

Angels and Demons.

(Demonic Possession, Demonization and its Sources)

Question 1—*What are some of the theories held respecting demonic possession?*

Answer—There have been several theories respecting demonic possession which must be considered due to their wide acceptance and promulgation amongst various groups:

First, there is the theory that the narrations of the expulsion of demons by Jesus is merely symbolic, or mythic, without any foundation in fact, *contra* 2 Pet. 1:16 (*fables—mythois*; μύθοις). In this view, demon possession is a vivid symbol of the prevalence of evil in the world, and the casting out of demons by Jesus is a symbol of the triumph of His doctrine and life over evil, *contra* 1 Tim. 1:4. Against this view, we must note that the narration of the incidents as facts in the Scriptures would make these statements not symbolical but a lie, *contra* 2 Tim. 4:4. Again, it would be as reasonable to expect that the ancient historians, such as Thucydides or Tacitus, included myths, or fables, in their accounts of the facts of contemporary history, *contra* Tit. 1:14.

Second, there is the theory of accommodation which asserts that both Jesus and the Evangelists spoke only to accommodate the prevalent ignorance and superstition of their auditors, without making any assertion as to the truth or falsity of then current belief, *contra* 2 Pet. 1:21. It is concluded, that since the symptoms were often those of physical disease—such as blindness and dumbness, *cf.* Matt. 12:22; or epilepsy, *cf.* Mark 9:17, 18; or even common dementia, or insanity, *cf.* Mark 5:1-5; and the phrase “to have a demon” was sometimes used as the equivalent “to be mad,” *cf.* John 10:20; therefore, cases of demon possession were discussed in Scripture in accommodation to the common convictions of the times, *contra* John 10:35. However, this theory is undermined by the fact that Jesus did not speak of demons only to the ignorant but to those who were His own disciples, *cf.* Matt. 17:19-21.

Third, there is the theory that demon possession is simply a matter of psychological delusion wherein the one “possessed” is brought to a high pitch of emotional phrenzy or excitement imagining himself to be under the control of another and more powerful being, *cf.* Luke 4:34; yet, this theory fails to explain how a person, so bereft of reason, can in the same instant, manifest a knowledge of Jesus’ deity and sonship, *cf.* Mark 5:7. Nor does this explain the violent effect of the entrance of the demons into the swine, *cf.* Mark 5:13.

Question 2—*What does Scripture teach regarding demon possession?*

Answer—The Bible clearly states that Jesus came into this world to destroy the devil and his works, *cf.* 1 John 3:8. Moreover, Jesus placed demons and demon possession, or demonization, on the same factual level as His own Messiahship claiming His power to cast out demons was from the Father, *cf.* Luke 11:20. Thus, both the Gospels and the book of Acts make Christ’s casting out of demons an evidence of His supreme deity and proof of His Messiahship, *cf.* Matt. 12:22, 23, 28, 29; Acts 10:38. So, too, the apostles and evangelists witness the truth of the Gospel through miracles, including the casting out of demons, *cf.* Acts 5:16; 8:7.

Etymologically, the word *daimonizomai* (δαμονίζομαι), translated “possessed by a demon,” *cf.* Mark 5:18; has a sense which connotes a demon caused passivity such that demonization appears as a demon controlling a somewhat passive human being, *cf.* Matt. 15:22. It represents the decomposition of the personality arising from a dissociation of a person from reality, including his own body, *cf.* Mark 5:1-5. Importantly, it was distinguished by the Scriptures from cases of lunacy, or mental illness, *cf.* Matt. 4:24. Nonetheless, though Scripture distinguishes between demonic possession and natural disease, it also represents many physical ailments as due to demonic inhabitation, *cf.* Matt. 9:32, 33; Mark 9:17.

First, in demonic possession, the victim seems to undergo a deprivation of reason or the power of choice, sometimes complete and sometimes not, *cf.* Mark 9:17-20; and it is quite often apparent that his

personality is so eclipsed or overwhelmed as to produce the consciousness of a twofold will in him, *cf.* Luke 9:39. This demonization may be the result of more or less demons exercising various degrees of control so that the resulting manifestations, whether physical, psychological or spiritual, may be mild, *cf.* Luke 13:11; Matt. 12:22; or extreme, as in the case of the demonic at Gergesenes, *cf.* Luke 8:29. The character of this demonization is noted by some of the phrases used to describe the condition, “having the spirit of an unclean demon,” Luke 4:33 (ἔχων πνεῦμα δαιμονίου ἀκαθάρτου); “a man with an unclean spirit,” Mark 1:23; “they that were vexed with unclean spirits,” Luke 6:18; “oppressed of the devil,” Acts 10:38; “vexed with unclean spirits,” Acts 5:16; and “grievously vexed with a devil,” Matt. 15:22. The character of this affliction is said to be through a process of inhabitation, *cf.* Luke 8:30; so that the apostle commands the spirit of divination come out of the slave girl, *cf.* Acts 16:16, 18. Moreover, when Christ would build His claim of Messiahship, He does so by performing a miracle which he describes as casting out of demons, *cf.* Matt. 12:22-28. Furthermore, it is notable that Jesus describes the phenomenon of demonization as a kind of inhabiting, likening the man to its house, and suggesting that many demons may inhabit a single person, *cf.* Matt. 12:43-45.

