

21: What Part Do Demons Play?

What Demons Are

Demons are angels who followed Satan in rebelling against God. Jude 6 mentions them as angels who sinned and Revelation 12:4 seems to indicate that when Satan fell he took one third of the angels with him.

Being by nature the same kind of spirit beings as angels they possess the abilities and limitations of angels. Like angels, they are personal, intelligent beings capable of acts of great strength (Mark 5:3; Acts 19:16; Revelation 9:1 – 11) and like angels they are immortal. Nevertheless their power and knowledge is limited: they do not know the future and they can only be in one place at any time. Although they are spirits, like angels they can appear in physical forms (2 Corinthians 11:13 – 15).

Unlike angels, demons are wicked and deceitful (1 Timothy 4:1 – 3). They are called evil spirits (Matthew 10:1), unclean spirits (Mark 1:27), deceitful spirits, familiar spirits (1 Chronicles 18:20 – 22) and angels of Satan (Revelation 12:9). Each of those names tells us something about them.

What Demons Do

The demons are subject to Satan (Mark. 3:22) and actively carry out his evil plans. Indeed, often the deeds we attribute to Satan are actually their work. Under his command they are at war with the kingdom of God (1 Peter 5:8). They deceive the world (2 Corinthians 4:4), attack Christians (2 Corinthians 12:7), and combat the angels (Revelation 12:4 – 9).

Demons are deliberate and organized in their activities (Ephesians 6:10 – 12). Specific activities they may be responsible for include tempting, deceiving and deluding people, promoting false teaching, possessing and afflicting people and causing physical ailments such as dumbness (Matthew.9:32), blindness (Matthew.12:22), convulsions and mental disorder (Matthew.17:15 – 18). Although demons may be responsible for these things they are not always the cause of them. For example, the Bible distinguishes between illness caused by demonic activity and illness that is purely physical (Matthew. 4:24).

Believers are not exempt from afflictions imposed by demons, as the case of Job proves. Paul's thorn in the flesh is another example (2 Corinthians 17:7). Demons do not just afflict individual believers they also stir up selfishness and division in the church (James 3:13 – 16).

The Doom Of Demons

Although demons are enemies of God, they are defeated enemies. They must recognise and submit to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 8:30 – 31).

Greater is He who is in you, than he who is in the world

1 John 4:4

The demons, like their master, are destined to be thrown into the lake of fire and doomed to eternal torment. Indeed they know their future judgment and dread it (Matthew.8:28 – 29).

Demons And The Occult

Demons are associated with books of magic (Acts 19:19), idols (1 Corinthians 10:19 – 21) and the like. They are the power behind idolatry and all false religion (Leviticus17:7; Deuteronomy 32:17; Psalms 106:36 – 38, Revelation 9:20).

Although they do not have knowledge of the future demons have many thousands of years experience and looking from the vantage point of the spirit world they can make good

attempts at prediction — an ability they exploit through mediums and fortune tellers. God has commanded us to stay well clear of these and other similar activities that we group under the name occult (Leviticus 19:26 and 31, Deuteronomy 18:9 – 14, Isaiah 8:19 – 20). Indeed we are forbidden to communicate with demons or to benefit from their powers in any way.

Question: Why is visiting fortune tellers or consulting horoscopes dangerous?

Demons And Ghosts

The spirits of the dead are confined to their places and are not free to come and go (Luke 16:26). However a demon can masquerade as the spirit of a person who has died and appear as a familiar spirit, or ghost.

Demon Possession And Exorcism

The Bible gives us examples of people, and animals (Mark 5:13), being possessed by demons that control their thoughts and actions. It also gives us examples of how that possession expressed itself: screaming (Mark. 5:5), violent behaviour (Matthew 8:28), self-destructive behaviour (Matthew 17:15), nudity (Luke 8:27), seizures, muteness, deafness (Mark 9:25), blindness and involuntary speaking (Luke. 4:33; Acts 16:16 – 18). None of these is exclusively a sign of demonic activity. In fact Scripture gives us no firm criteria by which to diagnose demon possession: that can only mean we are not meant to diagnose it. Neither are we told how or why some people are demon possessed: to say we know is only speculation.

Does It Happen Today?

The activity of demons was greatly increased when the Lord was on earth and in the earliest days of the church. Overt demonic activity and demon possession are not everyday occurrences but we are not told that we will not encounter them and accounts given by those who have worked in parts where idolatry is more prominent indicate that they still go on.

But can Christians be possessed by demons? The answer to that has to be no. Every believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit: he cannot be controlled by Satan.

“He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.”

Colossians 1:13

Question: What are the differences between demon possession, demonic oppression and demonic influence?

Exorcising Demons

The Bible also tells of demons being cast out of people by Jesus, by the disciples and by Paul. There was no elaborate or prolonged ritual followed — the demons were merely commanded in the name of Jesus to come out — and there is no standard procedure laid down for us to follow.

Question: What should we do if we suspect that someone is demon possessed?

A Warning

Beware of becoming over-concerned about demons and their activity. It is also dangerous to have an inordinate fear of them. We must respect them (Jude 8 – 9) and use the things God has given us to defend ourselves against them but they are a defeated foe.

Question: What are the dangers in laying too much emphasis on the activity of demons?

Memory Verses

- ☺ Ephesians 6:10 – 12
- ☺ Colossians 1:13
- ☺ 1 John 4:4