

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

43 Do Demons Exist?

Scripture: I Timothy 4:1-1

But the Spirit explicitly says that in the later times, some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.

Does a discussion about the reality of demons belong in the realm of folklore and superstition? Many believe it does. However, there are others who are not quite so sure. On the other hand, there are people living and dead whose writings and words leave no doubt as to their firm belief in the existence of demons. The Septuagint translation of the Old Testament with the use of the words “*shedhim*” and “*diamonia*” indicates that the ancient Jews believed in real demons who were not only idols. In Deuteronomy 32:17 we read, “*They sacrificed to demons who were not god, To gods whom they have not known, new gods who came lately, whom your fathers did not dread.*” Psalm 106:36-37 tells us, “*And served their idols, which became a snare to them. They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons, and shed innocent blood.*” There are also references in Leviticus 17:7; II Chronicles 11:15; Isaiah 13:21 and 34:14 where demonic forces (*seirim*) are active. Of course, the New Testament abounds with such teaching. The existence of demons is taught in James 2:19 where we read, “*You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.*” We will be considering other New Testament passages as we move on in our study. The Scriptural witness to the reality of demons is clear and unequivocal. It is for this reason that believers down through the centuries have believed in demon activity.

The very able thinkers who lived during the first four hundred years of the Christian Church wrote prolifically on the subject. Justin Martyr in his first apologetic (LIV) wrote, “The evil spirits were not satisfied with saying before Christ's appearance that those who were said to be sons of Jupiter were born of him; but after He had appeared and had been born among men, and when they learned how He had been foretold by the prophets and knew He should be

believed on and looked for by every nation, they again put forward other men, the Samaritans, Simon and Menander, who did many mighty works by magic and deceived many and still keep them deceived.” Other writers during this period (A.D. 70-350) were Tertullian, Irenaeus, Origen and Lactantius. The last man instructed in **his Divine Institutes**, that demons were “the inventors of astrology, and soothsaying, and divination, and those productions which are called oracles, and necromancy, and the art of magic, and whatever evil practices beside these men exercise, either openly or secretly...”

The next period in the history of the Church has come to be known as the Polemical Period (A.D. 250-730) and it was during this time that the great creeds of the faith were formulated; The Apostles' Creed, The Nicene Creed, The Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. Outstanding writers of this period were Jerome, Athanasius, and Augustine. In his monumental work, **City of God**, Augustine writes in the Seventh Book, “the Christian faith has alone been able to manifest the gods of the nations as most impure demons, who desire to be thought of as gods, availing themselves of the names of defunct souls, or the appearance of mundane creatures, with proud impurity rejoicing in things most base and infamous, as though in divine honors, and envying human souls their conversion to the true God.” It was following this period that a rather unusual thing happened, and for the space of nearly fourteen hundred years the subject of demon activity was hardly spoken of. There seemed to be a strange silence even though the influence of demons appeared unrestrained. Right up to and through the 19th. century the Scriptural teaching on this subject was unattended to. One can search thousands of pages and hundreds of chapters recorded by the Puritan divines with but few references to demons. With the turning of the century, the advent of depressions, world wars, crime, and unspeakable atrocities which have befallen human beings at the hands of others, we are seeing in the latter half of the century a serious reconsideration of what lies behind the indescribable sorrow of it all. It is a turning again to what others down through the centuries who have been committed to the authority of the Scriptures have always believed, that being, the presence of a personified evil in this world in the form of a leader and those who service his purposes, mainly Satan and his demons. Now let us make a few comments on questions which are pertinent to this theme.

I. WHAT IS THE ORIGIN OF DEMONS?

When it comes right down to it, the Bible does not say much about the origin of evil in this world. The men who wrote the Bible were allowed but limited understanding of the genesis of sin. An important insight is recorded in Isaiah 14:12-14 where the lofty "*Day Star*" toppled from a position of honor through vanity and pride. Another passage is Ezekiel 28:11-18. Both of these sections ought to be known by Christians as the primary sources having to do with the coming of evil into an otherwise perfect creation. So we can say there is a certain reserve in Scripture about origins, and what we must do is hypothesize from what information we have. Generally, evangelicals have accepted three views concerning the origin of demons. The first view is well stated by a Dr. E. H. Bancroft in **his Christian Theology**, p.215, "Demons are an order of spirit beings apparently distinct and separate from angels, and which from the intimations of certain passages of Scripture seem to be in a disembodied state, having existed in some previous period and place in bodily form." (Matthew 12:43; Mark 5:10-14) The feeling here is that demons are the disembodied spirits of a race of beings upon earth before Adam. A second opinion is that demons were created angelic beings who fell when Satan did. They were not created evil, but like man, were made thoughtful and free spirits, fully able to disobey God upon their will to do so. This is the "fallen angel theory" and it further divides demons into two groups. Those which roam and those which are bound. (John 8:44; II Peter 2:4; Jude 6) Another view suggests that demons are the offspring of a union between "*sons of God*" (fallen angels) and the daughters of men. This theory identifies under the heavy title "the monstrous offspring of angels and antediluvian women." It is the opinion of Dr. M.R DeHann as stated in his book, *His majesty the devil* p. 17, "The sons of God in this passage were none other than fallen angels who caused a supernatural union with the daughters of man, with the resultant birth of these monstrosities." These are the three main theories about the origin of demons and it would seem that the best supported view is that of fallen angels. They seem to have a close relationship with Satan as suggested in Matthew 12:24 and 25:41. Other suggestions have been made about the origin of demons such as the view of Josephus who felt they were the spirits of wicked dead returned to earth, and Jewish tradition which has them as a kind of transformed viper as well as the offspring of union with Adam and Eve.

