

Unordered Beings

While the Old Testament spiritual confrontations primarily focus on gods, idolatry, and temple practices, the New Testament shows Jesus confronting a reality that is not well-described in the Old Testament: Demons.

Last week, we looked at the act of creation and the importance of naming by roles and separation for **purpose**. It is worth noting that demons break this pattern in scripture. They are not depicted as having roles, authority, or purpose. Instead, they are identified as demons (Greek for spirit), evil spirits, or unclean spirits. The reason for this distinction comes from what the Jewish belief was at the time regarding the origin of demons, and for that, we can look at other literature of the time.

1 Enoch 15:2-12

Go and say to the watchers of heaven, who sent you to petition in their behalf, 'You should petition in behalf of men, and not men in behalf of you. Why have you forsaken the high heaven, the eternal sanctuary; and lain with women, and defiled yourselves with the daughters of men; and taken for yourselves wives, and done as the sons of earth; and begotten for yourselves sons, giants?... But now the giants who were begotten by the spirits and flesh—they will call them evil spirits upon the earth, for their dwelling will be upon the earth. The spirits that have gone forth from the body of their flesh are evil spirits, for from humans they came into being, and from the holy watchers was the origin of their creation. Evil spirits they will be on the earth, and evil spirits they will be called. The spirits of heaven, in heaven is their dwelling; but the spirits begotten in the earth, on earth is their dwelling. And the spirits of the giants lead astray, do violence, make desolate, and attack and wrestle and hurl upon the earth and cause illnesses. They eat nothing, but abstain from food and are thirsty and smite. These spirits (will) rise up against the sons of men and against the women, for they have come forth from them.

NOTE: 1 Enoch is Second Temple Jewish literature, and was considered important religious literature at the time of Jesus. While this text is quoted and referenced by NT authors and is included in the Ethiopian canon, no other Christian canons consider this text to have the same authority as Scripture. This reference is for historical context.

So at the time of Jesus, demons were considered to be...

In essence, these beings are a result of the corruption of God's creation rather than directly created from His hand with purpose and intention. Thus, they do not have a purpose and are in a sort of permanent exile, symbolically known as the wilderness.

Luke 11:24

When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.'

As 1 Enoch describes, we see these beings *afflicting* humanity.

Matthew 9:32-33

As they were going away, behold, a demon-oppressed man who was mute was brought to him. And when the demon had been cast out, the mute man spoke. And the crowds marveled, saying, "Never was anything like this seen in Israel."

Luke 13:10-13

Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And behold, there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your disability." And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God.

Mark 9:17-18

And someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid.

What kinds of afflictions are these demons causing?

Luke 8:27

When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs.

Mark 5:2, 5

And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. [...] Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones.

What kinds of afflictions are these demons causing?

Acts 16:16-17

As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation."

Mark 1:23-25

And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!"

What kinds of afflictions are these demons causing?

Acts 19:13-16

Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

What kinds of afflictions are these demons causing?

Notice also who has authority over the demons in that last passage. They know Jesus, and recognize Paul who comes in Jesus name, but what do they say of these Jewish exorcists? What is the difference?

Luke 10:17-20

The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Mark 9:38-41

John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." But Jesus said, "Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. For the one who is not against us is for us. For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward."

What is the difference here between those casting out demons that the disciples tried to stop, and the sons of Sceva?

Demons are described in the New Testament as *trespassers*. They often appear where they should not be, doing awful things to humans and causing suffering. This is a very different view from the Old Testament, where the nations' religions were the primary issue, and simply didn't belong in Israel. Why do we see this fundamental shift in spiritual warfare?

The New Testament does not portray spiritual warfare as a battle between equal partners. The demons *always* and *immediately* cower in Jesus' presence. Rather, the New Testament displays God reclaiming sacred space from disorder.

This Week's Takeaway

How did Second Temple Jews believe demons differed from other evil beings like Satan?

What kinds of harm and suffering do the Scriptures show that demons cause?

Jesus and Paul both silence demons, even when they speak the truth. What does this tell us about the nature of truth in the mouth of the enemy?

Why is it theologically important that we see Jesus confronting demons as part of His mission on Earth?

Preparing for Next Week

To prepare for class next week, read the following passages and write down a few observations for each passage about the **forbidden practices**. This isn't about right answers or deep insight, just jot down what you notice and what stands out in each passage, or what questions you may have. What is forbidden? Does the passage explain why it's forbidden? Does that practice persist today?

Deuteronomy 18:9-14; Leviticus 19:26, 31; 1 Samuel 28:7-14; Jeremiah 27:9; Isaiah 47:13; Acts 13:4-12; Acts 19:18-20;