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DEMONS

FACT OR FICTION?

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I. There Are Five Major Views on Demons:

Lately, there has been a good deal of discussion through the media regarding the subject of demons. There was a television special about demon possession just a few weeks ago. A report from the highly respected Reuters News agency claims that **the Pope personally practiced several “exorcisms”** recently on persons who claimed to have been possessed with demons (Reuters: 2003). **Several important questions arise**; (1) Are demons real, (2) Who were they, (3) Do they possess people today, (4) Are there those who can cast out demons today?

There are ninety-eight references in the Bible about demons; so, there is no doubt that the Bible speaks of demons and demon possession as real. There are at least **five major views** on what demons were in the Bible: (1) Departed spirits of wicked men, (2) fallen angels, (3) a race that existed and fell before Adam was created, (4) the off-spring of angels who married human women, and (5) simply false superstitions which were in reality accommodative language describing physical diseases and mental illnesses.

Let’s begin with the last one that says they were false superstitions. This belief says that demons as individual beings **never have existed**, but were simply a way that superstitious people used to explain certain extreme physical and mental diseases such as epilepsy and palsy. There are **several problems with this view**: (1) The scriptures list “demon possession” separately from other physical and mental diseases. Notice Matthew 4:24; “...and they brought to him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them...” Demon possession was recognized by the first century writers as a problem **distinctly different from physical and mental disorders**. (2) It is also observed that demons were recognized as **spiritual beings who often spoke on their own**. Diseases are not individual beings and they don’t speak, “And demons also came out of many, crying out and saying, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of God,’” Luke 4:41.

The view that demons are the **spirits of a race that existed before the time of Adam and Eve** has little support. Those who hold this view say that Genesis 1:1 states that the heavens and earth were completely made and inhabited as God intended, but something happened and it became “without form and void;” thus, God had to ‘start over’ and redo the earth (Genesis 1:2-31). The problem with this view is that the verse does not say that what

God originally made became void. It says, “The earth **was** without form, and void...” Genesis 1:2-31 simply goes back and gives details on the creation process of God. Nowhere in the Bible is there made mention of a race of beings before the creation of Adam except for angels.

II. Demons Were Real Spirit Personalities Who Desired Physical Bodies.

Ever since William Blatty wrote his novel, *The Exorcist* in 1971, there has been a heightened interest in Demonology. The book was made into a movie in 1973 which resulted in the subject of demon possession becoming **a popular subject**. Before then the subject was seldom discussed. It was basically relegated to the category of “ancient myths.” Because of the popularity of the novel and especially the movie, other scripts with demonic themes have appeared on the scene; *Amityville House*, *Rosemary’s Baby*, *Omen I*, *Omen II*, and of course *The Exorcist II*.

One noted author, who writes about popular trends in America, noted that the next **fashionable curiosity** to arrive on the scene has been the explosion of a curiosity about angels. A few years ago you would have been hard-pressed to find a book on angels. Now you can find whole sections dedicated to the subject. You will find my articles on angels on our church web site.

But who or what are demons? Can we be possessed by them? We noted in the first article that there are **five major views** on what demons are. In a process of elimination by a study of the scriptures we concluded that **demons were real personalities**. (1) They were not seen by Jesus or the New Testament writers as an explanation for mental illnesses or diseases (Mat. 4:24). (2) They were not the spirits of a race that existed before the creation of Adam and Eve (Gen. 1:1-31). (3) They were not the result of angels marrying female humans; for, Jesus said that angels do not marry or have sex (Mk. 12:25). Angels were created as a whole race. **They do not produce baby angels** among themselves much less have physical relations with humans.

The fourth theory is that demons are **fallen angel spirits**. This view, however, has some difficulties. In order for the physical eye to see them, angels have appeared as men, horses, flaming chariots, creatures with wings, etc. (Gen. 18), but the Bible never says they entered into or possessed human beings. Angels did not require a body nor did they have any

reason to desire a body. **Demons, however, wanted human bodies** and were often found among tombstones. Besides, Peter and Jude point out that the fallen angels are being held in “chains” in the unseen world reserved for the Judgment Day (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6).

The fifth possibility is that demons are the **departed spirits of wicked men**. This is how the ancient writers such as Josephus, Philo, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Origen, Ignatius, and others viewed them. Even pagan authors described them thusly. Did demons, however, ever have bodies? Notice Jesus’ statement to Peter after His resurrection, “Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have,” Luke 24:39. The words “not a disembodied spirit” were used by those who soon after wrote commentary on this verse (demon: *daimao asomaton*). Jesus had a literal resurrected body, animated by spirit and life, but He denied being a demon. Demons took up residence in living fleshly bodies. They did not resurrect bodies and then possess them. Demons knew definitely who Jesus was. They pleaded not to be cast back into the abyss. They had no choice but to obey Christ and confess that He was the Christ.

III. Demons Were the Spirits of Dead Evil Men.

The first two articles in this series examined the five major theories about the identification of demons. The scriptures identify demons as real and evil spirit beings (Matthew 4:24; Luke 4:40-41). It was concluded that the greatest evidence both biblical and extrabiblical points to their identification as **the spirits of dead evil men**, who were allowed to possess the bodies of a few human beings on earth. The final question is, “Are demons allowed to possess the bodies of humans today?”

