

Angels & Demons

by Craig Smith

Since this issue of *Deep & Wide* is coming out right between Halloween, which often highlights the demonic, and Christmas, which often highlights the angelic, we thought this would be an appropriate time to explore the topic of angels and demons.

Throughout the centuries, Christians have had an on-



again, off-again relationship with angelic spirits. There have been periods in our history where we have been almost obsessed by these enigmatic creatures...and other periods where they seem to have hardly warranted a passing glance.

In recent years, there has been a tremendous upsurge of interest in this subject, not only among Christians but among non-Christians

as well. Television shows, web sites, books and pamphlets have appeared in astonishing numbers, causing many men and women to be naturally curious about both angels and their opposites, demons. Unfortunately, many of the “authorities” to whom interested researchers have turned have nothing more to offer than imaginative speculation. The truth is that “angelology” is a study with very few sources from which to draw its information. Of course, the only expert to be found on the subject of angelic spirits is the God who made them, and so what little we know about them is to be found in the pages of Scripture. However, even the Bible has surprisingly little to say about these beings.

What are angels?

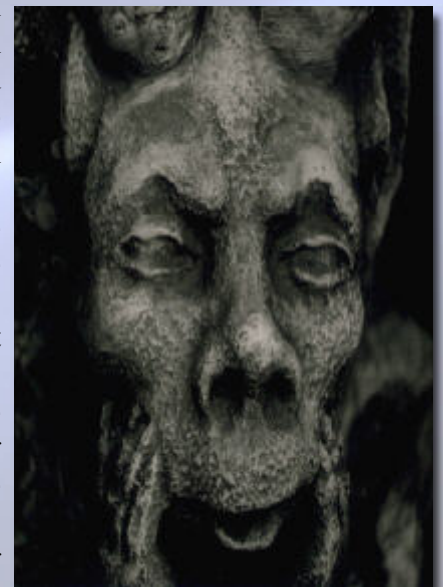
Angels are created beings that God appears to have brought into existence at some time prior to His creation of the earth. This is implied by references such as the one found in Job 38:7, where angels are portrayed as rejoicing over the creation of the earth. Beyond that, details are

scarce. Many scholars believe that angels were created on the first or second day of Genesis 1 and there is some inferential support for this theory. However, there is simply not enough Biblical evidence to say conclusively.

As *beings*, rather than *objects*, angels possess intellect (1Pe. 1:12), emotions (Luke 15:10) and authentic will (Jude 1:6). In this sense, angels can be said to be persons, though of course not in precisely the same way as human beings. In important respects, angelic nature appears to be an inversion of our own. We are primarily physical, having been created with bodies and being destined to be restored to them at Christ’s return, but we may exist for a time as spirit (during the period of disembodiment between physical death and resurrection). Angels, on the other hand, are pure spirit, but they may assume physical form for a time (see Gen. 19:1-3).

What do angels do?

The English word “angel” comes from the Greek term *angelos* which means “messenger.” This gives us some insight into the nature of angels, but it does not fully describe the host of activities in which these beings are engaged. Perhaps because human exposure to these beings has been primarily limited to those that *do* bring messages, we tend to describe all of these creatures with the generic term “angels.” However, in addition to the word “angel,” the Bible distinguishes between types of such beings with words like archangel, seraphim, cherubim, principalities, powers, etc. It is not clear if these names always refer to the nature of such angels or if they are used sometimes as descriptions of particular roles or duties performed.



On the most general level, angels serve God, but the exact manner in which they do this appears to depend on

the particular being in question. Some are in command of other angels (Rev. 12:7). Some bring messages to humans about important events (Luke 1:8-17). Some appear to be primarily concerned with worship (Rev. 4:8). Others seem to serve as warriors and guards (Gen. 3:24). A few appear to be intimately concerned with overseeing human affairs on a geographical basis (Rev. 2 & 3).

What are demons?

The English word “demon” comes from the Greek *daimonion*, which the New Testament uses as a synonym of *akathartos pneuma* (“evil spirit”). It is generally accepted by Christian scholars that demons are those angelic spirits who rebelled against God with Lucifer (Eze. 28:11-19, Isa. 14:13-15). If Rev. 12:4 is a reference to this rebellion, as seems likely, then 1/3 of the angels were cast to earth with Lucifer. The Bible does not directly reveal any information about when this rebellion happened but it would appear to have taken place prior to Adam and Eve’s own fall.

