

Excerpts of Archived Lecture:

Challenge to Scriptural Authority: Demonic Possession

By Raymond E. Harris

In the main, the proponents of modern-day demonism fall into three major groups. First, there are those who zealously declare that demons are active today and that they can influence, induce or possess anyone, including a Christian. There are others who say demons are active today, but that they can only possess the non-christian, and especially those involved in the occult. These usually are people who hold the doctrine of the impossibility of apostasy. Hence, they claim that Christians are “kept and protected by God.” And there are still others who say demons are active today, but that they can only influence, suggest and deceive.

Among those who believe that demons can only possess the unsaved we find the well-known Baptist, Merrill F. Unger, A.B., Ph. D., Th. M., Th. D. Mr. Unger is a highly respected theologian, having written a Bible handbook, a Bible dictionary and two well-known books on demonology. It was somewhat difficult to know just where to list Mr. Unger in this study as in his book, *Demons In The World Today*, he hedges some on his former position by acknowledging that he now believes there may be limited instances of Christians being possessed.

Mr. Unger's first work on demonology, *Biblical Demonology*, was copyrighted in 1952. It is likely the most widely read book on demonology in America today. It is a rather general work, briefly covering a wide scope of material. It is very readable and yet considered by some to be scholarly. In my opinion, portions of the book are profitable; however, I strongly disagree with many of his conclusions.

But, there is still another theory involving demons. Its proponents declare that demons are still active, but that they can only influence, suggest, and deceive. They maintain that demons cannot now literally and physically possess anyone. However, advocates of this position get nearly as excited about demons as those who believe in possession. They believe demons influence, suggest and deceive to the point that it is said that the afflicted person has an evil spirit of anger, lust, fear, depression, hate, uncleanness or infidelity. Everything from headaches, to temper fits, to skipping worship services is attributed to demon influence.

With the current emphasis on demons it is not uncommon for various denominations to conduct "deliverance services" where they engage in all sorts of loud, wild, bombastic exorcism. J. P. Newport, in his book, *Demons, Demons, Demons*, reports how 17 year old Bernadette Hasler, a Swiss girl, was beaten to death in 1966, by a defrocked German priest and five of his followers while trying to drive a demon out. And in this country, people have been driven to the verge of insanity by religious zealots who see a demon behind every bush and tree and *in* most people.

Beginning in the middle of the last century, modernists began to cut the very heart and soul from the one Faith of the New Testament. Our permissive society refuses to accept the responsibility for its sins and an obliging, emotional "clergy" cries, "Demons, demons, demons."

Lastly, I am persuaded that the present whirlwind of demonism is also a result of many *false scripture concepts* held by current preachers and theologians. Current demonism has found a fertile seed-bed in the resurgence of Pentecostalism in the various denominations. Belief in the direct operation of the Holy Spirit, tongue speaking, and divine healing was bound to lead to exorcism. It is indeed logical and reasonable that if God's Spirit is working directly in a supernatural way, the Devil's forces are energetically working in the same fashion. Likewise, Premillennialism puts a perverted interpretation on many passages of scripture having to do with the Devil and his demons. Truly, *if the kingdom has not come, Satan has not been bound. If the kingdom has not come, the demons have not been cast down, Christ's mission was thwarted and the victory has not yet been won.* Hence, we see that only those with a proper understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit and the establishment of the Kingdom will be able to come to grips with Bible teaching regarding demons. . .

Satan was bound by Jesus and the demons have been cast into "the abyss." Consider with me some scriptures having to do with the robbing and binding of Satan. In Lk. 10:18, Jesus said, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." In the N.A.S.B. it is rendered, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning." The N.E.B. renders the passage, "I watched how Satan fell . . ." and Phillips translates the verse, "I was watching and saw Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning." Notice that in the context, Jesus responded in this way when the "seventy" returned from preaching "the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you." They reported that even the demons were subject to them through His name. Notice that the expressions "beheld," "was watching," and "I watched" are all past tense.

With the preaching of Jesus and his disciples, accompanied with the casting out of demons, Satan is said to have fallen. In John 12:31, Jesus in referring to his eminent crucifixion said, “Now is the judgment of the world; Now shall the prince of this world be cast out.” Will we believe Jesus or twentieth century demonologist? Jesus, in his day said, “Now shall the prince of this world be cast out;” yet today’s demonists say the Devil is still loose and as powerful as ever.

