

Possession

by Devils and Unclean Spirits

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Abbreviations

BD	Bible Dictionary
CR	Conference Report
DBY	Discourses of Brigham Young
HC	History of the Church
JD	Journal of Discourses
TDLP	Teachings of the Latter-day Prophets
TPC:JS	Teachings of the Prophets of the Church: Joseph Smith
TPJS	Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith

To Amy

God sent us an angel

Preface

This work was written to dispel the myths, deceptions, and false beliefs about possession by evil spirits that are so prevalent among the membership of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Because all too many members of the Church believe in the wisdom of the world, they either dismiss the idea of possession altogether or think that it is a rare occurrence. This work describes the frequency of possession and how to avoid becoming a victim of possession by evil spirits.

If the reader has not read the previous paper, *Pornography, Sickness, Evil Spirits and the Priesthood*, it is recommended that he download and read it first. This paper contains a very extensive collection of quotes from previous and current Church leaders, LDS scholars, and missionaries regarding evil spirits. It can be downloaded at:

<http://www.thesis.dislib.info/as-other/216488-3-pornography-sickness-evil-spirits-and-the-priesthood-scott-gilles.php> or

http://www.nofearpreps.com/uploads/1/4/4/2/14427784/2porn_sickness_evil_spirits_and_the_priesthood_-_copy.pdf

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Myths and Deceptions

There are two myths constantly propagated among Latter-day Saints regarding evil spirits. The first, “If you talk about evil spirits, you will bring them about,” is most likely born out of fear of the unknown and lack of correct knowledge. It seems that with many Latter-day Saints, the idea that they could possibly have any evil spirits near them or within their homes is ludicrous. The concept behind this reasoning is that a “good” member of the Church could not possibly have evil spirits near them. This notion follows the worldly idea that “good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people.” The idea is that only those Saints who are sinning, do not read their scriptures enough, pray enough, or at least sincerely enough, or do not play or sing Gospel hymns could possibly be attended by evil spirits. This faulty reasoning is far from the truth and simply demonstrates the serious lack of knowledge of these Saints.

President Wilford Woodruff taught:

That is what I want to say to the brethren and sisters here today. Every man and woman in this Church should labor to get that Spirit. We are surrounded by those evil spirits that are at war against God and against everything looking to the building up of the Kingdom of God; and we need this Holy Spirit to enable us to overcome these influences.¹

Consider what Brigham Young taught regarding those Saints who are striving to do good.

I know very well that, whether we are active or not, the invisible spirits are active. And every person who desires and strives to be a Saint is closely watched by fallen spirits that came here when Lucifer fell, and by the spirits of wicked persons who have been here in tabernacles and departed from them, but who are still under the control of the prince of the power of the air. Those spirits are never idle; they are watching every person who wishes to do right, and are continually

¹ Lundwall 1941. 322

prompting them to do wrong. This makes it necessary for us to be continually on our guard—makes this probation a continual warfare.²

President Young also stated:

Bunyan speaks of a city that was perfectly given up to idolatry, and needed only one devil to watch the whole of it; but one Saint, a poor old man walking through the streets, required a score of devils to watch him. The city was already in possession of the Evil One, and it needed no care or watching. There are scores of evil spirits here—spirits of the old Gadianton robbers, some of whom inhabited these mountains, and used to go into the South and afflict the Nephites. There are millions of those spirits in the mountains, and they are ready to make us covetous, if they can; they are ready to lead astray every man and woman that wishes to be a Latter-day Saint.³

When it comes to evil spirits, it does not matter how righteous you may be or your calling in the church. Evil spirits attend us⁴ and surround us⁵ every moment of every day of our lives. There is no avoiding them, especially if you are serious about returning to your Heavenly Father. This is not to say that they will not harass those who are mediocre or indifferent. *Everyone* has evil spirits assigned to them. They watch us constantly, waiting for an unguarded or careless moment to tempt, influence, and afflict. Talking about them will not bring them suddenly to you because they *already* surround you. Those who are without a knowledge of evil spirits, and lack a belief in their existence and power will be unable to discern their presence.

Being tempted, influenced, afflicted, and tormented by evil spirits is the main, necessary component of opposition⁶ in the plan of salvation. Without the role that evil spirits play in the plan of salvation, we could not prove ourselves worthy to return to our Heavenly Father.⁷ Satan and evil spirits are absolutely essential to His plan. “He needed the devil and a great many of those who do his bidding just to keep men straight, that we may learn to place our dependence upon God and trust in Him, and to observe His laws and keep His commandments.”⁸ Brigham Young told the Saints to “not flatter yourselves for a moment that the Devil has left us. You will find that he marshals his forces more particularly against this people....”⁹ President Joseph F. Smith said, “I would fear very much for our safety if we had fallen into a condition where the devil ceased to be concerned about us.”¹⁰

To say that you do not have evil spirits around you because you do not talk about them is utter fallacy. The entire purpose of Satan and his minions is to influence and tempt us, to see if we will choose of our own free will to follow the Savior or give in to sin.¹¹ Consequently, these evil spirits are continually watching us and waiting for an opening to see if we will give in to their promptings.¹²

The second myth is, “If you talk about evil spirits you give them power.” The primary thing

² JD 7:239

³ JD 8:344

⁴ JD 3:372

⁵ Smith 2007. 214

⁶ Oaks 1993

⁷ JD 4:373

⁸ Fawcett and Fawcett 1998. 52

⁹ JD 6:73-74

¹⁰ CR, Oct 1905. 5

¹¹ CR, Apr 1902. 85

¹² JD 8:347

that gives them power over a person is sin.¹³ The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that “the moment we revolt at anything which comes from God, the devil takes power.”¹⁴ Another way we give Satan power is when his “lies succeed in deceiving us, we become vulnerable to his power.”¹⁵ Then there is fear. Fear is the opposite of faith¹⁶ and when we lack faith, we open ourselves up to Satan's power. Finally, there is ignorance or lack of correct knowledge. Our *lack* of correct knowledge gives evil spirits a great deal of power. Talking about evil spirits does not give them power; instead, it gives *us* power over them because that knowledge will allow us to understand how they work and thus enable us to thwart their designs.

