

Facing Evil Spirits – Manase Woja Alfred

In the beginning of 1990 strange things began to happen especially through Christian youth in the Sudan. The civil war centred mainly in the south had already made many Christians come to the north. Most settled in the capital Khartoum. They continued with their usual Christian activities through hardship and persecution.

God began to move in a special way. Groups of youths organised youth fellowships, prayer meetings, conferences and night vigils. In these fellowships many people committed themselves to serve Christ. Healings and casting out of demons were commonly practised. People fell under the power of the Holy Spirit. They spoke in tongues and they prophesied. Those who received the baptism of the Holy Spirit preached the word of God with boldness. Across the capital Christians were praying with loud voices, fasting and having all night vigils. Youth evangelised in the schools and higher education institutions they attended. Mass conversions to Jesus Christ were taking place in conventions. Much as Jesus sent out His original disciples and gave them power to cast out unclean spirits and heal all manner of sickness and disease, these Christian youths started operating in similar ways. Like the earliest disciples they experienced many God-given signs and wonders.

Please read Matthew 10:5-10 and Mark 16:14-20.

The phrase “**drive out demons**” is in both passages of Scripture, Matthew 10:8 and Mark 16:17, as well as in many others. Facing evil spirits is one of the things Jesus expected His followers would need to do as they preached the good news of the kingdom of heaven to people everywhere.

What does this phrase mean?

1. Demons are evil angels who sinned against God and who now continually work evil in the world.¹

¹ Wayne Grudem Systematic Theology (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press) 1994.

They are also called “evil spirits” and “unclean spirits” in the Bible. Compare Matthew 10:1,8. The words are used inter-changeably.

Angels are sometimes called, “the heavenly hosts”, Psalm 103:20-21; 148:2. They are “spirits” who “minister”, Hebrews 1:14. They are *not* the souls or spirits of people who have died, as some Africans mistakenly think. They are unseen spirits who invisibly serve in this life and in the life to come, Luke 16:22.

All angels were originally good. They were part of God’s creation, Genesis 1:31. But by Genesis 3:1 Satan, the serpent of Revelation 20:2, was working against God. He had become bad. He tried to deceive the first human beings and to disrupt God’s plans for the world.

Satan wants to be worshipped. He even tried to persuade Jesus to worship him, Matthew 4:8-9.

Satan, with some of the other angels, proudly rebelled against God, 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6. In the Bible we are not told clearly what happened. Isaiah 14:12-15 *may* describe it.

Satan and all the rebellious angels are all still accountable to God. They are being taught lessons by God. God sometimes uses human beings as examples in teaching demons, Job 1:6-8; 2:1-3.

Jesus Christ came to earth to destroy all of the devil’s work, the devil’s people and the devil’s power, 1 John 3:8.

2. Driving out demons was a characteristic of Jesus Christ’s own ministry. He said the conflict with demons showed that the kingdom of God was arriving among people, see Matthew 12:28.

Look at the example of Jesus in Matthew’s gospel:

4:23-25 people brought to Jesus were healed

7:21-23 Jesus warned of evil people, using His own name but falsely

8:14-17 spirits were driven out by a spoken word

8:28-34 demons were sent into pigs and then destroyed

9:32-35 Jesus enabled a dumb man to talk.

10:1, 5-10 Jesus gave authority to the disciples for their work.

12:22-28 Jesus enabled a blind and dumb man to see and talk. This was misunderstood by His opponents as the work of the devil, not the work of God.

12:43-45 Jesus taught on the need to fill life with good things in order to prevent a worse possession by an evil spirit or a group of them.

15:21-28 Jesus healed a suffering daughter in response to humble faith.

17:14-20 Jesus mercifully healed a suffering son by a word of rebuke.

25:41 Jesus taught that the devil and his angels will be sent to eternal fire by the King of God's kingdom, (that is by Jesus Himself).

The New Testament word “demon” means “evil spirit”.²

The word “drive” means to “forcefully push out”.³

We may conclude that, where it is necessary, as Christians we will be able to defeat opposition from bad spirits. When we face demons as we preach the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus will help us overcome them.