Demons and demon possession were allowed a short time on earth:

All the reliable information I know about demons is revealed in scripture by men, who were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write the truth, especially about a realm that cannot be seen without the aid of God’s revelation (2 Peter 1:19-21). Some people have the idea that demon possession has been around at least since the beginning of the human race. The fact is there are but five references in the Old Testament about demons, and they refer to false gods which are not real in the first place. In addition there is **not one single record of demon possession in the Old Testament**. It does, however, contain a prophecy that when Jesus comes and builds his church he would “cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to

pass out of the land,” **Zechariah 13:1-2**. The words “unclean spirit” are found many times in the New Testament, and they describe demon possession. This chapter in Zechariah and its verses are right in the middle of other chapters which describe the coming of the Messiah in the flesh, His crucifixion, the Savior as Shepherd, and the destruction of Jerusalem. Since Jesus has come and He has built His church, demons have been removed from this earth because they served their purpose.

Look at the facts. There is not one single reference in the Old Testament about humans being possessed by demons or the casting out of demons for those thousands of years. However, from the time Jesus began his ministry until his death, a span of about three years, there were **sixty-two references written** about demon possession and the casting out of demons. After Jesus built his church, we find **only five references** to actual demon possession in the New Testament (Acts 5:16; 16:16; 19:11-12; 19:13-17). Jesus realized there would be those who would still be possessed with demons after his death; thus, he promised some of them would be given a gift to cast out demons (Mark 16:17-18).

After the book of Acts was written, there is no specific mention of demon possession or the gift of casting out demons. The book of Acts records the first thirty years of the church. The total span of time for demon possession was about thirty-three years.\

Casting them out was a proof of God’s authority:

What was the purpose of God’s allowing humans to be possessed at that particular time? Jesus worked miracles **to prove that he was the Son of God** (Matthew 11:2-6; John 20:30-31). These miracles confirmed his claim and proved his power over nature, sickness, diseases, death and evil spirits. Jesus left behind temporary gifts (Ephesians 4:8-15; 1 Corinthians 13:8-13) for the purpose of **confirming the word** being preached by the apostles and prophets in the first century; that it was from God and not from the minds of men (Mark 16:17-18; Hebrews 2:3-4). When the word of God was completed and confirmed there was no further need for these gifts of miracles, including the casting out of demons. When the ‘evil spirit passed out of the land’ there was no need for the casting out of demons. If demon possession does still exist, then we have a huge problem. Who has the power of the Holy Spirit to cast them out since there are no longer apostles who can perform this power or pass it on to others?

IV. What About Exorcism and Demon Possession Today?

There was little interest in the subject of “exorcism” until the book and movie *The Exorcist* were circulated and thus popularized. After that the claims of demon possession exploded. These and other media productions have had a great deal of influence on how the public at large views demons and exorcism. However, whatever views or portrayals there are about demons, demon possession, and exorcism, **they must be tried and tested by the standard of truth.** In all my articles, including this series, I have appealed to only one standard of truth, the revelation of scripture. Who better knows about the unseen world than God, be it good (angels) or bad (demons)?

The modern form of exorcism (casting out of demons) is derived principally from the *Rituale Romanum*, dated about A.D. 1620. The ceremony is a combination of prayers and scripture readings designed to subjugate the evil spirit and to force it to depart from the victim. The **readings and the prayers are repeated many times** while calling upon a vast pantheon of “sacred” names. After the sermonic portion is concluded there are more prayers uttered for the possessed person and for the protection of the exorcist. All of this is repeated until the desired results are obtained. It is described as a long and exhausting ritual (See R. H. Robbins, *The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology*).

Did Jesus or the apostles ever perform a ritual such as that described above? Read for yourself; “When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits **with a word**, and healed all who were sick,” Matthew 8:16; “But Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘Be quiet, and come out of him!’ And when the unclean spirit had convulsed him and cried out with a loud voice, he came out of him,” Mark 1:25; “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.’ And he came out that very hour,” Acts 16:18. These are similar to all sixty-two references on demons in the Bible.

What is the difference between what Jesus and the apostles did and the so-called exorcisms of today? If demons can possess people today, then why is it necessary to have such a “long and exhausting ritual?” Are the demons of today stronger and the power of God weaker? God forbid! **It is about authority.** After Jesus cast out demons with few words, notice the crowd’s response, “Then they were all amazed, so that they questioned among

themselves, saying, ‘What is this...For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him,’” Mark 1:27.

It is also about whether or not God still allows people to be possessed by demons. As I wrote in the last article, I believe that **God has kept His promise** in confirming Jesus as the Son of God and scripture as the word of God through signs, wonders, and miracles; and afterwards removed the unclean spirit from the land (Zechariah 13:1-2; Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3-4). **Christ has been victorious over Satan.** He gives the same victory to Christians. “If God is for us, who can be against us...?” (Romans 8:31-39)

Charles R. Williams

HELPFUL REFERENCES:

Matthew 4:24

Luke 4:40-41

Matthew 9:32

Matthew 12:22

Mark 16:15-20

Mark 1:23-24

Mark 5:7-8

Luke 8:31

1 Timothy 4:1

Matthew 8:28-34

Matthew 12:24

Luke 10:17-18

Colossians 2:14-15

1 John 3:8

Ephesians 4:7-15

and other references noted in the articles.

A Curious Observation: Have you noticed who claims today to have the power to cast out demons? The Romans Catholic Church claims to have the gift and ritual of exorcism. One of their recent popes, Pope John, claimed to have cast out demons on several occasions. Many Pentecostal groups, who claim to have the gifts of the Holy Spirit, also claim to have cast out demons among their members. I have been a preacher in the churches of Christ since 1960 and have not seen a single member possessed by a demon. In my limited journey on this earth I have not seen a single Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist, etc. make such claims. What does that say? It says to me that if demons do possess people today I don't want to be a member of their religious organization since they seem to be the only ones who get possessed. What it really says to me is that their claims are not true. What do you believe?