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### Promiscuity and the Search for Wealth

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*And now I make an end of speaking unto you concerning this pride. And were it not that I must speak unto you concerning a grosser crime, my heart would rejoice exceedingly because of you. But the word of God burdens me because of your grosser crimes. For behold, thus saith the Lord: This people begin to wax in iniquity; they understand not the scriptures, for they seek to excuse themselves in committing whoredoms, because of the things which were written concerning David, and Solomon his son. (Jacob 2:22-23)*

In one of his speeches to the Nephites, Jacob condemned sexual promiscuity (“whoredoms”) and the love of riches and its resulting pride (Jacob 1:15-17; 2:12-35).<sup>1</sup> Jacob’s brother, Nephi, likewise spoke against pride, wickedness, abominations and whoredoms (2 Nephi 28:13-15). A few centuries later, the Nephite prophet Abinadi accused the priests of Noah of whoredom and seeking for riches (Mosiah 12:29). Significantly, Alma’s discussion of fornication (Alma 39:5-9, 11) is immediately followed by his condemnation of riches (Alma 39:14). The sins of sexual promiscuity and love of riches are similarly condemned in the

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<sup>1</sup> The pride that comes from excessive wealth (including fine clothing) is frequently denounced elsewhere in the Book of Mormon (Helaman 13:22, 33; 3 Nephi 6:10-15; 4 Nephi 1:24-26, 43; Mormon 8:36-37) and in the Apocrypha (*Wisdom of Solomon* 5:8; *Ben-Sirach* 5:1-2; 11:4-5). The pseudepigraphic *1 Enoch* 94:7-8 condemns those who seek wealth instead of God. Nevertheless, both Jacob 2:18-19 and *Ben-Sirach* 13:24; 31:8 indicate that wealth is permissible if its pursuit is for the intent to accomplish righteous deeds.

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centuries-old *Testament of Judah* 17:1-2; 18:2-3, where they are listed among the blinding tools of Satan.

### **THE THREE NETS OF BELIAL**

One might well wonder why sexual sins and the love of wealth are mentioned together in these passages. The answer can be found in a number of early sources. One of the Dead Sea scrolls, the *Damascus (Zadokite) Document*, a copy of which was also found in 1898 in the old Cairo genizah, speaks of the “three nets of Belial,”<sup>2</sup> which it lists as sexual promiscuity, riches, and pollution of the sanctuary (CD 4.15), generally through idolatry.<sup>3</sup> The same three sins (sexual promiscuity, stealing from the temple, and polluting the temple) are listed in the same order in the pseudepigraphic *Psalms of Solomon* 8:9-12.

*Testament of Levi* 17:11 lists “money lovers” right after “adulterers” and “idolators” and elaborates by including the “arrogant, lawless, voluptuaries, pederasts, those who practice bestiality.” *Testament of Judah* 18:2-5 mentions “sexual promiscuity and love of money, [which] blind the direction of the soul” and “impede the sacrifices to God.”

The three sins or nets of the devil are mentioned in several pseudepigraphic sources as well. In *Jubilees* 7:20-21, we read that Noah instructed his grandsons to keep themselves from fornication, pollution, and injustice, and that it was these three sins that brought the flood. *Jubilees* 20:3-6 notes that Abraham, when

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<sup>2</sup> These may be the same as “the nets of deceit” by which men are ensnared, mentioned in *Testament of Dan* 2:4.

<sup>3</sup> The passage is commenting on Isaiah 24:17-18, which speaks of those who escape fear being taken in the pit, while those who escape the pit are taken in the snare. For a discussion of this topic, see the appendix “The ‘Three Nets of Belial’ in the Zadokite Document and ‘balla/BELA’ in the Temple Scroll,” in Robert Eisenmann, *James the Just in the Habakkuk Peshet* (Rome: Tipographia Gregoriana, 1985; reprinted Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), 87-94.



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blessing his sons and grandsons, warned them against fornication, impurity, and pollution; verse 5 specifically states that the giants and Sodomites had been destroyed because of fornication, impurity, and corruption.

In another passage, we read that the sins for which the flood was sent were fornication, pollution of the earth, and injustice (*Jubilees* 7:20-21), especially fornication (verses 22-25). The sins for which the people of Sodom and the cities of the plain were destroyed were fornication, pollution of themselves, and pollution of the earth (*Jubilees* 16:5-6). In the last days, the evil generation will likewise be destroyed because of fornication, contamination, and abomination (*Jubilees* 23:14-18).

The book of Mormon similarly condemns the same sins. All three of the nets of Belial are mentioned in Mosiah 11:6, which condemns laziness (i.e., the desire to get gain without labor), idolatry, and whoredom. Alma 1:32 lists a number of sins, of which some (idolatry, sorcery, wearing of costly apparel, pride, and whoredom) are clearly tied to the nets of Belial.

