and necessary prerequisite for mankind's further progression and their rejection of the generally negative portrayals of Eve in historical Christianity, Mormon exegetes typically emphasize Eve's perspicacity and interpret her role as ultimately constructive. A few, however, have taken this view to an extreme, not only rightfully exonerating her from full accountability for her transgression and honoring her subsequent faithfulness (as would every Mormon), but in addition arguing that, for various reasons, she was not actually "beguiled" by Satan in her decision to eat of the forbidden fruit.<sup>678</sup> Such a view goes well beyond the settled LDS doctrines that the Fall was an essential part of the divine plan from the beginning and that Adam and Eve did not commit a sinful or otherwise blameworthy act.<sup>679</sup> A full discussion of this issue is given in a separate article.<sup>680</sup>

For Ephrem, the crucifixion of Christ both "fulfills and abolishes" the terms of the Old Covenant,<sup>681</sup> dismantling the barrier of enmity that had separated mankind from God since

33-36. For a general discussion of such dangers, see J. Dan, *Mysticism*, 1:261-309.

671 Revelation 22:1-3, G. A. Anderson, *et al.*, *Synopsis*, Greek 22:4, p. 62E. See *Endnote E-116*, p. 731.

672 G. B. Eden, *Mystical Architecture*, p. 22; cf. the idea of "the luxuriant sacred tree or grove... as a place of divine habitation" in D. E. Callender, *Adam*, p. 51; cf. pp. 42-54. See also T. Stordalen, *Echoes*, pp. 173, 293, *Commentary* 4:31-c, p. 280. See *Endnote E-117*, p. 731.

673 Esther 4:11.

674 As opposed to her former appearance as a "beauty queen"—see A. Berlin, *Esther*, pp. 51-52.

675 Esther 5:1-2.

676 Ephrem the Syrian, *Paradise*, p. 59.

677 Ephrem the Syrian, *Commentary*, 2:17, p. 209.

678 See, e.g., V. M. Adams, *Eve (2010)*; B. Campbell, *Eve*, pp. 70-73; A. L. Gaskill, *Savior and Serpent*; C. F. Olson, *Women*, p. 13; J. T. Summerhays, *Wisdom*.

679 J. E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, pp. 18, 29.

680 J. M. Bradshaw, *Was Eve Beguiled?*

681 K. E. McVey, in Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns*, p. 297.

the Fall.<sup>682</sup> “Very sad was the Tree of Life / that saw Adam hidden from him. / Into the virgin earth he sank and was buried, / but he arose and shone forth from Golgotha.”<sup>683</sup> “In His love there came to us the blessed Tree: the one wood undid the work of the other, the one fruit was annulled by the other, that which brought death by that which is alive.”<sup>684</sup> “As the source of immortality, ‘the Tree of Life is the symbol of the Son of the Living One,’<sup>685</sup> whose Eucharistic fruit is plucked daily in the Church.”<sup>686</sup> In verse, Ephrem expresses gratitude that the sweet fruit forbidden to Adam is available again to the Saints, and that the sword that prevented man’s return to the Garden of Eden was “removed by the lance” that pierced Jesus’ side as He hung on the cross:<sup>687</sup>

With the blade of the sword of the cherub  
 was the path to the Tree of Life shut off,  
 but to the Peoples has the Lord of that Tree  
 given Himself as food.

Whereas Eden’s other trees were provided  
 for that former Adam to eat,  
 for us the very Planter of the Garden  
 has become the food for our souls.

Whereas we had left that Garden  
 along with Adam, as he left it behind,  
 now that the sword has been removed by the lance,  
 we may return there.

682 Ephesians 2:14; Ephrem the Syrian, *Paradise*, p. 63.

683 Ephrem the Syrian, *Virginité*, 16:10, p. 332.

684 *Hymn on Virginité* 8:1, cited in Ephrem the Syrian, *Paradise*, pp. 60-61; cf. Ephrem the Syrian, *Virginité*, 8:1, p. 297.

685 Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymn on the Church* 49:16, cited in Ephrem the Syrian, *Paradise*, p. 61.

686 Ephrem the Syrian, *Paradise*, p. 61.

687 *Commentary on the Diatessaron* 49:9-11, cited in Ephrem the Syrian, *Paradise*, pp. 61-62, also pp. 64-66.