Demons and the Occult in the New Testament

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Introduction

Man's belief in the demonic is both ancient and widespread. On the question of the existence of demons C.S. Lewis wrote in the preface to his Screwtape Letters,

It seems to me to explain a good many facts. It agrees with the plain sense of Scripture, the tradition of Christendom, and the beliefs of most men at most times. And it conflicts with nothing any of the sciences has shown to be true. ¹

Merrill Unger has made a similar observation:

The history of various religions from the earliest times shows belief in Satan and demons to be universal ... The great ethnic faiths of India, China, and Japan major in demonism, as well as the animistic religions of Africa, South America, and some islands. Even the ancient Bible lands swarmed with demons. ²

Against this background the paucity of references to Satan and demons in the Old Testament, as highlighted by the previous article, is indeed noteworthy. Even more remarkable is the contrast of the OT's reserve to the veritable flurry of demonic activity that is recorded in the NT, particularly in the Synoptic Gospels. The handful of OT references stands in stark contrast to the obvious concern that the NT writers have with the powers of darkness. These spiritual forces are referred to by a great variety of names. Demons, for example, are also known as "evil" or "unclean spirits", "principalities", "powers", "lords", "authorities", "thrones" and "dominions". The devil, too, goes by a number of different names in the NT. He is called "Satan".

"Beelzebul", "Belial", "the evil one", "the destroyer", "the adversary" and "the enemy". He also appears as "the prince of demons", "the prince of this world" and "the prince of the power of the air".\(^3\)

Not only is the nomenclature impressive, but so are the number of occurrences of some of these names and terms on the pages of the NT. \textit{diabolos} ('devil') occurs 37 times and \textit{Satanas} ('Satan') 36 times. Similarly \textit{daimonion} ('demon') is found 63 times and \textit{datmontzomat} ('to be demon possessed') 13 times. Moreover, there are some 28 references to evil and unclean spirits in the Synoptics alone.\(^4\)

This contrast between the OT and NT data raises an obvious but very significant question: Why the difference? What accounts for the shift from the OT's reserve to the NT's interest? The imbalance between the testaments on this score certainly appears to be unusual and calls for an explanation.

A. The Inter-Testamental Period

While the whole sphere of demonology appears only on the margin in the OT, the emphasis changes markedly in the Judaism of the inter-testamental period. In various strands of Jewish thought demonologies are developed which are ostensibly based on the OT data but in actual fact go well beyond it.

(a) Rabbinic Judaism abandoned the strict reserve of OT piety. Belief in demons became widespread, though the Jews never felt themselves as strongly threatened by them as did their neighbours. The scribes were steeped in belief in demons and developed detailed demonologies. Some aspects of their beliefs were somewhat bizarre. As Bietenard has pointed out:


The demons are spirits, but they have bodily organs such as wings. They need food and drink. They can propagate themselves and appear in human or other forms. They are innumerable and fill the world ... The demons have access to heaven, where they can discover God's counsels. They live both on earth and in the air, preferably in deserts, ruins and impure places, especially cemeteries.  

On the other hand, it needs to be said that other aspects of the rabbis' beliefs approximated the teaching of the NT. For example, the demons' main goal is to lead men into sin. They can also kill. They are the cause of some, but not all, diseases. Though they belong to Satan's kingdom, God gives them authority to inflict the punishments imposed on sinners. Their power will end in the days of the Messiah.

(b) In the Pseudepigrapha demons are commonly called evil or unclean spirits. Sometimes they are called Satan's angels. Their origin is traced back to Gen.6:1–4. Foerster has further pointed out:

Their main work is to tempt into witchcraft, idolatry, war, bloodshed, and prying into mysteries. Pagans pray to them when seduced into idolatry. They are in opposition to God and owe their position to a fall which implies sin and guilt. They are depicted sometimes as related or subordinate to Satan, but not consistently so.  

(c) In the Qumran writings demons are referred to as "angels of destruction" (1QS 4:12). They are servants of Belial and yet execute God's temporal and eternal judgments on evil-doers. In these documents we find the concept of a prince of evil, controlling a kingdom of evil spirits. The eschatology of Qumran expected the defeat of the devil and his demons in the end time.  

