

**C**an a Christian be demon-possessed? There are many in Christendom today who believe that this is possible. As a result, deliverance ministries have sprung up, hundreds of books have been written and many radio and TV shows focus upon delivering Christians from the throes of demon-possession. But is this a biblical doctrine? Does Scripture teach us that we are to be confronting Satan and casting demons out of individual Christians?

**I**n order to understand the doctrine, we must first define demon possession. The demonic realm is not heavily emphasized in the Old Testament. This is not to say that there was not demonic activity. It was just not often recorded. There is, however, no instance of demon possession recorded in the Old Testament.

**T**herefore, we look to the New Testament for our understanding. There are four terms in the New Testament that are used to describe one whose body is possessed by a demon or demons – “having a demon” (Mk. 5:15), being “demonized” (Mk. 5:15), “with an unclean spirit” (Mk. 5:2) and being “vexed with unclean spirits” (Acts 5:16). In all of these instances, the understanding is that the person is under the control of the demon and unable to resist his power. Manifestations of this control may exhibit themselves in physical or mental distress. The key to understanding here is that there is an indwelling of the person’s physical body by a demon or by many demons, in which the person is tormented in

some way and in which he is helpless to resist.

Why is this important to note? Because there are instances in the Bible where persons are influenced in some way by demonic forces but they are not demon-possessed. The above terms are the only ones in the New Testament which specifically refer to the indwelling of a demonic spirit. We will refer to this as being demonized from here on. Others refer to influence one toward false teaching (1 Tim. 4:1), toward sexual sin (1 Cor. 7:5) or toward divisiveness (2 Cor. 12:7) but they do not signify the inhabiting of an individual by a demon.

Let it be said that there is no question that our enemy, Satan, and his minions can have influence over Christians and non-Christians alike. Paul indicated that it was possible for Satan himself to take advantage of him (2 Cor. 2:11) and to thwart his plans (1 Th. 2:18). He influenced Ananias and Sapphira to lie (Acts 5:3). However, the issue is not the influence of Satan or demons but the indwelling of a believing Christian by them.

**F**irst, how do we know what a demonized person looks like or how he behaves? The Scripture gives us three differing types of manifestations of demonization. There are outward physical manifestations ranging from convulsions and foaming at the mouth (Lk. 9:39) to being mute (Matt. 9:32) to causing nakedness and providing superhuman strength (Lk. 8:27-29). There was also a change in the personality of the individual. There could be a change in the voice of the

person so that those around knew that it was a demon speaking rather than the individual possessed (Lk. 4:33). Note, too, this is not to be associated in any way with mental illness. There was a cogency to the language spoken by one demonized that is not present in those today who are claimed to have mental illness manifest through speaking gibberish. Whenever confronted, demons in the N.T. spoke coherently and rationally through the demonized person. Finally, demonization was characterized by supernatural abilities. The girl in Acts 16 had a spirit which could predict future events.

This being said, it was obvious to those in the Bible who confronted demoniacs that they were indeed possessed persons. Not once was there any question whether their behavior was due to some other cause. It was obvious to all, believers and unbelievers alike.

**L**et us look to the Scriptures for evidence of believers being demonized. Specifically, let us look to the people involved and the age.

The only possible case of demonization in the O.T. is Saul. Those who insist that Saul was demonized (1 Sam. 16:23) miss some facts regarding his case, such as the spirit was sent from God, it left him when David played, it did not seem to affect him long-term (he continued carrying out his kingly duties).

All of the other cases of demonization or the casting out of demons, which are found in the New Testament, clearly involve unbelievers. There is the demoniac of Gadara (Mk. 5), the Syro-Phoenician woman’s daughter (Mk. 7:26), the

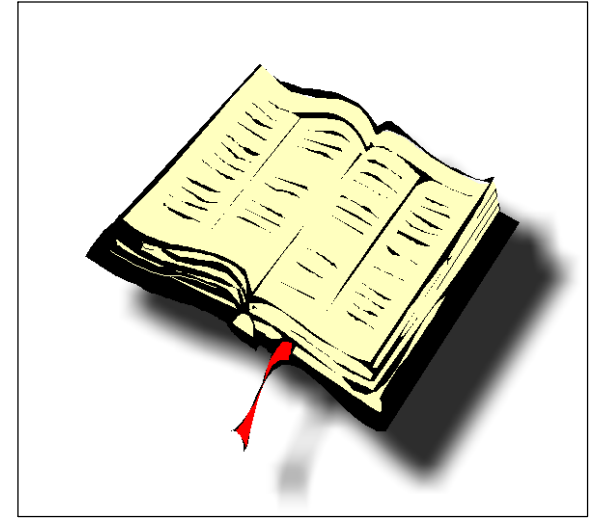
Philippian slave-girl (Acts 16:16), and on it goes. There is simply no mention of anyone in the Bible who has had a genuine conversion that has been subsequently demonized. That silence speaks loudly. The Scriptures seem to be clear. The gospels, which describe the life of Christ contain the overwhelming majority of records of demonic activity, demonization and exorcism. The book of Acts, which is a record of the transition from the Old Covenant to the New, only relates four examples of demonization, all dealt with by Apostles or those upon whom they had laid hands (Peter [5:16], Philip [8:7], and Paul [16:17; 19:12]). In addition, there is no mention in any of the Epistles, which are God's instruction manuals for the church, of any direction for ridding believers (or unbelievers, for that matter) of demons.

There is credence to the theory that demonization was restricted to a particular age in history. Again, there is no evidence of demonization in the O.T. The only authoritative record we have is the N.T. When Christ came upon the scene, there was a flurry of demonic activity, often resulting in demonization. How does one account for this? Satan is known as the ruler of this world (Jn. 12:31) which is also known as his kingdom (Mt. 12:26). Christ is the mortal enemy of the kingdom of Satan and His coming to establish His Kingdom (Mt. 12:28) obviously resulted in an all out attack by Satan, not only upon Christ but upon any whom he may be able to influence, even possess. There is a noticeable tapering-off of demonization in the book of Acts, leading on to believe that it is the presence of the

King of Kings that incites Satan to such activity. Scriptures also indicate that demonic activity will increase once more just prior to Christ's Second Coming (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Th. 2:1ff). The point to be noted here is that demonization has not been a common occurrence in all ages. It seems to have rapidly declined shortly after the ascension of Christ. It can only be suspected that it will occur again in the last days, though the Bible does not state that it will ever occur again, apart from the Antichrist.

Finally, the most convincing evidence for the inability for believers to be demonized is in Paul's mention to the Corinthians that believers are the temple of the living God (2 Cor. 6:16) and that we have nothing in common with the powers of darkness. The O.T. links idol worship with the worship of demons (Deut. 32:17; PS. 106:36-37). Paul asks, "what agreement has the temple of God with idols?" We know from Scripture that the Holy Spirit indwells us at the time of our conversion (Rom. 8:11). Therefore, it seems unlikely that an individual who has the Holy Spirit within, who has been redeemed, sealed and placed "in Christ" for eternity through His ministry, would have any place for a demon to take up residence.

Today, many have made much of attributing to Satan, symptoms of sin in those who purport to be believing Christians. Perhaps they would do well to address the root of these symptoms as the manifestation of a rebellious heart and to avoid the sensationalism of "deliverance" ministry altogether.



"Thy Word is Truth"  
(John 17:17b)

## What does the Bible Say About Demon- Possession?

Can a Christian Be Demon-Possessed?

by

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