

“In *40 Questions about Angels, Demons, and Spiritual Warfare*, John Gilhooly responds to many misconceptions, old and new, surrounding the vexing issue of spiritual warfare. Foundational to his approach are: a belief in the final authority of the Bible on the subject; a commendable reticence about engaging in unbiblical speculation; and a conviction that spiritual warfare is primarily about the believer’s ongoing struggle with sin. Gilhooly offers robust discussion of a very wide range of issues, and his book will be appreciated by those perplexed by the bewildering and constantly expanding range of unhelpful teaching in this area.”

—Keith Ferdinando
Associate Pastor
Woodford Evangelical Church

“C. S. Lewis warned years ago that our approach to demons tends toward disbelieving their existence or becoming fascinated with them. This work strikes a healthy, biblical balance by grounding responses in the Word while addressing debatable contemporary approaches to spiritual warfare. It is a biblically sound, historically informative, and practically relevant resource.”

—Chuck Lawless
Dean of Doctoral Studies, Vice-President for Spiritual Formation
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

40 QUESTIONS ABOUT
*Angels, Demons, and
Spiritual Warfare*

John R. Gilhooly

Benjamin L. Merkle, Series Editor

 **Kregel**
Academic

40 Questions about Angels, Demons, and Spiritual Warfare
© 2018 John R. Gilhooly

Published by Kregel Academic, an imprint of Kregel Publications, 2450 Oak Industrial Dr. NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505-6020.

This book is a title in the 40 Questions Series edited by Benjamin L. Merkle.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without written permission of the publisher, except for brief quotations in printed reviews.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are from the New American Standard Bible®. Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. www.Lockman.org

Scripture quotations marked NRSV are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and are used by permission. All rights reserved.

The Greek font GraecaU is available from www.linguistsoftware.com/lgku.htm, +1-425-775-1130.

ISBN 978-0-8254-4468-5

Printed in the United States of America

18 19 20 21 22 / 5 4 3 2 1

To my wife

Contents

Introduction / 9

Part 1: Introductory Questions

1. Why Is There a Fascination with the Supernatural? / 15
2. Are Angels and Demons Active Today? / 19
3. What Is Spiritual Warfare? / 23

Part 2: Questions about Spiritual Powers

Section A: Questions Related to Angels

4. What Is Angelology? / 29
5. What Does the Bible Say about Angels? / 35
6. Do Believers Have Guardian Angels? / 41
7. Who Is the Angel of the Lord? / 45
8. Who Are the “Sons of God” in Genesis 6? / 53

Section B: Questions Related to Demons

9. Should We Study Demonology? / 61
10. What Does the Bible Say about Demons? / 65
11. Do Judaism or Islam Believe in Angels and Demons? / 71
12. Are There Territorial Spirits? / 75
13. Can Christians Be Demon-Possessed? / 79

Section C: Questions Related to the Devil

14. Who Is the Devil, or Satan? / 87
15. Why Did God Create the Devil? / 91
16. Why and When Did the Devil Fall from Heaven? / 97
17. Does Isaiah 14 Describe the Fall of the Devil? / 103
18. Does Ezekiel 28 Describe the Fall of the Devil? / 109
19. What Is the Role of the Devil in Temptation? / 113

Part 3: Questions about Spiritual Warfare

Section A: Questions Related to Spiritual Warfare in History

- 20. What Does the Bible Say about Jesus and Spiritual Warfare? / 119
- 21. How Was Spiritual Warfare Understood in the Apostolic Church? / 123
- 22. How Was Spiritual Warfare Understood in the Ancient Church? / 127
- 23. How Was Spiritual Warfare Understood in the Medieval Church? / 131
- 24. How Was Spiritual Warfare Understood in the Reformation Church? / 135

Section B: Questions Related to Contemporary Models of Spiritual Warfare

- 25. What Is the World-Systems Model of Spiritual Warfare? / 143
- 26. What Is the Strategic-Level Deliverance Model of Spiritual Warfare? / 149
- 27. What Is the “War with the Flesh” Model of Spiritual Warfare? / 155