The Sudanese Christian youths affected by God in this way in the 1990's conducted their meetings in the former Catholic Club, near Khartoum Airport. They gave themselves the name Young Christian Fellowship (Y.C.F.). Within a short period Y.C.F. became famous all over the nation because of the move of the Holy Spirit. The youth witnessed wherever they could.

The objective of Y.C.F. was to strengthen the Christian youths and through them to influence the life of all Sudanese churches. They were distinguished from other Christian groups by their praying in unison, speaking in tongues, experiencing divine healings, casting out demons, powerful evangelism and visiting families. Their emphasis on the Pentecostal parts of the New

² W.E.Vine Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson) 1996, page 157.

³ W.E.Vine Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson) 1996, page 185.

Testament naturally shaped their Christian practice.

In the first Y.C.F. prayer and fasting conference in 1992, many youths came from Malakal and Renk, towns in southern Sudan, and from Kosti, in western Sudan, to attend. Through them this emphasis – some would say revival – moved to those towns. Outreach was organised to various parts of the Sudan. Usually after the annual prayer and fasting conference, groups of youths would be sent to various towns to train youth leaders and Sunday school teachers. They held youth conferences, Sunday school conferences, family conventions and outreaches to the neighbouring villages and towns. Literature was distributed and the Jesus film shown.

The churches in the Sudan became suspicious of the youths because most of their youth groups began worshipping in the style of Y.C.F. “Our youth meetings have become Pentecostal”, some said. Some also realised the hand of the Lord in the movement. It was impossible to ignore the positive changes in young lives. Those who used to go to parties stopped participating in them. Drunkards left drinking and the immoral stopped practising immorality. Even the behaviour of the youths in their family homes changed.

What happened? What was the cause of all these changes? It was the work of the Holy Spirit. Young people committed themselves to live for God, to serve Him, to pray and study the word of God. That was why the glory of God manifested itself. God began to speak through various ways to people. This confirmed the word of God in Joel: “And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions”, Joel 2:28. This was an answer to the prayers of those praying for the Sudan. As students in Egypt between 1985 and 1990, some Sudanese students and I used to pray daily for revival to take place in Sudan.

Some of the miracles I saw reflected miracles recorded in Scripture.

Here are seven examples.

1. At our first prayer and fasting conference in June 1992, for five days at Gereif Bible School, many more people came than we had planned for. At meal times the number was more and the food was less! The bread was less than the number of people. We decided that two persons would eat one and a half loaves of bread (the number of the participants was almost 200). But when everybody had eaten, there still remained more bread. Each two persons was given their half bread, still the bread remained. When we asked the ladies serving, they said that whenever they got bread from the sack, the second time they dipped their hands into the sack they got more bread. Praise the Lord!

Please read Matthew 14:13-21 and 15:29-39.

2. In the last day of the conference, we had a night vigil, praying, worshipping and sharing the word. Early in the morning there was a mighty manifestation of the power of God. Many people were baptised by the Holy Spirit. The power of God was so strong that many people were falling down and speaking in tongues, worshipping and praising God. When we asked everybody to leave, no one wanted to, instead many were crying. So we decided to leave as a group and took buses. There was so much joy that the youths continued to praise God and preach Jesus in the buses until they arrived in the central bus station. This unusual time in Khartoum was the work of the Holy Spirit.

Please read Acts 2:1-12, 4:23-31, and 13:1-3.

3. Once we went to pray for a lady at Arkwait, a residential area in Khartoum. She was complaining of continuous sickness throughout her life. After giving her life to Christ, we started to pray for her. A demon manifested itself by throwing her down, crying and moving on the ground like a fish swimming in the water. We cast out the demon and the lady was delivered. Then we prayed for her healing and laid hands on her to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Later on she confessed that she had a relationship with a sea-spirit called Arus al Bahr (the bridegroom of the Sea). When we examined her we realised that her body shape was like a fish. After some years we heard that this lady went to Wau, a town in Southern Sudan. Through her testimony

many people gave their lives to Christ.

Please read Luke 9:37-43.

