

Transcript 118

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. Today, Jeff, Kevin and I are going to continue in our series of discussing angels and demons, so if you have not listened to the previous episodes where we've covered, what does the Bible say about angels? What does the Bible say about demons? What does the Bible say about Satan? Today we're going to be covering what's the Bible say about demon possession and also the question very important question can a Christian be demon possessed? So joining me today again is Jeff, the editor for bibleref.com and Kevin, the managing editor of Got Questions Ministries. So this is a question I'm sure you guys know also that we we see quite a bit, and often it's more recently I've seen some questions on does it still happen? Because when you you read the Bible, especially the Gospels, where it discusses multiple instances where Jesus heals someone who was demon possessed, we don't seem to be seeing that same kind of stuff today or do we? Or is it more a matter of where there's some confusion between what could be a severe psychological disorder versus that demon possession we will be discussing that a little bit, but Kevin wont you start us off and just as you looked into primarily the Gospels and what it says about demon possession, what are some of the key points?

Kevin Stone

Yes, it's good to take a look at Scripture and see what's happening there. And that's where we start you know, forming our theology and we come to our conclusions based on what we read in Scripture. This is the inspired word of God, and we know that when Jesus walked the earth, he interacted with spiritual forces, many times, especially in the book of Luke we see a lot of encounters with the demonic. And of course, Jesus Jesus always just dealt with it with a word you know he's spoken and is the power of Christ that that cast these demons out.

Kevin Stone

I'm going to take a look at some passages here that are specify demonic activity and in fact demon possession. Not every case where there's a demon involved is there possession, but in these cases that or I'm going to read these passages it actually says there was a possession of some kind and the demon was cast out. And so I have like I don't know four or five of these passages here.

Kevin Stone

Matthew Chapter 9 says that while they were going out, a man who was demon possessed and could not talk was brought into Jesus. And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke. Crowd was amazed and said nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel. The display of the power of Christ was amazing to them. And it was Jesus who drove out that demon. And the effect of the demon in this particular person's life, in Matthew Chapter nine was that he was mute. This demon was preventing him from speaking. As soon as Jesus drove the demon out, the man began to speak and so there was a direct correlation there between his condition and the demon possession.

Kevin Stone

In Matthew Chapter 12 then they brought to Jesus a demon possessed man. So again, we're specifying that there was a demon inside this man. And this man was blind and mute Matthew says. And Jesus

healed him so that he could both talk and see. So here the effects are a little bit different, but we do have the mute aspect, but also the blind aspect. He could not see and he could not speak. Jesus cured both of those conditions when he cast out that demon.

Kevin Stone

Matthew 17, they came to a crowd and a man came up to Jesus and kneeling before him said, Lord have mercy on my son, for he has seizures and suffers terribly. For he often falls into the fire and often into the water, and so there's the description of the condition of this boy that is brought to Jesus and at this point it doesn't, there's no mention of a demon. It's not until we get a couple verses later on in the passage. This is Matthew 17 verse 18 says that Jesus rebuked the demon and it came out of him and the boy was healed instantly. So there was this boy that was suffering terribly Matthew says. He had seizures and there was some self-destructive stuff going on here was he was being thrown into the fire, thrown into the water, different ways to harm this boy and maybe even destroy him. And Jesus healed him specifically by rebuking the demon. So in this case again there was a demon possession in this young boy.

Kevin Stone

Mark Chapter 5. This is the story of Legion. Where Jesus goes to the area of the gadarenes and he steps out of the boat immediately, there met him out of the tombs a man with an uncleaned spirit. We find out later that there are many many spirits in this man. And then listen to the description of this man. He lived among the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain for he had often been bound with shackles and chains. But he wrenched the chains apart and broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. Jesus said to him, come out of this man you impure spirit.

