

Dealing With Demons

Polls tend to show that Americans are a largely religious people, with something close to 95 percent claiming a belief in God, and large numbers saying they think that heaven exists, and also angels.

But the people who respond to those polls appear to have an easier time personalizing religious concepts of good than of evil. As a New York Times article put it: Apparently this is a nation inclined more to theological optimism than to pondering literal representations of faith's dark side.

In 1997 the Barna Research Group, market researchers in Oxnard, Calif., reported that nearly two-thirds of Americans do not believe in the devil as a living entity.

In a nationwide survey of randomly selected people, Barna's pollsters asked whether they agreed that Satan is "not a living being, but is a symbol of evil." Sixty-two percent agreed with the statement, while 30 percent disagreed; the remaining 8 percent had no opinion.

The results echo a survey Barna did in 1995, in which people were asked whether they thought hell existed as an actual location, "a place of physical torment." Only 31 percent said they thought it did.

I suppose it's a matter of convenience for most people.

It's fun to believe in angels, but who wants to believe in demons. Let's keep demons in the horror movies where they belong!

Along with that, heaven is a great idea. We'd all like to go there if such a place existed, but who wants to believe in hell?

Post modern America is very creative when it comes to religion. We want to construct our own beliefs. We have a lot of very personalized, taylor-made religion.

The problem with home-brewed religion is it has no standard of measurement. It's totally subjective. It ignores truth.

I have discussions with people about eternal issues and they tried to dismiss the whole thing by telling me what they don't believe. I've had them say, "I don't

believe in heaven or hell so I'm not worried about what happens when I die."

My question to statements like that is always the same. "How did you come to the determination that heaven and hell don't exist? What evidence did you look at?" The same thing happens all most every time. They look at me with a blank stare because no one's ever asked them to substantiate their beliefs.

Just because we believe something doesn't mean it's true. Before Columbus most Europeans sincerely believed the earth was flat. One hundred and forty years ago scientists believed in spontaneous generation.

Maggots just grew by themselves in old meat. For most of recoded history scientists believed that solid matter was completely static. Today we know that atoms in solids vibrate at roughly a few million times per second.

Belief, no matter how sincere, does not equal fact. So then how do we know anything about eternity, spiritual issues, heaven & hell? Obviously we need a source of authority.

The Bible claims to be that source of authority. If it is, then the Bible should be able to meet the test. There should be some way of examining the Bible to see if it lives up to it's claims.

What are it's claims? II Timothy 3:16 *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God* The word translated "Scripture" is *graph* in Greek. It means "writings." We get our word graphite from *graphe*. That's the led in a pencil we write with.

So the Bible claims that the writings, in other words the very words them selves, are given by the inspiration of God. The word translated inspiration is *theopneustos*. *Theos* means "God," *pneuma* means "breath" or "wind." A pneumatic drill works on air pressure.

So every word was breathed out by God Himself. That's it's claim, what's the evidence?

The Bible is a book written over a period of 1500 years by 40 different authors that fits together in one book. It has a central theme running from beginning to end without contradiction.

Unlike other books of history it has been shown again and again to be 100% historically accurate. It contradicts no known facts of science even though it was written at a time of what we would call “scientific ignorance.” Only the Bible contains clear, specific, verifiable prophecies that are 100% accurate. To top it off the Bible has changed the lives of millions and millions of people and given them hope.

Many people have sat down to investigate the Bible and try and prove it false who have changed from skeptic to believer. From Lew Wallace who ended up writing Ben Hur to Simon Greenleaf, law professor at Harvard, whose books on jurisprudence are recognized as being on the level of Blackstone.

I believe when all the evidence is considered, only the Bible stands up to that kind of scrutiny. I believe the Bible first of all, gives us the reasons to believe, then it gives us the answers to our questions about the supernatural.

Today we’re going to look at one passage from this God breathed book, Luke chapter 8, beginning in verse 26. **Turn Luke 8 pg 1001**

Did you ever have one of those days? You know, just one of those days that seemed like it was one thing after another that hit you? Well this was one of those days for Jesus’ disciples.

