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Opposition in All Things

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OPPOSITION IN ALL THINGS

For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, my first-born in the wilderness, righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad. Wherefore, all things must needs be a compound in one; wherefore, if it should be one body it must needs remain as dead, having no life neither death, nor corruption nor incorruption, happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility. (2 Nephi 2:11)

The concept of the two choices offered mankind is familiar to readers of the Book of Mormon. “Opposition in all things” forms the basis of Lehi’s teachings about the atonement in 2 Nephi 2:11-29.¹ Lehi contrasted wickedness and holiness, good and bad, life and death, corruption and incorruption, happiness and misery, sense and insensibility (2 Nephi 2:11-13).

Man’s ability to choose between good and evil, life and death, joy or misery, is also discussed in Alma 13:3-4, 10; 29:4-5; 41:4-7, 10-11; 42:16-18. Omni 1:25 declares, “There is nothing which is good save it comes from the Lord: and that which is evil cometh from the devil.” The same idea is reflected in Alma 5:39-42 and *Testimony of Naphtali* 3:1 from *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, an Old Testament apocryphal work.

The importance of the principle of opposition in allowing humans to choose between good and evil is also explained in Moses 5:11. Isaiah 5:20 (cited in 2 Nephi 15:20) contains a list of oppo-

¹ Compare Moroni 7:11-19, which contrasts the devil and his works (associated with night) with God and his works (associated with day), each enticing man to do either evil or good.

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sites that includes good and evil, light and darkness, sweet and bitter, and notes, like *Ben-Sirach* 11:31 in the Apocrypha, that the wicked garble the two. *Ben-Sirach* 11:14-17 has a similar list (prosperity and adversity, life and death, poverty and riches) and notes that while wisdom, knowledge, and love are from God, sinners are noted for error and darkness. In words that parallel those of Lehi, he declared, "All things are double one against another; and he hath made nothing imperfect. One thing establisheth the good of another" (*Ben-Sirach* 42:24-25, King James translation).

OPPOSITION IN NON-CANONICAL BOOKS

A number of noncanonical books discuss the concept of opposition in ways that are reminiscent of Lehi's teachings. This is particularly true of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. Note the following list of opposites from *Testament of Asher* 5:1-3:

Children, you see how in everything there are two factors, one against the other, one concealed by the other: In possessions is greed, in merriment is drunkenness, in laughter is lamentation, in marriage is dissoluteness. Death is successor to life, dishonor to glory, night to day, darkness to light, but all these things lead ultimately to day: righteous actions to life, unjust actions to death, since eternal life wards off death. One cannot say truth is a lie, nor a righteous act is unjust, because all truth is subject ultimately to the light, just as all things are subject ultimately to God.

Another list of opposites is found in *Testament of Benjamin* 6:5-6:

The good set of mind does not talk from both sides of its mouth: praises and curses, abuse and honor, calm and strife, hypocrisy and truth, poverty and wealth, but it has one disposition,

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uncontaminated and pure, toward all men. There is no duplicity in its perception or its hearing.

According to *Testament of Gad* 5:1, hatred turns good things into their bad counterparts; among the contrasts listed are small and big, light and darkness, sweet and bitter. *Testament of Naphtali* 2:6-7 contrasts the laws of God and of Beliar [the devil], saying that “there is a distinction between light and darkness.”

Testament of Judah 20:1-3 speaks of the two opposing ways thus:

So understand, my children, that two spirits await an opportunity with humanity: the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. In between is the conscience of the mind which inclines as it will. The things of truth and the things of error are written in the affections of man, each one of whom the Lord knows.

Asher admonished his children to “not be two-faced,” following both good and evil, but “rather, cling only to goodness” (*Testament of Asher* 3:1-2; see also 6:1-5 and *Testament of Benjamin* 6:5-7). His words remind us of Jesus’ teaching that one “cannot serve two masters” (Matthew 6:24; 3 Nephi 13:24). Mormon wrote that one cannot serve both Christ and the devil, for “the devil is an enemy unto God, and fighteth against him continually” (Moroni 7:11-12). He further warned against confusing evil with good and the devil with God (Moroni 7:14), for “the devil . . . persuadeth no man to do good” (Moroni 7:17). *Testament of Asher* 6:3 also warns against seeing evil as good.

James 1:18 declares that “a double minded man is unstable in all his ways.” According to the Book of Mormon, the carnal or natural man, who follows Satan, becomes, like his master, “an enemy to God” (Mosiah 2:37-38; 3:19; 16:5). Having chosen works of darkness rather than light, he yields himself to the devil and becomes subject to destruction and goes down to hell (2 Nephi

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26:10).

THE FALL MADE CHOICES POSSIBLE

Lehi taught that it was because of the devil and the fall that mankind was exposed to the opposites of good and evil and became capable of choosing between sweet and bitter (2 Nephi 2:15-16; see Alma 12:31-32; 36:19-21). The same topic is discussed in D&C 29:39-40, where we read “it must needs be that the devil should tempt the children of men, or they could not be agents unto themselves; for if they never should have bitter they could not know the sweet” (D&C 29:39). It is ironic that the fall made it possible for mortals to “taste the bitter, that they may know to prize the good. And it is given unto them to know good from evil; wherefore they are agents unto themselves” (Moses 6:55-56).

After learning of the redemption of Christ that would rescue them from the fall, Eve declared, “Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient” (Moses 5:11).

A similar statement is found in the medieval Jewish document, the *Zohar* Exodus 187a. Commenting on Daniel 2:22, it states that “were it not for darkness we would not know what light is.”²

It is interesting to note that the contrast between good and evil is often defined as the difference between sweet and bitter, as in D&C 29:39, cited above. In describing the two trees in the garden of Eden as opposite choices for Adam and Eve, Lehi said, “it must needs be that there was an opposition; even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life; the one being sweet and the other

² Maurice Simon, and Paul P. Levertoff, *The Zohar* (New York: Rebecca Bennet Publications, 1958), 4:130.

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bitter" (2 Nephi 2:15).³

In an early Coptic document, the serpent says to Eve, "Ye shall not surely die, but ye shall be like unto these gods, ye shall know the good and the evil, and ye shall [be able] to separate the sweet from the bitter."⁴ Alma experienced these opposites firsthand, noting the bitterness of the pains caused by his sins compared with the sweetness of the joy he received when he repented and called on Christ (Alma 36:21).

SATAN OBSCURES THE DIFFERENCES

Satan, in his efforts to get mankind to follow him, tries to minimize the differences between his way and God's way, uses various deceitful tactics, such as telling us that there is no devil (2 Nephi 28:22) and that there is no harm in committing a "little" sin. Moses 4:3-4 informs us that Satan "sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him."

CONCLUSION

The prophet Isaiah condemned "them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isaiah 5:20, cited in 2 Nephi 15:20). The Apocryphal *Ben-Sirach* 11:31 also notes that the wicked confuse good and evil. Such actions are contrary to the Lord's plan in making us agents and in enabling us to distinguish between good and evil.

³ The *Zohar* frequently speaks of the left and right sides, sometimes comparing them with the two trees in the garden of Eden.

⁴ *Discourse on Abbaton* by Timothy Archbishop of Alexandria folio 16b, in Ernest A. Wallis Budge, *Coptic Martyrdoms in the Dialect of Upper Egypt* (London: Oxford University, 1914), 485.