In Matt. 12:22–29, Jesus cast out a demon. The Pharisees accused him of doing this by the power of Satan. The Lord pointed out that it would be absurd to think the Prince of demons would work through Him to destroy his own kingdom. Rather he suggests, “But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.” And then he explains, “How can one enter into a strong man’s house, and spoil his goods except he first bind the strong man? And then he will spoil (rob, R.E.H.) his house.” Jesus here affirms that he had bound Satan and was demonstrating his domination over him by casting out his demons. The apostle Paul later corroborated the above in Col. 2:15 when he wrote, “And having spoiled (robbed, cast out, R.E.H.) principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” Also consider Rev. 12:7–9. In that place John wrote: “... neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.” We encourage our readers to consider the comments on the foregoing passage in Ray Summer’s commentary, *Worthy Is The Lamb*, and in William Hendriksen’s commentary, *More Than Conquerors*. We want to note that in Rev. 12, Satan and his angels are cast down at the *coronation* of Jesus. Verse five explains how the man child that was to rule was caught up to the throne of God. Verses seven through nine tell of the struggle of Satan against the church prior to the binding and casting down of Satan described in Rev. 20:1–10.

Consider especially Rev. 20:2–3, “And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled; and after that he must be loosed a little season.” Hence, with the victory of the resurrected Christ and the sustaining of the church, the conquest of Satan was accomplished. And finally, in regard to the casting down of Satan, let’s notice 1 John 3:8, “He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.”

It is our sincere conviction that Jesus was totally successful in fulfilling the mission of his first advent. John said that Jesus came to “destroy the works of the devil” and we believe he did just that.

Further, James 4:7, tells us to, “*Resist* the devil, and he will flee from you.” And in 1 Peter 5:8–9, the apostle admonished, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom *resist* stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.” In the days of Jesus on earth it is evident that people, the good and the bad, were helpless before the power of Satan and his demons. However, with the resurrection of Jesus and the establishment of his kingdom, man now has the ability to “resist” due to Satan losing a great deal of his power and his angels being cast into “chains of darkness.” In James 1:13–15, it is made plain that man is a free moral agent and that if he acts in a wicked way, it is not because “the Devil made him do it.” But, rather it is because of his own lust and enticement.

Yes, James said: "... when lust hath conceived it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." Hence, if we are guilty of hate, adultery or fraud, it is not because of supernatural indwelling powers or demonic influences. It is a matter of succumbing to our own weakness and we will have to repent and obey God or we will have to answer in judgment.

Now before we proceed any further, we must note that the translators of our King James Version unfortunately did not distinguish between the Greek words *Diabolos* and *daimon*. *Diabolos*, means, accuser or slanderer, and is one of the names of Satan and should always be rendered, Devil. On the other hand, *daimon* should be translated "demon." Hence, the reader of the King James Version must always remember to make the distinction. There is but one Devil but there are many demons. The reader will note that the distinction between the words *Diabolos* and *diamon* is made in later translations.

Now let's consider a few verses in regard to the current limitation of demons. Let me call your attention to Matt, 25:41. In depicting the final judgment, Jesus said, "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire; prepared for the devil and his angels." From this we learn that the ultimate end of the Devil's angels is "everlasting fire." But what of their current status? Let's consider next, Matt. 12:26–29. The passage reads, "And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, (demons, R.E.H.) by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore, they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils (demons, R.E.H.) by the Spirit of God, *then the kingdom of God is come unto you*. Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house and spoil (take away, R.E.H.) his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil (plunder, R.E.H.) his house."

First, notice that the casting out of demons by the power of God was to take place *when the Kingdom was about to be established*. This causes the premillennialist to think demons are still active and may be cast out. However, to those who understand that the kingdom is the church, and that the kingdom has come, it is obvious that Jesus bound the strong man (Satan) and then proceeded to plunder his kingdom by casting out his demons. Also, it is obvious that the demons were terrified at the very sight of Jesus. In Matt. 8:29 one such demon cried out, "What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" Please note that this demon knew his time was limited and that Jesus had power to cut that time short.

But, now the question follows, when were the demons to be tormented? When was "the time" that he made reference to? Consider 2 Pet. 2:4, 9. There Peter wrote: "For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, (Tartarus, pits of darkness, R.E.H.) and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment:" (vs. 9): "The Lord knoweth how to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished."

It is our conviction that demons are fallen angels and in these verses, written in about 66 A.D., Peter tells us that these sinful angels had been cast into a dark pit and reserved unto the final judgment when they will enter into their eternal punishment. A similar statement is found in Jude 6, where it is written, "And the angels which kept not their first estate (original place with God, R.E.H.) but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." We notice that both Peter and Jude give us almost identical accounts as to the whereabouts of the demons. **"Their time" had come! They were in Tartarus, in chains of darkness, in a pit of darkness, reserved unto the judgment of the great day.**

And now, let's turn to a passage which, when considered in the light of the foregoing, sheds considerable light on our subject. It is Zechariah 13:1-2. It is our conviction that this inspired prophet, writing some 487 B.C., foretold the cessation of demon activity on earth. Let's read the passage. "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness. And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of Hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered; and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land." Notice that verse one gives us the point in time of the context. This is generally considered to be a Messianic prophecy, explaining that the time would come when God's people would be provided with a fountain at which their sins and uncleanness could be washed away. Hence, with the sacrifice of God's son, the fount of salvation would flow forth.

