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### Captivity of the Devil

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## CAPTIVITY OF THE DEVIL

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*Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself. 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 2:27-29)*

The captivity of the devil is a major topic in the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 14:7; Alma 9:28; 34:35) and is mentioned in Moses 4:4. It results from men choosing “evil works rather than good” (Alma 40:13; see also Alma 34:33-35). The Book of Mormon warns of “the grasp of this awful monster; yea, that monster, death and hell” (2 Nephi 9:10) and speaks of how one can be delivered (2 Nephi 9:19, 26; Jacob 3:11).

Similarly, one version of the Armenian text *Concerning Adam, Eve and the Incarnation* 64-65 notes that the risen Christ “released us from the captivity of Satan.”<sup>1</sup> The collection of ancient

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<sup>1</sup> Michael E. Stone, *Armenian Apocrypha Relating to Adam and Eve* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 79, 266.

## CAPTIVITY OF THE DEVIL

texts known as the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* speaks of being “enslaved” to the devil by choosing evil (*Testament of Judah* 18:6; *Testament of Dan* 2:4; *Testament of Asher* 3:1-2).<sup>2</sup> *Testament of Dan* 5:11 speaks of “captives” taken by the devil, in terminology reminiscent of Isaiah 14:17; 24:22; 42:7; 49:9; 61:1 (cited by Jacob in Jacob 2:19 and Jesus in Luke 4:18).<sup>3</sup> Asher teaches that the two-faced, who perform both good and evil deeds, “are enslaved to their evil desires” (*Testament of Asher* 3:2) and that the mind of the wicked man “is overmastered by Belial” (*Testament of Asher* 1:8).<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Nephi wrote that Satan has “power over the hearts of the children of men” (2 Nephi 30:18) and Alma noted that the devil’s plan is to “ensnare the hearts of men” (Alma 28:13).

### THE DEVIL’S SNARES

Such passages remind us of the “snares” or “nets” of the devil, by which he brings people into captivity (Alma 28:13-14; Helaman 3:29; 1 Timothy 3:7 [cf. 6:9]; 2 Timothy 2:26; *Testament of Dan* 2:4-5; *1 Enoch* 103:2; Ignatius, *Epistle to the Philadelphians* 6:2; *Pistis Sophia* 67). The *Falasha Book of the Angels*, referring to the devil as Mastima and “the Angel of Darkness,” speaks of “the serpent and its snares.”<sup>5</sup>

The snares of the devil are the sins committed by men. *Jubilees* 1:20-21 says that Beliar ensnares people through their sins.

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<sup>2</sup> The brief quotes from the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* are drawn from the English translation by Howard Clark Kee in James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983), 775-828.

<sup>3</sup> See also the comments on captivity in *Testament of Joseph* 1:4-2:4; 10:3; 18:2.

<sup>4</sup> The Hebrew term Belial also appears under the Greek form Beliar and is sometimes used as the name of the devil.

<sup>5</sup> Wolf Leslau, *Falasha Anthology* (New Haven: Yale, 1951), 55-56. The Falasha are the “black Jews” of Ethiopia.

## THE DEVIL'S SNARES

The *Damascus (Zadokite) Document* speaks of the “three nets of Belial,” the sins of sexual promiscuity, riches, and pollution of the sanctuary or temple (CD 4.15). Similarly, Revelation 2:14 speaks of the “snares” (the King James Bible has “stumblingblock”) of fornication and eating polluted sacrifices.

Sin is termed a “snare” in Mosiah 23:9, while lies and slander are considered to be a snare in the Apocryphal *Ben Sirach* 51:2. *Testament of Dan* 2:4-5 speaks of the snare of “the spirit of anger.” “High-mindedness and pride,” we are informed in D&C 90:17, “bringeth a snare upon your souls.” The first-century A.D. Jewish philosopher Philo wrote that riches and glory are a snare to weak minds (*De Iosepho* 254). In one of the Dead Sea Scrolls, we read that Moses, in preparation for his farewell address to the Israelites, told them that idolatry would be “a snare and a pitfall.”<sup>6</sup>

The Apocrypha, *Tobit* 14:10-11, contrasting light and darkness, speaks of the “snares of death.” The same expression is found in Proverbs 13:14; 14:27 and 2 Samuel 22:6 (same as Psalm 18:5; cf. 116:3). In the latter, these snares are paralleled by the “sorrows of hell.” D&C 10:26 tells us that the devil flatters men “and leadeth them along until he draggeth their souls down to hell . . . in their own snare” (cf. D&C 10:40).<sup>7</sup> We can compare these passages with the “nets of deceit” in *Testament of Dan* 2:4.<sup>8</sup>

In Alma 10:17-18, “foundations of the devil” parallels “traps and snares.” Alma 12:6, speaks of “a snare of the adversary,

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<sup>6</sup> 1Q22, in Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (3rd ed., London: Penguin, 1990), 264.

<sup>7</sup> For Joseph Smith's discussions on the devil's use of snares, see *History of the Church* 1.468; 3.351, 394, 396.

