

1 Samuel 16:13-23: A Theology of Demons - Part 1

Well, this morning we come to a very unusual section of 1 Samuel that has a lot to do with spiritual activity. By now we know that Saul has been rejected as king and David has been chosen by God and anointed by Samuel to be the next king of Israel. Although David has not officially taken over as king, he is God's chosen one who will one day rule.

But really what we see happening in this section are the spiritual affects of that transition. This isn't just a political transition, this is a spiritual transition. The Spirit of God rushes upon David, departs from Saul, and God himself gives Saul a harmful spirit. This is very unusual.

And because we don't often discuss angels and demons - and that is the the elephant in the room here - I want to pause and take some time to address what the Bible says about demons specifically. We are going to look at a lot of passages. Many of these passages have a lot of other issues going on, but I want to focus primarily on what we learn about the demonic world. This will be a 2 week side study. This week is what we learn about demons in general, next week is what we as believers need to be on guard against, and then we'll come back to this chapter and unpack this section a little more.

First, a little background here. In the OT, God gave his Holy Spirit to empower kings and prophets and priests and others who served him in special ways for service. Part of Saul becoming king was that he had God's Spirit - the Holy Spirit - empowering him as the king. When God rejected Saul, he took his Spirit away from him and gave it to David. In the OT the Spirit could come and go from the people of God, in the NT every true Christian has the Spirit permanently dwelling in them.

But what about the harmful spirit? What do we do with that?

Let me just say as American Christians there are basically 2 views on demonic activity and both are not healthy. On the one side there's the view where Christians would acknowledge angels and demons exist but don't really know a lot about them or how they work and really, functionally ignore the spiritual world.

To be honest, that's probably most of us - myself included. The danger there is that there's a lot going on all around us that we're not even aware of, or care to be aware of, and operate as though it doesn't exist. To many of us, the spiritual world is almost like the world of cell phone signals, radio waves, wifi or bluetooth signals. Somehow it's out there and working, but we really don't know how or why and it only marginally affects us. The danger with that is that if we're ignorant of the enemy and how he works then we might be getting hammered by him and we don't even know it.

The other side are the people who are in the popular spiritual warfare camp. People who advocate binding satan, and prayer walks, generational sins, praying hedges of protection, and all other sorts of weird things advocated by Neil T. Anderson.

These are people who probably take the reality of angels and demons more seriously than we do, but often end up with unbiblical practices. If you go into Lifeway there are all kinds of books on how to wage spiritual warfare that has nothing to do with the Bible. If you want a good book to read that is more comprehensive and that refutes many of the popular spiritual warfare claims, you can look up a book called *Truth or Territory* by Jim Osman who is a pastor friend of mine over in Sandpoint, ID.

First of all, what are angels? Angels are spiritual being created by God to minister and serve and worship God. Angel means "messenger" and that's often what they do: deliver messages.

So, what are demons? Demons are angels who have sinned. God created angels at some point in the first days of creation when he created everything else. But at some point some of those angels fell into sin. So there are good, holy angels, also called elect angels, chosen angels. And wicked angels are called demons.

Demons go by various names. Here they are called harmful spirits. Other times they are called evil spirits or unclean spirits or just spirits. In **Matt. 25:41** they are called the devil's angels. Or in **2 Cor. 12:7** they are called messengers of satan. **2 Pet. 2:4** refers to them as angels who sinned.

I'll open up a small can of worms and just say that I think the unusual episode that's described in **Gen. 6:1-8** where the sons of God marry the daughters of men is talking about demons who somehow took on human flesh and procreated with women and created a hybrid race. **Jude 6-7** refers to angels who did not keep their proper place in the days of Noah but committed sexual immorality. I think he's talking about Genesis 6 and so at least once demons are actually called "sons of God," which is also a name for angels in other places in the Bible.

Also, although it seems obvious, angels and demons are primarily spiritual in nature. That is, they operate primarily in the spiritual realm, the non-physical realm. And unlike ghosts - which don't exist by the way - angels and demons have bodies. Every time they are described they are described in a bodily form. Often people in the Bible don't recognize them because they look so much like humans. They are described as men throughout the Bible because that's what many look like. But there are angels and demons that look nothing like humans at all. Some of the images we get in the prophets makes it clear that there are all kinds of different angels and demons. So there's no easy categorization.

We are going to turn here in a minute, but I just want you to notice something in the passage here in **Vs. 23** because we're going to look at the operation of demons. **Read 23**

All I want to point out here is that it seems that those who are filled with the Holy Spirit can have a pacifying affect on those who are tormented by demons. David wasn't afraid of Saul, instead he had a pacifying affect. I don't know that this is always the case, but it seems that those with the Spirit can often show grace toward those who are afflicted spiritually.