Kevin Stone

There's a little bit of a conversation after that, and the demons, plural, leave the man. So again, it's a power of Christ and just simply speaking come out of him that cures this man. He's he's later found clothed and in his right mind, and sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to Jesus instructions. But before this there I mean he was out of control. He had a. He was associated with the with cemeteries. And the tombs and the uncleanness there. He had he was exhibiting superhuman strength, no one could overpower him. No one could tame him except for our Lord Jesus. He has the power. With his spoken word He drives this demon out. Or actually this legion of demons.

Kevin Stone

And in the book of Acts we have the case of the apostle Paul, who is going to a place of prayer. This is Acts chapter 16 in Philippi and they were met by a female slave who had a demon by which she predicted the future. So this particular demon possession was giving her some special knowledge that she would not have ordinarily had. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortunetelling. And then she followed Paul and the rest of us, Luke writes, shouting these men are servants of the most high God who are telling you the way to be saved. She was turning this whole thing into a circus act.

Kevin Stone

Verse 18. She kept us up for many days. Finally, Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said of the spirit in the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to come out of her. That moment, the spirit left her. So we see through these passages that demon possession did occur, there were actually demons possessing human bodies. They were. They seemed to have been in control of the actions and the thoughts of these people, that they were inhabiting but it manifested in various ways. Sometimes it was a sickness of some kind, a physical malady. Sometimes it was great strength, sometimes it was special knowledge. It was different things at different times, but they, we also see that they are driven out by the power of Christ in each case. Even when Paul casts out the demon in Acts chapter 16 he is doing so in the power and the name of Christ.

Kevin Stone

It's probably one other case of Demon possession that we need to mention and that is Luke Chapter 22 when Judas Iscariot is leaving the the Last Supper, Luke says that Satan entered Judas, who was one of the 12. And we know the result of that as Satan was indwelling Judas Iscariot and Judas went out and betrayed the Lord Jesus Christ to death.

Shea Houdmann

Kevin that's the great reminders of what Scripture says about demon possession and the symptoms, so to speak, of it. I'm just kind of thinking in the study I did in preparation for this conversation and I don't know that there's any place in Scripture where it explicitly answers this question. Maybe Jeff you can touch on it, or Kevin, but I think I have some ideas, but why do the demons desire to possess people? Like what what is their motivation for it 'cause I've heard, we've received questions about do demons possess people because they really want to have a body and or demon possessed people just because they love to steal, kill and destroy? So what would you say? What is the main motivation of Satan's demons to possess people?

Jeff Laird

It seems like mostly what they're doing is they're spreading fear and uncertainty and doubt. People have a tendency to respond to those things in different ways. Sometimes people turn to God, sometimes people don't, and in a culture that's full of things like idols and false religious beliefs and superstitions, then seeing those things can actually drive people to other things that aren't true. So I can see how it's possible that a demon could use those things.

Jeff Laird

Uh, a guy like the the one who was in the tombs who's supernaturally strong and cutting himself and just acting insane, that's going to inspire an awful lot of fear and panic. And we see what happens when people are afraid. They resort to all sorts of strange things in order to try to fix that. I can see that as possibly being one of the things that demons are attempting to do when they're doing this is just to use that person as some sort of an influence in the world that promotes fear and panic. I think sometimes it may even be that the the demons intention is not, not necessarily for other people to notice as much.

Jeff Laird

Some of the cases that we that we talked about there in the Bible, the effects are on the person in question, and it's possible that other people didn't necessarily connect that with explicit demon

possession, that they knew that there was a problem but they did not realize or recognize that there was something that was supernatural that was going on there. And in that case, it could be very much the same as we see Satan interacting with other people today where he's trying to interfere with or confuse or slow down your belief, your approach, and the things that you're doing in faith. So I think there's there's probably a couple different reasons for why demons would do what they do, but they don't, they aren't given any explicit motivation, so all we can really do is speculate.