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7 Cf. Bietenard, 252.
In the inter-testamental writings there is therefore a distinct movement away from the reticence of the OT. It appears that this may have been more than a matter of emphasis. A theological shift seems also to have occurred, particularly in the rabbinical and pseudepigraphical writings. In its religious speculations Judaism came under the influence of surrounding pagan cultures. In distinction to the OT, all evil was no longer traced back to the rule of God. The developing demonologies sought to explain that the present world order, with all its suffering, want, and mortality, is in conflict with the will of God. In its attempt to attain to an adequate theodicy later Judaism had—perhaps gradually and unwittingly—compromised the OT teaching of the absolute sovereignty of God.

This background information raises some interesting questions for the study of the NT. The stark contrast between the OT and NT seems to be at least partially explained by the demonologies that were developed in Judaism during the inter-testamental period. Even some of the terminology used by the NT has its origin not in the OT but in the demonologies of this intervening period with their possible background in paganism. Moreover, the writers of the NT in many ways seem to be men of their time reflecting the beliefs of popular piety rather the spiritual sobriety of the OT which was content to place the demonic and satanic on the periphery of its thought.

These are concerns that cannot be answered simpliciter. Within the NT there are nuances and variations that need to be noted. Even the Synoptics and the Fourth Gospel have their distinct emphases. Hence, when we consider the questions of background and possible deviation from OT thought, we cannot treat the NT as an undifferentiated whole. The interests of the different writers must be given their due weight.

B. The Synoptics.

(a) Jesus' Exorcisms:

The vast majority of references to demons and the demonic are found in the Synoptic Gospels. For example, 12 of the 13 occurrences of *daimonizomai*, and 47 of the 63 occurrences of *daimonion*, are found here. Furthermore, the only detailed accounts of Jesus casting out demons are recorded in these Gospels. They are as follows:

(i) the demoniac in the synagogue at Capernaum (Mk.1:21-28; Lk.4:31-37).

(ii) the Gadarene demoniac (Mk.5:1-20; Mt.8:28-34; Lk.8:26-39).

(iii) the daughter of the Syrophoenician woman (Mk.7:24-30; Mt.15:21-28).

(iv) the epileptic boy (Mk.9:14-29; Mt.17:14-21; Lk.9:37-43).

(v) the Beelzebul controversy (Mk.3:22-27; Mt.9:32-4; 12:22-30; Lk.11:14-23).

While there are other references to Jesus releasing the demon-possessed (Mt.4:24;8:16; Mk.1:32-34), they are fairly incidental compared to these fuller accounts. In John's Gospel there are no references at all to Jesus casting out demons, a point to which we must return later.

Although these accounts are limited in number they are quite explicit when it comes to describing some of the symptoms of demon possession. While not intending to be exhaustive, these descriptions are certainly instructive. Affected individuals give evidence of being controlled by a force or personality other than their own. They may display bizarre, anti-social behaviour, and superhuman strength beyond their normal ability. This behaviour may also be accompanied by intense convulsions, seizures, and self-injury. The demons at times cry out with a loud shrieking voice and speak either coherently or incoherently, possibly in an unknown language. Some confess names other
than that of the individual with whom they are cohabiting. This usually gives some aspect of their evil character, eg. Mk.5:9; Lk.8:30. There is a recognition of, and resistance to, the person of Jesus Christ. Yet ultimately the demon must obey Christ.  

It is important to recognize at this point that the NT describes rather than defines the phenomenon of demon possession. The line between demon possession and disease is not always clearly drawn. An epileptic boy (Mk.9:14–29) and a deaf mute (Mt.9:32) may be described as demon possessed. A woman who was bent double and could not straighten up at all is described by Jesus as one "whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years" (Lk.13:16). While this woman is not seen as possessed her condition is clearly regarded as the work of Satan. This raises an important perspective. As R.A. Cole has explained:

All disease is seen as being the work of Satan in this world, in so far as it, with death and pain, belongs to the Fall, which was not God’s loving purpose for mankind ... This is thoroughly Jewish language, used by Christ to Jews: it is also a perfectly legitimate description, for it goes directly to the first cause of evil, whereas our modern Western way is to concentrate on 'secondary causes', and forget primaries.  

In conclusion he further points out:

All sickness is seen, in the long run, as the outward manifestation of satanic presence and activity on earth, and extreme forms, involving mental disorder and/or self-destructive tendencies are seen as being peculiarly due to demonic influence, since the mind is not free to serve God.