The day had started off with Jesus teaching the crowds on the Western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus spoke in parables and the disciples didn’t have the slightest idea what He was talking about.

They had to sheepishly come to Jesus, who they had been traveling with for a year and a half and say, “Help! We don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Later on in the afternoon Jesus says to the whole group, “Let’s cross over to the other side of the lake.” So they get in a boat to travel across. While Jesus sleeps a storm whips up, the boat starts to take on water, and the disciples have to wake Jesus saying, “Master, Master, we are perishing!”

Earlier in the day they were embarrassed, now they’re terrified. Jesus wakes, rebukes the storm, and the raging sea is suddenly calm and peaceful. Now the disciples are really afraid. They say, “Who can this be? Who is this guy we’ve been following for the past 18 months that can control the weather?”

Finally their boat arrives on the eastern shore of the lake. They probably thought, "Boy, are we glad this day's almost over. Nothing else could possibly happen."

Read vs 26-27

As Jesus steps ashore, all of a sudden, a wild man, buck naked, comes running towards him, and begins screaming at the top of his lungs. What a welcoming committee!

What we're going to read in a minute is that there are pig farmers in the area tending their herds. Can't you just see a couple of them sitting up on the hill watching this whole thing play out.

These guys were gazing out on the lake below, and saw the boat approaching. They probably had watched the storm which had threatened this and other boats on the lake. When they realized that the boat was going to land here, in this virtual "no man's land," they must have been expecting that their day would have a little excitement.

Of course they knew that the demoniac was nearby. I'm sure they kept their distance. They knew that no one ever used this road. No one ever landed on the shore near the graveyard. I can see these guys nudging each other in the ribs, saying, "Hey, Joe, watch this. This ought to be good."

They watched as the demoniac swooped down on the unsuspecting disciples, shrieking in a way that would chill anyone's blood. They waited for him to brutalize these men, sending them back in their boat, to wherever they had come from.

For the pig farmers this was a little entertainment. For the disciples this was a bad end to a tough day.

What's going on here with this guy? If we're going to look to the Bible as a source of spiritual truth then it becomes obvious that the Bible teaches the reality of demons and demonic control.

I. Demonic forces are real and desire to control

This man had demons, and because of that he exhibited some bizarre behavior. In

the Screwtape Letters CS Lewis wrote: There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors, and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.

It would be wrong of us to dismiss the idea of demons as some outmoded folklore from the ignorant past. It would be just as wrong to become obsessed with demons. The NT speaks of demon possession as a reality. But it doesn't dwell on it. It's not a main theme and we're not given any commands or formulas for casting out demons.

What we do know is this. Satan was a creation of God. His name was Lucifer which means "shinning one." According to Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14, Lucifer stood in the most privileged position in heaven. He was second only to God. But that wasn't good enough for him. He wanted to be in control.

So Lucifer rebelled and a third of the angels followed him. The rebellion failed, his name was changed to Satan (the opposer), and the fallen angels exist today as demons.

Satan hates God and his demons share that hatred. Since human beings are the crown of God's creation Satan has a special hatred for us. Demons cause disruption, confusion, and chaos. Their ultimate goal is to control.

Everyone of us are influenced at times by demons, but some times demons may even possess an individual.

It's interesting that at the time of the first coming of Christ there seemed to be a flurry of demonic activity. I believe that the closer we come to the second coming of the Lord the more of that activity we'll experience.

For the man in Luke 8 demonic possession wasn't a matter of speculation. He couldn't have an armchair discussion about the different theories of demonology.

For him it was painfully real.

Demonic forces are real and desire to control but I want you to notice something else about demons. It's something we might not expect at first.

II Demons have faith **Read vs 28-31**

Actually demons have more faith than a lot of 21st century Americans I know. They believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God with the authority to command them. They believe in a future judgment and a place where Jesus could send them. They even believe in prayer. The demons brought their request to Jesus! James 2:19 declares: *You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe--and tremble!*

Isn't this fascinating? The tortured man, who has been living in the tombs among the dead, no clothes, and out of his mind, is begging the Prince of Peace not to torture him. Obviously it's the demons speaking.

