

Demons

In the first century, the whole world believed in demons, they might be good or bad, but usually bad. They were spirits who were intermediate between the gods and men. For the Greek every spring, every grove, every mountain, every tree, every stream, pool, rock, every place had its demon. For the Jew there was the *shedim*, evil spirits who haunted empty houses. Egyptian amulets, incantations, magic, charms etc. The Book of the Dead had its examples: at every step the pious Egyptian had to mutter strange formulas to avert evil and attract the good. Every evil spirit has a will, intelligence, a personality, and a distinctive character of its own. People believed that diseases were caused by demons which in some way had been received into the human system and an instrument in the hands of the gods for the punishment of sins.

Mental disease was often explained in ancient times as the consequence of demon possession, and Jesus' healing ministry is frequently described in the gospels as an act of exorcism. There are many examples in the New Testament of person possessed by demons, often called demoniacs. An important reason for the rapid spread of the Christian faith in the first century was the successful work of Christian exorcists who carried on Jesus' healing ministry. In doing so, they felt they were not only imitating Jesus, but acting in the same power as He.

The healing stories recorded by the gospels were models used by the Christian exorcists as they continued this work. Jesus did not ask God to expel the evil spirits, any more than to heal the sick. Our Savior speaks to and commands the demons who actuated the possessed, which demons answered and obeyed, and gave proofs whom they obliged to quit. He simply ordered the demons out, and they had to go. They might plead, they might abuse, but they went. Jesus had healed diseases without calling upon God - and cast out devils. John told Jesus that they had seen a man casting out devils in the name of Jesus, and had ordered him to stop, "Forbid him not." This is why the demons cry out, because they sense an inroad upon their sphere of power "before the time." This is why His own people fear him mad and also why the people marvel and the saved praise God. The demons hope, of course, for a successful transference of an evil thought from the spiritual realm into the human realm. That is how doctrines of demons get into circulation among mankind.

The word "devils" occur frequently in the gospels, but it is the translation of a different Greek word from that use to denote the devil, and might be rendered demons. The bible applies the other word only to Satan. Jesus alleges, as proof of his mission, that the demons are cast out; He promises his apostles the same power that he himself exercised against those wicked spirits. The cure was always in the word of power entrusted to his disciples, in His name, and which the demons always obeyed. They all owned the power of Jesus. So do we. [296, 310, 311, 318, 319, 355, 378, 380, BD, 398]