10 This is a summary of the report by S.F. Dyrness et al, "Study Committee on Demonic Activity Report", Minutes of the 152nd General Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod, Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania, May 24–30, 1974, 185–6. Situations have been described in our own day where phenomena such as this have clearly been present, eg. D.W. van Gelder, "A Case of Demon Possession", The Journal of Pastoral Care, 41(2), June 1987, 151–161.


12 Cole, 52.
While the Gospel accounts show little interest in making neat clinical distinctions, it would nevertheless be a mistake to conclude that the biblical treatment of the demonic is just a pre-scientific way of describing mental and physical illness. Although there is some overlap the demonized are usually a separate category from the diseased in the Gospels. This is particularly the case where the presence of alternate personalities is involved.  

Any attempt, therefore, to demythologize Jesus' exorcisms must be resisted. While the exorcism of demons and the healing of sickness certainly share some common ground in his ministry they cannot simply be identified. However, demon possession and illness are both clearly traced back to the underlying activity of Satan. It is this factor which opens up broader dimensions and places the healing of disease and the casting out of demons directly within the overarching purpose of the Synoptic Gospels.

(b) A Kingdom Phenomenon:

The Gospel accounts make it clear that Jesus' exorcisms and healing miracles are neither isolated incidents nor mere appendices to his ministry but belong to the very warp and woof of the Synoptic accounts. They form an integral part not only of his mission but also of his message. They are inseparable from his overall kingdom proclamation. The necessity of discussing the exorcisms within a broader kingdom perspective has been widely recognised in contemporary NT scholarship:

Beasley-Murray states unequivocally: "...the exorcisms of Jesus show that the eschatological rule of God is present among men in and through Jesus."  

Ridderbos writes in the same vein: "... the casting out of the devils proves the victory over the devil gained by Jesus and thus the break-through by the kingdom of heaven."  

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More recently Twelftree has said of the exorcisms: "In the casting out of demons, the mission of Jesus itself is taking place, being actualized or fulfilled. In short, in themselves the exorcisms of Jesus are the kingdom of God in operation."\(^{16}\)

The reason for this consensus is not far to seek. In answering his opponents Jesus declares quite categorically: "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." (Mt.12:28; cf. Lk.11:20).

The exorcisms therefore demonstrate that in Jesus' person and coming the kingdom of God has become a present reality. The great moment of the breaking down of Satan's rule has come and the kingdom of heaven has arrived. The healing miracles are evidence of the same reality. In fact, the scope of Jesus' miracles must needs be as wide as the perversion of Satan's rule. Hence they overcome not only demon possession and disease but even death and the hostile forces of nature. As the whole created order is affected by the malignant power of Satan, the coming of the kingdom of God in Jesus must be at least as broad in scope as the situation which it is to set right. The ministry of Jesus is therefore more than a matter of ethical renewal; it has creational and cosmic dimensions. All the miracles, including the exorcisms, are therefore an indication of the presence of the kingdom. The pervasive power of Satan's dominion has been shattered and the kingdom of God has broken in.

This perspective helps to answer some of the concerns raised by the OT background as well as by certain developments during the inter-testamental period:

(i) The OT emphasis on the sovereignty of God is not compromised. It is simply transposed to a higher key. God's power is now demonstrated not so much in His sheer omnipotence as it is in His redemptive activity through Jesus. While the OT clearly taught that Satan's power was subordinate to God's (eg. Job 1,2), that power is now decisively challenged and broken.

(ii) The Messiah's triumph over Satan and his demons, while not specifically foretold in the OT Scriptures, is not out of line with the general tenor of their messianic expectations. It did, however, become part and parcel of the eschatological expectations of inter-testamental Judaism and remained so for many of Jesus' contemporaries. In his discussions with his opponents Jesus is therefore able to make a strong appeal to this aspect of his ministry (eg. Mt.12:22–37). While he did not adopt the extreme features of the rabbinical demonologies, he does not distance himself from certain current beliefs even though they were not taught explicitly in the OT. On the contrary, he is at times eager to demonstrate that he himself is the fulfilment of many contemporary Jewish expectations. The Evangelists' use of current terminology (such as their references to 'unclean spirits') which can be traced not to the OT but to inter-testamental demonologies should probably be understood in the same light.