The Prophet went on to say:

“...A man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge, for if he does not get knowledge, he will be brought into captivity by some evil power in the other world, as evil spirits will have more knowledge, and consequently more power than many men who are on the earth. Hence it needs revelation to assist us, and give us knowledge of the things of God.”¹⁷

Instead, the Prophet Joseph taught a number of things about knowledge. “Knowledge does away with darkness, suspense and doubt; for these cannot exist where knowledge is.”¹⁸ He also taught, “In knowledge there is power. God has more power than all other beings, because he has greater knowledge....”¹⁹ “God hath not revealed anything to Joseph, but what He will make known unto the Twelve, and even the least Saint may know all things as fast as he is able to bear them....”²⁰ With evil spirits, Joseph further taught that “one great evil is, that men are ignorant of the nature of [evil] spirits; their power,...government, [and] intelligence..., the laws by which they are governed, and the signs by which they may be known...,”²¹ and “that they possess a power that none but those who have the Priesthood can control....”²²

“To his (Joseph’s) declaration that ‘a man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge,’ he adds that if men do not get knowledge, *including the knowledge of how to control evil spirits*, the latter will have more power than the former, and thus be able to dominate them” (emphasis added).²³ Elder Orson F. Whitney continued along this line, saying that with evil spirits, “foreknowledge is power.”²⁴ During a talk in 2015 given at the LDS Business College, Elder Larry R. Lawrence stated, “President Young...taught that we need to study the enemy’s (Satan's) tactics in order to defeat him.”²⁵ Brigham Young told the Saints to “learn not only what is in heaven, but what is in hell....”²⁶ He went on to say, “We are obliged to know and understand”²⁷ the Devil. He also told the Saints that they have a “*duty*” to “study...evil, and its consequences.”²⁸ In the October 1987, general conference, Elder James E.

¹³ Mosiah 16:5

¹⁴ Smith 2007. *op. cit.*, 214

¹⁵ Oaks 2004, 43

¹⁶ Packer 2004, 79

¹⁷ HC 4:588

¹⁸ TPC:JS. 265 (also HC 5:340)

¹⁹ *Ibid*

²⁰ HC 3:380

²¹ HC 3:572-3

²² *Ibid.* 576

²³ Whitney 1921. 311

²⁴ Whitney 1888. 263

²⁵ Lawrence 2015

²⁶ Young and Widtsoe 1925. 383

²⁷ JD 4:373

²⁸ DBY. 395

Faust repeated Brigham Young's statement to "study...evil, and its consequences."²⁹

In light of these numerous quotes, it is very obvious that rather than avoiding the subject of evil spirits, we should be openly discussing and learning about them. However, this is not happening within the membership of the Church. On the contrary, any talk about evil spirits is actively suppressed by ignorant members. There is even outright rejection of these truths by many Saints because of fear or because they are taken in by the wisdom of the world. With some members, even when given a direct quote from the scriptures or from one of the general authorities regarding evil spirits, they will *still* willfully reject it.

This life is an extension of the war in heaven.³⁰ How can we combat the enemy when we refuse to acknowledge that he even exists? The acceptance and teaching of these myths indicate a great deal of deception of the Saints on the part of Satan. Deception is his "main tool of destruction."³¹ Elder H. Verlan Andersen said:

...Deception constitutes one of the gravest risks faced in this life. However, very few seem to give the problem much thought even though the scriptures are filled with warnings against it. Of course, many never read those warnings, but those who do tend to apply them to others. Consequently, indifference to the problem is quite general. Being unaware of the danger, people take no measures to defend themselves against it, and thus fall easy victims to one of Satan's most formidable weapons.³²

Why is it that Satan is so successful in his deception? One major reason is because one of his most effective deceptive tools "is to have us believe that the wisdom and the learning of the world is the only source of knowledge we should follow."³³ Worldly secular education and knowledge can be very dangerous because: (1) belief in false knowledge and traditions take away "light and truth;"³⁴ and (2) when these are passed down through generations they become inherited lies, which are "the very mainspring of all corruption."³⁵ These traditions and lies are handed down from generation to generation without parents confirming their truthfulness or their falsehood.

Elder Orson Pratt also explained why this deception is so effective:

The devil has invented various names for his manifestations in order to get the people to swallow them down; the same as the doctors. When they wish to administer some nauseous kind of medicine, they sweeten it up a little. So the devil has sweetened up these things in such a way that he has got almost all these manifestations under the name of science. If you want to see a species of devilism made manifest, it comes out under a scientific phraseology, under the specious name of electrobiology, animal magnetism, or some such popular name—names that have been given to real sciences, which have their laws, founded in nature, are now given to these supernatural manifestations. Why does Satan use these artifices? Because the people at the present day have become naturally scientific, or a great many of them have; and the devil thinks if he can only invent a real,

²⁹ The Great Imitator, CR, Oct 1989. 40

³⁰ Woodruff 1890. 706

³¹ Widtsoe 1943. 109

³² Andersen and Andersen 1972. 13

³³ Schultz 2002

³⁴ D&C 93:39

³⁵ D&C 123:7

nice, beautiful name, with some resemblance to a scientific name, a great many of these persons will swallow it down, and think it all right.³⁶

Elder Pratt's comment that people are "naturally scientific" is even more so today. The leaders of the Church have encouraged the Saints to get an education and many have complied with this. However, what is ignored is the counsel to filter secular knowledge through the Holy Spirit so that one can identify the falsehoods that are so prevalent in the secular education system. President Joseph F. Smith warned of the dangers of a tax payer funded school system when he said, "God is not in it. Religion is excluded from it. The Bible is excluded from it."³⁷ Because many Latter-day Saints do not follow the counsel to filter secular education, they accept with very little question what they are taught as the "truth" not realizing that they have accepted Satan's falsehoods.

It is easier and more comforting for the carnal or worldly³⁸ mind to believe in the wisdom of the world and secular education, because these things teach you to believe in what you can see and feel. These are the "Korihor conclusions;" these conclusions say that "man cannot know of that which he cannot see."³⁹ Korihor was so successful and persuasive because of these arguments that many of the Nephites followed him. The things of God, i.e., faith, spirits, Heaven, etc., are not discernable to the natural senses, and therefore much harder to believe in. "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, except he has the Spirit of God."⁴⁰

President Ezra Taft Benson said, "Today the world is full of alluring and attractive ideas that can lead even the best of our members into error and deception. Students at universities are sometimes so filled with the doctrines of the world they begin to question the doctrines of the gospel."⁴¹ He also said, "We cannot believe all we read, and what we can believe is not all of the same value. We must sift. We must learn by study and prayer."⁴² He went on to say, "The best yardstick to use in discerning the worth of true knowledge and learning is to go first and foremost to the words of the Lord's prophets."⁴³

President Joseph Fielding Smith taught that the wisdom of the world means nothing unless it conforms to God's wisdom.

