

DEMONOLOGY

Introduction

What is the truth regarding “*demons*”? What were the demons of biblical fame? Where did they come from? What powers did they possess? Why did they enter certain persons and not others? Do they still possess people today? These questions engage the attention of Bible-believing people.

The subject of demons is only introduced in the New Testament as the topic relates to other matters of importance; it is therefore incidental and so we are merely given sufficient minimal information - information necessary for the establishment of more important truths. The subject of demonology was thus obviously not an end within itself in New Testament doctrine.

FACT

Demons in the New Testament

In the N.T. several allusions to the subject of demonology are made and it is here that a clearer conception of the subject emerges.

1. *Daimon*, one Greek word for demon, is from a root that means "to know" (Vine, p. 291). This word occurs five times: Matt. 8:31; Mark 5:12; Rev. 16:14; 18:2; 8:29.
2. *Daimonion*, another Greek word for demon (neuter of the adjective *daimonios*) occurs 60 times in the N.T. Matt. 7:22, 9:33, 34, 34; 10:8; 11:18; 12:24, 24, 27, 28; 17:18; Mark 1:34, 34, 39; 3:15, 22, 22; 6:13; 7:26, 29, 30; 9:38; 16:9, 17; Luke 4:33, 35, 41; 7:33; 8:2, 27, 30, 33, 35, 38; 9:1, 42, 49; 10:17; 11:14, 14, 15, 15, 18, 19, 20; 13:32; John 7:20; 8:48, 49, 52; 10:20, 21; Acts 17:18 (where it means "gods"); 1 Cor. 10:20, 20, 21, 21:1 Tim. 4:1; James 2:19; Rev. 9:20.
3. The Greek word which means "possessed with demons" occurs in: Matt. 4:24, 8:16, 28, 33; 9:32; 12:22, 15:22; Mark 1:32, 5:15, 16, 18; Luke 8:36; John 10:21. There are 13 of these references.

4. "Demonic" occurs only in James 3:15.
5. "Unclean spirit or spirits" are the same as demons and they occur 21 times: Matt. 10:1; 12:43; Mark 1:23, 26, 27; 3:11, 30; 5:2, 8, 13; 6:7; 7:25; Luke 4:33, 36; 6:18; 8:29; 9:42; 11:24; Acts 5:16; 8:7; Rev. 16:13.
6. "Evil spirits" occurs six times: Luke 7:21; 8:2; Acts 19:12, 13, 15, 16.
7. "Spirit of divination or *Python*" is found in Acts 16:16 and "spirit of infirmity" in Luke 13:11.

In all there are over 100 direct references to the subject of Demonology in the N.T. alone.

WHAT ARE DEMONS?

Terms used in the Bible.

1. The most common New Testament term is *daimonion*, translated **demon** in the American Standard Version (**devils**, King James Version). Sometimes they are called evil spirits, unclean spirits, foul spirits, angels of the devil, world rulers of this darkness, and hosts of wicked spirits in heavenly places.
2. Also commonly used in the epistles are the terms, **principalities and powers**. Principalities is from *archai* and speaks of "angelic and demonic power." (Arndt & Gingrich, *Lexicon to the New Testament*, p. 112.) Powers is the Greek *exousia* and suggests "rulers and functionaries of the spirit world." (Ibid., p. 278.) Satan is the prince of the powers of the air. (Eph. 2:2.) Beelzebub was the prince of demons to the Jews. (Matt. 12:24) (Rudell White, "Demons," Firm, Foundation.)

Theories Concerning the Demons

The question of demon origin is not spelled out in the Scriptures. Several theories have been advanced by respectable Bible students, some of which, incidentally, may be dismissed immediately.

There are some six prominent theories concerning the question of just who the demons were

Preview: The major views are: (1) they were the spirits of the offspring of angels and women; (2) They were a pre-Adamic race; (3) they are the spirits of those who perished in the flood; (4) they are fallen angels; (5) they are the departed spirits of wicked men which escaped Tartarus; (6) they are simply myths or superstitions, and Jesus used such language to accommodate their myths..