### ***POLLUTING THE SANCTUARY THROUGH SIN***

In this context, we must note that Jacob's condemnation of sexual sins and the search for riches, discussed above, was part of a sermon he delivered in the temple located in the city of Nephi (Jacob 1:17; 2:2, 11). Revelation 2:14 speaks of the "snares" ("stumblingblock" in the King James Bible) of fornication and eating polluted sacrifices (by which is meant sacrifices made to idols rather than sacrifices to the Lord). *Testament of Levi* 9:9 notes that promiscuity defiles the sanctuary, while *Testament of Levi* 14:6-15:1 lists the same "nets," condemning priests who steal, have illicit sexual relations, and pollute the sanctuary. *Testament of Levi* 17:11 prophesies of wicked priests who would be "idolators, adulterers, money lovers, arrogant, lawless, voluptuaries, pederasts, those who practice bestiality." The profanation of the sanctuary by the priests is also noted in Ezekiel 44:7-8 and Zephaniah 3:4. Ezekiel wrote of

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the three sins of whoredom, idolatry, and the search for wealth (Ezekiel 22:4, 9-12, 26-29; see Ezekiel 20:30-32, 39, where he speaks of idolatry and whoredom). In Ezekiel 17:6-8, 11-13, 15-17, he lists the sins as idolatry, women, and usury.

The concept of the wicked priests whose covetousness caused them to steal, to commit adultery, and to pollute the Lord's sanctuary seems to derive from the story of the sons of the high priest Eli, who served Israel when the prophet Samuel was a boy. We read that "the sons of Eli were sons of Belial" (1 Samuel 2:12), that they stole from worshipers both the meat that the people were to eat, as well as the fat that was to be offered on the altar to the Lord (1 Samuel 2:13-17). They also "lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation" (1 Samuel 2:22).

### *SINS LEADING TO IDOLATRY*

A number of ancient texts see the sins of sexual promiscuity and covetousness leading to idolatry, which is the same as pollution of the sanctuary. Thus, the apostle Paul listed "fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness" together (Ephesians 5:3), then denounced the "whoremonger," the "unclean person," and the "covetous man, who is an idolator" (Ephesians 5:5). In the Book of Mormon, we read that the Lamanites "delighted in murdering the Nephites, and robbing and plundering them; and their hearts were set upon riches, or upon gold and silver, and precious stones; yet they sought to obtain these things by murdering and plundering . . . Thus they became a very indolent people, many of whom did worship idols" (Alma 17:14-15).

*Habbakuk Commentary* 8-10, 12-13 (one of the Dead Sea Scrolls) also groups together sins related to the search for riches (robbing the poor, gathering riches, profiteering from the wealth of others) and pollution of the sanctuary. Another of the scrolls, the *Temple Scroll* (11QT 2) mentions the search for wealth and idolatry together. According to *Testament of Judah* 19:1, the love of money



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leads to idolatry.<sup>4</sup> The same concept is taught in the Book of Mormon (Alma 7:6). Similarly, Colossians 3:5 equates covetousness to idolatry. Paul clearly ties the love of money to the devil<sup>5</sup> in 1 Timothy 6:4-11, where he speaks of “temptation and snare . . . destruction and perdition.” *Ben-Sirach* 31:1-11 denounces corruption and the love of gold, indicating (verse 7) that it is a stumblingblock to those who sacrifice to it.

In *Testament of Reuben* 4:6, it is promiscuity that leads to idolatry. This concept is also found in the medieval *Chronicles of Jerahmeel* 55:10-11, referring to the story in Numbers 25, where we read that fornication with the Moabites led Israelites to worship the Moabites’ false gods. Solomon, out of his desire for many wives, was led to introduce idolatry into Israel by constructing temples to their pagan gods (1 Kings 11:1-10). *Qur’an* 24:3 ties adultery to idolatry and the Old Testament prophet Hosea based his entire book on a comparison of adultery to idolatry (see especially Hosea 4:11-17). *Wisdom of Solomon* 14:12 declares that “the devising of idols was the beginning of [spiritual] fornication,” while verses 22-30 list idolatry with various sexual sins. The Babylonian Talmud (*Ketubot* 11b) indicates that “most idolators are adulterers.” *Testament of Judah* 23:1 lists “licentiousness and witchcraft and idolatry” together, while *Testament of Benjamin* 10:10 has fornication and idolatry together. *Testament of Naphtali* 3:3-5 similarly ties sexual promiscuity to idolatry.

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<sup>4</sup> Among the Gadianton robbers, the desire for gain led to murder, plunder, theft, false witness, and “all manner of iniquity” (Helaman 7:21-26). The love of wealth is also condemned in Ecclesiastes 5:9-14. *Testament of Issachar* 4:2 notes that a good man does not desire gold, defraud his neighbor, or want fancy foods and fine clothes.

<sup>5</sup> The second-century Church Father Irenaeus tied idolatry to Satan, noting that the devil is worshiped through idols (*Against Heresies* 25:1).

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### *CONCLUSION*

The Book of Mormon's contention that sexual promiscuity and the unrighteous search for wealth are major sins is supported by a large number of other early Jewish and Christian texts. Many of these teach that these two sins, because they have such a strong influence on man, can lead us away from God. The message is just as important in our day, when promiscuity and materialism occupy so much of people's minds and time.