So far as the philosophy and wisdom of the world are concerned, they mean nothing unless they conform to the revealed word of God. Any doctrine, whether it comes in the name of religion, science, philosophy, or whatever it may be, if it is in conflict with the revealed word of the Lord, will fail. It may appear plausible. It may be put before you in language that appeals and which you may not be able to answer. It may appear to be established by evidence that you cannot controvert, but all you need to do is to abide your time. Time will level all things. You will find that every doctrine, every principle, no matter how universally believed, if it is not in accord with the divine word of the Lord to his servants, will perish. Nor is it necessary for us to try to stretch the word of the Lord in a vain attempt to make it conform to these theories and teachings. The word of the Lord shall not pass away unfulfilled, but these false doctrines and theories will all fail. Truth, and

³⁶ JD 13:70

³⁷ CR, Oct 1915, p 4

³⁸ McConkie 1966. 113

³⁹ Maxwell 1992

⁴⁰ JST 1 Cor 2:11

⁴¹ Benson 1998. 302

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid. 302-303

only truth, will remain when all else has perished.⁴⁴

The core of the problem is that the Saints do not question their secular education and, worse, they lack correct spiritual knowledge. Instead, many Saints believe implicitly in modern sciences that deny the existence of God, the Savior, and Satan. Like Elder Pratt said, if you make up a scientific or medical name for an illness, the majority of Saints will accept it regardless of the teachings of the prophets and apostles. Secular educators and their adherents in and out of the Church have ridiculed, mocked, and shamed Saints who divert from the mainstream of what is claimed to be “scientific knowledge.” Those who question these educators and “scientists” regarding the reality of evil spirits and Satan, especially in regard to mental illness is made to feel uneducated and superstitious. Consequently, those who do not have the necessary spiritual knowledge and are not resistant to this pressure will give in and accept, and *teach* the falsehoods of the secular world. Consider the following incident in a class a psychology class taught by a Brigham Young University professor.

A young psychologist was attending an Abnormal Psychology class at BYU. The class was being taught by a High Priests' group leader, a fine man. While turning the pages and following along in the textbook, looking carefully at what was being discussed (it was Coleman's book on Abnormal Psychology) he remembers hearing these words: "Now we know, of course, that there are no such things as evil spirits. We recognize that these are simply mental disorders." That remark had the effect of a *cold* slap in the face. The student's reaction: "Now wait a minute. Wait a minute. How can you say that? What's the message of the New Testament?" The professor insisted that demonic possession was a symbolic or unsophisticated way of saying that people were troubled mentally and emotionally. This caused great concern. It seemed as if an awful price was being paid needlessly.

Anyone who has had experience with demonic possession will testify of the reality of evil powers. We are foolish to ignore or deny their existence. The issue of demonic possession is one example of many in which Mormon professionals have been forced, as they suppose, into an unnecessary compromise, which compromise may follow such a dichotomy.⁴⁵

Another major reason for Satan's success in deceiving the Saints is that he has convinced many of them that he is merely a symbol or representation of evil rather than an actual personage of spirit. In 2001, a survey⁴⁶ of Latter-day Saints was published in the Deseret News in which they were asked if they believed that “Satan is a real being who can influence people's lives...”⁴⁷ It is the *doctrine* of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that Satan is a real personage of spirit who was thrust down to earth for rebellion and became the Devil. One would think that since it is doctrine, those Latter-day Saints surveyed would answer one hundred percent in the affirmative. That, however, was not the case. An amazing 41% of those surveyed *did not* believe this.

What this shows is that many Saints are fulfilling the prophecy of the prophet Nephi.

And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil

⁴⁴ CR, Oct 1952. 60s

⁴⁵ Madsen and Millet 1981

⁴⁶ Barna.org 2001

⁴⁷ Moore 2001

cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell.

And behold, others he flattereth away, and telleth them there is no hell; and he saith unto them: I am no devil, for there is none—and thus he whispereth in their ears, until he grasps them with his awful chains, from whence there is no deliverance.

Yea, they are grasped with death, and hell; and death, and hell, and the devil, and all that have been seized therewith must stand before the throne of God, and be judged according to their works, from whence they must go into the place prepared for them, even a lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment.

Therefore, wo be unto him that is at ease in Zion!

Wo be unto him that crieth: All is well!

Yea, wo be unto him that hearkeneth unto the precepts of men, and denieth the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost!⁴⁸

⁴⁸ 2 Ne.28:21-26

The Single Most Common Affliction of Mankind

Possession by evil spirits is the single most common affliction of mankind.

If you are steeped in the wisdom of the world, the above statement will cause you dissonance. Your first reaction may be to think, “No. That cannot be true.” The dissonance is caused by the conflicting wisdom of mankind vs. the teachings of the scriptures and the apostles and prophets. Elder Bruce R. McConkie said, “However much it may run counter to the carnal mind to read of men possessed of devils, and of other men who cast them out, such is one of the realities of mortal life.”⁴⁹ “The Joseph Smith Translation particularly emphasizes that evil spirits are real and afflict mankind, and may be cast out by the power of God.”⁵⁰ The wisdom of the world denies the existence of Satan and evil spirits, so the idea of possession also is denied. Admittedly, no apostle or prophet, or the scriptures come right out and say that possession is the single most common affliction. However, an analysis of several statements made by several church scholars, general authorities and prophets of the Church, and in official Church publications will demonstrate otherwise.

Almost everything revealed in this dispensation about the doctrine and principles of the Gospel came from the Prophet Joseph Smith. From the very beginning, Joseph was attacked by Satan, who did everything he could to destroy Joseph. His experience and instruction on the realities of possession began soon after organizing the Church. In April 1830, Joseph performed the very first miracle in this dispensation when he cast out the devil from Newel Knight.

[Newel] began to feel uneasy, and continued to feel worse both in mind and body, until, upon reaching his own house, his appearance was such as to alarm his wife very much. He requested her to go and bring me (Joseph) to him. I went and found him suffering very much in his mind, and his body acted upon in a very strange manner; his visage and limbs distorted and twisted in every shape and appearance possible to imagine; and finally he was caught up off the floor of the apartment, and tossed about most fearfully.

⁴⁹ McConkie 1979. 2:36

⁵⁰ Matthews 2003. 129

His situation was soon made known to his neighbors and relatives, and in a short time as many as eight or nine grown persons had got together to witness the scene. After he had thus suffered for a time, I succeeded in getting hold of him by the hand, when almost immediately he spoke to me, and with great earnestness requested me to cast the devil out of him, saying that he knew he was in him, and that he also knew that I could cast him out.

I replied, "If you know that I can, it shall be done;" and then almost unconsciously I rebuked the devil, and commanded him in the name of Jesus Christ to depart from him; when immediately Newel spoke out and said that he saw the devil leave him and vanish from his sight. This was the first miracle which was done in the Church, or by any member of it; and it was done not by man, nor by the power of man, but it was done by God, and by the power of godliness; therefore, let the honor and the praise, the dominion and the glory, be ascribed to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen.⁵¹

Joseph received and taught many revelations, including those regarding Satan and evil spirits to the Brethren of his time, who, in turn, continued those teachings. Brigham Young taught extensively from the teachings of Joseph Smith, including the reality of evil spirits. He attributed all of his Gospel instruction to Joseph Smith.

What I have received from the Lord, I have received by Joseph Smith: he was the instrument made use of. If I drop him, I must drop these principles: they have not been revealed, declared, or explained by any other man since the days of the Apostles.⁵²

From the very beginning of his instructions to the Saints, Joseph taught about the realities of possession by evil spirits.