But now to verse two. What was to coincide with the coming of salvation? Three things. **First**, the idols of the pagan world would become so obscured that their names would even be forgotten. **Secondly**, with the coming of salvation, inspired prophets would cease to be. And **thirdly**, "The unclean spirit" (demons) would "pass out of the land." Now, that should be plain enough for anyone! Zechariah said with the coming of the fount of salvation, the demons were to pass out of the land and John later agreed that Jesus "was manifest that he might destroy the works of the devil." Zechariah said that with the coming of the fount of salvation, the prophets would also pass out of the land and in 1 Cor. 13:8-10, Paul wrote "... but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away."

Hence, with the victory of Jesus in his resurrection and coronation, and with the completion of the inspired word, “the prophets and the unclean spirit” passed “out of the land.” If the demons had not been cast down by the time of the cessation of spiritual gifts, mankind would truly be at the mercy of these evil spirits as there would be no one on earth with the power to cope with them. Notice what John said in 1 John 4:4; 5:18. “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them; because *greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.*” And again, “We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and *that wicked one toucheth him not.*”

PURPOSE. But, you may be quizzing, why did God allow demons so much freedom and power during the first century? It seems rather obvious to this writer that the demons were made readily available so Jesus could cast them out and demonstrate his complete mastery of all Satanic powers. Jesus proved repeatedly His total power over the Devil and his hosts and so proved to one and all that He truly was the Son of God. The casting out of demons by “the twelve” and “the seventy,” was to help convince Israel that Jesus was the Messiah and that the kingdom was at hand. Later the apostles exercised their power over demons to prove they were the men of God with the message of God (Mk. 16:17–20). WHEN JESUS PROVED HIS DEITY AND THE APOSTLES PROVED THEIR APOSTLESHIP; AFTER THE CHURCH WAS ESTABLISHED AND AFTER THE NEW TESTAMENT WAS CONFIRMED AND COMPLETED, THE DEMONS “TIME” WAS UP, AND THEY ARE NOW CONFINED, AWAITING JUDGMENT.

However, some may feel that there are a few New Testament passages that do not seem to harmonize with our position on this matter. Let's consider some of these and see if they are really as contradictory as they may seem. But first, we must remind you that the Greek word *daimon* (demon) has not always meant the same thing to all people. A number of authorities may be cited to show how the meaning of the word has evolved. In E. W. Bullinger's, *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance*, we find the following: "In classic Greek, these words (*daimon* and *daimonion*) were originally the same as *theos*, god.... From Homer downwards they answer to the Latin *numen*, and denoted general divine agency, the working of a higher power, and afterwards it came to denote a destructive power. In the Septaugint, *daimonion*, is used in a bad sense, and in contrast to *theos*, god, (Deut. 32:17).... In the New Testament the word is specially applied to evil spirits.... They appear as special powers of evil in the service of Satan...." In Kittel's, *Theological Dictionary of The New Testament*, Vol. II, we are informed that in the earliest times the word *demon* could simply be defined as "supernatural power." It is further stated that in popular Greek belief, demons were "fundamentally the spirits of the departed." "Philosophy tried to fashion these notions into the conception of the demon as a divine force, but it had to take the popular belief into account, and to varying degrees it thus incorporated demons into its system as intermediary beings...." Hence, we see how the Greeks used the term *demon* in referring to the spirits of the dead, whom they deified and worshipped as intermediary gods who held a position between man and their great gods such as Jupiter, Zeus or Apollo. Both Thayer and W. E. Vine point out that the Greeks of New Testament times still held this view, as in Acts 17:18, they accused Paul of being a setter forth of strange demons or gods, after he had preached about the resurrection of Jesus.

In George Campbell's, *The Four Gospels*, Vol. I, page 170, he makes the following interesting observation in regard to the use of the word *demon*: "This having been a word much in use among the heathen, from whom the Hellenist Jews first borrowed it, it is reasonable to expect that, when it is used in speaking of pagans, their customs, worship and opinions, more especially when pagans are represented as employing the term, the sense should be that which is conformable, or nearly so, to classical use. Now, in classical use, the word signified a divine being, though not in the highest order of their divinities, and therefore supposed not equivalent to *theos*, but superior to human, and consequently, by the maxims of their theology, a proper object of adoration." Therefore, in our study of the use of the word *demon*, we must always consider who the passage is directed to, who the speaker is and we must also give due consideration to the context. If the speaker or the ones spoken to are Greeks, we must remember that the word *demon* likely refers to Greek deities and not to the evil spirits.