(c) A Decisive Impulse:

Up to this point our discussion has sought to place Jesus' exorcisms within the broad framework of Synoptic kingdom theology. Their significance is neither isolated nor incidental and they are of a piece with Jesus' overall miraculous activity. At the same time it is possible to bring the significance of the exorcisms to an even sharper focus. Again Jesus' discussion with his opponents in Matthew 12 provides a clue. In vs.29 he uses the following illustration to explain this aspect of his ministry:

> Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house."

The basic exegetical question here has to with the binding of the strong man. The choice seems to be between two alternatives:

(i) The binding of the strong man refers to the exorcisms themselves. This is Twelftree's opinion: "... what we have here is a parable of an exorcism. Satan, the Strong Man, is bound
and his house, the possessed person, is taken from him."17 Ladd likewise believes that Jesus is illustrating what happens at an exorcism.18

The problem with this interpretation is that Jesus' words seem to imply a twofold action: first the strong man is bound, and then his house is plundered and his property carried off. This makes the next alternative more probable.

(ii) The binding of the strong man is distinct from the exorcisms and refers to a prior activity of Jesus. Such an activity is not far to seek. As Ridderbos explains:

The whole struggle of Jesus against the devils is determined by the antithesis between the kingdom of heaven and the rule of Satan, and time and again Jesus' superior power over Satan and Satan's dominion proves the break-through on the part of the kingdom of God. This is already proved at the start by the temptation in the wilderness. There can be no doubt that in it the issue is Jesus' messianic kingship.19

With the temptations in the wilderness Jesus has therefore been able to achieve a preliminary binding of Satan. In the desert the strong man is bound and with the exorcisms his house is being plundered and his property carried off. Moreover, as Ridderbos has pointed out, the temptations have kingdom dimensions. This becomes particularly clear when the devil offers Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory (Mt.4:8,9). Universal, cosmic lordship is on the line. Jesus has come to set up his kingdom and to destroy the kingdom of Satan. The first showdown comes with the temptation in the wilderness. Satan suffers his first major defeat. From this titanic victory in the desert Jesus follows through with his numerous expulsions of demons.20

17 Twelftree, 112.
19 Ridderbos, 62.
Another feature of the temptations is their specific character as messianic temptations. In all three Synoptic accounts they follow immediately upon Jesus' messianic investiture, namely his anointing with the Holy Spirit at his baptism. Both Matthew and Luke make it clear that it was the Spirit who led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Mt.4:1; Lk.4:1). It is as the one who has been specially anointed by the Holy Spirit, the Messiah of OT expectation, that Jesus enters the temptations. It is also Jesus' messiahship that is the point at issue in the temptations. Hence Satan prefaces two of the temptations with the words, "If you are the Son of God..." – words clearly reminiscent of the divine pronouncement at Jesus' baptism (Mt.4:3,6, cf. 3:17). In each instance the temptation is an effort to trick Jesus into a disobedient or unmessianic display of his messianic authority. It is Satan's purpose to disqualify Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus' obedience is the beginning of the messianic victory. It is an eschatological binding of Satan.

Luke has no reference to the binding of the strong man, but makes the same point in a different way. When the seventy report on their mission, saying that the demons are subject to them in his name, Jesus replies, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning," (Lk.10:18). At the same time Jesus rejoices in the Holy Spirit in that his messianic mission is now being fulfilled (Lk.10:21).

Again these factors have bearing on the earlier question of the NT's interest versus the OT's reticence when it comes to the activity of Satan and his demons. The contrast cannot be explained simply on the basis of the heightened awareness of the praeternatural that developed within Jewish popular piety during the inter-testamental period. We cannot overlook the fact that early in the Synoptic record an event of enormous redemptive-historical proportions has taken place. The Messiah has come. Satan is bound. During the ministry of Jesus the key battle of the history of the universe was being conducted and both sides knew it. Although bound and fallen Satan is marshalling his forces as never before. This aspect must be given due consideration in any comparison between the OT and NT perspectives. Adams summarizes the situation succinctly:

Thus the frequent reference to demon possession in connection with Christ's ministry of exorcism is not
incidental, but central to the Gospel writers' purpose. It is to be understood in eschatological terms as evidence of the messianic identity of Jesus, who came not only to preach about the kingdom ... but also to establish it.  