Turn over to **2 Kings 6:8-19**. This is an interesting account during the time of Elisha the prophet where the king of Syria comes to attack Israel and we have this amazing moment where the spiritual world is sort of opened up for a brief time. **Read 8-19**

Wouldn't that be amazing to have the spiritual world just made visible to us for a brief time so we could see all that's going on around us? It might scare us, actually. The Bible seems to make a strong case that angels and demons are active all over the place, we just can't see it.

I think there is plenty of biblical evidence that they gather with us every Sunday morning when we worship together as a church. **Rev. 2-3** talks about the angels to the seven churches, **1 Cor. 11:10** talks about proper worship around angels. **Heb. 13:2** talks about entertaining angels without even realizing it. **1 Pet. 1:12** talks about how the angels long to look into the salvation we have in Christ. If you think about it: the one thing all humanity has in common with demons is that we've sinned - we have rebelled against God. But the difference between demons and humanity is that God himself in Jesus Christ redeemed his chosen people out of their sinfulness. He didn't do that for angels who sinned. There is no redemption for demons. And the redeeming love that God has poured out on Christians fascinates angels.

Angels and demons are also personal beings. They have names, personalities, positions, and they will be judged individually by Christians (**1 Cor. 6:1-4**).

Turn to **Matt. 4:1-11**. I just want to spend some time walking through the NT especially because I think we often just think of demonic activity happening long ago, in a galaxy far, far away. But what I think the NT does, especially in the gospels and Acts is give us an idea about what is going on.

Because, here's the thing: I don't think demonic activity has ceased at all. I think there's probably a lot of demonic activity all around us and because we are so wired to think that everything has a physical cause we just assume that something can't be demonic. Or if we call something demonic we're that weird person who is anti-science or maybe we're even slandering people. But I don't think that's the case.

So let's just walk through some passages. **Read 1-11**

So several things. The devil is a real person. It has been said that the greatest deception Satan ever came up with was to convince the world he doesn't exist. The red guy with horns and a pitchfork and a pointy tail is meant to make us scoff at the idea of a devil, but he is alive and well as the Lord Jesus knows.

He is a person. By person I mean he has a name, has personality, has power. Satan is not just negative feelings or forces. He's not just bad karma or bad vibes or bad Juju. The influence of New Age into our society has made for some very weird views on spiritual things.

Satan is a person. The name Satan means adversary, that's who he is the the people of God. He's also called the devil - διάβολος (diábolos) - which means slanderer. So any time there's slander happening there's a good chance Satan or his demons are at work.

Although Satan is not omnipresent like God is, as Peter says, he prowls around like a roaring lion seeking people to devour (**1 Pet. 5:8**). He is smart and he knows how to tempt people.

And here we see one of his greatest tactics. I mean if he had one shot to tempt the Son of God to sin, what would he do? Well, he has 3 shots and he does the same thing: he twists scripture. He intentionally takes it out of context for his own gain and to get Jesus to sin. One of the most satanic things people can do is use Scripture for their own personal gain and to justify sin. And I'm not talking about accidentally misinterpreting Scripture - we all do that. I'm talking about blatant twisting and deception for sinful ends.

Look down at **Matt. 4:23-25**. We see scenes like this a lot in the NT. **Read**

A few things to point out here:

First, we see Jesus going around healing and casting out demons a lot. People come to Jesus and say "Hey, this is the symptom a person has" and the thing Jesus does to solve it is to cast out a demon. That is, a lot of times physical and mental ailments, erratic behavior seem to be caused by demons.

And here's what I want us to understand: those who being tormented by demons are not the scum of society. They're not the bottom of the barrel. It's just that rather being afflicted by diseases and pains and medical things, they happen to be afflicted by spiritual beings. We get no indication that demonic activity was more radical during Jesus' time than it is now. The difference was Jesus is God and could identify the affliction with perfect accuracy. Honestly, I think there's probably more demonic activity going on than we know, we just don't recognize it.

Now this is also important: the phrase used in **Vs. 24** is "oppressed by demons" in the ESV. NIV/NKJV: demon-possessed. NASB: demoniacs. What does it mean that someone is demon-possessed? Well, that phrase is not very helpful. The Greek doesn't say "possessed by a demon" or even "oppressed by a demon." It's a verb in Greek and literally it is demonized. These people are demonized.

Here's where we need to be really careful how we define things. When we hear demon possession often we think of someone who is completely at the whim of an evil spirit - they have total control. But when we look through the NT there's a variety ways that demons afflict people. I remember being a young Christian and people telling me that Christians couldn't be possessed by demons because we have the Holy Spirit inside of us. And so I had this idea that demons couldn't really do anything to me. That's non-sense. That'd be like soldiers walking through the middle of a battle field saying "there's no such thing as bombs, they can't hurt me" and then wondering why their bodies are blown to bits.

