What Does the Bible Say About Demon Possession and Spiritual Warfare?

Introduction

1. Our topic today came from Jackie and has to do with demon possession and spiritual warfare
2. This is timely because there's been a significant increase in the growth and popularity of what's called "deliverance ministries" especially among younger Christians
3. The trend really started back in the 1970s with people like talk show host Bob Larson, but has really taken off since Covid, most due to deliverance influencers all over social media (e.g. Kathryn Krick, pastor of 5F Church in Los Angeles)
4. It used to be mainly on the fringe within charismatic and Pentecostal churches, but it's having a growing influence on main-line evangelical churches
5. Before we can truly understand what the Bible says about all of this, and about demon possession and spiritual warfare, I thought it might be best to back up and look more generally at a few things:
    a. First, we're going to look at what the Bible says about beings in the spiritual realm
    b. Next, we're going to look at the origin, nature, and activities of Satan and Demons
    c. Finally, we'll look at spiritual warfare and demon possession

A. Beings in the Spiritual Realm

1. The Bible describes a range of heavenly beings using different terms and phrases
2. It gets a bit confusing because sometimes the terms appear to overlap:
    a. Sons of God (Hebrew bene Elohim):
        1) This phrase directly appears five times in the Old Testament where it's clearly a reference to heavenly beings (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Genesis 6:1-4)
        2) However, there's a debate as to whether the phrase "sons of God" is simply a general reference to angels or a higher rank of heavenly beings (some falsely claim in Genesis 6 it refers to human descendants of Seth as a godly line)
        3) Dr. Michael Hieser, an Old Testament Hebrew and Semitic language scholar, believed the latter:
            a) He was one of the leading proponents of something called the Deuteronomy 32 Worldview, also called the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible
            b) This view proposes that the heavenly realm is composed of a hierarchy of heavenly beings:
                - God is the ultimate, uncreated supreme being
                - God then governs what is referred to as the Divine Council, a group of created lesser divine beings, <u>the sons of God</u>, to whom He delegates

administrative duties to oversee nations (Deuteronomy 32:8-9; Psalm 82)
- Next in rank are those who guard His throne, the Cherubim and Seraphim
- Finally, the Angels and Watchers who serve as messengers and observers

b. Cherabim and Seraphim:
   1) Some scholars believe these are simply a type of angel, but others disagree because they have some very unique features:
      a) Cherubim (Ezekiel 1:5ff) are described having four faces (human, lion, ox, eagle), with four wings that cover human hands, straight legs with bronze-like feet shaped like hooves, and interlocking wheels; Revelation 4:6 describes similar creatures but instead of one creature with four faces, it describes four different creatures, each with a different face

      b) Seraphim only appear once by name in the OT, Isaiah 6:2, where they are described as flying above God's throne with six wings—two that cover their faces, two that cover their feet, and two with which they fly—and crying out "Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD of hosts"

   2) They are usually depicted surrounding the throne of God suggesting their primary role is that of directly attending Him, possibly guarding and protecting His divine presence
   3) God also placed a cherub outside the Garden of Eden after ejecting Adam and Even to guard the way to the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:24)

c. Angels (Hebrew malak meaning messenger):
   1) This term sometimes appears to be used in a very broad sense to refer to all of the heavenly beings, but it also refers to what we traditionally think of as angels
   2) Other terms for angels include hosts (1 Kings 22:19; Nehemiah 9:6), watchers and holy ones (Daniel 4:13, 17, 23), and princes (Daniel 10:13; 20; 12:1)
   3) Angels have a range of functions including worshipping God (Psalm 148:1-2; Isaiah 6:3), delivering messages to people (Luke 1:19, 26), transmitting God's Word (Hebrews 2:2), fighting spiritual battles (Daniel 10:13; Jude 1:9), executing judgment (Exodus 12:12; Revelation 7:1), and ministering to those who are saved (Hebrews 1:14; Acts 27:23-24; 12:6-10)
   4) Another prominent role for angels is serving as warriors in God's heavenly army:
      a) The term "**host**" in both Hebrew and Greek is a military term referring to an army, division, or even battle

b) God is referred to 239 in the Bible as "The Lord of hosts" meaning that He commands a heavenly army made up of angels
c) We even have the names of two of the chief angels in His army: Gabriel (Daniel 8:16) and Michael the Archangel (Daniel 10:13)
d) "The Angel of Yahweh" is a reference to the preincarnate Christ, not an actual angel