(d) A Necessary Qualification:

The intimate association of the casting out of demons and the coming of the kingdom calls for some comment on the nature of the kingdom that Jesus came to establish. The tension between the present and the future dimensions of the kingdom as found in the Gospel records has been the cause of much scholarly debate. Some earlier NT scholars, such as Albrecht Ritschl and C.H. Dodd, emphasized the present at the expense of the future. Others, such as Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer, were guilty of the opposite error and saw only apocalyptic features in the kingdom teaching of Jesus. Still others have adopted an intermediate position and speak of "an eschatology that is in process of realization".  

The Gospel data do not allow for a neat and simple classification and a certain paradox must remain. The kingdom is both present and future; it is already here and is still to come. The kingdom has come and yet the fulfilment is still in abeyance. Again Ridderbos is helpful:

It is remarkable that the gospel itself does not explicitly distinguish between the kingdom now and the kingdom later. It only says in one place that the kingdom of heaven has come, and in another passage that the kingdom will come. 

This does present our study of demons with a certain dilemma. Was Jesus' defeat of the demons definitive and final, or was it merely initial and hence unfinished? In other words, did his ministry bring the phenomenon of demon possession to an end, 

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23 Ridderbos, 105.

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or was it intended to serve only a preliminary purpose? Adams has sought to answer this question at a very practical level:

The curtailment or restraint (through the coming of the kingdom) upon Satanic power and influence necessarily involved the virtual cessation of such activity by his demonic forces. This accounts for the rare incidence, if not entire absence, of demonic possession in modern times ... Counselors, in the present era, have every reason to expect that the cause of the problems with which they will deal in counseling will be other than demonic possessions.24

This conclusion, however, is overdrawn in that it does justice neither to the biblical nor contemporary evidence.25 The eschatological tension that lies on the surface of the synoptic kingdom presentation would suggest that greater caution is necessary. Jesus' coming did not finally eliminate demon possession any more than it did disease or death. Such finality must await its fulfilment at the consummation. This is reflected in the ways the demons behave in Jesus' presence. On the one hand they know they are totally subject to his power. On the other they know they still have a period of time left on earth before judgment day. A case in point is the demons' request to be allowed to enter the swine (Mk. 5:12). Although this incident has been subject to varying interpretations (including the suggestion that the owners of the pigs were Jews and were thus punished for keeping swine!), it is probably best taken as a clear illustration of the tension still inherent in the kingdom Jesus came to establish.

Ridderbos is able to provide a convincing interpretation of Jesus' compliance with the demons' request in the light of his overall kingdom theology:

This is an important indication of the character of Jesus' power over the devil and of the nature of the kingdom that began with his coming. The permission Jesus gives the demons to enter the swine should not be considered as a kind of concession to the evil spirits. Jesus does not

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24 Adams, 118, 120.
25 See eg. van Gelder above, footnote 10.
negotiate with the demons. Nor is their entry into the swine their undoing, but rather, the (provisional) self-maintenance of the demons ... This explains the meaning of the exorcism of the devils in general: it does not yet put an end to Satan's power, but is the guarantee and the symbol of definitive victory.26

Hence our understanding of Jesus' kingdom proclamation dictates certain qualifications. Satan has been bound but not destroyed. He is not powerless, but his power has been broken. The decisive battle in the war has been won, but the final victory is yet to be gained. The whole mission of Jesus meant an initial defeat of satanic power that makes the final outcome and triumph of God's kingdom certain. Every occasion in which Jesus drives out an evil spirit is a foretaste of the eschaton.27

C. John's Gospel

In the Synoptics the exorcism of demons is the most notable evidence of the presence of God's kingly rule. In John there are no exorcisms. Ironically whenever the terms *daimonizomai* (10:21) and *daimonion* (7:20; 8:48,49,52;10:20,21) are used, the context is always a debate where the crucial question is whether or not Jesus himself has a demon! In contrast to the other Evangelists John does not connect miracles with the destruction of the power of Satan. He does, however, record Jesus' saying, "Now the ruler of this world shall be cast out" (12:31). The verb that is used is the one commonly found in the Synoptics to refer to the casting out of demons. Hence it could with some justification be claimed that while John does not mention exorcisms, he does highlight the ultimate Exorcism. Although this is a valid comparison the obvious contrast between John and the Synoptics on this score does demand an explanation.