...This was the case with Lucifer when he fell. He sought for things which were unlawful. Hence he was sent down, and it is said he drew many away with him; and the greatness of his punishment is that he shall not have a tabernacle. This is his punishment. So the devil, thinking to thwart the decree of God, by going up and down in the earth, seeking whom he may destroy any person that he can find that will yield to him, he will bind him, and take possession of the body and reign there, glorying in it mightily, not caring that he had got merely a stolen body; and by-and-by some one (sic) having authority will come along and cast him out and restore the tabernacle to its rightful owner. The devil steals a tabernacle because he has not one of his own: but if he steals one, he is always liable to be turned out of doors.⁵³

The spirits in the eternal world are like the spirits in this world. When those have come into this world and received tabernacles, then died and again have risen and received glorified bodies, they will have an ascendancy over the spirits who have received no bodies, or kept not their first estate, like the devil. The punishment of the devil was that he should not have a habitation like men. The

⁵¹ HC 1:82-83

⁵² JD 6:279

⁵³ TPJS. 297-298 (see also HC 5:388)

devil's retaliation is, he comes into this world, binds up men's bodies, and occupies them himself. When the authorities come along, they eject him from a stolen habitation.⁵⁴

Now that we see that possession by evil spirits is a reality, how does this prove that it is the most common affliction of mankind? It does not, but let us examine scripture and the quotes of several general authorities, church scholars, and official Church publications. In this way, it can be demonstrated that possession is a common affliction.

In Alma chapter 40, Alma is teaching his son, Corianton, about the resurrection and what happens to the wicked if they die in their sins.

And then shall it come to pass, that the spirits of the wicked, yea, who are evil—for behold, they have no part nor portion of the Spirit of the Lord; for behold, they chose evil works rather than good; therefore *the spirit of the devil did enter into them, and take possession of their house*—and these shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, and this because of their own iniquity, being led captive by the will of the devil.⁵⁵
(Emphasis added)

Notice in the above scripture that the wicked had the “spirit of the devil enter into them, and take possession of their house.” While one might think that the term “house” to be a metaphor for something other than a physical body, Elder Heber C. Kimball asked, “Are not your spirits in the house? Are not your bodies your houses, your tabernacles or temples, and places for your spirits?”⁵⁶ Elder Jedidiah M. Grant continued on this line when he used this same term to describe those who become possessed. “The grand difficulty we have to encounter is from devils that enter into you; they take possession of your houses, and then we have to fight devils in tabernacles.”⁵⁷

Why do people become possessed? Because they chose “wicked works.” What are these wicked works? If you read on to the end of the chapter in verse 26, the explanation will become clearer.

But behold, an awful death cometh upon the wicked; for they die as to things pertaining to things of righteousness; for *they are unclean, and no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of God*; but they are cast out, and consigned to partake of the fruits of their labors or their works, which have been evil; and they drink the dregs of a bitter cup (emphasis added).⁵⁸

Next, we cross reference this verse to see what is considered “unclean.”

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,

Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall

⁵⁴ TPC:JS. 211-212 (see also HC 5:403)

⁵⁵ Alma 40:13

⁵⁶ JD 1:356

⁵⁷ JD 4:87

⁵⁸ Alma 40:26

inherit the kingdom of God.⁵⁹

Every one of the sins listed above are of the type that would get one consigned to hell or the telestial kingdom. What other sins would get one consigned to this kingdom? In his book, *Life Everlasting*, Duane Crowther compiled a list of these sins.

A number of sins are specifically listed in the scriptures, the knowing commission of which would doom the individual to suffer in hell if he did not repent. These sins include

1. Refusal to accept the gospel and the testimony of Jesus (D&C 76:82, 103-106; Al. 12:10-11)
2. Murder (D&C 42:18-19, 79)
3. Adultery (D&C 76:103-106)
4. Whoring and harlotry (D&C 76:103-106; 2 Ne. 9:36; 28:15; Rev. 21:8; Prov. 7:6-27; 5:3-5)
5. Being filthy and abominable (Rev. 21:8; 2 Ne. 9:16; 1 Ne. 15:34-35)
6. Idolatry (Rev. 21:8).
7. Sorcery (D&C 76:103-106; Rev. 21:8)
8. Hypocrisy (Mt. 23:27-28, 33)
9. Loving lies and telling them (D&C 76:103-106; Rev. 21:8; 2 Ne. 9:34)
10. Preaching false doctrine (2 Ne. 28:9-15)
11. Leading others into sin (Al. 36:13-14; Al. 14:6; 1 Ne. 14:3-4; Lk. 12:5)
12. Lying in wait to ensnare others (D&C 10:22-27)
13. Rebellion against God (Al 36:13-14)
14. Forgetting God (Ps. 9:17)
15. Being fearful and unbelieving (Rev. 21:8)
16. Persecuting God's people (D&C 121:23)
17. Pride (2 Ne. 28:9-15)
18. Failure to aid the poor and needy (Mt. 25:31-41; D&C 104:18)
19. Cursing one's fellow man (Mt. 5:22)
20. Failure to repent (Mk. 9:43-48)
21. Believing in infant baptism (Moro. 8:14, 21)
22. Being an unprofitable servant (Mt. 25:30).⁶⁰

An additional list was compiled by President Spencer W. Kimball in his book, *The Miracle of Forgiveness*.

As we read the scriptures quoted or referred to above, we observe that they list virtually all the modern transgressions, though sometimes under ancient names. Let us review the lengthy list: Murder, adultery, theft, cursing, unholiness in masters, disobedience in servants, unfaithfulness, improvidence, hatred of God, disobedience to husbands, lack of natural affection, high-mindedness, flattery, lustfulness, infidelity, indiscretion, backbiting, whispering, lack of truth, striking, brawling, quarrelsomeness, unthankfulness, inhospitality, deceitfulness, irreverence, boasting, arrogance, pride, double-tongued talk, profanity, slander, corruptness, thievery, embezzlement, despoiling, covenant-breaking, incontinence,

⁵⁹ 1 Cor. 6:9-10

⁶⁰ Crowther 1967

filthiness, ignobleness, filthy communications, impurity, foolishness, slothfulness, impatience, lack of understanding, unmercifulness, idolatry, blasphemy, denial of the Holy Ghost, Sabbath breaking, envy, jealousy, malice, maligning, vengefulness, implacability, bitterness, clamor, spite, defiling, reviling, evil speaking, provoking, greediness for filthy lucre, disobedience to parents, anger, hate, covetousness, bearing false witness, inventing evil things, fleshliness, heresy, presumptuousness, abomination, insatiable appetite, instability, ignorance, self-will, speaking evil of dignitaries, becoming a stumbling block; and in our modern language, masturbation, petting, fornication, adultery, homosexuality; and every sex perversion, every hidden and secret sin and all unholy and impure practices.

These are transgressions the Lord has condemned through his servants. Let no one rationalize his sins on the excuse that a particular sin of his is not mentioned nor forbidden in scripture.⁶¹

Considering that the wicked referred to in Alma are those who commit acts worthy of the telestial kingdom, then, by extension, they become possessed by the spirit of the devil. Additionally, the inhabitants of this kingdom will be as “innumerable as the stars in the firmament of heaven, or as the sand upon the seashore....”⁶² Since the telestial kingdom will have an innumerable number of inhabitants, all of whom were possessed in this life, that would indicate that literally billions of people are currently possessed either transiently or permanently.