There is one thing the demons can't believe, though. Acts 16:31 says to us *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved..."* In John 6:47 Jesus said *"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life."*

According to the Bible Lucifer and his angel cohorts aren't the only ones who rebelled against God. They're not the only ones facing judgment either. We're rebels too. The difference is that God has provided a way for us to be forgiven of our rebellion.

See, when Lucifer rebelled God pronounced his judgment. Mt 25:41 *"Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:'"*

Hell was created for Satan and his demons. God proclaimed Satan's judgement but hasn't carried out the sentence yet? Why? Because God is establishing His character for all the angels.

If God would have dumped Satan in the lake of fire, Satan would have gone down with a sneer on his lips. Before all of the angelic hosts he would have questioned God's character.

I can just hear him, "Sure God you claim to be love and mercy, but your not. You're all wrath and judgment."

To demonstrate once for all His true character God created us. He created us knowing that we'd sin and break His laws. He gave us the freedom of choice full well knowing what choice we'd make.

God says, *"The wages of sin is death."* Our punishment for sin is the lake of fire. Then God robed Himself in flesh as Jesus Christ and went to the cross to die in our place.

In forgiving us and making us part of His Body God has silenced Satan's accusations once for all. He is holy, just and righteous. But He's also love, grace, and mercy.

We have something to believe that the demons could never comprehend. We can trust our God to be our Savior.

I. Demonic forces are real and desire to control

II Demons have faith

III People fear the unfamiliar more than the familiar

Read 32-33

I wonder what the pig farmers thought of that! I have to believe this whole scenario turned out a little different than they had expected.

How about this: Jesus answered the prayer of demons! And there were a lot of them. A Roman legion was a regiment of 3,000 to 6,000 soldiers. The parallel passage in Marks' gospel says, *"And at once Jesus gave them permission. Then the unclean spirits went out and entered the swine (there were about two thousand); and the herd ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and drowned in the sea."*

This guy was in bad shape. How he got that way we don't know. We're not told. In fact, there is only one person in Scripture who was said to be tormented by an evil spirit, that we know what led up to the demon influence. That was Israel's King Saul.

In Saul's case it was his open rebellion against God. In I Samuel 15:23 the prophet Samuel condemned Saul with these words: *"For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king."*

Saul's sin was that he deliberately rejected God's authority in his life. He tried to be free from God's restrictions and responsibilities. And his rebellion manifested itself in a kind of arrogance that opened him up to demonization.

Over 30 years ago now I spent time in a mental hospital after flipping out from taking a lot of drugs. I got to be good friends with one of the maintenance workers and one day he took me into an area that was closed off from the rest of the hospital.

The patients there were the worst of the worst. Sitting in that room was a young man in his 20's. He refused to wear any clothes. He only had a leather strap around his waist. He wouldn't let anyone touch him, and he would cut himself anytime he could get a hold of something sharp enough.

Now I'm not trying to diagnose the guy. I don't know anything more than what I've just told you. But look at the peculiarities of this man living in the tombs: He would wear no clothes, he would break his restraints, and listen to this: Mark 5:5 *And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones.*

There's no reason to see a demon around every corner, but there's no reason to believe that demons were only a first century phenomenon either.

The Bible clearly tells us that there is a spiritual battle being waged, an angelic conflict, and we're living in the battle field.

Turn to Eph 6 pg 1128 Read vs 10-17

The spiritual battle is real. Demonic influence is real. Our victory comes only through Jesus Christ. **Back to Luke 8**

Read vs 34-35a (through mind) Then every body was thrilled, right? No, notice *And they were afraid.* **Read 36-37**

It didn't take long for the word to spread quickly. The pig tenders reported it far and wide, in city and country so the residents came to see for themselves what had happened.

Everybody showed up and everybody wanted Jesus out of there. The usual explanation is, they were pig farmers and they didn't want to loose any more pigs. They'd lost enough already.