<sup>8</sup> In a Coptic gospel fragment recapped by James, the devil appears with his demons in the form of a fisherman, carrying nets and hooks to catch human beings. See Montague Rhodes James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 149.

## CAPTIVITY OF THE DEVIL

which he has laid to catch this people, that he might bring you into subjection unto him, that he might encircle you about with his chains, that he might chain you down to everlasting destruction, according to the power of his captivity” (cf. 1 Nephi 15:24; Alma 10:11; 30:60; Helaman 6:28). Alma admitted that, while a priest of wicked king Noah, he was “caught in a snare” (Mosiah 23:9; compare *Ben-Sirach* 27:29) and declared that the people under king Noah had been “bound with the bands/bonds of iniquity,” from which they had been “delivered by the power of God” (Mosiah 23:12-13). His son, Alma the younger, also spoke of darkness and the bonds of iniquity that came from choosing evil (Alma 41:4-7, 10-11).

The scriptures also teach that the devil binds men with strong cords (2 Nephi 26:22) and “grasps [the wicked] with his awful chains” (2 Nephi 28:18-23; see also 2 Nephi 1:13; 9:45-47; Alma 12:17; 13:30; 36:17-18; D&C 138:23; Moses 7:26). Lehi warned his family about the “captivity of the devil” (2 Nephi 1:18) and admonished them to “awake from a deep sleep, yea, even from the sleep of hell, and shake off the awful chains by which ye are bound, which are the chains which bind the children of men, that they are carried away captive down to the eternal gulf of misery and woe” (2 Nephi 1:13; see also verse 23).

Ammon spoke to his brethren about how “the Lamanites, were in darkness, yea, even in the darkest abyss, but behold, how many of them are brought to behold the marvelous light of God!” (Alma 26:3). God had loosed these converts “from the pains of hell” (Alma 26:13), “from the chains of death” (Alma 26:14). “Yea, they were encircled about with everlasting darkness and destruction; but behold, he has brought them into his everlasting light, yea, into everlasting salvation” (Alma 26:15). Similarly, *Odes of Solomon* 22:1-8 speaks of deliverance from chains, the dragon, evil, poison, and the grave.

One pseudepigraphic text describes how Enoch, during his heavenly vision, saw angels of plague preparing chains for Satan and the wicked, then saw the wicked bound by chains (*1 Enoch*

## THE DEVIL'S SNARES

53:3-5; 54:1-6; 62:1-11; 69:27-29; 88:1-3). He describes the nets of iron and bronze that would be used to bind the wicked Israelites (*1 Enoch* 56:1-4). The chains that bind the wicked are also mentioned in *Moses* 7:57 and *Qur'an* 76:5; according to *Qur'an* 36:9, they are customs and habits.

## THE BINDING POWER OF SIN

The scriptures frequently mention “the bands of death, and the chains of hell” (*Alma* 5:7, 9-10; 12:11; 13:30; 26:13-14; cf. 2 *Peter* 2:4; *Mormon* 9:13; *D&C* 123:8; 138:23), which are the same as the “pains of hell” of *Alma* 14:6. *Alma* 7:15 notes that sin binds one down to destruction. Thus, the Israelite king Manasseh, according to the Apocrypha, confessed his sins, saying, “I am bowed down with many iron bands” (*Prayer of Manasseh* 1:10, King James translation). According to *Alma* 7:15, sins “bind you down to destruction.”

*D&C* 84:49 speaks of the “bondage of sin,” which is similar to the “captivity to the law of sin” (*Romans* 7:23) or the captivity of hell (2 *Nephi* 9:12), from which one can be freed (*Romans* 6:18; 8:2). Related terms are the “bonds of iniquity,” which are linked with the “darkest abyss,” from which one can be delivered by coming to the “light of God” (*Mosiah* 27:29; see *Acts* 8:23; *Mosiah* 23:13; 26:3, 15; *Alma* 41:11; *Mormon* 8:31). Deliverance from the snare is also mentioned in *Psalms* 91:3; 124:7.

A small scroll fragment found among the Dead Sea Scrolls (4Q171) speaks of the repentant being delivered from the snares of Satan. Another of the Dead Sea Scrolls, *Damascus (Zadokite) Document* 16.12 says that righteousness saves a man from the pit, while a third, the *Thanksgiving Psalms*, indicates that it is the Lord who saves from the pit or Abaddon (1QH 3.19).

But Peter warned that the “servants of corruption,” who were “in bondage” and then freed through Christ, could again fall (2 *Peter* 2:19-20; note the “mist of darkness” with which the

## CAPTIVITY OF THE DEVIL

wicked are punished in verse 17). Compare the pit of darkness in 4Q186 1.2.

### *THE PIT*

The Book of Mormon speaks of sinners being in an abyss (Mosiah 27:29; Alma 26:3). *Testament of Reuben* 2:8 says that fornication “leads the young person like a blind man into a ditch.” Jesus declared, “If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” (Matthew 15:14; Luke 6:39; see *Ben-Sirach* 27:26). The Greek word rendered “ditch” in the King James Bible means “cistern” or “pit.” Psalm 7:15 speaks of the wicked falling “into the ditch which he made.”

