

## Was Adam Meant to “Rule Over” or “Rule With” Eve?

An Old Testament KnoWhy<sup>1</sup> for Gospel Doctrine Lesson 4:  
“Because of My Transgression My Eyes Are Opened” (Moses 4; 5:1–15; 6:48–62)  
(JBOTLo4B). See the link to the video supplement to this lesson at the end of the article  
under “Further Reading.”



*Figure 1. Eugène Delaplanche, 1836-1890: Eve, After Transgression, 1869. In this poignant sculpture by Delaplanche, the vacant, tearless eyes and agonized posture of the solitary figure bespeak the depths of Eve’s utter hopelessness immediately after her transgression.*

**Question:** After the Fall, God told Eve: “thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.”<sup>2</sup> However, some say that the words “rule over” should be translated “rule with.” Which translation is correct?

**Summary:** A modern English translation makes the meaning of this difficult phrase clear: “You will want to control your husband, but he will dominate you.”<sup>3</sup> Looking at the verse in context, it is evident that the Lord is not telling the couple how they *should* treat each other, but rather describing a tragic tendency in mortal marriages that they must *avoid*. As further evidence for this interpretation, note that the same Hebrew terms for “desire” and “rule” that describe a relationship of competition and rancor will later reappear in God’s warning to Cain: “Satan desireth to have thee; ... And thou shalt rule over him.”<sup>4</sup> In an honest effort to make sense of the troubling English translation of “rule over” in the King James Version, some have suggested that it should be read instead as “rule with.”<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, the “rule with” translation does not hold up

under scholarly scrutiny. For example, in her BYU Masters Thesis, RoseAnn Benson argued conclusively that the “rule with” translation should be abandoned. In every occurrence of the underlying Hebrew she examined the phrase is best understood as “rule over,” as when a king rules over his subjects.<sup>6</sup> This further confirms the idea that the verse is describing *broken* marriage relationships that would become a common tendency in the fallen world, with each spouse contending to “rule over” the other. It’s obvious that God did not intend Adam and Eve’s marriage to work that way. Instead, as the *Proclamation on the Family* explains, “fathers and mothers” — both then and now — “are obligated to help one another as equal partners.”<sup>7</sup>



*Figure 2. J. Kirk Richards, 1977-: Cherubim and the Flaming Sword, 2000. While the function of the cherubim is to selectively admit those authorized and prepared to enter the Garden of Eden, Hugh Nibley argues that the fire and steel of the sword symbolized the power to repulse the deceitful serpent, forever preventing its return.*

## Know

**Challenges to the marriage relationship in a fallen world.** Moses 4:22 records God’s words to Eve:

I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception. In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children, and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

While scripture describes the results of transgression differently for Adam than for Eve, the ultimate effect of these consequences is essentially the same: a mortal life replete with the opposing experiences of good and evil.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, one of the most poignant sources of pain in a fallen world comes within marriage and family relationships.

Some scripture readers are misled when they read this verse, assuming that the woman's "desire" and the man's "rule" should be read *prescriptively* as a biblical marriage model to be followed rather than *descriptively* as a tragic condition to be reversed.

However, when the Lord tells Eve "thy desire shall be to thy husband," the word Hebrew word for "desire" does not refer to a romantic attraction, but rather a contentious wish to "overcome or defeat another."<sup>9</sup> In addition, the "rule" of the husband depicted in Hebrew version of the phrase is not benevolent but controlling.<sup>10</sup> The sense of this terrible situation is well captured in a modern Bible translation: "You will want to control your husband, but he will dominate you."<sup>11</sup> As further evidence for this interpretation, note that the same Hebrew terms for "desire" and "rule" that describe a relationship of competition and rancor will later reappear in God's warning to Cain: "Satan desireth to have thee; ... And thou shalt rule over him."<sup>12</sup>