4. In Renk a lady who had epilepsy came and asked for prayers. She had scars from burning all over her body. Her right hand finger could not move because of the burns. She told us she used to fall into the fire when she was on her own. We cast out the spirit and she was delivered. Her fingers began to move. God healed her. We went to their house and burned all the things that belonged to the demons. As we were burning the items, a relative who was living with her, fell down screaming. She showed signs of demon possession. She was also delivered. Praise the Lord. Glory to God who is faithful to His word, delivering people from the power of darkness. Through that incident Christians in Renk were encouraged and many people gave their lives to Christ.

Please read Acts 19:11-20.

5. Among the cases of deliverance in Renk there was an outstanding one in which we spent four hours before breaking through. As we worshipped, a lady fell down and crying. There were seven demons in her. We commanded them to leave in the name of Jesus, but the girl was so violent that she struggled to stand and a voice spoke through her saying that she wanted to go to the river. The demons demanded the necklace, the cross and the ring we had removed from her earlier. They spoke in Shilluk and Arabic languages. They claimed that they would not leave unless the things were given. They mocked our faith but after four hours she was wonderfully and completely freed in Jesus' name.

Please read Luke 8:26-39.

6. In El Obeid youth conference, someone came for prayers, walking very slowly using a stick. He told us that he had been lame for ten years. He could not walk without leaning on a stick. We prayed for him and then removed the stick from his hand and asked him to walk. He started walking slowly, then faster and faster. He began to run. Praise the Lord! Jesus is alive; He is the

same, yesterday, today, and forever, Hebrews 13:8.

Please read Luke 13:10-13.

7. A lady came to S.I.M. (then the Sudan Interior Mission) in Khartoum asking to be prayed for. One of our colleagues set a date and invited us to come and pray for her. As we counselled her she said that she had recently come back from Japan. She went there for cancer treatment, but she was not cured. She was a Muslim. We prayed for her and she was healed. Later on we heard that she went to Egypt for medical check up. All her medical documents indicated she had cancer, but there was no cancer found in her body! There were only marks of healed one!

Please read Luke 17:11-19.

In the spiritual battle every Christian faces, how can we discern the presence of evil spirits and how can we defeat them?

1. Test the spirits to see whether they are from God, 1 John 4:1-6.

Notice that a demon can recognise Jesus as the Son of God. Bad spirits will use the name of Jesus and the appearance of worshipping Jesus to deceive if they can, Luke 8:28; Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34.

“Acknowledging Jesus”, 1 John 4:2-3, means agreeing with Jesus about everything *and consequently living as Jesus wants*. The demons in Luke 8:28 and 31 knew the right words to say but did not let the man live in a God-honouring way, see Luke 8:27,29.

In legal usage, “to acknowledge” means “to recognise the authority, rights and claims” of another. Paul would not let the evil spirit in a fortune teller continue to speak in support of his ministry, Acts 16:16-18.

Notice that Jesus warned about many people who will work false miracles in the later stages of Christian history, Matthew 24:24.

Christians should not accept everything that claims to be done in Jesus' name.

2. Know and keep the faith. 1 Timothy 4:1-16 warns about “deceiving spirits and things taught by demons”, verse 1. It also reminds that a correct reading and application of Scripture (our Christian Bible) leads to visible evidence of progress in Christian discipleship, verses 13, 15-16.

This spiritual struggle is described in Ephesians 6:12.

“The faith”, verse 1, refers to Paul’s gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, see 1 Timothy 1:3-11, 15; 4:6; 2 Timothy 2:8.

When people apparently without faith in Jesus tried to copy Paul by casting out evil spirits, they were physically hurt, Acts 19:13-16. The name of Jesus is not to be used easily and by anyone.

3. Remember the symptoms shown by demons in Scripture.⁴

- Blindness, deafness and dumbness, Matthew 12:22; Mark 9:17; 9:25; Luke 11:14
- Unusual strength, Mark 5:3-4; Luke 8:29
- Unusual noises, including loud speech Mark 1:23-26; 3:5; 9:26; Luke 4:33-34; 4:41; 8:28; 9:39; Acts 8:7
- Self-harming, Mark 3:5; 9:18; Luke 4:35
- Foaming at the mouth, gnashing teeth, a rigid body Mark 9:18-20; Luke 9:39
- Body convulsions, Mark 1:26; 9:20, 26; Luke 9:39, 42
- Crippling of the body, Luke 13:11-13,16
- Troubling and the destruction of usual human life, Luke 6:18; 7:21; 8:27, 29; 9:39; Acts 5:16; 13:8; 19:16

It is important to remember that all of these symptoms may also come from physical or medical conditions. They do not always indicate the presence of demons.