1. One theory is that the demons were the departed spirits of a mixed angel-human race arising from the intermarriage of angels with the daughters of men. (Gen. 6:1-6)
 - a. The rationale for this theory includes the following:
 - That in the book of Job, one reads of the "sons of God" and how they "came to present themselves before Jehovah, and that Satan also came among them". (Job. 2:6) The sons of God, therefore, were angels --- not men.
 - That in the book of Genesis one reads that "the sons of God", or angels, saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all they chose; and further, the off springs of that mixed angel-human relationship produced giants who were of great renown. (Genesis 6:1-6).
 - That this conclusion agrees with a statement from Jude, which reads; "And angels that kept not their own principality, but left their proper habitation, he hath kept in everlasting bonds under darkness unto the judgment of the great day", (Jude 6)
 - That in short, one aspect of angel's leaving their own principality was by the means of their becoming flesh and indulging in sex relations with women.
 - That all of the mixed angel-human race were evil and thus reprobated by the all powerful God.
 - b. The case is however, that the angels could no more transform themselves into flesh (though they often appeared as if in the flesh) than men can transform themselves into angels.
 - c. Christ clearly taught that angels are sexless beings, incapable of such unions (cf. Matt. 22: 30).
 - d. Further, while the expression "sons of God" was applied to angels ---as in the

- book of Job --- the case is that the expression "sons of God" is also applied to men. Example: The apostle John wrote of Christ; "He came to his own, and they that were his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (KJV) John 1:11, 12.
- e In that Genesis context the "sons of God" were the righteous lineage of Seth, while the "daughters of men" represented the wicked descendants of Cain.
2. Another theory is that the demons are the evil spirits of a pre-Adamic creation.
- a. The rationale for this theory includes the following:
- That Isaiah wrote: "For thus saith Jehovah that created the heavens, the God that formed the earth and made it, not a waste, that formed it to be inhabited: I am Jehovah; and there is none else". (Isaiah 45:18).
 - That thus the statement in Genesis which reads, "and the earth was waste and void," represented a time later than the original creation of the earth. (Genesis 1:2)
 - That the necessary implication is that there had been a pre-Adamic order of creation, that the order of creation had become evil beyond a point of return, and therefore, God had plunged the earth into a state of chaos as a means of punishment against those evil souls.
- b. This theory begs for sufficient evidence to support it. It was the brain-storm of evolution-minded people whose first intent was to create a place in the Bible for an "old earth."
3. A third theory is that the demons were the evil spirits of those who perished in the flood.
- a. The rationale for this theory is based on the following:
- That according to Matthew and Luke, "the unclean spirit when he has gone out of a man, passeth through waterless places, seeking rest, and findeth none". (Matthew 12:42-45; Luke 11:14-26.
 - That this characteristic of the unclean spirit necessarily implies that he had experienced physical death by drowning, which in turn, necessarily implies those demons were the evil souls who perished in the Noahic flood.

- b. The case is however, that the waterless places may have merely indicated desert or uninhabited places.
 - c. The theory begs for supporting evidence.
 4. A fourth theory is that the demons were the fallen angels who joined Satan in his rebellions against God.
 - a. The rationale for this theory include the following:
 - That without doubt there were angels who joined Satan in his rebellion. (Rev. 12:7; Rev. 12:9; Jude 6).
 - That further those angels were cast out and down from heaven, as per Peter's statement which reads: "For God spared not angels when they sinned, but cast them down to hell, and committed them to pits of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment." (2Peter 2:4).
 - That those evil angels would be, therefore, the very likely demons of Christ's day.
 - b. Charles Hodge, in his Systematic Theology, contends for this viewpoint.
 - c. However, (that at least some) demons showed a great affinity for mortal tenements -- grave yards, tombstones, sepulchers --- but the angels never had physical bodies and thus they never had the experience of a physical death.