Bible scholar Victor Hamilton sees God's words as a warning to Adam and Eve. Unless they are careful, the conditions of a fallen world may lead them "to break the relationship of equality and turn it into a relationship of servitude and domination. ... Far from being a reign of co-equals over the remainder of God's creation, the relationship [would then become] a fierce dispute, with each party trying to rule the other. The two who once reigned as one [would] attempt to rule each other."<sup>13</sup>

This is a war that can never be "won," since God's intent was not for one party to dominate the other. The Hebrew word for "help meet"<sup>14</sup> means "a helper or strength corresponding to him" — or, in other words, a completing counterpart. "This term cannot be taken as demeaning because Hebrew *'ezer*, employed here to describe the intended role of the woman, is often used of God in His relation to man."<sup>15</sup> President Howard W. Hunter said: "The Lord intended that the wife be ... a companion equal and necessary in full partnership."<sup>16</sup> Thus, in Moses 2, both man and woman are created in the image of God, and in Moses 3, they are described as corresponding strengths.<sup>17</sup>

Westermann observes further that there is more intended here than merely "help at work" or "the begetting of descendants": "The man is created by God in such a way that he needs the help of a partner; hence mutual help is an essential part of human existence."<sup>18</sup> *Targum Yerushalmi* captures this sense when it refers to the woman as the man's "yoke-fellow."<sup>19</sup>

After the Fall, God warned Adam and Eve — and us — of the sad consequences that would result if they turned their powers away from their originally intended, mutually fortifying purpose. Such a turning away would result in an equal match of opposing wills, each spouse contending for domination over the other.

A Christian phrasing of Adam's punishment describes how such a struggle would spread beyond the couple to their children: "your family will be forever contending against you."<sup>20</sup> Summarizing the unfortunate new state of affairs, LDS author Lynn A. McKinlay observed that "the Fall of man and the continual source of degeneration in

this world have resulted in the estrangement of parents from God, from each other, and from their children.”<sup>21</sup>

Like the blessing of childbirth, the experience of married love holds out a promise of happiness, yet its practice, in a fallen world, will be frequently mixed with sorrow “till God make men of some other mettle than earth.”<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, as Joseph Smith observed, “[t]here has been no change in the constitution of man since he fell.”<sup>23</sup> “Sad experience” has shown “that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, [to] immediately exercise unrighteous dominion,”<sup>24</sup> a tendency which modern prophets have repeatedly condemned.<sup>25</sup>

**Marriage as a school of love.** It might well be said that the continued application of the healing and sealing power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ within and between families is “the essence of eternal life.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, Martin Luther aptly described God’s purpose for marriage when he called it a “school of love.”<sup>27</sup> As couples and families learn to live together in intimacy, affection, and oneness, they experience the finest kind of preparation for eternal life that mortality can provide.<sup>28</sup>

President Spencer W. Kimball emphasized that in celestial marriage the “man and the wife are equals” and that the designation of “authority” to man “does not mean that he is superior.”<sup>29</sup> He explained that the role of the husband is to “preside” rather than to “rule”<sup>30</sup> and stressed the need for women to be “contributing and full” partners in marriage.<sup>31</sup> Going further, Elder Dallin H. Oaks further described the difference between presiding in Church organizations and in the home. As summarized by Elder Bruce C. Hafen:<sup>32</sup>

[Elder Oaks] quoted the “equal partners” principle from the Family Proclamation and then said this concept does *not* apply to a ward organization. The Relief Society president and her ward bishop, for example, are not equal partners in administering the affairs of the ward; however, that same Relief Society president *is* an equal partner with her husband in administering the affairs of their home...

Elder Oaks also compared Adam and Eve’s relationship to each other with their relationship to the Lord. He said that “the word “obey” is used in describing our covenants with the Lord and [the word] “counsel” is used in expressing [a married couple’s] relationship with one another.” ...

The point is a simple one: Marriage is a partnership of equals whose most essential roles both revolve around their families.