4. Rightly use the name of Jesus and encourage Christian discipleship.

Reading again many of the gospel accounts already quoted notice how Jesus and later, the

⁴ based on James Nkansah-Obrempong Angels, Demons and Powers in the Africa Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan) 2006, p.1454, expanded by Colin Salter.

disciples, dealt with evil spirits in people.

Examples from Jesus (in Luke):

- He silenced and ordered the spirits, Luke 4:35
- He rebuked the spirits, Luke 4:41; 9:42
- He commanded, conversed and permitted the spirits, Luke 8:29-32
- He drove out the spirits, Luke 11:14
- He spoke healing to the person, and confirmed the result by laying His hands on her, Luke 13:11-13

Examples from the disciples (in Acts):

- people were freed and healed in response to their requests. We are not told exactly what the disciples did, Acts 5:16
- they linked exorcism and healing to preaching Christ, Acts 8:7
- Paul (with Luke and Silas) commanded in Jesus' name, Acts 16:18
- very unusually even for miracles, things Paul had touched conveyed Jesus' power to release others, when shared, Acts 19:11-12.⁵

5. Take the necessary follow up actions.

- Burn and destroy the objects of demonism, fortune telling and witchcraft, Acts 19:18-19
- Fill the space emptied by the cast out evil spirit with good Christian things, Luke 11:24-26. The Holy Spirit lives in a believer and produces good things through a disciplined life, Galatians 5:22-25
- Remember, having once followed demons and evil spirits does not exclude you from living close to Jesus now, Luke 8:1-3.

⁵ "The wisest attitude to the sweat-rag miracles is neither that of the sceptics who declare them spurious, nor that of mimics, who try to copy them, like those American televangelists ... Bible students remember that Paul regarded his miracles as his apostolic credentials (2 Corinthians 12:12 and Romans 15:19) and that Jesus himself condescended to the timorous faith of a woman by healing her when she touched the edge of His coat", John Stott The Message of Acts Bible Speaks Today, (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press) 1991, page 306.

There is no reason for any Sudanese Christian to be afraid of demons and evil, unclean spirits. Witchdoctors and their curses or spells, ancestral spirits and traditions, the idols, amulets and sacred places of other religions, may appear strong and fearful. But, "You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world", 1 John 4:4. "The ruler of the kingdom of the air", Ephesians 2:2, "the prince of this world will be driven out", John 12:31. Jesus Christ is Lord!

"And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross", Colossians 2:15.

Jesus Christ is Lord!

Discussion guide

Using this chapter and Scriptures quoted:

1. Since Satan wants to be the centre of our attention and worship, what is the main danger we must avoid as we *consider and deal with* his evil spirits? How can we avoid this?

Matthew 4:8-10; 1 John 3:7-10.

2. In what undeniable ways did the Holy Spirit change young people (see above) as He came upon them?

List at least seven ways mentioned.

3. Why is it always a good idea to compare our stories of confrontation with demons today with those in Scripture?

Mark 4:15; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; 2 Corinthians 12:7-9; 2 Timothy 3:12-17.

4. Explain the importance of "testing the spirits", 1 John 4:1.

Why are the words spoken by them not enough to discern good from bad?

James 2:18-19.

5. Compare Acts 2:1-13 with 1 Corinthians 14:26-40:

How was the "bewilderment" of Pentecost explained?

Why are "order" and "peace" essentials for Christian ministry?

What is the most important result of *any* spiritual confrontation? Why?

6. Comment on the statement, "There is no reason for any Sudanese Christian to be afraid of demons and evil, unclean spirits".

Why do some Christians still fear spells, ancestral spirits, amulets, etc.?

Where should their focus be?

How can a person live with their focus securely on Jesus Christ?