What we see instead is that demon-possession and demon oppression and harassment seem to be used interchangeably. And I think the idea is simply that demons are afflicting a person. And they afflict in different ways with different amounts of success and power. And I'll try to make that case as we walk through other passages.

Some confusion about possession is added because demons are often "cast out" - ἐκβάλλω (ekballo) in Greek. So if they are **cast out**, they must have been **in**. But the idea of the word is more remove or send away.

In **Mark 1:12** the Holy Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness, literally cast him into the wilderness. The idea is that the Spirit compelled Jesus out into the wilderness. That's the idea with demons when they are sent away from a person, or "cast out."

And demons can harass believers as well. We'll see that next week. Can they take control over us? No, but they can afflict us and tempt us. We don't need to be scared of demons. **Jas. 4:7** says that we should resist the devil and he will flee from us. Want to make Satan and demons go away? Just resist the temptation to sin. They want to get you to sin, if you resist temptation he doesn't have time to waste, he's going to go on to easier targets.

Let's look at some more passages. I don't want to be insensitive in any way so I'm going to try to balance everything I can. But I just want you to see ways that demons are active in a variety of ways. I'm not saying every time someone deals with one of these issues it's demon-related. But it might be and we need to be aware of it.

1) **Turn to Matt. 9:32-34.** Here Jesus heals a man who is mute. **Read**

So one way demons can attack people is through preventing speech, making a person mute. So Jesus casts out the demon. I've known plenty of people who have had various diseases or ailments and out of nowhere they just disappear and doctors can't explain it. We hear about those frequently. And usually the conclusion is that God miraculously healed them through prayer. What if the cause was actually demonic and God healed them by sending the demon who was harassing the person away? I'm not talking about binding Satan or demons or weird things, but maybe a part of our prayer for others might include "And God, if there is some demonic activity going on, please remove it." We ask God to heal everything else, why not that?

By the way, something we need to keep in mind, is that there are other people in the gospels who are mute or blind and it just says that Jesus healed them. No demons are mentioned. So not every time is every physical malady caused by a demon. People who think **every** illness is caused by demons have no biblical foundation.

2) **Turn to Matt. 12:22-24.** Here Jesus heals a man who was blind and mute. **Read**

So again, the man comes to Jesus with physical maladies but the underlying issue is spiritual. There's nothing more heinous or weird about this guy, his ailment is just spiritual rather than physical in nature. You remember in **John 9** when Jesus heals the man born blind? He doesn't cast any demons out, he spits in mud, rubs it on the guy's eyes and tell him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. Which is weirder? Sending a demon away or spitting in mud and smearing it over a blind man to heal his vision?

This is why I think we would be wise to not assume something is only physical or spiritual in nature. It could be a combination.

3) **Turn to Matt. 15:21-28.** Here Jesus heals a young girl at the request of her mother. **Read**

So here's another situation. We don't know exactly what's wrong with this little girl, but somehow the mom knows that the situation is demonic not medical. And she knows her daughter is **severely** oppressed. Again, it seems like there are levels of severity.

But what I want us to notice here is how the issue is resolved. She was a gentile but Jesus' earthly ministry was primarily to Jews. But she doesn't take no for an answer. She begs and pleads and even when Jesus calls her a dog - ouch - meaning she's unclean like a dog, she basically says, "Fine, call me whatever you want, I know you can heal my daughter please do it." And Jesus does it and praises her for her faith.

This is earnest pleading - we could say earnest prayer - to God for help even when all hope seems lost.

Side: The word used here is the same word that is often used for demon-possession - δαιμονίζομαι (die-mon-izomai). Some of the translations change it though or translate it awkwardly because if a demon possesses you, have you can you be more possessed than other possessions? For for all my love for the NASB it says

“cruelly demon-possessed.” Is there a gentle demon-possession? You’re either possessed or not. But if it’s just demonized - or harassed by demons, which I think it is - there are varying levels of harassment.

4) **Turn to Matt 16:21-23.** Here we see that when people deny Jesus or reject his truth it is satanic. **Read**

So what do we do with this? If you remember Peter just moments ago confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. Now he’s rebuking Jesus for crazy talk about crucifixion.

So Jesus rebukes Peter: “Get behind me, satan!” Has Peter become Satan? Well, no. But it seems as though there is some sort of satanic influence in Peter. One scholar said Peter had become a tool of Satan and was unwittingly carrying out and is actually trying to further satan’s design to interrupt the crucifixion. (Osborne, *Matthew ZECNT*. note on 16:23)

I do think there was satanic activity with Peter, though. The rebuke - “Get behind me satan” is the exact same command we read earlier when Jesus rebuked Satan in **Matt. 4**.