Second, there are numerous symptoms of demonization suggested by the several accounts in Scripture: 1.) There is the indwelling of an unclean spirit, *cf.* Mark 5:2; by which we ought to understand that the demon is not only something alien to the holiness of God, *cf.* Rev. 18:2; but something especially connected with the filthiness of fornication, physical and spiritual, *cf.* Rev. 17:4. Thus, it is often accompanied with a disdain for modesty, *cf.* Luke 8:27. 2.) There are exhibitions of unusual physical strength, often beyond the normal capacity of the person possessed, *cf.* Mark 5:3; Luke 8:29. 3.) There are fits of rage, or sudden outbursts of violent behavior, *cf.* Mark 5:4; 9:20. 4.) There is a drive toward self-mutilation, such as cutting of the flesh, including bloodletting rituals, *cf.* Mark 5:5; 1 Kings 18:28; hence the prohibition of doing such, *cf.* Lev. 19:28. 5.) There are hints of the disintegration of the personality discovering the dissociative disorder caused by the demonic activity, *cf.* Mark 5:6, 7. 6.) There is a resistance to spiritual things, particularly those associated with the true religion, *cf.* Mark 1:24; 5:7. 7.) There is often an excessive sensibility, so that the possessed is aware of things which are true without former contact, *cf.* Mark 5:7; Luke 4:34; Acts 16:17. 8.) There is an alteration of voice as the demonic spirit speaks through the vocal facilities of the possessed, *cf.* Mark 5:9. 9.) There may be occult transference, the transmitting of demonic influences, with little warning, usually at the time of their casting out, as they turn their attention elsewhere, *cf.* Mark 5:13.

Third, for the elect believer, his position, by reason of his justification in Christ, constitutes a guarantee that there will be victory over sin and the powers of darkness, *cf.* Rom. 6:1-11. Therefore, demonic principalities and powers are included in the list of things which shall not be able to separate us from the love of God manifested in our salvation through Jesus Christ, *cf.* Rom. 8:38, 39. This is due to spiritual union with Christ whereby the believer is exalted far above all principality joined to the risen and glorified Lord, *cf.* Eph. 1:21. Thus, the believer is protected in his *position* before God in Christ, *cf.* Heb. 2:3; yet, in his *experience*, he is protected against demonic attack only in proportion as he both knows and believes, *cf.* Rom. 6:11 *with* 12:6. So, while the Bible teaches that the believer has been set free from sin, *cf.* Rom. 6:6, 7, 18; if he fails to reckon himself dead to sin and alive to God in union with Christ, *cf.* Gal. 5:16; he will soon give place to sin in his life, *cf.* Eph. 6:16. In the same way, while he has been delivered from the powers of darkness, it is only as he rests in Christ and employs the resources of that position of union and communion in resisting the enemy that the defeated foe will flee from him, *cf.* Jas. 4:7; Eph. 6:10-18.

When Scripture teaches that the believer who sins shamelessly and scandalously may be delivered over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, 1 Cor. 5:5; we are reminded that those who are saints by profession, even elect believers through their backsliding, may be subjected to the divine chastening of demonic forces, for Satan has the power of death, *cf.* Heb. 2:14. So, similarly, sinning saints at Corinth were afflicted with physical weakness, sickness and even death, for their carelessness in spiritual matters, *cf.* 1 Cor. 11:30-32.

Question 3—*What are the sources of demonic possession?*

Answer—While every breach of the divine command constitutes a breach, or breaking, of the hedge which God has placed around men for their wellbeing, opening them to the possibility of a serpent's bite, *cf.* Eccl. 10:8; it must be remembered that this hedge is set by the LORD for protection, especially against Satan and his demons, *cf.* Job 1:8-12. So, this hedge is most usually breached through sin whereby we are made liable to the curses of the covenant, *cf.* Prov. 26:2; including a total abandonment to Satan, if we remain impenitent, *cf.* 1 Cor. 5:5. However, there are certain sins which seem to carry with them more immediately the threat and consequence of demonic influence, including the complete possession of the flesh that it might be destroyed:

First, engaging in occultic activities, *cf.* Deut. 18:10; which was punishable by death, *cf.* Ex. 22:18. The demonic element is clearly brought into view in several cases in the Bible, *cf.* 1 Sam. 28:7; Acts 16:16.

Second, the use of mind-altering substances, such as psychotropic drugs, *cf.* Gal. 5:20; Rev. 9:21 (“witchcraft” or “sorceries;” *pharmakeia*; φαρμακεία). In the LXX, this word is used to designate drugs used for “magical” purposes, *cf.* Ex. 7:22; Isa. 47:9, 12.

Third, idolatry, which is equated with the worshipping of demons, *cf.* Deut. 32:16, 17; 2 Chron. 11:15; Num. 33:4. Notice as well, God also smote the firstborn amongst the beasts because demons quite often possess animals as “familiar,” *cf.* Ex. 12:12.

Fourth, through sexual immorality, which is often linked to both idolatries, *cf.* Lev. 17:7; hence, the temple sodomites, *cf.* 2 Kings 23:7; as well as drug use, or harlotry induced by means of drunkenness, *cf.* Jer. 51:7; Rev. 17:4.