Section C: Questions Related to Spiritual-Warfare Practices

- 28. What Is the Full Armor of God? / 163
- 29. What Is “Tearing Down Strongholds”? / 169
- 30. What Is “Binding the Strong Man”? / 173
- 31. What Is Spiritual Mapping? / 177
- 32. What Is the Role of Prayer in Spiritual Warfare? / 183
- 33. Should We Practice Exorcisms? / 187
- 34. Is It Possible to Bless Objects for Spiritual Warfare? / 193

Section D: Questions Related to the Occult

- 35. What Does the Bible Say about the Occult? / 201
- 36. What Is the New Age Movement? / 207
- 37. What Is Wicca? / 211
- 38. Are There Such Things as Spiritual Curses? / 217
- 39. What Is Satanic Ritual Abuse? / 221
- 40. What Are Tarot, Ouija, and Divination? / 227

Selected Bibliography / 233

Scripture Index / 235

Introduction

This book is intended to assist Christians, pastors, and churches to think rightly about the nature of spiritual warfare, as well as the concomitant realities of spiritual beings and occult practices. Writing a book about spiritual warfare involves a number of difficulties, the greatest of which is that spiritual-warfare discussions often take place at the level of folk religion. In other words, the language of spiritual warfare, and the questions that arise about its shape and practice, are often generated in local conversations amongst church people of varying levels of study and experience. If you happen to mention in a church setting that you are writing a book on spiritual warfare, all manner of strange questions and anecdotes pop up. I've spoken to people who claim to have seen Michael the archangel, or live in houses inhabited by demons. However, apparitions of spiritual beings, whether sincere or occult fantasy, are not principally what I think about when I think about spiritual warfare. Neither is exorcism. I think principally about the war with sin.

Of course, such differences are inevitable when working with an umbrella term like "spiritual warfare." It is taken for granted that "spiritual warfare" is a term well-understood and well-attested to by the Bible. As a result, much of our talk about spiritual warfare is unclear.

Perhaps the most troubling tendency in literature on spiritual warfare, however, is the extent to which mere anecdote bears the brunt of the heavy lifting. In other words, many authors on spiritual warfare treat the biblical texts as if they are an addendum to what they have gleaned through experience, whether in deliverance ministry or counseling sessions. In reaction to some of this excess, others reject the idea of spiritual warfare wholesale. Many books on spiritual warfare consist almost entirely of the reporting of stories of personal experience, but experience is not self-interpreting. The best books on the subject fill out the contours of these reports with the data of the Scriptures, so that God's Word becomes the interpreter of our experience.

Even still, these are difficult and weighty matters, and we often find that the Bible does not answer the exact questions we find ourselves asking. In such instances, however, we must ask why the biblical authors chose to address other matters. Perhaps, our speculations about the spirit realm are not always helpful and would be better off left behind. In fact, we are told very early that "secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are

revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do the words of this law” (Deut. 29:29). We should be satisfied with what we have been given.

In any case, the paucity of data about some of these matters in Scripture often has the effect of leading to an overreliance on anecdote. Likewise, this leads to another difficulty: Often we find ourselves so desperate for an answer to a question of curiosity that we will “find” answers in texts that simply have nothing to do with the question. Typically, authors accomplish this by allegorizing, spiritualizing, or by word association. However, these techniques are generally disrespectful to the intentions of the authors, since they erode any sense in which the meaning of what the author wrote is determined by the text and not our own questions of curiosity. To say that the text is “for us” does not mean that it is for us to do what we will; it is to say that what the author wrote is what we need to hear.

These worries lead to two extreme responses to spiritual warfare. One is an incredible worry about the dark powers, and an over-suspicion about their involvement in and responsibility for troubles in human life. If all the reports about demonic activity, satanic cults, ritual curses, and the like were true, it might well lead to fear. In fact, Martin Luther argued that we do not see the angels and demons, in part, because we would be terrified if we knew how active they were. But, the fact that there is so much mystery about these activities should not lead us to rely on former occultists for information about the demonic realm, or to an uncritical acceptance of anecdotal accounts.

People who speak as I am doing now, however, are often accused of the other extreme response, which is a mere lip service to the reality of the existence of spiritual warfare. These extremes are not any easier to avoid simply because C. S. Lewis pointed them out so eloquently. Furthermore, threading a middle way runs the risk of being crushed by both sides. Nevertheless, I have attempted to lay out the middle ground in response to many of the questions posed. Again, the middle ground will sound to many like lip service. I will say here at the outset that it is not. My hesitation to buy into fantastic stories of possession and demonic strongholds and the like is based on my reading of Scripture.