Now, let's make the application and consider 1 Cor. 10:20–21. It would seem obvious that Paul in this passage accommodated Greek thinking when he wrote to Corinth: "But I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils (demons, their lesser gods, R.E.H.) and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils (demons, the Greek idols, R.E.H.). Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils; ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils." Surely, we can all see that Paul in this passage is simply using terminology the Greeks would understand. Paul is not warning them about having fellowship with evil spirits, but rather he is cautioning them against any further involvement in their old idolatrous practices. 1 Cor. 8 makes this fact even more obvious.

Now, consider 1 Tim. 4:1: “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils: ...” Today’s demonists feel that this is one of their strongest passages. They steadfastly affirm that this text warns of false doctrines that will be spawned and spread by evil spirits. However, many Greek scholars and commentators agree that the structure of the sentence in the original will allow the expression “doctrines of devils” to mean either doctrines taught by demons *or* doctrines about demons. George Campbell, in *The Four Gospels*, Vol. I, pg. 176, in speaking of the use of the word *demon* in this passage comments, “... there is reason to think that it is used more extensively, for all those beings inferior to God who are made objects of adoration.... That this is his meaning is rendered not improbable, ...”

Matthew Henry believed that Paul was simply foretelling, “One of the great instances of the apostasy, namely, giving heed to doctrines of demons, or concerning demons; that is, those doctrines which teach the worship of saints and angels, as a middle sort of deities, between the immortal God and mortal men, such as the heathen called demons, and worshipped under that notion. Now this plainly agrees to the church of Rome, and it was one of the first steps towards that great apostasy, the enshrining of the relics of martyrs, paying divine honors to them, burning incense, consecrating images and temples, and making prayers and praises to the honor of saints departed.” Albert Barnes gives more than five pages in his commentary of 1 Timothy to the proposition that in 4:1–3, Paul was warning that the worship of “The Virgin Mary” and other dead saints, forbidding to marry and the abstaining from meats, would all be doctrines of the approaching Roman apostasy.

Likewise, modern demonists can find no consolation in James 2:19: “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils (demons R.E.H.) also believe and tremble.” If the word *demon* in this passage applies to “spirits of dead men,” James is certainly correct in saying that they believe and tremble. There are no atheist in hades! The spirits of all the dead are either in paradise or in torment awaiting judgment day. Truly, they all believe in God and tremble (see Lk. 16:19–31). If, on the other hand, James is speaking of evil spirits (fallen angels), they too believe and tremble as they are in the abyss, in chains of darkness, awaiting judgment (2 Pet. 2:4, 9; Jude 6).

But, some quiz, what about James 3:14–15? There the Lord’s brother wrote: “But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish (demoniacal, R.E.H.).” This passage does not teach that demons cause people to be filled with envy and strife, rather it simply teaches that a person with these qualities cannot be considered spiritually wise. People with these qualities evidence an earthly, sensual disposition such as that exhibited by the evil spirits.

Finally, let’s turn our attention to the book of Revelation. Remember that this book was written to the seven churches of Asia and that the inhabitants of this area were greatly influenced by Greek culture and religion. In Rev. 9:20, John wrote, “And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils (demons, R.E.H.), and the idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk.” In this passage John is not referring to their worshipping literal demons, but rather, as in the foregoing references, it is a condemnation of idolatry.

The verse provides its own commentary. They had worshipped that which could neither see, hear nor walk. The evil spirits were powerful and could certainly see, hear and move with great mobility.

And now, to the final passage to be considered in this investigation. Many of today's demon chasers will run to Rev. 16:13–14, to prove that demons are to be powerful and active until the end of time. The verses are as follows: “And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, (demons, R.E.H.) working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.” This is beyond doubt highly symbolic language, referring to events that were to soon take place to assure the victory and permanence of the church. This passage has nothing to do with literal evil spirits rallying literal kings to fight in a physical battle just before the second advent of Christ. Ray Summers, in his commentary, *Worthy Is The Lamb*, sums up the meaning of the passage in this way: “The three frogs perhaps symbolize some form of evil propaganda since they come from the mouth of the three. They are the offspring of the devil, of godless government and of false religion.”¹

¹ Harris, R. E. (1974). [The Challenge to Scriptural Authority: Demon Possession](#). In Bible Faculty of the Florida College (Ed.), *Biblical Authority: Its Meaning and Application* (pp. 28–44). Marion, IN: Cogdill Foundation Publications.