Furthermore, we cannot see how demons could be fallen angels. Angels are never said to enter into or possess anyone, demons did; angels evince no peculiar affection for bodies as places of habitation, demons did; angels have no special desire for tombs of the dead, demons did. We feel the correct view of demons is that they are the departed spirits of what must have been especially wicked men, which in some way got out of Tartarus and possessed people in Bible times. – (J. Noel Merideth)
 - c. Some doubt, therefore, that the demons were fallen angels.
5. A fifth theory is that the demons were the spirits of exceedingly wicked men who had died. That somehow they managed to escape Tartarus, or were released by Satan.
 - a. The rationale for this theory includes the following:
 - That the demons were evil spirits set for punishment.
 - That such a sentence of punishment rests upon every evil departed human being of all the past, present and future time.
 - That the evil spirits or demons could include those who perished before the flood and also since the flood.

- b. While this theory has much to commend it, the other theories should not be dismissed without study and consideration.
 - c. There are many who maintain this is the correct understanding of “who” the demons were.
 - d. Based on the writings of the ancient Greeks, Alexander Campbell concluded that demons were the spirits of deceased, wicked men.
 - e. Josephus, the Jewish historian of the first century says, "Demons are the spirits of wicked men, who enter into living men and destroy them, unless they are so happy as to meet with speedy relief."
6. The theory that the New Testament references to demons are only an accommodation of Biblical language to the people's superstitions with respect to certain diseases is disproved by the fact that of some eighty references to demons in the New Testament, eleven instances clearly distinguish demon possession from physical diseases. Consider the following: Matthew 4:24; Matt. 8:16;
7. Some argue that both Satan and these demons were outside of God’s creation. That everything He created was “good” but these were evil, so therefore God didn’t create them.
- a. Note that this theory says that they were not “created” but always “was”, like God. Because everything “created” was created by God (cf. John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:16)
 - b. However, Nehemiah 9:6 refutes this theory (and Col. 1:16).
 - 1) First, there is nothing in the heavens or on the earth but that God made them.
 - 2) Second, Satan and the demons, therefore, are necessarily a part of God's order of creation.
 - 3) Third, there is, therefore, no possibility of the rise of a power which can challenge or overthrow the power of God.

The two more plausible views of the identity of demons are as follows. **First**, demons may have been the spirits of wicked dead men who were permitted to leave the Hadean realm to indwell some people. **Second**, others have contended that demons were fallen angels who were allowed to escape their confinement to similarly accomplish some component in the divine plan (cf. Jude 6).

Regardless of the problem of origin, the NT clearly recognizes the fact of first century demoniacs.

CHARACTER OF DEMONS

1. In the New Testament, "Demons are ... spoken of as personal, conscious, powerful, responsible agents, who perceive and understand, who hate and rage, who speak and act and tremble. Our Lord always deals with them as such." (Imperial Bible Dictionary, Vol. II, p. 148.) They are always pictured as foul, evil spirits that work harm to their victims.
2. Demons are under Satan's controlling power. In Mark 3:22-23, the Jews charged, "He hath Beelzebub, and, By the prince of the demons casteth he out the demons. And he [Jesus] ... said unto them How can Satan cast out Satan?" Jesus then believed Satan to control the evil spirits. It would be good here to remind ourselves that the King James Version uses the term "devil" where the American Standard uses "demon." But demons are not to be confused with Satan, the Devil.
3. The demons in the N.T. know Jesus (Mark 1:24); bow before Him (Mark 5:6); speak of Him as the "son of the Most High God" (Mark 5:7); realize that there can be no fellowship between light and darkness, between Him and them (Luke 8: 28); entreat favor of Him (Luke 8:31); obey Him (Matt. 8:16); are rebuked by Him (Mark 1:25); are cast out by Him (Luke 9:42); give false doctrine (1 Tim. 4:1-3); discern between those sealed by God and those unsealed (Rev. 9:4); know of their inevitable doom (Matt. 8:29); believe and tremble (Jas. 2:19); are organized under Satan's control (Matt. 12:26; Acts 10:38; Luke 10:18); are of various degrees of wickedness (Matt. 12:45); came from the abyss (Luke 8:31; Rev. 9:11).