II. WHAT ARE DEMONS LIKE?

We must remember that one of the most difficult things for us to do is to discarnate personality in our thinking. By that I mean to seem to have to visualize personality in the form of a body of some kind. This is the reason why the doctrine of demons suffers as it does. We insist in thinking of them as little red devils racing about forever poking at people with their pitchforks. Consequently, the whole concept of demonism becomes rather absurd to intelligent people. But this is not the way we are to think of them at all. **First**, we must think of them as part of the spirit world, not the human, making them invisible. This characteristic is spoken of in the familiar words of Ephesians 6:12 where it is plainly stated that our warfare is not with flesh and blood but with an incorporeal enemy. On the same token, their lack of material substance makes them no less intelligent or mighty. **Secondly**, they appear to be localized in their operations. Each demon is able to be in only one place at one time. I think we may be able to conclude this by confinements which are spoken of in such passages as II Peter 2:4 and Mark 5:13. Along these lines I might also add that contrary to what many think, Satan's sphere of operation is in heaven, not hell or on the earth. Paul called him the prince of the power of the air. (Ephesians 2:2) There are three heavens represented in Scripture. One heaven is the heaven where God's throne is. There are the heavens where the planets and stars are, and there is the upper air where the birds fly and the rains are formed. In this heaven Satan resides and directs the energies and activities of the numberless fallen spirits which he has won to himself. **Thirdly**, demons appear to have intelligence, but not infinite understanding. They identified Christ. (Mark 5:7) They also have the capacity to believe as shown in James 2:19. **Fourthly**, demons are evil and their moral corruption is shown by the use of the word "*unclean*" in Scripture. (Matthew 10:1; Mark 1:27; 3:11; Luke 4:36; Acts 8:7). Demon possession and oppression is often associated with immorality. (Leviticus 18:6-30; 20:10; Ephesians 5:3; Deuteronomy 18)

III. WHAT ARE THE ACTIVITIES OF DEMONS?

I have come to associate the onslaughts of demons with three words which seem to me to be Biblically sound. The first is the word "*possession*." In this activity there is an objective, invasion of the body and personality of the victim. Matthew 12:45 states, "*...and they entering in, dwelt again in the man.*" Another instance is found in Luke 8:30.

Another activity is to **oppress** people. That is, they attack the human body to injure and harass it. They cause dumbness (Matthew 9:33), mental breakdown (Mark 5:4-5), blindness (Matthew 12:22). Paul speaks of a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan sent to buffet him. (II Corinthians 12:7) It appears that the body is a primary target for the demon attack.

A third influence is that of **obsession**. Here the mind is brought into view as men are tempted with evil thoughts (I Corinthians 7:5), overwhelmed with the pleasures of this world (I Timothy 5:11, 15) and are urged to a life of lying and hypocrisy. (Acts 5:3) In this matter of obsession there is also the ability of demons to foster a corrupt line of doctrine (I Timothy 4:1-3) and to inspire teachers who are anti-Christian in their outlook. The doctrine of demons spoken of in I Tim 4:4 is a doctrine of works by certain abstentions, as well as to deny the deity of Christ. (I John 2:22-23). Denial of Jesus' humanity is also included here. (I John 4:2-3).

IV. CAN A CHRISTIAN BE DEMON POSSESSED?

The question of a Christian having a demon has long been debated among scholars. The controversy is plainly stated. If a believer can be demon possessed then the doctrine which holds he cannot is in error. It is true that many conservative theologians hold to this position that is, no born again person can have an evil spirit. Dr. Merrill F. Unger in his classic work, **Biblical Demonology**, writes, "To demon possession only unbelievers are exposed; to demon influence, both believers and unbelievers. (p. 100) Dr. Unger's reasoning is that no person who has been sealed, indwelt, and filled by the Holy Spirit is now vulnerable to demon inhabitation. There are certain Scriptures which may be difficult to reconcile with this view. These are 1 Corinthians 5:5; 1 Timothy 1:20; and II Timothy 2:26. The point is that if for some gross sin the believer is turned over by the Church to the bondage of Satan for chastisement, it does not seem unreasonable that oppression might embrace possession. As much as we might like to think otherwise, it seems not unlikely that a believer who persists in some gross sin might leave himself open to an invasion of evil spirits.