Kevin Stone

Yeah, we're in the realm of conjecture now, but yeah, I think what Jeff said is is perfectly sensible as to why demons would possess people. Going back to the the Legion there in the area of the gadarenes. What a what a spectacle that man was and everybody in that region, I'm sure knew of him. And going along with that knowledge and what he was doing was a fear and a and an unhealthy fear of the demonic. And people were probably saying, you know, this is a powerful force nobody can deal with it. We had better appease this force. We had better worship this this spiritual force. We had better offer some sacrifices to to this thing. We better make sure that we're appeasing it so that we don't, and that is, you know, that just leads right into paganism, leads right into idolatry, the worship of demons. And Jesus comes and puts a stop to it all. And then I love when when Jesus is ready to go back across the the sea and the man wants to come with him of course, you know, let me come with you. I want to be with you. You are the savior. And Jesus says no, you stay here in your region where people know you and you go and tell everybody your testimony of how you met the Messiah and he healed you. What a testimony this man had then and as he shows that there's a greater power than the power that these people had feared for so long. The power of God and Jesus Christ the Savior.

Jeff Laird

Another thing that I think is interesting when we look at those different passages is we have the same thing with demonic possession and demonic influence that we do sometimes with miracles. People will look at miracles and they'll say, well, why don't miracles happen as often today, as they happened in the Bible? And we have to remind people they didn't happen very often in the Bible, they're recorded there. So yes, when you read the Bible, you'll come across miracles relatively often, but that's sort of like you come across presidential assassinations fairly often if you read through history. It doesn't mean that it's the kind of thing that happens all the time. Same thing with demonic possession.

Jeff Laird

One of the first passages that Kevin was reading there, people made a point of saying nothing like this has ever happened before. In the specific context they're referring to the healing and the miraculous aspect of it, but that still suggests that this is not something that happens especially often, so I don't think that we we necessarily have to look at these things in the Bible and say, oh, in every town there were 5, 6, 7, 20 people who were overtly possessed by demons. It was likely something that needed some sort of special circumstance or some particular environment to happen. And that leads to one of the reasons that Shea, I know another question that we sometimes run into is this question of Christians and demonic possession. And I think the fact that we don't see it as often as people seem to think that we do, and that it's not the same nature that we see in pop culture, which is something we can get into later, but I think that recognizing that it is not something that happens especially often in the 1st place is a good place to start with our understanding for why it's reasonable for us to have a conviction, not

necessarily an ironclad absolute, 100% insistence, but a pretty strong conviction that born again Christians, cannot be demon possessed. And that's a starting place. It's just not the ending point for that 'cause there's a lot more to consider.

Shea Houdmann

Jeff, it's definitely jump into that one, but that's to me probably the most important question related specifically to demon possession. But if you look through back to demon possession in general for just for a second, you look at, off the top my head I can't think of any occurrences of demon possession throughout the Old Testament. And then it happened quite a bit during the time of Jesus and then a little bit in Acts, but then throughout the Epistles they there's never any, OK, you're going to be running across a lot of people who are demon possessed. Here's what you do. So I think that gives weight to your thing. This is not something that happens that often. Even from the fact that it seems to happen most often when Jesus was here during his ministry, and that makes sense. That's the goal of the demons is to instill fear in people, to thwart God's plan or what, what more would they want to thwart than Jesus accomplishing his mission?

Shea Houdmann

So I've heard some Bible scholars say that they think demon possession will become more common as the end times approach, and that seems like a reasonable assertion to make. But again, even in Scripture, aside from in the Gospels, demon possession is not common. It's not something that happens that often, and I think that's due to God's protection over people, whether that's believers in Christ or even his protection over nonbelievers and they're still created in his image and he is perfectly willing to protect them from being attacked by demons. In that way, there seems to be, it's not just like you're walking down the street and boom, you're at risk of being demon possessed. There seems to be more to it than that. There has to be some sort of engagement with dark spiritual forces that opens yourself up to those sorts of things. But again, like given, this is a little conjecture, but the Bible didn't say I don't think in any of the cases, it specifically says what caused that person to become demon possessed.