Hugh Nibley<sup>33</sup> observes further:

There is no patriarchy or matriarchy in the Garden; the two supervise each other. Adam is given no arbitrary power; Eve is to heed him only insofar as he obeys their Father — and who decides that? She must keep check on him as much as he does on her. It is, if you will, a system of checks and balances in which each party is as

distinct and independent in its sphere as are the departments of government under the Constitution — and just as dependent on each other.

Indeed, Catherine Thomas observes that a primary objective of mortality seems to have been precisely “to foster the conditions in which the man and the woman may achieve interdependence,” thus affording us an opportunity to rise to “the challenge of not only perfecting ourselves individually but also perfecting ourselves in relationships. ... Relationships were given to us to develop us in love.”<sup>34</sup>

The notion of the “interdependence” of husband and wife is perhaps best expressed through the scriptural concept of “cleaving”: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh.”<sup>35</sup> The underlying meaning of the idea of two distinct entities becoming attached to one another while preserving their separate identities becomes clear, “if it is noted that the verb *d-v-k* [cleave, cling] is often used to describe human yearning for and devotion to God.”<sup>36</sup> Likewise “forsake” is often used in a biblical context to describe Israel’s departure from her covenant with the Lord.<sup>37</sup> Noting that Adam and Eve “symbolically represent all men and women,” Jolene Edmunds Rockwood observes:<sup>38</sup>

Male and female were created from one flesh; as separate individuals who are now companions to one another, they strive to again become as one in their relationship. Note that it is the man who leaves his parents and cleaves unto his wife.<sup>39</sup> In view of the patriarchal society in which this passage was written, one would instead expect to hear the reverse: a woman leaves her parents and cleaves unto her husband. Three important insights are, then, encapsulated in this summary statement: the woman is an independent and equal creation, marriage does not make her the possession of the man, and achieving oneness should be the common goal of both.



*Figure 3. William Blake, 1757-1827: The Clothing of Adam and Eve, 1803. Blake depicts the exit scene at the gates of Eden as a tender moment of forgiveness and farewell. In childlike submission and gratitude, Adam and Eve bow their heads. Endowed with knowledge and covenantal safeguards, and clothed with divinely made garments of animal skin as a protection and a reminder, they are prepared to leave God's embrace and prove themselves by overcoming the dangers of the mortal world.*

### **Why**

Through partaking of the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve began to know good and evil — in that respect becoming “as gods.”<sup>40</sup> While the serpent had painted a picture of a jealous God, the Lord's actions after the Fall bear out His intent to further bless the couple.

For example, Cassuto argues that what may seem solely as punishments for Adam and Eve should be regarded instead as “measures taken for the good of the human species in its new situation.”<sup>41</sup> Exposed in nakedness, God will clothe them;<sup>42</sup> subject to temporal and spiritual death, God will bless them with posterity and the eventual possibility of eternal life;<sup>43</sup> and bereft of the food of the Garden, God will provide Adam and Eve with the seeds of life-sustaining grains.<sup>44</sup>

Most important of all, God will provide a Savior for them, and will make the Gospel with its covenants and ordinances available so that, through their faithfulness, they might be sanctified and return to His presence.<sup>45</sup> The healing of the broken harmony between man and woman is an essential prerequisite for their eventual joint exaltation.

## Further Study

For more explanation on the connection between the story of the Fall and the Israelite temple, see the video supplement to this lesson: "The Tree of Knowledge as the Veil of the Sanctuary." The video can be seen on the Interpreter Foundation YouTube channel (<https://youtu.be/LfIs9YKYrZE>) or the FairMormon YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-B1FeOcTZ8>). Also available for download at [www.TempleThemes.net](http://www.templethemes.net) (<http://www.templethemes.net/media/videos/180113-Tree%20of%20Knowledge%20as%20the%20Veil.m4v>). If the video plays when you left-click it, right-click within the video and select the "Save video as ..." menu option to download it.