Character of Demons - Their Nature

1. As to their nature, demons were spirits. Note how Matthew interchanges the terms: "... they brought unto him [Jesus] many possessed with demons: and he cast out the spirits with a word" (8:16). Since Christ declared that "a spirit hath not flesh and bones" (Lk. 24:39), it is certain that demons were not physical beings. Concerning their character,

demons are represented as malevolent entities. They were unclean spirits and evil - under the sway of him known as "the prince of demons," i.e., Beelzebub, Satan (cf. Matt. 12:24; Matthew 12:43-45).

2. Demons were quite intelligent beings, possessing true knowledge (Mk. 1:24); moreover they could exercise both volition and locomotion when permitted to do so (Matt. 12:44-45). Demon possession frequently brought about physical and/or mental illness (though such illnesses were clearly distinguished from the demons themselves - see Matthew 4:24). Demoniacs were sometimes smitten with dumbness (Matt. 9:32), blindness (Matt. 12:32), convulsions (Mk. 9:18), epilepsy (Matt. 9:32-), etc., and occasionally they were endowed with superhuman strength (Mk. 5:4; Acts 19:16). The NT gives no specific reasons why demons entered into particular individuals; they inhabited men (Matt. 9:32), women (Lk. 8:2), and even children (Mk. 7: 30).

Character of Demons - Their Power

1. They were under Jesus' power. Since demons were obviously under the control of God ultimately (Lk. 10:17f), why were they allowed to enter into and to afflict those ancient folks? Apparently, demon possession was divinely permitted by God in order that the supreme authority of Christ might be made manifest. As the Lord revealed his control over nature (Mk. 4:30), disease (Mk. 1:12), material things (Jn. 2:9), and even death (Jn. 11: 44), so also must the Son of God demonstrate his power over the spirit realm. His power over unclean spirits heralded his approaching reign - "If I by the finger of God cast out demons, then is the kingdom of God come upon you" (Lk. 11: 20).
2. The authority of Jesus over evil spirits amazed the Jews. They exclaimed: "What is this? a new teaching! with authority he commandeth even the unclean spirits, and they obey him"(Mk.1: 27). The Lord also empowered his disciples to expel demons, and they did so (Lk. 10:17), except on one occasion when their own lack of faith hindered their efforts (cf. Mk. 9:28; Matt. 17:20).

Character of Demon Possession

1. Demons did actually possess the minds and bodies of human beings in the days of

Christ and the apostles. There are at least twenty-six instances in the New Testament that speak of demon possession. A total of eighty places speak of demons in some way. In all of these we have matter of fact statements that can be understood only as accepting the reality of the affliction.

2. A distinction is made between those who suffer some physical or mental illness or condition and those who have similar symptoms caused by demon possession. "And he healed many that were sick with divers diseases, and cast out many demons." (Mark 1:34.) Demon possession was more than epilepsy or insanity for these are listed as maladies that cured in addition to demon possession in Matthew 4:24. Certain women had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities. (Luke 8:2.)
3. Skeptics have argued that there were no real demons, rather it was the attributing to some unknown spirit power that which was unexplainable to ancient man or that the Lord knew better but accommodated himself to the level of knowledge of that day. How could these doubters account for the response of the herd of swine at Gadara when the demons were cast out and allowed to enter them? (Mark 5:10-14.)