Shea Houdmann

So its fascinating. There's been so many movies, pop culture made about demon possession that we have all these ideas about it and it's scripture honestly doesn't say that much about it. But with that said, let's jump into the can Christians be demon possessed? And Kevin why don't you start off as I know you had several points that you made the arguments for, why you and we believe that Christians cannot be demon possessed.

Kevin Stone

Yes, I'm of the conviction that a believer in Jesus Christ, someone who is united with Christ cannot be demon possessed. And I have that conviction because of, or at least for these three reasons, that we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God. First Corinthians 3:16, don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple? And that God spirit dwells in you. First Corinthians 6 and verse 19. Your temples of the Holy Spirit again. And then I'd also point people to Romans 8 in verses 9 through 11 that talks about our indwelling by the Holy Spirit. So we already have the Holy Spirit living within us. And he's God. I don't think that he's going to be making room for a demon to move in even temporarily.

Kevin Stone

Also, Scripture says that we have overcome the evil spirits of this world. First John four and verse four you, dear children, are from God and have overcome them. In the context, it's the demonic forces of this world and the false teachers that go along with them. We've overcome them because the one who is in you is greater than the one who's in the world.

Kevin Stone

Again, we're being pointed to the power of Christ. Power of the of God himself and then First John five in verse four, everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. And Paul talks about how we've been given the shield of faith and we have this indwelling Holy Spirit and we have overcome the evil of this world through the power of God.

Kevin Stone

And then God is greater than the one who's in the world. John points that out in the verse I just read, but I love Jesus parable in Luke Chapter 11. This is verses 21 and 22. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder. So here we have Satan, who is pictured as a strong man who's guarding his house. Satan is in this world, he's armed. He has all kinds of weapons. He knows how to use them, and he's guarding his house. He's pretty formidable and guarding the world, this possession of his that at least something that he considers his position. And he thinks he's got all these people under his control. But then here comes Jesus and Jesus is the stronger one and he attacks this strong man. He overpowers this strong man. He takes away his power. He takes away his defenses. And he divides up the plunder. That's us. He divides up the the people that were under Satan's control, so now we are no longer in the Kingdom of darkness. We have been transferred to the Kingdom of light. We are not children of the night or of the darkness we are children of the light now. Because Jesus has rescued us, he is the stronger man that came and overpowered the one that seemed so formidable at first.

Kevin Stone

For those three reasons, I believe a believer cannot be demon possessed, that is we have the indwelling Holy Spirit. We have been promised that we have overcome the world. And the greater is he who is in us than he who is in the world.

Jeff Laird

Those are similar reasons to where I am on the concept of Christians being demon possessed. That same passage in Luke 11 goes on to talk about the idea of a house that's been left empty and the idea of a spirit being kicked out of the house goes around doesn't find anywhere to stay comes back finds the house empty again. And I know it's important for us not to blur the implications of separate parables. However, those come right on top of each other, so this idea of us being indwelt by the Holy Spirit suggests that we're not empty vessels. We're not just places that are waiting around. There's so much in the New Testament about believers, true believers being filled with the spirit, led by the spirit, guided by the spirit, at least from a logical standpoint, it just doesn't seem to jive with the idea that a demonic spirit could take up residence in somebody exactly the same way as the Holy Spirit.

Jeff Laird

And there again, I think you know the mention was made of things like popular culture. We tend to get dragged into thinking about demons and demonic possession in these superstitious science fiction Dungeons and Dragons kind of ways where we think of things like the Exorcist and movies like that, where somebody has a demon that acts like a physical animal that latches itself onto somebody. Where there's no control, no sense of it, and then also the people who are demon possessed act outrageously. The only person in Scripture who seems to act even remotely like something we see in a horror movie is the guy in the tombs. Everybody else, the effects are relatively subtle. It's much more likely that demonic possession, demonic influence is going to come in that sense.