Lucifer, also known as Satan or the Devil, was apparently a spirit of considerable power and privilege before his sin (Eze. 28:12-14) and he retains some of this even after his banishment (Job 1).

Satan retains command of the lesser spirits that rebelled with him (Rev. 12:7) and it is because of this that we often speak of “Satanic” attacks without necessarily meaning that Lucifer himself is directly involved in the event. This is similar to the way we can charge that the U.S. was attacked by Osama bin Laden on 9/11 without meaning that he actually flew any of the planes. Unfortunately, this direct attribution, while perfectly logical, has caused some Christians to mistakenly think of Satan as being omni-present when he is nothing of the sort. While he is the greatest of the demons, and possibly of all angels as well, he is still a created, finite being and his attributes are in no way equivalent to God’s.

Is there an angelic/demonic hierarchy?

Throughout Christian history, various writers have attempted to delineate an elaborate chain of command to which angels (and apparently demons) adhere. While such organizations are primarily speculative, there is clear Biblical evidence for some kind of hierarchy among the angels.

First, there is the use of the term “archangel” which appears to denote superiority, if not of nature, then at least of rank (1Th. 4:16, Jude 1:9). Second, we find the use of possessive constructions by which some angels are portrayed as belonging, in some sense, to another angel (see Rev. 12:7 where we find mention of Michael’s

angels and the dragon’s angels). This is similar to the way in which soldiers are construed as “belonging” to a commanding officer (e.g. “General Patton ordered *his* men to advance on the enemy”). Third, an angelic hierarchy is implied by references to the power or position of certain angels (Luke 1:19 - where Gabriel declares himself one who “stands in the presence of God,” or Dan. 10:13 - the very name “Michael” means one who is “like God”). Fourth, some angels and demons are portrayed in Scripture as having command over large geographical regions (Rev. 3, Dan. 10:13-21) and, presumably, over the lesser spirits acting within those regions. Finally, though the exact meaning of the text is debated, Matthew 17:19 seems to hint that some demonic spirits are more difficult to drive out than others, possibly because they are of greater power.

What can demons do to Christians?

This is an important question which has, unfortunately, not been answered carefully enough over the centuries. This has led to some dangerous misunderstandings. For instance, it is frequently said that Christians cannot be “demon possessed” since they are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. However, this is, at best, an extreme oversimplification and, at worst, simply incorrect. This misunderstanding arises, in part, from an unfortunate decision on the part of some Biblical translators. Where the phrase “demon possession” or “possessed by a demon” occurs in English Bibles, it translates either the Greek phrase “has an unclean spirit” or the adjective “demonized.” In both cases, the literal idea is that an individual is negatively affected by a demonic spirit to some degree. What we call “possession” (where the oppressing spirit has assumed a significant degree of control over a person’s motor functions) is simply the extreme end of a spectrum of demonic influence. Lesser forms of demonic oppression may involve feelings of depression or fear (1Sa. 16:14).

Even the Apostle Paul suffered under some sort of demonic affliction (2Co. 12:7). Since the Bible does not explicitly indicate that Christians are liable to demonic



affliction from only a portion of the spectrum discussed above, it is a mistake to draw an arbitrary line on the spectrum and assure believers that they cannot suffer a particular kind of oppression which is not even named in Scripture. A number of evangelical theologians today believe that many Christians may be suffering from demonic afflictions that go unrecognized, and thus undefeated, simply because they have been wrongly told that believers are immune to those particular types of oppression.

More important than the degree of affliction that demons can or can not bring against believers is the fact that, in Christ, believers have been given all necessary authority to achieve victory over these spirits (Luke 10:17-18, Eph. 2:6, *et al*). We have nothing to fear from them so long as we remember that they are present and can affect us in various ways, especially if we are not on guard against them.



In the vast majority of cases, demons apparently gain access to individuals, Christian or otherwise, through sin (Eph. 4:26-27) and so the greatest defense against these beings is not simply salvation, but holy living. There are some indications that, while confession and repentance of

sin closes the door to additional spirits entering a person's life, those spirits which have already begun their oppression through a previously opened door may need to be cast out directly. Thus demonic affliction does not always indicate *present* unresolved sin but may be a holdover from previous sin long since repented. Please note: this principle is not explicitly taught by the Bible, but is drawn from common Christian experience. While no particular text of Scripture advances this precise principle, it is certainly not contradicted by Scripture and appears to be consistent with the larger Biblical teaching on this topic.