However, this is just one example in the scriptures. What did the prophets, apostles, and church scholars teach about the commonness of possession by evil spirits? The following quotes demonstrate their opinion on the matter.

The Devil was cursed and sent down from heaven. He has no body of his own; therefore he is *constantly endeavoring* to obtain possession of the tabernacles belonging to others (emphasis added).⁶³ Brigham Young

Jesus found foul spirits and devils so thick, in his days, that *he had occasion frequently to cast them out* of persons, and also to empower others to cast out devils. Some instances are recorded where many of these fallen spirits took possession of a single person at one and the same time. No less than seven occupied one female. Now modern Christianity must be highly favored, if they are so much better than primitive Saints, that they can escape the annoyance of these multiplied and troublesome spirits (emphasis added).⁶⁴ Orson Spencer

Of the many gifts of the Spirit which were manifest through my administration, next to my acquirement of the language, the most prominent was perhaps the gift of healing, and by the power of God the casting out of evil spirits *which frequently occurred* (emphasis added).⁶⁵ Joseph F. Smith

The devil with one-third part of the spirits of our Father's Kingdom got here before us, and we tarried there with our friends, until the time came for us to come

⁶¹ Kimball 1999. 25

⁶² D&C 76:109

⁶³ JD 5:331

⁶⁴ Spencer 1879. 191-192

⁶⁵ Smith 1919. 671

to the earth and take tabernacles; but those spirits that revolted were forbidden ever to have tabernacles of their own. You can now comprehend how it is that *they are always trying to get possession* of the bodies of human beings; we read of a man's being possessed of a legion, and Mary Magdalene had seven.

You may now see people with legions of evil spirits in and around them; there are men who walk our streets that have more than a hundred devils in them and round about them, prompting them to all manner of evil, and some too that profess to be Latter-day Saints, and if you were to take the devils out of them and from about them, you would leave them dead corpses; for I believe there would be nothing left of them (emphasis added).⁶⁶ Brigham Young

You think it was an exceptional miracle when, after crossing the sea, the Savior with his disciples came upon one who was a maniac, and cast the devils out of him, but it was not; *it is something that is occurring (sic) all the times (sic)* (emphasis added).⁶⁷ Elder Nicholas G. Smith

Hence he exerts an invisible agency over the spirits of men, darkens their minds, and uses his infernal power to confound, corrupt, destroy and envelope the world in confusion, misery, and distress; and, although deprived personally of operating with a body, he uses his influence over the spirits of those who have bodies, to resist goodness, virtue, purity, intelligence, and the fear of God; and consequently, the happiness of man; and poor erring humanity is made the dupe of his wiles. The Apostle says, "The God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ who is the image of God, should shine unto them." 2 Cor. iv. 4. But not content with the ravages he has made, the spoliation, misery, and distress, not having a tabernacle of his own, *he has frequently sought to occupy that of man*, in order that he might yet possess greater power, and more fully accomplish the devastation (emphasis added).⁶⁸ John Taylor

Satan and his evil angels are bodiless. That is their heavy punishment. Their power, now and hereafter, is greatly limited by this lack. Therefore, *they often seek entrance into human bodies*, even bodies of lower animals. Whenever this occurs, the individual thus made to share his body is caused much agonized suffering (emphasis added).⁶⁹ Elder John A. Widtsoe

Manifestly, as in all things, there are laws and conditions under which devils have power to force entry into human bodies. And of course in the power and majesty of their priesthood, both Jesus and the legal administrators sent from him have cast these usurping and unclean spirits out of their stolen habitations. On *the numerous occasions* that our Lord exercised his power over devils, he was fulfilling the Messianic promise: "And he shall cast out devils, or the evil spirits which dwell in the hearts of the children of men." (Mosiah 3:6.) (emphasis

⁶⁶ DBY. 86

⁶⁷ CR, Oct 1921. 139

⁶⁸ Taylor 1852

⁶⁹ Widtsoe 1943

added)⁷⁰ Elder Bruce R. McConkie

Why did the demons desire to enter the bodies of the swine? or, for that matter, how came they to take up tenancy in the body of the man? We cannot tell and do not know how it is that evil spirits-few or many-gain entrance into the bodies of mortal men. We do know that all things are governed by law, and that Satan is precluded from taking possession of the bodies of the prophets and other righteous people. Were it not so, the work of God would be thwarted-always and in all instances-for Lucifer leads the armies of hell against all men, and more especially against those who are instrumental in furthering the Lord's work.

There must be circumstances of depression and sin and physical weakness that within the restrictions of divine control, permit evil spirits to enter human bodies. We do know their curse is to be denied tabernacles, and we surmise that the *desire for such tenancy is so great* that they, when permitted, even enter the bodies of beasts. (emphasis added)⁷¹ Elder Bruce R. McConkie

This particular instance of ejecting spirit beings from a stolen tenement is set forth in detail by the gospel authors to show:

- (1) That evil spirits, actual beings from Lucifer's realm, gain literal entrance into mortal bodies;
- (2) That they then have such power over those bodies as to control the physical acts performed, even to the framing of the very words spoken by the mouth of those so possessed;
- (3) That persons possessed by evil spirits are subjected to the severest mental and physical sufferings and to the basest sort of degradation—all symbolical of the eternal torment to be imposed upon those who fall under Satan's control in the world to come;
- (4) That devils remember Jesus from pre-existence, recognize him as the One who was then foreordained to be the Redeemer, and know that he came into mortality as the Son of God;
- (5) That *the desire to gain bodies is so great* among Lucifer's minions as to cause them, not only to steal the mortal tabernacles of men, but to enter the bodies of animals;
- (6) That the devils know their eventual destiny is to be cast out into an eternal hell from whence there is no return;
- (7) That rebellious and worldly people are not converted to the truth by observing miracles; and
- (8) That those cleansed from evil spirits can then be used on the Lord's errand to testify of his grace and goodness so that receptive persons may be led to believe in him. (emphasis added)⁷² Elder Bruce R. McConkie

False spirits are more subtle, and more contagious than the small pox; their number and diversity of operations cannot be counted by man; and the first moment the saints leave the path of duty, that moment they are subject to the influence of evil, false spirits, which once having taken possession of the soul, are

⁷⁰ McConkie 1971

⁷¹ McConkie 1979 op. cit., 2:282

⁷² Ibid. 1:311

difficult if not impossible to be removed by the person so receiving them, without assistance from those who have more wisdom. *The great object of evils spirits is to get bodies*, and the only chance they have is to dispossess a soul of the spirit of the Lord, the light of eternal truth, and take possession of that body thus dispossessed; and when thus once in possession, it may truly be said there is a body possessed of the devil. (emphasis added)⁷³ (Deseret News editorial)

So long as evil spirits can obtain possession of living, human beings and influence them according to their wishes, so long has evil a tangible existence upon the earth. If there were no tabernacles for them to operate through—no men and women who would allow them to use their bodies (*the great object of their desire*, because of their own great lack of earthly attributes)—evil and sin would have no existence upon the earth....⁷⁴ (Emphasis added) George Q. Cannon

The following quotations come from *official* publications of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The first two are from *The Young Woman's Journal*, which was a “publication of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) for the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association (YLMIA), then the LDS Church's organization for adolescent females.”⁷⁵ The following two quotes were part of a Church approved Sunday school lesson.