So even those close to Jesus can be tempted by Satan and might need rebuke.

5) **Turn to Mark 5:1-13.** This is where things get crazy. **Read**

This kind of situation is probably what we think of when we think of demonic activity: super-human strength - he’s ripping chains apart. Maybe there are multiple demons. Legion means literally means 6,000. We don’t know if that’s how many there were precisely, but it seems like there were a lot.

We would probably say that he’s insane, he has a mental illness or is bi-polar. This is probably one of the most severe cases we see in the gospels. And oddly, it seems as though demons have the ability to influence and harass animals as well.

Again, I want to be very careful here because I don’t want you to hear me say that every mental illness is demonic. At the same time, I think we need to seriously consider that many of the cases we call mental illness probably have some sort of demonic activity happening. And if we don’t even consider prayer as an option we’re not doing anyone any good. That’s not to say people shouldn’t get treatment or take medication. I’m not a doctor, I don’t deal with those kinds of questions. But I think as believers we have to know there is a spiritual component on some level and it very well could be demonic.

And these are things we are seeing more and more in our society. Bodily mutilation and cutting is nothing new. I don’t want to give you the impression that every person who is tempted to that has a demon or that the solution is simple. Usually there’s a lot going on with that. But what I want you to hear is that we should never rule out a spiritual cause. Because self-mutilation is not from the Holy Spirit.

But can I give you some encouragement? There’s hope even for the most severely depressed and harassed people. This man ends the whole thing in his right mind, so profoundly changed by the power of God, that he wants to follow Jesus. And Jesus says, “No, stay here and tell people what the Lord has done.” **Read 19-20**

He doesn’t need to be ashamed of what has happened, he’s praising Jesus for his mercy on him!

6) **Mark 9:14-29.** Here Jesus heals a young man with epilepsy.

So here’s a situation where a demon has a constant presence but also flares up in his oppression. The boy is mute, but sometimes basically becomes an epileptic. He has seizures.

Two things I want you to walk away from with this episode. First, the father had very little faith. Jesus rebuked him for that. **“If I can heal him?”** Don’t ever doubt Jesus’ power to heal **anything. Anything.**

Second, even the disciples couldn't cast it out. What did Jesus say they needed to do to cast it out? Pray. Do you know that in the Bible we are never called as believers to cast demons. That seems to have been something Jesus and the apostles did. But you know what we're called to do all the time? Pray.

If you think someone might be harassed by a demon the best thing you can do is pray. Some versions say pray and fasting. Fasting is earnest prayer to the Lord over a situation. Pray.

7) **Turn to Luke 13:10-17.** Here Jesus heals a woman who is bent over. **Read**

We also see in Acts where Luke mentions that people brought those who were afflicted with unclean spirits (**Acts 5:16**). If you remember Paul casts out a spirit of divination from a young girl in **Acts 16:16-24**. Apparently the spirit gave this young girl knowledge about events she otherwise could not have known giving her the appearance of omniscience.

In **Acts 19:11-20** there are some Jewish exorcists who think they can cast out demons by the name of Jesus whom Paul proclaims. But because they are not true believers the spirit - apparently affecting a man - beats them all up and they run away beat up and naked.

Here's what I want you to walk away with this morning.

1) As Christians, we of all people should know there is spiritual activity all around us. We shouldn't be functionally blind to what Satan and his demons are doing.

2) We don't need to fear demons. We shouldn't just go up to crazy people thinking we can handle them like Jesus, but we also don't need to fear the spiritual world that's around us.

3) We know that Jesus through the cross has already crushed Satan's head underfoot. He's already delivered the decisive blow to our greatest adversary. Those who are in Christ are on the winning team. Satan can attack us, tempt us, depress us, but he can't damn us. Who can bring an charge against God's elect? Answer? No one.

You are freed in Christ, forgiven in Christ, heirs in Christ, and will one day judge angels.

4) What can we do as believers if we suspect demonic activity? Two things. First, as we've already seen: pray. Pray for the person. Don't assume there is demonic stuff, but don't discount it either. We don't have Elisha's light switch where we can see it all so we have to be careful. But pray - even out loud with them there - that Lord if there is some demon or demonic activity that you would cause it to stop.

Second, and this is most important, tell them the gospel. Invite them to trust in Jesus Christ alone to forgive their sins,

The one thing we seem to see in all these exorcisms is that they become followers of Jesus. It's not enough just to be free from harassment, Jesus wants to go make disciples. So let's go. Go to those who are weary, heavy laden. Those who maybe make us uncomfortable and preach. And may the Lord in his grace, give them salvation.

Pray