Is there a connection between demons and “ghosts” or “hauntings”?

Possibly. In some cases, the answer would appear to be yes, though most such phenomena are undoubtedly hoaxes, hallucinations or simple errors of perception.

“Ghosts” are believed by many people to be the souls of departed human beings. However, the Bible indicates that this cannot be the case. Throughout the Bible we are told consistently that, apart from a miracle (1Sa. 28), the souls of the dead are kept separate from the world of the living (Psalm 6:5, Luke 16:20-31). The Biblical evidence is somewhat sparse, but the implications seem clear. The notion that ghosts are human spirits who “don't know they are dead” or are somehow chained to the place of their demise is simply unsupportable against the backdrop of Biblical revelation regarding the nature of death.

However, there does seem to be some Biblical support for the notion of demons haunting particular geographical locations. Though the precise translations are debated, Is. 34:14 and Lev. 17:7 are thought by many scholars to be references to demons which haunt portions of the desert. More clearly, Matthew 12:43-45 seems to describe demons residing, at least for a time, in the desert and this may well be due to the fact that the desert was the place where occult/idolatrous sacrifices and activities took place. A substantial body of anecdotal evidence from Christian missionaries also supports the idea that the activity of some demons is restricted, either by choice or some unknown restraint, to particular geographical regions. While this is primarily speculation, the preceding observations may account for some purported “hauntings,” especially when the areas purported to be “haunted” were used for occult activity or perhaps the perpetration of horrific sin as these may give demons a foothold in those locales.

How shall we then live?

First, remember that we can be afflicted. Salvation is no guarantee of amnesty from spiritual warfare of varying degrees. Ephesians 6 contains a familiar warning, encouraging Christians to put on the full armor of God so as to be ready to resist the attacks of evil spiritual forces. If we were immune to such attacks, the command to put on the armor would be meaningless.

Interestingly, one of the pieces of armor this passage describes is the *helmet of salvation*. As modern people, we tend to think of the brain as the center of our being, so we naturally think of anything that protects the brain as being most important. But in the ancient world, it was the *heart* that was considered the center of our being. And what does Paul describe in that passage as protecting the heart? The *breastplate of righteousness*. Our best defense against demonic spirits is not salvation, but righteousness. Now, even righteous living does not guarantee us complete amnesty, because we are living in enemy territory. Attacks will come, but the more holy are our lives, the more glancing will be the blows of our enemy. And that leads me to my second point.

Second, remember that Satan's power over us is severely limited. No matter how frightening his attacks may seem, they can do only limited damage. Hear the words of Paul in Romans 8:38: *For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* I don't know what the specific limitations on demonic attack are, especially for Christians with unconfessed and unrepented sin in their lives, but I know this: no one who is in Christ can be taken out. Whatever the Devil can do, it is ultimately temporary for those who are in Christ.

Third, remember who we are in Christ. In Christ, we have been seated in the heavenlies... Eph. 2:6 describes this and it is a description of our authority over the spiritual forces of evil. Remember what Jesus did when people afflicted by demons were brought to him? He told them to leave and they left. The people were astonished because they were familiar with the long, complicated and often unsuccessful nature of Jewish exorcisms. But Jesus didn't rely on special rituals or rites. He simply commanded the spirits to depart and the spirits obeyed. This is why the people exclaimed, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He

commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him."

And when his disciples returned from their first missionary journey, what did they say to Jesus? They rejoiced that even the demons obeyed them when commanded in the name of Christ. Jesus' authority over evil spirits is delegated to those who follow him. What was true of the first disciples is true of us. We have nothing to fear. Evil spirits are no real threat to us...except when we forget about them and provide them with open doors into our lives. Evil spirits are only dangerous when we forget their presence and our position.

Craig Smith's recent sermon on this topic can be heard at www.shepherdproject.com/messages.htm.



Disturbing Facts & Trends

- **Only 32% of self-designated Born-Again Christians believe in moral absolutes.***
- **50% of self-designated Born-Again Christians believe that Satan is a myth.***
- **31% of self-designated Born-Again Christians believe that Jesus sinned while on earth.***

*** Source: Barna Research Group, 2004**