Not only did the Savior perform miracles of healing the body, but diseases of the mind were *frequently* overcome by His divine power. The devil and his angels are bodiless, which is a part of their punishment for their rebellion in Heaven. In their great desire to possess mortal bodies, *they frequently enter into the bodies of men and women* to the serious injury of the person. At times they will enter even the bodies of lower animals. Many cases of individuals possessed by evil spirits, came under the notice of the Savior, and *He frequently had occasion to cast out evil spirits*. (emphasis added)⁷⁶

There are in existence numerous spirits. Many are good, and some are evil. At the great council in heaven, when the plan of salvation was formulated, the devil turned away one-third of the hosts of heaven, who became the angels of the devil. These spirits are not permitted to come on earth in mortal bodies. This is their great punishment. No spirit can attain full happiness unless it is clothed upon with a body obtained in a probationary earth existence. The angels of the devil know this, and attempt to circumvent the will of God in various ways. They will enter the bodies of men and women, to the serious injury of the person; and at times will enter bodies of the lower animals. Moreover, since the mission of these unclean spirits is to do evil, by their influence and suggestion they may torment the minds and bodies of men. The miracles of the Savior therefore, which dealt with the diseases of the mind, *frequently* concerned themselves with the spirits that as emissaries of the evil one seek power over the children of men.

Very soon after the beginning of Christ's ministry he was recognized by an evil spirit (read Mark 1:23-26). The man who was possessed declared that Jesus was

⁷³ To the Saints 1853

⁷⁴ Cannon and Newquist 1974. Vol 2. 284-285

⁷⁵ En.wikipedia.org 2017

⁷⁶ The Teachings of the Savior 1907

the “Holy One of God.” When in obedience to Christ's command, the spirit left the man, the people marveled, for such a thing had never been seen before. This miracle must have taught to those present that Christ was indeed a divine teacher for even the spirits of evil admitted it.

This power over spirits that afflicted humanity the Savior manifested on many occasions. One of the most remarkable spirit miracles is recorded in Mark 5:1-20 (which read). Across the lake of Galilee was a man who was terribly possessed of spirits. When Jesus appeared these spirits were afraid, and pleaded with Jesus, that if cast out, they might be allowed to enter the bodies of some swine that were feeding near by. This petition was granted with the result that the frightened swine were drowned in the lake. In this case, also, the unclean spirits acknowledged the place of the Savior as the Son of God. The most striking lesson taught by this miracle is perhaps *the almost uncontrollable desire of the spirits for bodies*, which harmonizes with the doctrine regarding the purpose of man’s coming upon earth. (emphasis added)⁷⁷

This last quote is from the Bible Dictionary contained in the official scriptures of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The “dictionary provides a concise collection of definitions and explanations of Bible topics. It is based primarily on the biblical text, supplemented by information from the other standard works.”⁷⁸ “The LDS *Bible Dictionary* was created in the 1970s by the Scriptures Publications Committee of the LDS Church. This committee was chaired by [Elder] Thomas S. Monson, then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.”⁷⁹ The following quote is under the heading, “Devil.”

Since the devil and his premortal angels have no physical body of flesh and bones, *they often seek to possess the bodies of mortal beings*. There are many such instances recorded in scripture (Matt. 9:32; 12:22; Mark 1:24; 5:7; Luke 8:30; Acts 19:15; see also Mosiah 3:6). Such can be evicted by the power of faith in Jesus Christ and the exercise of the holy priesthood. Jesus gave this power to His disciples (Matt. 10:1; Mark 16:17; Luke 10:17; Acts 5:16; D&C 84:67).⁸⁰ (Emphasis added)

The terms, “so great,” “often,” “frequently,” “numerous,” “occurring all the time,” “always trying,” “almost uncontrollable,” “great object,” and “constantly” are used throughout the above quotes. President Harold B. Lee taught that Satan has three main purposes in this life. Of these three purposes, “Satan's second purpose is to possess the bodies of Adam and his posterity.”⁸¹ This clearly indicates the importance Satan places on possessing the bodies of the human race. The terms used in the quotes, the frequency of possession being *officially* taught by the Church, along with Satan's second main purpose – when all are considered together – more than show that possession by evil spirits is, indeed, the most common affliction of mankind.

⁷⁷ How the Savior Taught by Miracles 1906

⁷⁸ Lds.org 2013

⁷⁹ En.wikipedia.org 2017

⁸⁰ Ibid

⁸¹ Lee and Williams 1996

The Nature and Classes of Evil Spirits

From the previous section, we learned that possession by evil spirits is a common event. One reason is because devils are denied the right to a body because of their rebellion,⁸² which creates an “almost uncontrollable desire” to possess the bodies of mankind. “...The mission of these unclean spirits is to do evil, by their influence and suggestion they may torment the minds and bodies of men.”⁸³ To the large majority of Saints, the most evil spirits can do is tempt and influence; possession is rarely considered, if at all.

If the mission of evil spirits is to “do evil” through “influence,” how does that apply to possession? Evil spirits are always around us looking for an opportunity to exert their influence on us. They “are constantly seeking to instill into our minds evil thoughts and wrong desires, to prompt us to commit sin and thereby grieve the Spirit of God...”⁸⁴ Even though evil spirits can project thoughts, desires, and feelings into our mind they do “not know whether these thoughts have taken root unless they are reflected either in words or in actions.”⁸⁵ The answer to the previous question is that once a person succumbs to the *external* influence to commit sin, he opens himself up to possession. Elder William J. Critchlow, Jr., said that “evil spirits can enter into and thus influence mortal bodies...”⁸⁶ This means that *after* a person succumbs to the temptations of evil spirits, they enter into and then exert a greater influence over mankind. This is cause-and-effect: a *greater, more powerful and more intense influence over people to commit sin is produced when they become possessed by evil spirits*. The preceding statement and the statement by Elder Critchlow is supported by Elder George Q. Cannon.

The Saints, at least, should understand that there are many spirits which are exerting their power among men and seeking to obtain an influence over them and that if they would escape from their effects, they must be upon their guard. But

⁸² HC 5:403 *op. cit.*

⁸³ How the Savior Taught by Miracles 1906 *op. cit.*

⁸⁴ Cannon and Newquist 1974. Vol 1. 84

⁸⁵ CR, Oct 199. 109 (Gibbons)

⁸⁶ Critchlow 1966. 45

how many are there who are sufficiently careful upon this point? How many of those who have embraced the Gospel are jealously watching every avenue of their hearts lest a spirit which is not of God should enter therein and obtain power over them?