For more detailed analysis of Adam and Eve's transgression and its consequences, see J. M. Bradshaw, *et al.*, *Mormonism's Satan*. See also J. M. Bradshaw, *Moses Temple Themes (2014)*, pp. 61-157. The book is available for purchase in print at Amazon.com and the book and the article are available as free pdf downloads at [www.TempleThemes.net](http://www.TempleThemes.net).

For a verse-by-verse commentary on Moses 4 (Genesis 3), see J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image 1*, pp. 82-212. The book is available for purchase in print at Amazon.com and as a free pdf download at [www.TempleThemes.net](http://www.TempleThemes.net).

For a scripture roundtable video from The Interpreter Foundation on the subject of Gospel Doctrine lesson 4, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jRBRQNoegTY>.

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## Endnotes

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1 Used with permission of Book of Mormon Central. See <https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/reference-knowhy>.

2 Moses 4:22.

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3 NET Bible, NET Bible, Genesis 3:22.

4 Moses 5:23. The same Hebrew terms for “desire” and “rule” that describe the tendency for marriage relationships in a fallen world to deteriorate into a state of competition and rancor reappear in God’s warning to Cain: “Satan desireth to have thee... And thou shalt rule over him” (Moses 5:23). The meaning is clear: Unless Cain is willing to make his escape from the bands of wickedness, he will be eternally locked together with Satan in the utterly destructive embrace of unrighteous dominion (see D&C 121:39, 2 Nephi 4:18, and Alma 5:7, 10). Additionally, Cassuto notes that the Hebrew term used for the verb in “bruise his heel” (Moses 4:21) comes from a stem that is cognate with “desire” as it is used in the same verse (U. Cassuto, *Adam to Noah*, p. 161), thus evoking the mortal danger Cain will court if he capitulates to Satan’s craving to wound him, and also perhaps suggesting that he must act quickly to crush his opponent. This latter idea is consistent with Hamilton’s translation of the final clause of Moses 5:23: “you, you are to master it!” (V. P. Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, p. 228).

5 For example, V. M. Hudson *et al.*, *Response*, p. 332 n. 62.

6 R. Benson, *Marriage.*, pp. 72-73.

7 G. B. Hinckley *et al.*, *The family: A proclamation to the world*. Proclamation of the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve presented at the General Relief Society Meeting, September 23, 1995.

8 H. W. Nibley, *Patriarchy*, pp. 89-90.

9 J. H. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, p. 58; cf. B. T. Arnold, *Genesis 2009*, pp. 70-71. See J. M. Bradshaw, *God’s Image 1*, pp. 266, 374.

10 Contrast the implausible suggestion that “rule over” be translated “rule with” (V. M. Hudson *et al.*, *Response*, p. 332 n. 62; R. Benson, *Marriage.*, pp. 72-73). After having seriously considered this suggestion, RoseAnn Benson eventually abandons the effort to make the Hebrew text agree with the idea of a happy partnership between husband and wife in the fallen world, in the realization that every other occurrence the term is translated “rule over,” the most frequent exemplar being the case of a king ruling over his subjects (*ibid.*, pp. 72-73).

11 NET Bible, NET Bible, Genesis 3:22. Compare the translation of the English Standard Version: “Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you” (L. T. Dennis *et al.*, *ESV*).

12 Moses 5:23. The same Hebrew terms for “desire” and “rule” that describe the tendency for marriage relationships in a fallen world to deteriorate into a state of competition and rancor reappear in God’s warning to Cain: “Satan desireth to have thee... And thou shalt rule over him” (Moses 5:23). The meaning is clear: Unless Cain is willing to make his escape from the bands of wickedness, he will be eternally locked together with Satan in the utterly destructive embrace of unrighteous dominion (see D&C 121:39, 2 Nephi 4:18, and Alma 5:7, 10). Additionally, Cassuto notes that the Hebrew term used for the verb in “bruise his heel” (Moses 4:21) comes from a stem that is cognate with “desire” as it is used in the same verse (U. Cassuto, *Adam to Noah*, p. 161), thus evoking the mortal danger Cain will court if he capitulates to Satan’s craving to wound him, and also perhaps suggesting that he must act quickly to crush his

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13 V. P. Hamilton, Genesis 1-17, p. 202; cf. H. W. Nibley, Patriarchy; G. J. Wenham, Genesis 1-15, pp. 81-82.

