

people... and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them." (Matthew 4:23-24)

Some diseases were understood, others, particularly those which changed behaviour were not understood and so the sufferers were said to have a demon or evil spirit that made them act in that way. But we see from Matthew's words that Jesus healed them all. Demon spirits did not really exist.

Demons were a sign of a greater problem

If demons did not exist, why did Jesus act and talk as if they did? He used the language and wrong beliefs of the people to teach a great truth. Some diseases made people behave in strange ways and their neighbours said that they were possessed by a demon which was untrue, they were simply ill people with diseases that changed their behaviour and Jesus healed their physical problems. It was a sign that he had the power to bring a much greater healing work to everybody.

All of us have a disease that eventually will kill us for 'the wages of sin is death' and we all sin, we all disobey God. Just as Jesus had the power to heal people, he also has the power to forgive sins. Look at these words.

"That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick.

This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases." (Matthew 8:16-17)

Isaiah's words are found in chapter 53. It is

the chapter that tells in detail about the crucifixion of Jesus and what it achieved. In the following verses, the prophet said that God laid on Jesus the sins of us all. These were the illnesses and diseases that Matthew meant.

This is a healing that we all need and which is available to everyone who believes in Jesus as his saviour and is baptised to become part of God's family.

#### **Our Discipleship**

If we understand Bible teaching about demons then it helps to understand how God looks upon sin. He sees it as something that makes our lives strange to him just as demonic behaviour was strange to other people. But he has healed us through the sacrifice of Jesus! This should make us rejoice and be full of gratitude – just as sick people were when Jesus healed them from their illnesses. Many of those healed became his disciples, understanding that he was the Son of God. This is the challenge for all of us. Our response to God's salvation

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## BASIC BIBLE TRUTHS

# Demons and Evils Spirits What the Bible Teaches

When you have read this leaflet you will know the answers to the following questions.

- Why is it so important to have an understanding of what demons and spirits are?
- Why did Jesus speak to demons and spirits?
- How will our understanding about demons influence our behaviour as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ?

This leaflet deals with the subject of 'demons' (or 'devils' as they are called in some Bible versions). It does not teach about The Devil or Satan, this topic is dealt with in the leaflet 'The Devil, who or what is it?'

#### **Old Testament teaching about demons and spirits.**

We first read about demons in Leviticus 17 in the Old Testament. We find that the Children of Israel were told by God that they must not worship the gods of the surrounding nations.

These peoples were superstitious and they worshipped different gods whom they thought influenced their lives in many ways. They worshipped them because they thought their gods could make their women fertile, they worshipped them for good harvests and for other reasons. But these gods were idols made from wood and carved into the shapes of animals and, in particular, the shape of a goat. The Hebrew word for demon or devil simply means a hairy animal and is translated many times as 'kid' or 'goat'. Worship of these was abhorrent to the Lord God and so He condemned it.

“So they shall no more sacrifice their sacrifices to goat demons, after whom they whore. This shall be a statute forever for them throughout their generations.” (Leviticus 17:7)

Their worship of strange gods or demons and their immoral behaviour provoked the only true God to anger against them.

"They stirred him to jealousy with strange gods; with abominations they provoked him to anger. They sacrificed to demons that were no gods, to gods they had never known, to new gods that had come recently, whom your fathers had never dreaded". (Deuteronomy 32:16-17)

Jeremiah the prophet wrote about these idols and mocked them. He showed that these things could not influence the lives of people in any way, only the Lord God of Israel, the one true God could do this.

“...the customs of the peoples are vanity. A tree from the forest is cut down and worked with an axe by the hands of a craftsman. They decorate it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so that it cannot

move. Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field, and they cannot speak; they have to be carried, for they cannot walk. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, neither is it in them to do good. There is none like you, LORD; you are great, and your name is great in might.” (Jeremiah 10:3-6)

We see from the Old Testament that demons did not exist they were merely carved idols, false gods made and worshipped by foolish men.

#### **Demons in the New Testament.**

Jesus came from a part of Israel called Galilee and the people who lived there were very superstitious. In New Testament times they recognised that there was only one true God and did not worship idols as gods but they still believed that demons existed. They thought that they were evil spirits living within people and that they affected their lives and made them behave in strange ways. They thought that these demons ruled over their lives just as people had thought that their carved, wooden idols had ruled over them many years before.

Here are some examples of people who were thought to be possessed by a demon.

At the beginning of the New Testament we read about a man called John the Baptist. He was chosen by God to tell the people about the coming of Jesus and he was very different to other people. He wore strange clothes and ate unusual food and some said that he had a demon because he was different.

In Matthew chapter nine a dumb man is described as possessed by a demon and who was healed by Jesus.

“As they were going away, behold, a demon-

oppressed man who was mute was brought to Jesus. And when the demon had been cast out, the mute man spoke. And the crowds marvelled, saying, "Never was anything like this seen in Israel." (Matthew 9-32-33)

In Matthew chapter seventeen a child is described as having epileptic fits during which he was unable to control his actions. People did not understand epilepsy and thought a demon was causing his strange behaviour. We are told that Jesus healed him showing that it was a medical condition. Today we understand about epilepsy and what causes it but in Jesus' time they did not know about it. They simply saw a boy who suddenly behaved in a very strange and unusual way and perhaps they were scared by him. They thought something had taken over his life.

“And when they came to the crowd, a man came up to him and, kneeling before him, said, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly. For often he falls into the fire, and often into the water. And I brought him to your disciples, and they could not heal him." And Jesus answered, "O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here to me." And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was healed instantly.” (Matthew 17:14-18)

Look at the following summary of the work of Jesus.

“And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the