Twelftree has suggested three possible reasons:

(i) In view of John's stated purpose in 20:30,31 the signs in this Gospel are intended to lead its readers to the conclusion that Jesus was the Christ. Hence John selected spectacular miracles

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26 Ridderbos, 112-113.
27 See Ladd, 66.
which were thought to be the work of God. "By contrast", says Twelftree, "to associate Jesus with the relatively common healing of exorcism performed by many other healers would have appeared banal." 28

While John's choice of miracles (he generally calls them 'signs') shows his messianic interest, this does not explain his exclusion of the exorcisms. Many of Jesus' contemporaries would certainly have understood them messianically and have considered them anything but "banal". Twelftree's further reasons are far more cogent.

(ii) Compared to the other Gospels John plays down the theme of the kingdom of God. "In the Synoptic Gospels, exorcism and the kingdom of God are so closely associated that for John to exclude one probably meant that he felt it necessary to exclude the other." 29

(iii) "... in the Synoptic Gospels the defeat of Satan is linked with Jesus' exorcisms. In John the defeat of Satan is linked with the cross (cf. John 14.30; 16.11)." 30

Clearly John has different interests to the other Gospel writers at this point. He provides no kingdom framework in which the exorcisms could be understood, nor does he record the temptation in the wilderness which is so foundational to the Synoptic exorcisms. For him the emphasis falls on the decisive battle and victory at the end. His key theme is not so much the coming of the kingdom as the securing of eternal life. A comparison between John and the Synoptics would suggest that these concepts are functionally equivalent. What the kingdom is for the Synoptics, eternal life is for John. Both concepts, for example, share the eschatological tension of the "already" and the "not yet". Nevertheless the differences are such that John saw no need to record Jesus' exorcisms and developed his major motifs along different lines.

28 Twelftree, 141.
29 Twelftree, 142.
30 Twelftree, 142.

During his earthly ministry Jesus had delegated the authority to cast out demons to his disciples – to both the twelve (Mt.10:8) and to the seventy (Lk.10:17–20). In the Book of Acts such authority seems to have been vested in the apostles and their associates. Exorcisms are attributed to Peter (5:16), Philip (8:7) and Paul (16:18; 19:12). The sons of Sceva,31 On the other hand, attempted to exorcise an evil spirit in the name of Jesus but were singularly unsuccessful (19:13–16). These are the only references Acts makes to evil spirits which, interestingly enough, it never calls 'demons'.

Even fewer are the references to Satan. He is said to have filled the heart of Ananias who dies suddenly at Peter's incisive condemnation (5:3). Similarly Paul rebukes Elymas the magician for being a "son of the devil" (13:11) before smiting him with blindness.

Compared to the Synoptics, Acts is somewhat muted in the attention it gives to the demonic and satanic. The limited data nevertheless appear to be significant. What is true of its account of miracles in general appears also to be true of the exorcisms in particular. They are virtually restricted to the apostles (especially Peter and Paul) and to those on whom the apostles had laid hands, namely the Seven (and especially Stephen and Philip). There is no evidence to suggest that exorcisms had now become the prerogative of Christians in general. Luke draws some very clear parallels between the baptism of Jesus in his Gospel and the church's baptism in the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in Acts 2. What the Jordan was for Jesus, Pentecost was for the church. Jesus' baptism was the confirmation of his messianic identity; Pentecost was the institution of the new messianic community. As such it would receive the power of the Holy Spirit (1:8). As the Messiah had power over Satan and demons, so did the messianic community. As the drama of Acts unfolds, however, this power is exercised not by the community in general but only by its specially anointed leaders.

31 A Jewish chief priest. In vs.13 they are called "exorcists", the only occurrence of this word in the NT.
E. The Epistles.

Apart from the passing references to demons in I Tim.4:1 and Jas.2:19, the Epistles use daimonion in only one passage. In I Cor.10:20,21 Paul uses the word four times. Not only Gentiles who sacrifice to demons but also Christians who participate in pagan cult meals transfer themselves into the sphere of the demonic. Here Paul is clearly echoing the OT teaching which identifies pagan idolatry with the worship of demons (Deut.32:17; Ps.106:37).32

While the Epistles refer to demons only sparingly, they are completely silent when it comes to demon possession and exorcism. As Dyrness has observed,

... in the Epistles there is no command given to expel demons, no instance given of daimonizomai, and no mention of a charismatic gift of exorcism. This does not necessarily mean that demons were not expelled by the members of the Christian church, but may well be an indication of a totally different emphasis of concern in the apostolic writings.33