But notice, it doesn't say anything about money here. In both the accounts of Mark and Luke, the primary motivation is fear. Fear solely because of what happened to the demoniac, not because the loss of their pigs.

This was not the same kind of fear that the disciples felt after Jesus had calmed the sea. This was the fear of superstition. They didn't rejoice over the healing of the demoniac.

They were surrounded by demonic activity and they became more afraid than ever. Not only had they lost their pigs, but what would the evil spirits do next to harm them? They were so blinded by fear and superstition they couldn't even think to ask Jesus who he was or why he had come to their town. They couldn't see their need for spiritual healing.

It's ironic that while the demons didn't want to leave the country, the people who lived there didn't want Jesus to stay. Here is one of the few times that a miracle drove people away, rather than drawing them to Jesus.

People fear the unfamiliar more than they fear the familiar. But the man who was healed had a whole different response. **Read 38-39**

As Jesus was getting into the boat to return to Capernaum, the man, now possessed of a right mind and a new heart, approaches him. He begs Jesus to allow him to accompany him to Galilee and become his disciple. But Jesus wanted this new believer to be a witness for him right where he lived.

He went from being a messenger of terror to a messenger of the great things God had done for him. Jesus left the area with a missionary of the good news on the job. We don't know the end of the story of the lives of the men and women who were so fearful of Jesus. Maybe as this former demoniac went around the countryside sharing his story, people in time would rethink and trust Jesus Christ as their Savior.

All we are left with is the statement: *they were seized with great fear.*

Bob Deffenbaugh writes: There is an unholy fear of God, the kind that fears God for what He is and will do, the kind that fears the good which He will do, which will hinder us from persisting in our evil deeds. It was this fear which caused Legion to run to Christ; it was this fear which caused the people of that place to beg Christ to leave them alone; and it was that same kind of fear which would cause our Lord's own people to cry out, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

But they shouted, "Taken him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" (John 19:15).

Pilate pressed this further, *"Shall I crucify your king?" To this, the crowds responded, "We have no king but Caesar"* (John 19:15).

The nation Israel was willing to renounce all their messianic hopes, all hopes of independence, just to be rid of Jesus.

Are demons real? They sure are and they desire to control. If you don't believe it just look at Josef Stalin, Pol Pot, Slobodan Milosevic, or Eric Harris & Dylan Clebold.

They're real. They're powerful. But they know their end. They know they're headed for the abyss.

They know that's where they're headed, but they don't want you to believe in hell. They don't want you to have the same spiritual knowledge that they have because there's hope for you.

Jesus Christ died for you. He didn't die for them. There's no hope for them. But there's hope for you and me.

Do you fear what it would mean for you to put your trust in Christ as Savior? Are you like the townspeople, fearing the unfamiliar more than the familiar? Are you afraid Christ might revolutionize your life. Move you out of your comfort zone?

Let me assure you, the God who sent His Son to die for you has nothing but the best for you in mind. There's nothing to fear. God only wants to heal your life and forgive your sins.

I have no doubt, there's some here today that need to be healed. You might not be demon possessed like that man in graveyard, but you've struggled with your own personal demons for too long. You've struggled with the demons of failure... of guilt... of shame & remorse. You've sensed that these demons have dominated you, held you under their control, held you in an addiction you can't let go of. And you may have always thought: "I got myself into this. I can get myself out." But all you've ended up with is an uneasy feeling that demons are still there. They're still in control. And you're still not healed. Despite what the culture may tell you - you can't solve all your problems on your own. There are demons in your life that only Jesus can heal.

Matthew's gospel says that there were, *two demon-possessed men, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no one could pass that way.*

Mark and Luke only speak of one. I believe that's because they wanted to focus on the one that was delivered. The one that was made whole by the love and grace of Jesus Christ.

That's the story of the Bible that's played out over and over again. The opportunity's given and one says "yes", and the other says "no." Some people fall at Jesus' feet and worship. Others send Him away.

What's your choice today. What decision will you make?