3. How many heavenly hosts are there?
   a. Daniel described seeing "**thousands upon thousands**" attending God and "**myriads upon myriads**" standing before Him (Daniel 7:10)—some translations render this as "10,000 times 10,000" or 100,000,000!
   b. Hebrews 12:22 and Revelation 5:11 use the same language to describe their numbers

B. The Origin, Nature, and Activities of Satan and Demons

1. The origin and nature of Satan and demons:
   a. Satan first appears in the Garden in Genesis 3:
      1) In this passage he is called "**the serpent**" which Revelation 12:9 and 20:2 identify as the devil or Satan
      2) We call him Satan, but the Bible never gives us his formal name
      3) Instead, he is simply referred to by titles or labels: "**the satan**" (Job 1:6), "**the devil**" (Matthew 4:11), "**the dragon**" (Revelation 12:4), "**the evil one**" (Matthew 13:19), "**ruler of this world**" (John 12:31), "**god of this world**" (2 Corinthians 4:4); "**the tempter**" (Matthew 4:3), "**the enemy**" (Matthew 13:39)
      4) Lucifer is a mistranslation by the KJV of the phrase "morning star" in Isaiah 13:12, and it's unclear if this verse is even about him

   b. Satan's origin is clouded in mystery because there are no passages that directly address his origin:
      1) Instead, most of what is claimed about his origin comes from symbolic interpretations of two Old Testament passages:
         a) Ezekiel 28:12-18 (READ) describes the King of Tyre
         b) Isaiah 14:12-14 (READ) describes the King of Babylon

      2) While these passages are directly addressing earthly kings, Bible scholars over the past 2000 years have believed that they figuratively depict Satan
      3) This double-meaning (if you will) is seen elsewhere in Scripture like Psalm 22 which describes not only David's trouble with his enemies but Christ's death on the cross
      4) Whether or not the Ezekiel and Isaiah passages apply to Satan, we know at least four things about his origin and nature for certain:
         a) He is a created being and one of the sons of God depicted in Job (Job 1:6)

b) He rebelled against God became His enemy and adversary (that's the meaning of "satan")—this also clear from all of the titles used of him in the Bible
c) He is the god of this world meaning that he exercises a certain amount of power and influence over it
d) Lastly, because he was created, he is limited and is neither omnipotent, omnipresent, nor omniscient

c. This brings us to demons:
1) The word "**demon**" occurs some 80 times in our English Bible, along with a range of other words and phrases to describe them:
a) Almost all appear in the New Testament; there's only two or three direct references to demons in the OT (Deuteronomy 32:17; Psalm 106:37)
b) In the Gospels and Acts they are often referred to as "**unclean**" or "**evil**" spirits (Mark 1:23; Acts 19:15-16)
c) In Ephesians 6:12 Paul referred to them as "**rulers**", "**powers**", "**world forces of this darkness**", and "**spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places**"

2) Like Satan, they are created beings—specifically angels—who rebelled with him against God before being kicked out of heaven (Revelation 12:1-9)
3) The Bible doesn't tell us how many demons there are, except that it's substantial—1/3 of the angels

2. The activities of Satan and demons (not exhaustive):
a. Satan Himself:
1) He is god's chief enemy and adversary, and ours as well—Peter wrote, "**Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeing someone to devour**" (1 Peter 5:8)
2) He lies, temps, and deceives: we see all three of these in Genesis 3:1-5 and Jesus said "**he is a liar and the father of lies**" (John 8:44)
3) In the same verse (John 8:44), Jesus said "**He was a murderer from the beginning**"
4) He blinds the minds of unbelievers so they can't understand the Gospel (2 Corinthians 4:4)
5) He accuses believers:
a) He challenged Job's righteousness before God (Job 1-2)
b) Revelation 12:10 calls him "**the accuser of our brothers**" and says that he "**accuses them before our God day and night**."