Nephi evidently had this passage in mind when he wrote of the wicked nations that “shall fall into the pit which they digged to ensnare the people of the Lord.” He goes on to speak of “that great whore . . . that great and abominable church” and of Satan (1 Nephi 22:14-15). Elsewhere, Satan is called the “founder” of the wicked church (1 Nephi 13:6; 14:9, 17; cf. 2 Nephi 26:22). In another passage, Nephi wrote of the captivity of the devil and of the pit that he has dug (1 Nephi 14:3-4).

In Revelation 9:11, the devil is called “the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon [”loss, perdition”], but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.”<sup>9</sup> In hymn 5 of the *Thanksgiving Psalms* Dead Sea Scroll,

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<sup>9</sup> D&C 76:26 calls Satan “Perdition.” Because he followed Satan, Cain was given two of the devil’s titles, “father of his lies,” and “Perdition” (Moses 5:24); significantly, in 2 *Adam & Eve* 20:35, the abode of Cain’s descendants is called “the abode of perdition and of sin.” The term “son of perdition,” used in the New Testament in reference to Judah, who betrayed Christ (John 17:12), refers to those who remain with Satan in the day of salvation (D&C 76:32, 43; 3 Nephi 27:32; 29:7; see 2 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 Timothy 6:9; 2 Timothy 3:7; 2 Peter 3:7; Revelation 17:8, 11). In *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah* 10:8, Perdition is the name of the place where the devil dwells and rules over the spirits of dead sinners. The Hebrew word *‘abbaddon*, rendered “destruction” is found in a number of Bible

## THE PIT

the term “pit” also parallels Abaddon (1QH 3.19). The pit and perdition are likewise found together in Revelation 17:8. The term “angel of the pit” is also used of the devil (called Belial) in one of the Dead Sea Scrolls (4Q286), which also mentions the darkness with which he is associated.<sup>10</sup> The *Damascus (Zadokite) Document* calls the wicked “sons of the pit” (CD 6.12). The devil is associated with the bottomless pit in *Gospel of Bartholomew* 4:40-41 and is called both Beliar and the “dragon of the pit” in *Gospel of Bartholomew* 4:46. The pit, as the punishment for sinners, is known from *Ben Sirach* 21:10; *4 Ezra* 7:36; and *Pirqe Abot* 5:22 (citing Psalm 55:24).

### **FLEE FROM EVIL**

Because evil and the devil imprison the soul, the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* advise fleeing from both. Asher taught, “cling only to goodness . . . Flee from the evil tendency, destroying the devil by your good works” (*Testament of Asher* 3:1-2). *Testament of Benjamin* 8:1 admonishes, “run from evil, corruption, and hatred of brothers.” Simeon promised his family, “If anyone flees to the Lord for refuge, the evil spirit will quickly depart from him, and his mind will be eased” (*Testament of Simeon* 3:5).

In the Armenian version of *Testament of Benjamin* 7:1, the patriarch advises, “Flee, my children, malice [and fornication],” while the Greek and Slavonic versions read, “flee from the evil of Beliar.” In *Testament of Reuben* 5:5, the patriarch instructs his children to “flee from sexual promiscuity.” The words remind us of Paul’s admonition to the Corinthians to “flee fornication” (1

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passages, where it appears with “hell” or sheol (Job 26:6; Proverbs 15:11), and “death” (Job 28:22; Psalms 88:11 [verse 12 in the Hebrew text]).

<sup>10</sup> Other Dead Sea Scrolls that speak of the pit include 4Q186 and the scroll of *Thanksgiving Hymns* (1QH, hymns 4, 5, and 8). The pit is associated with Mastemah, another of the devil’s titles in 4Q525.



## CAPTIVITY OF THE DEVIL

Christian Father, wrote, "Flee therefore the wicked devices and snares of the prince of this world" (Ignatius, *Epistle to the Philadelphians* 6).<sup>11</sup>

But the concept of fleeing from evil goes back to the Old Testament, where we find it in Psalms 34:14; 37:27; Proverbs 3:7; 13:14, 19; 14:27; 15:24; 16:6, 17; Isaiah 52:11 (cited in 3 Nephi 20:41); and Lamentations 4:15. Joseph is perhaps the greatest example of fleeing from evil, when he ran from the Egyptian woman who tried to seduce him (Genesis 39:7-13).

## CONCLUSION

A major theme in the teachings of Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, and Alma is that the devil has the power to captivate men when they succumb to temptation and commit sin.<sup>12</sup> To illustrate the seriousness of the subject, they describe this captivity in terms of nets, snares, bonds, and chains, all of which represent sinful acts. Many other ancient texts use the same imagery to describe the consequences of sin, suggesting that the Book of Mormon writers were drawing on something very old for their analogies.

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<sup>11</sup> Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (orig. 1885; reprint Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 1:83.

<sup>12</sup> See also the discussion in Chapter 29, The Evil Spirit, included in this volume.