Jeff Laird

But there again, that's what people are looking for. They're expecting they're thinking is it's going to be something like that. And that's because, again, we want to treat religion, Christianity, spirituality, like it's magic. I have my amulets. I have my words. I have my prayers. I have my spells. I think when we have the right understanding of who we are either in Christ or not in Christ, I think that leads us away from those superstitious ideas and it leads us towards a better understanding. Or we're not as afraid and we're not as prone to those misunderstandings.

Kevin Stone

Yeah, I just want to stress what Jeff just said that we need to be getting our theology from Scripture and not from horror movies. You know, we don't look to Hollywood for what we believe. They're not our theological teachers. We need to always go back to Scripture. What do scriptures say? What does Scripture not say? And we need to be basing our lives on that. And one thing that Scripture says is that that we are in Christ, Christ in me and I in Christ. There's great safety and security in that.

Jeff Laird

And I think that's true, but I think it's also important to remember that we can't and shouldn't downplay the idea that demons or demonic influences can be harmful to people, even if they're Christians, even if they're believers. And that's sort of a separate category from Demon possession, but an example that I think is at least a good shorthand of that is Job. In the book of Job Satan does certain things to Job. But one of the things that he does is he gives him a disease. Now that's a physical infliction on Job. And it's something that comes through some sort of demonic or evil spiritual source. Job's not possessed, he's not being controlled by Satan, but there's an example of an evil spirit that's causing some sort of blatant effect on somebody. And we can get into the theological debate about Job being an Old Testament believer and indwelling of the Holy Spirit and everything else like that.

Jeff Laird

But I think the point is that we can, we can see there's precedent in the Bible for the idea that demons and evil spirits can harm or afflict somebody, even if they're not directly possessing them. And I'm of the conviction of the inclination that most of the demonic interaction that most people are going to have is in that nature at the most. Most of it's really going to be in terms of things like influence, temptation, psychological aspects, and things like that. I just don't see anything in Scripture that leads

me to believe that demon possession of non believers is very common or that full blown demonic oppression is something that's really that frequently happening in the lives of believers.

Shea Houdmann

Good points both you and it's been a really good conversation. If I were to again, I entirely agree, my firm conviction is that believers cannot be demon possessed. Maybe I'd say my conviction is 99.9 just because I've heard from missionaries, who or other ministers who are firm Bible believers and were of the same conviction who have then witnessed, what to them truly seem like a believer being demon possessed. So whether that was a severe case of demonic oppression as Jeff was talking about or maybe the person was not actually a true believer.

Shea Houdmann

And then I heard the argument I mean I so we would think of Holy Spirit indwells us, so there's not room for a demon in there too. Well, I don't know that in a spiritual sense, room really makes the same sense as then OK, there's only room for one person in this closet. Well, that's physical space. How does space work in the spiritual? I don't know, but again, it does not make sense that the Holy Spirit isn't dwelling a person. He would allow that person to become fully possessed by demon, but all this to say, and as both Kevin and Jeff said during dealing with spiritual forces, Satan and his demons is is dangerous. It's not something to be treated lightly because throughout scriptures you see multiple examples of lives as they've destroyed and ruined and they tempt, they deceive, they lead us astray. They can have all sorts of negative impacts, so even putting demon possession outside of real possibility for believers, that's not to minimize how dangerous it can be.

Shea Houdmann

The next episode we are actually going to do is on spiritual warfare, and we'll be going into the demonic oppression a little bit more in that episode as well. But this has been primarily a focus on both demon possession in general and then the question of whether Christians can be demon possessed. So hope you found our conversation helpful, encouraging, edifying. Jeff and Kevin, thank you for joining me. Thank you for your insights and I know you guys have been studying this issue alongside me for the past couple weeks.

Shea Houdmann

So tune in next time for what the Bible say about spiritual warfare? That'll be a very important conversation as well. This has been the Got Questions podcast on what does the Bible say about demon possession. Got Questions? The Bible has answers. We'll help you find them.