Such a concern is suggested by the shift in terminology. Paul, for example, makes frequent reference to "principalities and powers" (Rom.8:38; I Cor.15:24; Eph.1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col.1:16; 2:10,15; Tit.3:1). Admittedly he does not use this expression in a uniform and unambiguous way. At times no more than political authorities may be in view (eg. Tit.3:1). On other occasions these powers appear to be positive or at least benign. Exegetically, however, it is difficult to eliminate all reference to malignant spiritual forces. After analyzing current scholarly debate on the issue O'Brien sees a definite continuity with the demons of the Gospels. The "principalities and powers" he understands as "personal, supernatural intelligences, emissaries of the god of this world, which seek to influence the world and mankind for ill at every level, using every resource at their disposal."34

The contexts in which these references occur are significant:

33 S. Dyrness et al, 190-1.
34 O'Brien, 146.
(I) The sovereignty of God and of Christ over these powers is repeatedly emphasized. Particularly prominent is Christ's supremacy over their authority by virtue of his death and resurrection (eg. Col.1:15-20; 2:15). Once again the OT stress on the sovereignty of God has been transposed to a higher key (cf. above, p. ).

(II) The nature and dimension of spiritual conflict are depicted in their full depth, intensity and complexity (see especially Eph.6:10-18). The issue is both broader and more subtle than "simply" a matter of casting out demons. Christians are warned that a war is in progress and that it cannot be fought at a purely human level, nor will mere earthly resources be adequate for conducting the campaigns. In this spiritual warfare every believer is exhorted to put on "the full armour of God" (Eph.6:11,13). The genitive is subjective – it is the suit of armour which God supplies. Yet this does not exhaust Paul's meaning. His allusions to the OT indicate that this is the armour which God Himself wears. In Is.59:17 it is Yahweh who "puts on righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head" (cf. Eph.6:15,17). The Messiah likewise is armed with truth, righteousness and the Gospel of peace (Is.11:5; 52:7; cf.Eph.6:14,15). Isaiah's imagery thus finds its fulfilment in the redemptive work of Christ, and further fulfilment in the spiritual warfare of the messianic community.

A decisive battle has been won, but the war goes on, and the foot-soldiers are to wear the armour of the King!

The Epistles' frequent references to the devil give further content to the nature of the conflict. Married couples are warned that prolonged abstinence from sexual relations may provide Satan with opportunities for temptation (I Cor.7:5). Unresolved anger may also give him a foothold (Eph.4:25,26). He can take advantage when a congregation is overly harsh in its discipline (II Cor.2:11) or when a new convert is too quickly elevated to a position of leadership (I Tim.3:6). Unwary elders may be ensnared, as may those who have strayed into false teaching (I Tim.3:7; II Tim.2:26). Satan can thwart the plans of missionaries (I Thess.2:18). He can both masquerade as an angel of light (II Cor.11:14) and "prowl about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (I Pet.5:9).

35 See O'Brien, 144.
Even though the devil is portrayed as a dangerous enemy he nevertheless serves the higher purposes of God. Paul describes his "thorn in the flesh" as "a messenger of Satan to buffet me" (II Cor.12:7). Yet the Lord uses it as a platform to demonstrate both his grace and his power (II Cor.12:9). So confident is Paul of Satan's subordinate role under the good hand of God that twice he delivers offenders to Satan as a disciplinary measure so that salutary lessons may be learned (I Tim.1:20) and that ultimate salvation may be gained (I Cor.5:5).

Paul also sees the activity of Satan in those who cause dissensions and hindrances in the church at Rome, but assures his readers that God "will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Rom.16:20). Despite his craft and power Christians may therefore resist the devil with confidence and the assurance of success (Eph.6:11; Js.4:7; I Pet.5:9). Such assurance is based on the redemptive work of Christ who came "that He might destroy the works of the devil" (I John 3:8).

Although at first sight the Epistles may seem to have little in common with the material in the Gospels and Acts, a closer examination reveals that there is a strong continuity between these strands of NT revelation. The redemptive facts of the Gospels are interpreted and applied to the life of the church in the Epistles. The spiritual warfare that was conducted primarily by Jesus in the Gospels and by the apostles in Acts is now shown in its relevance to the experience of every believer.