Results of Demon Possession In the Scriptures

1. Victims of demon possession suffered a variety of afflictions. Each case was different. We note the following examples. The man of Gadara raved and roared frightfully, was wild, fierce and dangerous to himself and others. He had supernatural strength, was insane, went naked, and frequented the tombs and deserted places. (Matt. 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-15.) One possessed of a demon was blind and dumb. (Matt. 17:14-18.) Also it made the child dumb and dashed him down. He foamed at the mouth and ground his teeth and pined away. (Mark 9:17-18.) A young girl had a spirit of divination. (Acts 16:16-18.) A man with a demon attacked and mastered two men. (Acts 19:13-16.)
2. From the frequency of its mention and the fact that "many with demons were brought" on many different occasions, we could conclude that it was a fairly common experience in Palestine in the first century. (Compare Matthew 4:23-24; Matt. 8:16, "many possessed with demons"; Luke 7:21; Mark 16:17-20.) There is no indication that the experience of seeing one possessed with demons was a rare thing.

Some Things To Be Observed From The Scriptures:

While the reading of all the passages of Scripture would involve too much time for one lesson, there are certain passages that are so pertinent that they cannot be overlooked.

1. The first reading with much pertinent information is from Mark's gospel and found in Mark 1:21-27. From this reading, the following facts regarding demons are adduced:
 - The demons were possessed of intelligence.
 - The demons had advance knowledge that Jesus of Nazareth was the Holy One of God.
 - The demons were set for punishment, and
 - Further, the demons were under the power of Jesus.

2. The second reading with pertinence information is Matthew 12:42-45. This reading reflects the following:
 - One, the demons avoided water --- they passed through waterless places.
 - Two, the demons were continually seeking a habitation in human bodies.
 - Three, the demons sought out other demons to dwell with them.

3. The third reading with much pertinence is an account of one instance, the casting out of the demons from the demoniac --- as recorded by each of the three synoptic writers --- Matthew, Mark and Luke: Matthew 8:28-32; Mark 5:1-13; Luke 8:26-35.

The three accounts are harmonious. This is to say that they are not contradictory, but each account gives certain details not included in the other accounts; and when all the details are considered, a summary of matters pertaining to demons would include the following:

 - a. For one thing, there were two men who were demon possessed, but one was so much more notorious than the other, that Mark and Luke concentrated on him and made no mention of the other.
 - b. For another thing, the men possessed of demons were super-humanly strong, as well as fierce and vicious.
 - c. For a third thing, the men possessed of demons dwelt among the tombs which may show that the demons had some affinity for mortal tenements --- graveyards, tombs, and sepulchers.

- d. For a fourth thing, the demons recognize and addressed Jesus as the "Son of God," and they worshipped him.
- e. For a fifth thing, by the demons' question, "Art thou come hither to torment us before our time," they showed that they were under sentence of punishment to be inflicted at a certain or specific time.
- f. For a sixth thing, a legion of demons possessed one man.
- g. For a seventh thing, the demons entreated Jesus that he would not command them to depart into the abyss.
- h. For an eighth thing, the demons chose to be allowed to go into the swine rather than to be without a body and/or to be cast into the abyss.
- I. For a ninth thing, the demons didn't seem to be able to control the swine when possessed of the demons, for they ran into the sea and were drowned.
- j. For a tenth thing, the demoniac who was made whole by Jesus' casting the demons out of him, was in his right mind, clothed, sat at the feet of Jesus, and prayed that he might accompany Jesus.

"Sickness" or "Demon Possession"

1. J. Noel Merideth writes:

A demoniac in the NT is a person who was possessed or seized by a demon or unclean spirit. There were demoniacs in NT times (Matt. 4:24; 8:16; etc.); the demons had the power over the human body to cause dumbness (Matt. 9:32-33); blindness (Matt. 12:22); insanity (Luke 8:26-36); personal injuries (Mark 9:18), and various physical defects and deformities (Lk. 13:11-17). They caused a maiden to divine (Acts 16:16); and their titanic energy is seen in the supernatural strength they could impart to the human body (Luke 8:29). Their affinity for bodies and deserted places is very evident (Rev. 18:2; Matt. 12:43-45; Mark 5:2-5).