On the whole, a key point of this book is that most discussions about spiritual warfare are not based on a robust engagement with the biblical text. At the same time, spiritual warfare is one of the most alluring topics for Christians. This combination is dangerous and has frequently produced excesses and, in some cases, downright silly views about the subject of angels and demons.

It’s important to note that the concept of spiritual warfare as we find it in churches today is a very recent invention, not much older than the 1970s. Because it originates in grassroots movements, the term “spiritual warfare” is tossed around with a familiarity and understanding that belie how confused much of the discussion really is. It also disguises the fact that many developments in spiritual warfare—reflected in prayer, counseling, mission, and evangelistic practices—are products of the late twentieth century and not systemic parts of historic Christian theology or (more importantly) the biblical text.

Even when they pretend to rely on historical antecedents, the relationships are tenuous. Hence also, there are strong and significant disagreements among writers on spiritual warfare, even within similar interpretive traditions.

As I have suggested, my own approach to spiritual warfare is relatively muted. I do not deny that the enemy is pervasive and active in his assaults on the Christian church or on Christians individually, but I also see little reason from the text of Scripture to obsess over his activity. Rather, the centerpiece of spiritual warfare should be the gospel of Jesus Christ, because he is the one who “appeared . . . to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). John is explicit, in the context of this comment, that sin is the true devilish mark, so it seems clear that the war with sin is war with the Devil in a broad sense.

Fighting against sin, however, is not principally what the phrase “spiritual warfare” calls to mind for most. Instead, spiritual warfare is thought to concern itself primarily with combatting demons and spiritual forces of darkness. It is a mistake on this score, however, to attempt a thick demarcation between the assaults of the enemy, the temptations of sin, and the persuasions of the world. The Devil exercises his reign across the whole of this age (2 Cor. 4:4). Hence, there is little sense in combatting the Devil *as if* this activity were ultimately separate in some way from purging sin from our lives and communities through repentance and reliance on the Spirit of God.

On the one hand, we could think of spiritual warfare in a typical way, namely, as combat with demons. The defense of this line of thinking comes from Ephesians 6, in particular verse 12: “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” But notice that Paul speaks of something that is already happening, not something that we need to seek out. Neither does he recommend a remedy beyond wearing God’s armor and prayer. Certainly, spiritual warfare involves a struggle, a fight, but this is nothing more than the Christian life. To think of spiritual warfare primarily as active moments of intense combat with demons externalizes the ills of human experience and undercuts the sense in which the Devil’s authority is united with sin and the whole world outside of Christ. Certainly, if someone in fact is tormented by demons we should help them, but this is an extraordinary event.

On the other hand, we could think of spiritual warfare as an element of discipleship—which is to say merely that our struggle, our wrestling with cosmic powers, is the whole of Christian life. Of course, there are moments of great intensity in this struggle, but the battle is *not* like a traditional pitched battle, where the enemy is over “there” and we are over “here.” Certainly, it is instructive to think of the church as a kingdom outpost in hostile territory. It is a bracing image, and one that makes clear the importance of maintaining the doctrinal and moral purity of the church. But the demons and the world are not the only threat: There is also sin. And, sin is on the side of the demons and the world.

Even though there are some key themes throughout, this book does not make a sustained argument for a particular thesis. Instead, it makes many points in response to many topics. First, our discussion of spiritual warfare should begin with a rigorous interaction with the biblical text. Our theology must start with what God has revealed to us in his Scriptures. Second, experience is not self-interpreting. It seems to be in our nature to enjoy stories, especially ones that run to the macabre or fantastic. An unfortunate trend in discussion about spiritual warfare is that almost no amount of biblical argument or theological discussion outweighs the power of one breathless anecdote. But, if we are serious that the Bible is sufficient for doctrine and practice in Christian living, then experience cannot automatically receive higher credence than interpretation. Our enemy is a deceiver; God's law is light. Third, there are more pressing things to worry about than whether an angel appeared to Aunt Sally or whether those neighborhood kids are holding a séance. Frightening as the occult may be, it remains less fearsome than God. "God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control" (2 Tim. 1:7). Angelology and demonology should have a place in Christian theology and doctrine, but it should be proportional to their importance.

