

Aprons

Perhaps the most familiar and meaningful passages that mention the wearing of an apron pertain to Adam and Eve. The prophet Moses recorded, “And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and make themselves aprons” (Genesis 3:7; see Moses 4:13).¹

Anciently, both aprons and figs symbolized fertility and reproduction.² “In ancient Semitic custom, young children ran about with a loose shirt or cloak. As they reached sexual maturity, they began to wear an “apron” or loincloth...[W]earing [an apron] represented adulthood.”³ It was not until the Fall that Adam and Eve were able to “multiply and replenish” the earth as they had been commanded (Moses 5:11). Upon placing themselves in a position to “be fruitful and multiply,” Adam and Eve appropriately donned the very symbols of the newly received power. What are we to make of Adam and Eve’s wearing aprons of fig leaves that, at the very least, symbolize “fertility” and “reproduction”?⁴ In light of Elder Richard G. Scott’s counsel that we should “learn from the lives of Adam and Eve,” the whole episode seems highly significant and applicable.⁵

On several occasions, President Joseph Fielding Smith taught: “The Lord said to Adam, here is the tree of knowledge of good and evil. If you want to stay here then you cannot eat of that fruit. If you want to stay here then I forbid you to eat it. But you may act for yourself and you may eat of it if you want to. And if you eat it you will die.”⁶ Adam and Eve’s choice was quite simple.

Option number one entailed God giving them the right to stay in Eden forever. They would be never really have to work, for everything would be provided for them. They wouldn’t really grow because they wouldn’t be tried and tested by being placed in difficult circumstances. According to this option, Adam and Eve would be allowed to focus on the things they wanted. Of course, major drawbacks were (1) they would never become like God because of their lack of growth, and (2) none of their potential offspring would ever have a chance at becoming like God either, because Adam and Eve’s choice would prevent them from having children.

Option number two, as President Smith read the account, entailed Adam and Eve’s sacrificing their opportunity for guaranteed ease and pleasure so that others could be born and have a chance at godhood also. This option promised hard work, requisite sacrifice, and trials and tests that would stretch the first of the human family to the core. They would likely have to give up some worldly goals and aspirations in order to make it back to God. According to this option, they were assured that, no matter how good a life they lived, in the end they would still die. However, the very things that would make the mortal experience so hard would also enable Adam and Eve and all of their posterity to return to God and to become like him.

The two choices given to Adam and Eve in Eden are the very same choices given to every couple when they kneel at an altar in the temple and enter into the new and everlasting covenant of marriage. Their first option, if it can even be called such, is to be self-serving and to put off having children until they have done all they want to do and have obtained all they want to

obtain. The second option is to forgo some of the things they might want, and to ignore much of what the world tells them that they should and must have, in order that others can have a chance at mortality and exaltation. Adam and Eve's choice was really between having or not having a family. They chose the former, reflected in Lehi's words, "Adam fell that men might be" (2 Nephi 2:25).

Thus if nothing else can be seen in the fig-leaf aprons, this much is certain: Adam and Eve made the right choice. They are going to be "fruitful and multiply," having decided to put God's ultimate will before any potentially competing desires of their own—and at great cost and sacrifice on their part. Such is the commitment God asks of us.

In ancient times aprons also symbolized priesthood⁷ and work.⁸ It is likely that for this reason the high priest who served in the Mosaic tabernacle was required to wear an apron, or ephod (see Exodus 28).⁹ He was engaged in the "work" of the Lord, a work requiring that he possess priesthood power. It seems clear that the Mosaic priest's apron was symbolically associated with the aprons of Adam and Eve:

Adam and Eve, while in the garden, possessed two items of clothing that apparently held ritual meaning: the apron (Genesis 3:7) and the garment of skins (see Genesis 3:21)...No doubt [the apron] held some sort of ceremonial significance for the first couple....It is quite likely that these vestments, belonging to Adam and Eve and obtained while in the garden, served as archetypes for later sacral vestments belonging to the Israelite temple system.¹⁰

(Alonzo L. Gaskill, *The Lost Language of Symbolism: An Essential Guide for Recognizing and Interpreting Symbols of the Gospel*, 62-64, Desert Book, Salt Lake City, Utah, 2003.)

Endnotes

¹ The Hebrew here translated “apron” is a word more often rendered “girdle,” and only sometimes “apron.”

² See Julian, *Mammoth Dictionary of Symbols*, 24-24; Cooper, *Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols*, 14; McConkie and Parry, *Guide to Scriptural Symbols*, 49; Bayley, *Lost Language of Symbolism*, 2:248; and Meyers, “Apron,” 1:319.

³ Meyers, “Apron,” 1:319.

⁴ This author uses “at the very least” because, without question, some symbols, including those employed in the temple, have multiple meanings (see Wilcox, *House of Glory*, 25). This seems to be the case with the fig leaf aprons of Adam and Eve. Symbolic meanings of figs and aprons, beyond fertility and reproduction, include the following: To be naked means to be innocent or exposed [you know your thoughts are exposed] (see Wilson, *Dictionary of Bible Types*, 17, 289). To “cover one’s nakedness” means to endeavor to make excuses for one’s actions; something aptly depicted in the temple endowment (see Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 320; and Charles, *Endowed from on High*, 59). Elder James E. Talmage associated figs with the covenant people (*Jesus the Christ*, 443; see Cooper, *Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols*, 66). When Adam and Eve, in accordance with God’s will, provoke the Fall, they became the first of God’s covenant people, and for that reason their aprons of fig leaves became a symbol of the covenant. Curiously, Jewish legend held that the “forbidden fruit” was the fig (see Gnzberg, *legends of the Jews*, 1:75, 96-97, 98, 122; see also *Books of Adam and Eve*, 20:5). When Satan told Adam and Eve to cover their nakedness with fig leaves, he was really tricking them into guaranteeing that their transgression would be discovered, but this act became a symbol of righteousness instead. as one LDS source states: “By sewing fig leaves together and making aprons for themselves, Adam and Eve covered their nakedness (Moses 4:13). In so covering themselves with leaves, they became trees, as it were.” Tress that are green represent righteous men and women (McConkie and Parry, *Guide to Scriptural Symbols*, 15, 103-4).

⁵ Scott, in Conference Report, October 1996, 100.

⁶ Smith, “Fall—Atonement—Resurrection—Sacrament.” 124. See Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 4:81.

⁷ See Conner, *Interpreting the Symbols and Types*, 141; and Unger, *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, 317.

⁸ See Julien, *Mammoth Dictionary of Symbols*, 23-24; and Cooper, *Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols*, 14. The symbol of “work” also seems applicable to Adam and Eve, in that their choice to eat of the fruit was a choice to give up ease for a life of sacrifice and work.

⁹ Although there is not absolute agreement in the scholarly community, an ephod is traditionally believed to have been an apron (see McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 241; Myers, *Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, 342; and Brown, *Gate of Heaven*, 85-86).

¹⁰ Parry, “Garden of Eden,” 145.