6) He is the "**prince of the power of the air…the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience**" (Ephesians 2:2) and the "**ruler of this world**" (John 12:31)

7) He can also perform powerful signs and false wonders (2 Thessalonians 2:9; Revealtion 16:13-14)

b. Demons:
   1) It appears that much of Satan's work is carried out by his minions
   2) Paul described them as "**rulers**", "**powers**", "**world forces of this darkness**", and "**spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places**" (Ephesians 6:12)
   3) Much like Satan, they can perform signs and wonders (Revelation 16:14)
   4) We also know that demons can exert a certain amount of influence over individuals:
      a) This is generally referred to as "demon possession" but many argue this term isn't Biblical because it never actually occurs in the Bible
         - Instead, the word "**demonized**" (daimonizomai) is used, along with statements regarding a person having an unclear spirit (Matthew 123; 4:24)
         - The debate revolves around ownership (e.g. whether a demon can own a person) and influence vs. inhabitation (do they inhabit a person spiritually or just influence them)
         - Personally, I believe this is too much hair splitting; no matter what word or phrase you use, demons can heavily influence a person, including his or her thoughts, words, conditions, and actions

      b) What we see in the Gospels:
         - Muteness, deafness, and blindness (Matthew 12:22; Mark 9:25)
         - Convulsions (Mark 1:26; 9:26)
         - Superhuman strength (Mark 5:4)
         - Mental illness and self-destructive behavior (Matthew 17:15; Mark 5:5)
         - Control of the person's voice (Mark 5:7)

      c) One last note: sometime people can be influenced by MULTIPLE demons:
         - Mary Magdalene had seven (Luke 8:2)
         - The Gerasene Demoniac (Luke 8:27-30): a legion referred to anywhere from hundreds of soldiers to thousands

C. Spiritual Warfare (so where does that leave us?)

1. The Bible clearly depicts that we are in a spiritual battle (READ Ephesians 6:10-12)
   a. Some churches over-emphasize the battle by seeing a demon around every corner and behind every sin, sickness and disease that needs to be cast out, usually in some spectacular public display

The rise of "deliverance ministries" (examples: Bob Larson, Kathryn Krick)

b. Other churches under-emphasize the battle by seemingly ignoring that it even exists

2. Our first TAKEWAYS: how do we fight this spiritual battle (e.g. engage in spiritual warfare)?
   a. First and foremost, we are not to give the devil an opportunity in our lives through sin (This is the point of Ephesians 4)
   b. Second, we are to submit ourselves to God and resist the devil in our faith—James wrote that when we do that, Satan will flee (James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:9)
   c. Third, we are to put on the full armor of God so we can stand firm against the schemes of the devil (Ephesians 6:11-17)
   d. Fourth, we are to pray for ourselves and others (Ephesians 6:18-20)

3. What about demonization?
   a. Does it still happen? There's no reason to believe it doesn't, Biblically or practically with what we see in the world
   b. Can it happen to Christians? There's no evidence in the Bible of Christians having demons or being "demonized" or that they can be, but the fact that we are warned to be aware of the devil's schemes and resist him suggests that we can fall prey to satanic and demonic influences
   c. Our second TAKEAWAY: How do we address demon possession? Like they did in the Bible:
      1) Jesus cast out demons "**with a word**" and "**by the Spirit of God**" (Matthew 8:16; 12:28)
      2) The Apostles, Paul, and others cast out demons in Jesus's name (Luke 10:17; Acts 16:18)
      3) Sometimes casting out demons required prayer (Matthew 17:21)
      4) Finally, it always revolved around the proclamation of the Gospel
      5) There's no evidence anywhere in the Bible that casting out demons required special rituals or formulas, long draw out spectacular performances
      6) There's also no evidence that the Holy Spirit anointed certain individuals to travel from city to city for the purpose of conducting "deliverance ministries" like we see in some circles today