2. The distinction between demon-possession and diseases ordinarily caused is clearly made (Matt. 4:24; 8:16; 10:8; Mark 1:32, 34; 6:13; 16:17,18; Luke 4:40, 41; 9:1; 13:32; Acts 19:12). The results of demon-possession are not exclusively mental or nervous (Matt. 9:32, 33; 12:22). They are distinctly and peculiarly mental in two instances (Gadarene maniac, Mt. 8:28 and parallels, and Acts 19:13f). Epilepsy is specified in one case (Matt. 17:15, ASV). There is distinction made between demonized and epileptic, and demonized and lunatic (Matt. 4:24). There is a distinction made between diseases caused by demons and the same disease not so caused (cf. Mt. 12:22; 15:30).

3. The demons possessed men (Mt. 8:28-34); a daughter (Mt. 15:22-29); a child (Mark 9:17-27); and women (Mark 16:9; Luke 13:11f). Jesus commissioned the disciples to cast out demons (Matt. 10:1), they did (Luke 10:17-18); though failing on one occasion it was because of lack of faith and prayer (Mark 9:18, 28, 29). In the Great Commission to all the world the apostles were to cast out demons (Mark 16:15-17); Peter cast them out (Acts 5:16); Philip cast them out (Acts 8:7); and so did Paul (Acts 16:16-18; 19:12). The seven sons of Sceva working as exorcists decided to use the name of Jesus in adjuring the demons to come out but were "mastered" and "prevailed against" by the evil spirit so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded (Acts 19:13-16). A man, in a highly figurative passage, is repossessed because of sin and neglect on his part (Matt. 12:43-45). We cannot believe, however, that all were possessed because of sin because of the instances of the children.

ARE DEMONS ON THE LOOSE TODAY?

1. With the termination of the supernatural era of the early church (cf. I Cor. 13: 8ff) , demon possession, and the corresponding gift of expulsion, ceased. Does it seem reasonable to assume that since there is no gift of demon expulsion available today, God would allow demons to continue to enter and afflict his human creatures? That would certainly suggest an imbalance of power and would put man at a great disadvantage.
2. A careful study of the NT data reveals a gradual cessation of demonic activity as the apostolic age drew toward a conclusion.

Demon Possession Today

1. The question which always comes to the fore, has to do with whether or not men are possessed with demons today; and if not, what is the explanation for their not being so?
2. The strong inference is that the demons were permitted to escape from the abyss prior to the coming of Christ --- and in time for men to be very aware of their presence so that Christ and the apostles could demonstrate by miracles their power over the evil spirit world.

3. The strong inference is that when the miraculous age of the church came to a close the demons were limited to the abyss and that, therefore, there can be no demon possession today.

CONCLUSION

1. Certainly Satan exerts great influence today. He does not, though, work miraculously. Just as God does not continue to work miracles in this age, but influences men by means of his Word and his providence, so also, the devil wields his power indirectly and non-miraculously through various media.
2. The study of demonology suggests these thoughts: (1) the existence of demons (and angels) prove there is a spirit world thus denying that our world is only materialistic, (2) demons worshiped Jesus and recognize his power and deity, thus another testimony that Jesus is the Son of God; (3) that evil beings are real; (4) that Jesus (and those to whom he gave authority) could cast the demons out; (5) that Jesus broke the power of Satan and demons. When the seventy returned they said, "Lord, even the demons are subject unto us in thy name." Jesus said to them, "I beheld Satan fallen as lightning from heaven." (Luke 10:17, 18.)
3. There are many things of the spirit world beyond our range of knowledge. We must be content to leave the secret things to God (Deut. 29:29). Perhaps some day we will learn the answers to our questions in that land that is fairer than day.

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