Does the man who finds fault with his brother in the Priesthood and grumbles against and condemns the President understand that when he does so he is giving place to a spirit which is not of God and which, if not expelled, will obtain such power over him that he will be led by it out of the Church and far from the path of righteousness? Or does the woman who scandalizes and talks about her sister know that in so doing she is giving utterance to the thoughts and feelings of a subtle, untruthful and delusive spirit which, if she retains it, will lead her to destruction? When men and women give utterance to such expressions and feelings, the evil influence is at work; they are being operated upon by it, though they themselves may not be aware of it; indeed, the great danger to the individual lies in he or she not being aware of the character of the spirit that is operating upon and leading him or her to commit the evil which it cannot accomplish itself, without the aid of human agency.

So long as evil spirits can obtain possession of living, human beings and influence them according to their wishes, so long has evil a tangible existence upon the earth. If there were no tabernacles for them to operate through—no men and women who would allow them to use their bodies (the great object of their desire, because of their own great lack of earthly attributes)—evil and sin would have no existence upon the earth....⁸⁷ (Emphasis added)

In the above quote, Elder Cannon asked if we are “jealously watching every avenue” of our hearts. What does it mean to be “jealously watching?” To answer this, consider the character traits of a jealous lover. What would he be doing to the one he loved? He would be forever suspicious, hyper vigilant, and constantly looking about for any signs of betrayal. He would be apprehensive and fearful of any potential rival. It is the same thing when it comes to being on guard against the potential of evil spirits entering us. We must be constantly hyper vigilant and forever on our guard, suspicious of any evil or intrusive thoughts that prompt us to divert from the path of righteousness.

As we can see, when Elder Cannon said, “a spirit which is not of God and which, if not expelled, will obtain such power over him,” he was indicating that it is an evil spirit that has taken possession of a person. It can be inferred from the overall context of the quote that this spirit is a literal evil spirit that can be expelled by, “Resist[ing] the devil, [who] will flee from you.”⁸⁸ Because everything we do, every act we perform first starts in the mind, we resist the devil first by resisting evil thoughts.

THE SHOCKING CHARACTER OF EVIL SPIRITS. If those who allow such spirits to possess and influence and speak and act through them were to behold them, with their eyes enlightened by the Spirit of God, in all their repulsiveness, they would be shocked at the character of the visitors they had entertained. But the first approaches of such influences are so insidious and insinuating that those to whom they introduce themselves are not aware of their character and the hideous train that they will call to their assistance and encourage to follow them, when once they have obtained an entrance into the human heart.

⁸⁷ Cannon and Newquist 1974. Vol 2 *op. cit.* 284-285

⁸⁸ James 4:7

When an Elder or a Saint (through being off his guard and not suspecting the nature of the influence that is operating upon him) suffers himself, by any of the numerous temptations and fascinations which such spirits know so well how to use, to be diverted, from attending to the duties of his ministry and religion with a perfect heart and an eye single to the glory of God, he has but little idea of the wicked troop which will follow the entrance of this unsuspected visitor at the avenue which he has left unguarded unless he instantly expel it and bid it begone....⁸⁹ (Emphasis added)

When Elder Cannon used the phrase, “the visitors they had entertained,” he was telling us that we, through giving in to the external influence of evil spirits, allowed them to take possession of us. Elder Neal A. Maxwell once said, “If we entertain temptations, soon they begin entertaining us! Turning these unwanted lodgers away at the doorstep of the mind is one way of giving ‘no heed.’ Besides, these would-be lodgers are actually barbarians who, if admitted, can be evicted only with great trauma.”⁹⁰ Plainly, we can infer from this statement that these barbarians are actually evil spirits.

Elder Cannon said that evil spirits “are so insidious....” Let us look at this in another light. Evil spirits are sly, corrupt, deceptive, deceitful, crafty, cunning, slick, treacherous, dangerous, and subtle, just to name a few traits. “...The hideous train” is better described as appalling, awful, disgusting, dreadful, frightening, revolting, ghastly, hateful, and repulsive. When a Saint is “off his guard” he is not jealously guarding every avenue of his heart. It also means he is distracted by any number of different things, such as technology, work, entertainment, hobbies, books, etc. When he is “off his guard,” he can be externally influenced to commit sin and after he succumbs, an evil spirit enters him, and unless the Saint expel it, a number of other evil spirits are waiting to follow the entry of the first spirit.

Evil spirits are insidious in their influence. They have one desire and that is to make all men miserable like themselves by keeping us from returning to our Heavenly Father. How does one fight their influence? Prayer, scripture study, partaking of the sacrament, temple attendance, etc., are the things the Brethren recommend. Additionally, there is one other thing that will also help: gaining correct knowledge. Evil spirits thrive on anonymity and ignorance; they do not want mankind to know they exist and how they operate. Not accepting the reality of possession by evil spirits, not gaining an in-depth knowledge about their capabilities and methods gives them power.⁹¹ Failing to gain knowledge about how to fight evil spirits is like going into battle with a blindfold covering your eyes. You will not know from which direction an attack is being launched and you will be taken into “captivity, because [you] have no knowledge.”⁹²

All spiritual knowledge is essential, but what types of knowledge should we gain to keep from coming into captivity? The Prophet Joseph Smith said that “if men do not get [a] knowledge...of how to control evil spirits, the latter will have more power than the former, and thus be able to dominate them.”⁹³ Where would we start in gaining this knowledge? Elder George Q. Cannon said that to be free of the power of evil spirits, we must gain “a correct knowledge of the laws which govern them....”⁹⁴ The Prophet Joseph taught that evil spirits have a government, laws, power, and “signs by which they may be known.”⁹⁵

⁸⁹ Ibid. 285-286

⁹⁰ CR, Apr 1987. 88

⁹¹ Smith 2007 *op. cit.*, 214

⁹² Isaiah 5:13

⁹³ Whitney 1921 *op. cit.*

⁹⁴ Cannon and Newquist 1974 *op. cit.*

⁹⁵ HC 4:571-574

Evil spirits receive their power and laws from and operate only upon the sufferance of our Heavenly Father. This is because they are a necessary part of the plan of salvation. In Satan's "government," he has specific assignments he gives to the myriad of his evil minions. It is important to know that his minions fall into two categories: devils and unclean/foul spirits. Devils are the one third part of the hosts of heaven that were thrust out for rebellion. Unclean or foul spirits are the disembodied spirits of wicked people who once lived on the earth.⁹⁶

The term, "unclean," is used because "ye have sought to do wickedly in the days of your probation, then ye are found unclean before the judgment-seat of God; and no unclean thing can dwell with God; wherefore, ye must be cast off forever."⁹⁷ These spirits then become subjugated by Satan⁹⁸ because they failed to repent while yet alive. Satan assigns his angels and unclean spirits various tasks that are all about temptation, influence, affliction, possession, and bringing misery to mankind.