This book is divided into three sections. In Part 1, I discuss some broad introductory questions, exploring why the supernatural is so fascinating, the activity of angels and demons, and the various understandings of spiritual warfare. Part 2 comprises questions related to spiritual powers; the angels; the demons; and the prince of demons, the Devil. Some of these questions are exegetically driven, whereas other questions cover various Bible doctrines. Part 3 relates to spiritual warfare theologically, historically, methodologically, and practically. This part concludes with some questions about the occult, which is often a source of fear or consternation in discussions of spiritual warfare. In each of these areas, my goal was to answer the question succinctly; and I have avoided, to the extent possible, reliance on critical apparatus such as footnotes and copious citation. The end of the book contains a selected bibliography for those interested in reading more. I am, like all authors, indebted to everything I read.

I am similarly indebted to my colleagues at Cedarville University for their encouragement during the writing of this project and for their sunny willingness to answer my remedial questions. In particular, I'd like to acknowledge Jeremy Kimble (for suggesting I write this book), Joshua Kira (for mockery and burritos), William Marsh (for barbecue and for Luther), Jason Lee (for employment), Dan Estes (for prayer), Zachary Bowden (for forwarding phone calls about angels), Daniel DeWitt (for coffee and for the dinner on the boat), and Michael Shepherd (for *torah lishma*). And finally, I would like to thank Ched Spellman, who kept reminding me as I wrote that the devil is in the details and the angels are in the outfield. As much as I would like to blame others for mistakes in this book, it is a trope that I take credit for them myself in the introduction. Please know that they are due to my frailty and not to malice.

PART 1

INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1

Why Is There a Fascination with the Supernatural?

Many secularists argue that supernatural explanations or beliefs are linked with a primitive past that is unbecoming for our modern times. In the past, we all believed in intelligent spirits that inhabited our world from some other realm, with distinct powers over the elements and over the natural world; but it is now widely considered irrational to hold such views. They simply are not scientific. Rather, belief in spiritual or supernatural things is thought to be superstitious. These ideas have even penetrated biblical studies. Rudolf Bultmann famously quipped, “It is impossible to use electric lights and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles.”¹ Of course, it is not impossible to believe in angels and electric lights—since many persons do believe in both—but some hold that it is inconsistent to believe in both. Nevertheless, it is not at all obvious how use of technology says anything at all about whether spirits exist. Bultmann’s point is, I think, a strong example of the tendency to assume that modern developments have made beliefs in angels and demons (or even in God) obsolete. The thought is, perhaps, that our scientific advancements, such as they are, have made supernatural hypotheses unnecessary.

Yet, for all our technological and scientific advancement, belief in the supernatural has not dissipated among the general populace. An atheist might suggest that this fact is due to widespread ignorance of scientific developments or to the inertia of rapidly sinking religions. I think a more likely answer is that there is something to the belief in the supernatural, and that its lingering presence—even after it has become “lowbrow” to believe in things like spirits—can be better explained by other considerations. This kind of

1. Rudolf Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” in *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. Hans Bartsch (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 5.

question defies a conclusive answer because there may be many reasons that there is a fascination with the supernatural, but I will suggest a few contributing theological and anthropological factors.

Humans Are for God

Historically, the Christian response to this question turns on the fact that human beings are designed by God for a relationship with him. Hence, all men seek after the numinous (i.e., the spiritual or “otherworldly”), and the prevailing worldview of scientific naturalism does not satisfy this appetite. In the opening lines of his autobiography, Augustine confesses to God, “You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”² Augustine is reflecting on the fact that human beings are made in God’s image and that God is our proper end. In other words, God is the one—and the only one—who can fulfill our needs and desires. He has made us for himself and for his glory.

At the same time, men deny the knowledge of God that is presented to them. Hence, all men seek to fill their desire for the numinous with something other than God. Men have a need for God, whether they know it or not. This condition leads men naturally to idolatry of various kinds (Rom. 1:18–23). However, the prevailing worldview in the West—scientific naturalism—holds that there really are no supernatural or spiritual entities. The desire for contact with such things is a vestigial sociobiological holdover from a more primitive time. Hence, man’s desire for contact with such things is a desire that cannot be fulfilled, according to this worldview. In fact, the desire for God or the supernatural is a desire that we should probably outgrow. Yet, we cannot deny that our longing for wonder remains. For example, even the strongest naturalists attempt to satisfy their desire for the numinous with the wonder of scientific discovery. Some even go so far as to claim that religion shortcuts such discovery and is thus ultimately less satisfying than a scientific worldview.