14 Moses 3:18.

15 N. M. Sarna, Genesis, p. 21.

16 H. W. Hunter, Teachings 1997, November 1994, p. 152.

17 R. E. Friedman, Commentary, p. 19. Brodie contrasts the positive picture of Woman at her creation with the highly negative Greek account of Hesiod (T. L. Brodie, Dialogue, p. 141).

18 C. Westermann, Genesis 1-11, p. 227. Compare Ecclesiastes 4:10.

19 J. W. Etheridge, Onkelos.

20 M. Herbert *et al.*, Irish Apocrypha, p. 6.

21 L. A. McKinlay, Patriarchal Order.

22 W. Shakespeare, Much Ado, 2:1:59, p. 338.

23 J. Smith, Jr., Teachings, 22 January 1834, p. 60. Brigham Young is reported to have said that although "there was no law in heaven or on earth that would compel a woman to stay with a man either in time or eternity," "all those evil traditions and afflictions or passions that haunt the mind in this life will all be done away in the resurrection. You will find then that any man who gets a glory and exaltation will be so beautiful that any woman will be willing to have him, if it was right... [A]ll those evils will vanish to which we are subject in this life" (W. Woodruff, Waiting, 2 June 1857, p. 194, spelling and punctuation modernized).

24 D&C 121:39.

25 E.g., G. B. Hinckley, Teachings (1997), November 1991 and 29 January 1984, pp. 1-2, 322-323, 326; G. B. Hinckley, Women of the Church, pp. 100-101; G. B. Hinckley, 4 October 1998, pp. 211-212; G. B. Hinckley, 6 April 2002, pp. 127-131; G. B. Hinckley, 3 October 2004, pp. 260-263.

Anticipating the great blessings that await all generations of women who have suffered abuse and mistreatment, Elder James E. Talmage promises that women will be "recompensed in rich measure for all the injustice that womanhood has endured in mortality" (J. E. Talmage, Eternity of Sex).

26 L. A. McKinlay, Patriarchal Order.

27 Cited in E. England, Church, p. 4.

28 J. R. Holland, Souls.

29 S. W. Kimball, Teachings (1982), 26 February 1977, p. 315.

30 S. W. Kimball, Blessings, p. 72.

31 S. W. Kimball, Teachings (1982), May 1976, p. 315. The qualifier "in love and righteousness" is added to the word "preside" in the *The Family: A Proclamation to the*

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*World* (G. B. Hinckley *et al.*, *The family: A proclamation to the world. Proclamation of the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve presented at the General Relief Society Meeting, September 23, 1995*).

32 B. C. Hafen, *Covenant*, pp. 175-176, 177.

33 H. W. Nibley, *Patriarchy*, p. 93.

34 M. C. Thomas, *Women*, pp. 54, 55, 56. Elder Bruce C. Hafen also discusses the importance of husbands and wives becoming interdependent, equal partners in marriage, as contrasted with the ideas of independence or dependence. See B. C. Hafen, *Covenant*, p. 174; B. C. Hafen *et al.*, *Crossing*, p. 26.

35 Moses 3:24. See additional discussion in J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image 1*, pp. 184-185.

36 N. M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 23. See also A. J. Heschel, *Heavenly Torah*, pp. 190-193.

37 E.g., *Jeremiah* 1:6. See V. P. Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, p. 181.

38 J. E. Rockwood, *Eve's Role*, pp. 59-60.

39 *Genesis* 2:24.

40 See J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image 1*, p. 253.

41 U. Cassuto, *Adam to Noah*, p. 163.

42 *Moses* 4:27.

43 *Moses* 4:22.

44 *Moses* 4:25.

45 E.g., *Moses* 4:27; 5:5-9; 6:64-65.