F. The Book of Revelation

The few references that the Apocalypse has to demons are in line with earlier biblical teaching. Again there is an echo of the OT in that the worship of demons is closely associated with idolatry (9:20; cf. Deut.32:17; Ps.106:37; I Cor.10:20,21). Their allegiance to Satan is symbolically portrayed under the imagery of frog-like creatures coming out of the mouth of the dragon (16:13,14). In the ensuing war of the great day of God, the Almighty, all satanic forces are finally defeated, and the demons and unclean spirits are consigned to the haunts of the fallen Babylon (18:2).
While these three occurrences exhaust the references to the demons as such, the imagery teems with allusions to the devil and his minions. He is called "the destroyer" (9:11) and "the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan" (20:2; cf. 12:9). The earlier biblical symbolism is as it were heightened in the Book of Revelation. The reason for this is to be sought not only in its interest in Satan's ultimate demise, but also because Revelation basically presents a theology of power. The symbolism is heavily studded with power words, such as "thrones", "horns" and "crowsns". The book's frequent doxologies abound with words like "power", "strength" and "might".

With this theology of power the NT finally returns, with full vigour, to the kingdom theology of the Synoptics. The word basileia ('kingdom') occurs seven times. The clash of two rival kingdoms is portrayed in Revelation more forcibly than elsewhere in Johannine literature. The kingdom dimensions of Synoptic theology find no direct parallels in the Fourth Gospel, but if anything they are enlarged in the Apocalypse. The triumph of God's kingdom over the dominion of Satan is nowhere stated as explicitly as it is in Revelation (11:15; 12:10). Nowhere are the contrasts as sharply drawn, and nowhere is the victory more final and total than it is here. While the Synoptics had told of the beginning of Jesus' kingdom victory, Revelation tells of its completion. The D-Day of the cross and resurrection have led to the V-Day of the consummation.

Conclusion

In the course of this study we have covered a broad sweep of redemptive history. In summary the following major points may be noted:

1. The OT's concern for the sovereignty and absolute power of God is fully maintained in the NT but at the same time transposed to a higher key through the breaking in of the kingdom of heaven through the ministry of Jesus.

2. The demonologies of the inter-testamental period need to be appreciated as part of the cultural and religious background of

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the NT. While certain features of these demonologies are assumed by Jesus, and although NT writers make use of some of their terminology, it would be a mistaken inference to suggest that these demonologies are determinative of the thinking of either Jesus or the Gospel writers. The NT shows no interest in developing such detailed demonologies and the excesses of certain Jewish schools of thought are clearly avoided.\(^ {37} \)

3. The temptations of Jesus in the wilderness have kingdom dimensions and are specifically messianic in character. In successfully resisting these temptations Jesus has achieved a preliminary binding of Satan and ushered in the kingdom of God. The stage has been set for the numerous exorcisms that take place in his subsequent ministry.

4. With Jesus' death and resurrection there is a further decisive break-through of the kingdom of God. Satan suffers a further major defeat, a point made particularly explicit in John's Gospel.

5. Although Jesus has gained a decisive victory for the kingdom of God through his ministry, death and resurrection there is still an element of eschatological tension in the present manifestation of the kingdom. While the present age is one of fulfilment it still awaits the kingdom's final consummation. Therefore, while Satan is bound, his power is not yet broken.

6. The victory of Jesus in the Gospels is extended through the ministry of the church in the Book of Acts. This is seen particularly in the exorcisms of evil spirits by the apostles and their associates.

7. While the Epistles make no mention of exorcisms they do bring out the deeper dimensions of the spiritual warfare in which the whole church is involved. Because of the decisive victory of the Messiah the messianic community is equipped with his armour and enters the battle with confidence.

8. The warfare to which the Epistles refer is graphically portrayed in the symbolism of Revelation. Underlying the apocalyptic imagery is a theology of power which both highlights

\(^ {37} \) Cf. the comment by Foerster in TDNT, vol.2, 19, "The OT view of the demonic, namely, that the concern of Israel is with God alone, is fully maintained."
the sovereignty of God which was so much the concern of the OT and brings to a consummation the kingdom of God which Jesus came to establish. Satan and his demons are finally vanquished. Hence "the kingdom of God and the authority of His Christ have come" (12:10) and "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever" (11:15).