V. WHAT ARE THE INDICATIONS OF DEMON POSSESSION?

The passage recorded in Mark 5 mentions eight distinct symptoms of the phenomenon of demon possession. The demoniac had an unclean spirit. He was indwelt by another being. (5:2) The possessed man showed amazing powers of strength. He couldn't be held any longer. (5:3) He had fits of rage and he broke

his chains with ease. (5:4) There is a break in his personality, he ran to Jesus for help and he screams in fear. (5:6-7) He offers strong resistance to the Christian faith and spiritual interests. He wants to be left alone. (5:7) He has excessive and unusual clairvoyant insights. He knew instantly just who Jesus was (5:7) There is a variation in his voice as many demons spoke from him. (5:9) The last is what is known as occult transference, the demons fled this man and entered into the swine. (5:13) It has been shown that the second, third, and fourth characteristics are very close to the symptoms of mental illness. The other five are not found in psychiatric classification. Clairvoyance is not a sign of mental illness. Other symptoms have been observed such as enlarged eyes, and a glassy stare, intense expression of hatred, labored breathing, abnormal passions, suicidal impulses, wild gestures which threaten, and acts of violence.

VI. HOW ARE PEOPLE DELIVERED FROM DEMON POSSESSION?

William Friedkin has directed a film which has few parallels in terms of audience impact. Described as a “parable of the 20th century” **The Exorcist** pulls no punches in its serious recognition of evil. The twelve year old daughter of a movie personality becomes demon possessed. The film demands the Christian solution when a psychiatrist priest assists in an exorcism which eventually claims his life. Exorcism is the process by which a person is freed from demonic control by supernatural power. It is an exercise by which the victory won over Satan by Jesus Christ at Calvary is applied to the life of the sufferer by faith. It appears that the counselor and the demon possessed person must fulfill certain conditions. The exorcist must first be a child of God. Unless this is true, it is an act of extreme hazard to mix with demons. Severe attack awaited those in Acts 19:13-16 who tried to drive out demons in Jesus’ name who did not themselves know the Lord. Secondly, a clean heart and life is necessary. Psalm 66:18 talks about iniquity which shuts the ears of God. John 14:30 speaks of the prince of this world coming and finding nothing in me. It is impossible for a demon to call to task or belittle a clean heart.

A third important qualification is a solid trust and faith that God is able to make good on His promises. This is made very plain in the embarrassing experience of the disciples who were powerless against demons and asked, *“Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief.”* (Matthew 17:19-20) Another qualification is that of courage. Demons seem able to discern fear and will take every advantage to exploit it. In Mark 4:40 we read, *“Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?”* Furthermore, there must be heavy

prayer and that without ceasing. Fasting also is called for. Recall the words of Mark 9:29, "...And he said unto them, this kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting." As far as the demoniac is concerned there must be a surrender of the life to Christ. Demons do not invade people indiscriminately. Their attack to oppress and possess seems predicated upon the committing of some gross sin which opens the life for possession. Certain sins provide an open invitation which the demons use as a wedge to gain entrance. Missionaries have noted that sins such as idolatry (rebellion against the revealed way of worshipping the one true God), impurity (Leviticus 20:10; Eph. 5:3) and drug addiction are often the catalyst to demon possession. In the strong and holy name of Jesus Christ demons can be permanently exorcised, but it is a very serious matter to contend with demons except on the grounds I have indicated. It should also be mentioned that there is no reference in Scripture of either Jesus or the disciples seeking out demon possessed to heal them. The arrangement was always that such were brought to them for exorcism. (Matthew 4:24; Luke 9:1-6) I believe one reason for this was that a demon possessed person cannot be helped unless he wants to be helped. One ancient form of exorcism comes from the seventh century and the words are, "I adjure you, o evil spirit, through God the Father Almighty, and through Jesus Christ His son, and through the Holy Spirit the Paraclete, that you depart, through His power, from the vessel which you hold captive."

VII. HOW CAN DEMON POSSESSION BE DISCERNED?

One way seems to be through the use of Scripture. Demons cannot bear to have Scripture quoted. If the Word of God is read or quoted in the hearing of the demon possessed the reaction will be one of violence and hostility if they discern the quote is directed toward them. Of course demons are capable of encouraging a moral and exemplary life and one of the delights of Satan is to make people religious and moral. But confrontation with Christ is another matter. If asked if they believe that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh there will be an avoidance of that question. The test is outlined in 1 John 4:1-4. There can be no such confession from the spirit of antichrist. Such a test will cause a demon possessed person to speak blasphemous things, to attack others, or to lapse into a coma of some kind. The question must be pressed however, "*Do you confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh and is from God?*"

Our study today has been brief and most incomplete. There is great difference of opinion on this subject, but we must at least be informed concerning the activity

of demons and the threat they constitute upon our lives. We should not fool with demons nor about them. We have a sure defense against their onslaughts in the pure Gospel of Christ. When that Gospel is honored the power of Satan is held back. (Colossians 2:15; Matthew 10:1; Ephesians 6:10-18) We do not withstand Satan and his angels only half armed or prepared. We have the armor God has provided. We also have the confidence that Satan has been defeated and that the destiny of demons is set. (II Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Matthew 8:29; 25:41) The victory is assured and as long as we walk with the Lord as He has instructed us to, demons cannot touch our lives.

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