Such arguments have not been successful in deterring the majority of people from believing in the supernatural. Studies repeatedly confirm that there are widespread beliefs in ghosts, paranormal activity, angels, and the afterlife. These beliefs are independent of commitments to specific religious doctrines, Christian or otherwise.³ In part, the failure of naturalism to take hold seems to be that its materialism—the claim that all that exists is physical stuff, mere particles in motion—does not satisfy our appetite for wonder and contact with the numinous. It seems to us too reductive to be true.

2. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3.

3. For example, 74 percent of cultures studied in a world ethnographic research project exhibited belief in spirits and demonic possession. See Erika Bourguignon, “Spirit Possession Belief and Social Structure,” in *The Realm of the Extra-Human: Ideas and Actions*, ed. A. Bharatic (Paris: Mouton, 1976), 19.

Perhaps for a similar reason, Eastern worldviews are increasingly embedded in the thinking of the West. There are more mundane reasons for these developments as well. For example, sociologists have noted a significant increase in the penetration of Eastern religion in the United States, due mainly to the success of immigrant peoples.⁴ An increasing religious pluralism has given rise to alternative worldviews that take seriously the presence of spiritual realities. Furthermore, recent developments in academia, particularly in sociology and anthropology, have made beliefs in spiritual or supernatural entities less taboo than they have been in the recent past.

The Supernatural Is Exciting

Second, there seem to be no rules regarding the supernatural, which makes speculation free and uncontrolled. A world controlled totally by inflexible laws and mechanical reactions feels stodgy and boring, whereas the realm of the supernatural seems both exciting and terrifying. It seems reductive to suppose that there are not greater forces at work than attractions between particles. Furthermore, we are conditioned to craft idols for ourselves because of our sin-natures. Hence, it is not unique to our moment in history that we take delight in fantastic stories about spiritual beings or preternatural occurrences. However, our materialistic worldview enhances the sense in which speculations about the supernatural serve as an escape from the doldrums of daily life. Since we may believe that there really are not such things as supernatural beings or events, we feel free to craft stories about them according to our own preferences. So, fascination with the supernatural provides both a continuation of the idolatrous tendency in man and an escape from the limitations of an unsatisfying worldview. These two factors seem to contribute to our fascination with the supernatural. Supernatural stories are exciting, and it is tempting to think the world is a bit more like our stories.

Not all discussion of the supernatural needs to be ominous. Much of our popular fiction involves some elements of magic or the supernatural, often with explicitly Christian themes, as in the writings of C. S. Lewis or J. R. R. Tolkien. The supernatural elements of these stories increase our wonder and invite us to consider who we are and what the numinous is really like, in comparison to the characters of the stories. We need to be careful, lest our caution about supernatural practices overturn works of fiction that make use of fairies and goblins to communicate a broader message.

Spiritual Beings, Including Demons, Are Real

Finally, the Devil and his angels are real, and occult speculation provides many lies and obstacles against the faith. There really is a world above the “mundane” experiences of humankind, and much of that world is interested

4. See Diana L. Eck, *A New Religious America* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001).

in directing our attention to anything other than the truth. Hence, fascination with the supernatural is plausibly a means by which the enemy can lead us into temptation. Of course, he wants to do this, so it is natural to think he would stir up unhealthy interests when the opportunity arose.

Once we understand that we are ensouled beings intended for communion with God, who is spirit (John 4:24), the longing for some supernatural contact—or the lingering suspicion that spirits exist—begins to make sense.

Summary

Because God made mankind to have communion with him, we are naturally oriented toward spiritual realities. Unfortunately, our sin-natures lead us to seek replacements for God. When the prevailing scientific worldview denies the existence of the numinous, people search for it in fantasies and occult speculation as well as beliefs in the supernatural and a variety of religious practices.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How does focus on Christ help avoid unhealthy supernatural speculation?
2. Do you think interest in the supernatural could provide an opportunity for sharing the gospel?
3. What challenges might there be in discussing the supernatural?
4. Does it matter what we think about the supernatural? Why or why not?
5. How might you discuss the supernatural with unbelievers?