

Do Demons Inhabit People Today?

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Recently, we received an inquiry which said in part, “Do demons really inhabit people today as they did in the days when Jesus lived on the earth?” The person asking the question explained that he had been in a discussion with a person who held that such illnesses as heart disease, cancer, diabetes, various psychoses and other life-threatening illnesses were nothing more than demons living within our bodies and when the demons were cast out by someone claiming to be a faith healer, the illnesses would go away. My first response was diabetes was not really a demon, it just seems that way! But we will do well to take a serious look at whether demons possess people today as they did in the days when our Lord was on the earth.

Firstly, We would point out that if the Bible is true, and it is, demons did indeed inhabit human bodies in the days when Jesus lived on the earth. But to the best of our recollection they were never associated with physical illnesses such as leprosy, palsy, various paralyses and things of that nature. It is true that demons did give a person the appearance of being psychotic, and after at least one “casting out of demons,” the Bible described the recipient of this blessing as sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind (Luke 8:35). However, psychoses are today treated with various medications and there is no hint that there is a connection between one’s suffering psychotic behavior and being possessed by demons.

Secondly, in the great Old Testament book of Zechariah, there is a prophecy regarding the time when “unclean spirits” (demons) would depart from the land. This would be in the time (day) when a fountain would be opened for the house of David and for Jerusalem, for sin and uncleanness. This can refer to nothing other than the crucifixion of our gracious and loving Lord. After that “fountain” was opened up, God would cut off the idols from the land so that they would never be remembered again – meaning that they would never become objects of worship after the church was established on Pentecost. Then God – through his prophet Zechariah said, “I will also cause the prophets

and the unclean spirit to depart from the land.” The prophet was simply saying that there would come a time, after the death of Christ on the cross, that divinely inspired prophecy would cease in the land of Israel and the unclean spirits would no longer be found.

In 1 Corinthians 13:8, Paul quoted this passage, at least in part, and applied it to the apostolic age saying, “But whether there are prophecies, they will fail...” This leads this student to believe that when the revelation of the New Testament was completed and there was no longer any need for inspired prophecies, then the “prophets and the unclean spirit” would depart from the land. The conclusion to which we have arrived is: during the apostolic age, after the New Testament was completed, the miraculous gifts of the Spirit along with those things against which some of them worked would disappear from the land. In other words, the Zechariah 13:1-6 prophecy was fulfilled during the first century, before the destruction of the Temple.

Thirdly, the last instance of demon possession of which we read in the New Testament is found in Acts 19:14-17. This was the occasion when the seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish priest, were attempting an exorcism “by the Jesus whom Paul preaches. The evil spirit replied, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?” Then the Scriptures record that the man who was possessed with the evil spirit leaped on these men, overpowered them, and caused them to flee from the house naked and wounded! After this incident, there is not, to the best of my recollection, another instance of an evil spirit (demon) possessing anyone on earth.

Therefore, in light of the prophecy to which reference has been made, and in light of the fact that the Acts 19 incident was during the apostolic age, we conclude that there are no demons possessing people today as they did in the apostolic period. If it should be the case that demons do possess men today, we have not a man on earth who has the ability to cast them out, notwithstanding the claims of various faith healers and religious bodies who claim to perform exorcisms. It does not happen, and never will.