



BOOK OF MORMON CENTRAL

<http://bookofmormoncentral.org/>

The Evil Spirit

Author(s): John A. Tvedtnes

Source: *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar*

Published: Salt Lake City; Cornerstone Publishing, 1999 (1st Edition)

Page(s): 206–209

THE EVIL SPIRIT

I beseech of you that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; for after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, if we do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed. Ye cannot say, when ye are brought to that awful crisis, that I will repent, that I will return to my God. Nay, ye cannot say this; for that same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world. (Alma 34:33-34)

Latter-day Saints typically misread this passage, believing that the “same spirit” refers to a person’s own spirit. Critics have even used the passage to suggest that the Book of Mormon precludes those who have died from accepting proxy temple ordinances in their behalf. But a careful reading indicates first that Amulek was addressing those who had already known the gospel, telling them,

For behold, if ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold, ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth seal you his; therefore, the Spirit of the Lord hath withdrawn from you, and hath no place in you, and the devil hath all power over you; and this is the final state of the wicked.
(Alma 34:35)

From this, it is clear that the “same spirit” that possesses the wicked person and will continue to possess him in the hereafter

THE EVIL SPIRIT

is the devil, not the individual's spirit. Those who do the devil's will and refuse to repent will come under his power both in this world and the world to come. King Benjamin spoke of this as well:

But, O my people, beware lest there shall arise contentions among you, and ye list to obey the evil spirit, which was spoken of by my father Mosiah. For behold, there is a wo pronounced upon him who listeth to obey that spirit; for if he listeth to obey him, and remaineth and dieth in his sins, the same drinketh damnation to his own soul; for he receiveth for his wages an everlasting punishment, having transgressed the law of God contrary to his own knowledge. (Mosiah 2:32-33)

Furthermore, King Benjamin, like Amulek after him, made it clear that this fate was reserved for those who knowingly rebelled against God and followed the devil:

And now, I say unto you, my brethren, that after ye have known and have been taught all these things, if ye should transgress and go contrary to that which has been spoken, that ye do withdraw yourselves from the Spirit of the Lord, that it may have no place in you to guide you in wisdom's paths that ye may be blessed, prospered, and preserved—I say unto you, that the man that doeth this, the same cometh out in open rebellion against God; therefore he listeth to obey the evil spirit, and becometh an enemy to all righteousness; therefore, the Lord has no place in him, for he dwelleth not in unholy temples. Therefore if that man repenteth not, and remaineth and dieth an enemy to God, the demands of divine justice do awaken his immortal soul to a lively sense of his own guilt, which doth cause him to shrink

THE EVIL SPIRIT

from the presence of the Lord, and doth fill his breast with guilt, and pain, and anguish, which is like an unquenchable fire, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever. And now I say unto you, that mercy hath no claim on that man; therefore his final doom is to endure a never-ending torment. (Mosiah 2:36-39)

Benjamin warned his people about allowing their children to “serve the devil, who is the master of sin, or who is the evil spirit which hath been spoken of by our fathers, he being an enemy to all righteousness” (Mosiah 4:14; see also Alma 3:26-27). Among the fathers who spoke of this evil spirit was Nephi (2 Nephi 32:8). But Nephi had been taught by his own father, Lehi, who contrasted the “Holy Spirit” of God with “the spirit of the devil”:

And now, my sons, I would that ye should look to the great Mediator, and hearken unto his great commandments; and be faithful unto his words, and choose eternal life, according to the will of his Holy Spirit; And not choose eternal death, according to the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein, which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate, to bring you down to hell, that he may reign over you in his own kingdom. (2 Nephi 2:28-29)

Alma also contrasted the “Spirit of the Lord” with the “spirit of the devil,” noting, like Lehi, that the wicked are “led captive by the will of the devil” until the resurrection (Alma 40:11-14).

After King Benjamin’s people heard his words about opposite spirits, “they all cried with one voice, saying: Yea, we believe all the words which thou hast spoken unto us; and also, we know of their surety and truth, because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our

THE EVIL SPIRIT

hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2). This is what Alma called being “spiritually . . . born of God” (Alma 5:14).

CONCLUSION

The words of the Lamanite king converted by Alma sum up the matter, and provide the question we should still be asking:

What shall I do that I may have this eternal life of which thou hast spoken? Yea, what shall I do that I may be born of God, having this wicked spirit rooted out of my breast, and receive his Spirit, that I may be filled with joy, that I may not be cast off at the last day? (Alma 22:15)