When the scriptures and the apostles and prophets refer to spirits of different sins, e.g., spirit of adultery, spirit of lust, spirit of fear, spirit of contention, spirit of sickness, spirit of anger, spirit of lying, spirit of jealousy, etc., it seems that many Saints think that this is a metaphor or a symbol of these sins or afflictions. They think that it might be a person's own evil passions and desires, but not an actual, literal "spirit." However, this is not the case. There seems to be a disconnect in the minds of Latter-day Saints between the doctrine of evil spirits and their reality. This disconnect comes because of their belief in and acceptance of the teachings and wisdom of the world. The "spirit" of these sins and afflictions are not metaphors or symbols, but actual personages of spirit whose assignment is to be a spirit of anger, or contention, or adultery, or lust, etc. Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote about this.

One spirit is from above (good), the other from beneath (evil); and that which is from beneath never allows more light or truth or freedom to exist than it can help. All religion, philosophy, education science, governmental control - indeed, all things - are influence[d] and governed by one or the other (in some cases, part by one and part by the other) of these spirits. (Moro. 7.)

It should be understood that these two influences in the world are manifest through the ministrations of *actual spirit personages* [both good and evil] from the unseen world. The power and influence wielded by Satan is exercised through the host of evil spirits who do his bidding and who have power, according to laws that exist, to impress their wills upon the minds of receptive mortals (emphasis added).⁹⁹

One example is from the New Testament. "And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up *herself*."¹⁰⁰ This was an actual personage of spirit that possessed the woman. The Savior then healed her by casting out the evil spirit through "whom Satan hath bound...."¹⁰¹ Elder George Q. Cannon expanded on this concept in two different sermons.

Every properly constituted person can feel the influence of the various [evil] spirits that are in the world, and that seek to bring us in subjection to them. To some it is given to see these influences; but all can feel them. Whence is it that

⁹⁶ Pratt 1915. 110

⁹⁷ 1 Ne. 10:21

⁹⁸ Woodruff and Cowley 1909

⁹⁹ McComkie 1966. 195

¹⁰⁰ Luke 13:11

¹⁰¹ Luke 13:16

anger comes? You will see a man all at once seized with a spirit of anger: another time you will see a person seized with a spirit of jealousy, or some other evil influence, infuriated sometimes, so much so that he or she is transformed. You have seen people's faces completely changed by the spirit that takes possession of them. They cannot see that power; but it is undoubtedly a spiritual entity. We may not be conscious of it, but it takes possession of us if we yield to it.¹⁰²

When a person is “seized with a spirit of anger” or “jealousy” or “some other evil influence,” this results from giving in to the external influence of a spirit personage whose assignment is to be a spirit of anger or jealousy. This is why it is very important that when one feels the initial signs of anger, jealousy, lust, greed, etc., he cannot let it escalate as this is the avenue through which evil spirits can enter and possess. If a person let’s his thought linger or broods on these feelings, evil spirits will then exacerbate the problem, attempting to urge its victim on to commit greater sins.

I have often heard it remarked by the brethren, and I have remarked it myself, that in some places there is a greater disposition entertained by the people to commit adultery and indulge in kindred sins of this description than there is in this country. There seem to be influences in the atmosphere in those lands of such a character, that unless a person is on his guard and constantly watching and resisting them, he will be led down to destruction by them. A spirit and disposition will creep over the people unless they are careful, to lead them astray in the direction which I have named. This is undoubtedly the case. There are [evil] spirits in the atmosphere that are filled with that disposition, and who seek to influence those with whom they are brought in contact, impressing those who are in the tabernacle of flesh to indulge in the same sin.

There are influences in the atmosphere that are invisible to us that, while we are here upon the earth, we ought to resist with all our might, mind, and strength— influences which, if we would be led by them, would lead us to destruction— influences that are opposed to the Spirit of God— influences that would bring upon us destruction here and hereafter, if we would yield to them. These influences we have to resist. We have to resist the spirit of adultery, the spirit of whoredom, the spirit of drunkenness, the spirit of theft, and every other evil influence and spirit, that we may continually overcome; and, when we have finished our work on the earth, be prepared to govern and control those influences, and exercise power over them, in the presence of our Father and God. I have no doubt that many of my brethren and sisters have sensibly felt in various places and at various times evil influences around them. Brother Joseph Smith gave an explanation of this. There are places in the Mississippi Valley where the influence or the presence of invisible spirits are very perceptibly felt. He said that numbers had been slain there in war, and that there were evil influences or spirits which affect the spirits of those who have tabernacles on the earth. I myself have felt those influences in other places besides the continent of America; I have felt them on the old battle grounds on the Sandwich Islands. I have come to the conclusion that if our eyes were open to see the spirit world around us, we should feel differently on this subject than we do; we would not be so unguarded and careless, and so indifferent whether we had the spirit and power of God with us or not; but we would be continually watchful and

¹⁰² Cannon 1894

prayerful to our Heavenly Father for His Holy Spirit and His holy angels to be around about us to strengthen us overcome every evil influence.¹⁰³

The above quote indicates some very important warnings. Two passages are important to remember: “in some places there is a greater disposition entertained by the people to commit adultery and indulge in kindred sins of this description...,” and “many of my brethren and sisters have sensibly felt in various places and at various times evil influences around them.” These places can be bars and clubs; areas frequented by drug dealers, prostitutes, and gang members; casinos, horse races, businesses that sell pornography, and adult entertainment establishments, etc. It can also be a person’s home because of inappropriate television shows and movies, video games, and the internet. For example, a person prone to anger, who watches violent shows and movies, or plays violent video games can open an avenue for evil spirits to possess him. It is the same for a person prone to looking at pornography. He can easily be lured into looking at it after watching TV or movies with inappropriately dressed characters because he gives in to the influence of the spirit of lust.

From the three previous quotes, we see that these spirits of various sins and afflictions are actual personages of spirit. Remember that the “great object,” the almost “uncontrollable desire” of evil spirits is to possess a body, even if it is an animal. There are two reasons for this: first, for a devil, they have been denied a body because of their rebellion and for unclean spirits, they had a body and have an overwhelming desire to have one once again; secondly, it is easier for an evil spirit to influence a person thus possessed. If we give in to their external promptings, they will quickly possess us leading us to further commit sin.

Because the average Latter-day Saint, let alone a non-member, would never know an evil spirit entered him, he would think the thoughts, feelings, and desires of that evil spirit were his own thoughts, feelings, and desires. He would be unable to distinguish between his thoughts and the thoughts and influence of the evil spirit. That Saint will then have greater difficulty resisting the influence to commit sin because of lack of correct knowledge and unbelief. Because the unwary Saint succumbed to the external influence of the evil spirit and became possessed, and went on to commit greater sin, he cannot say that he was forced to commit sin. Joseph Smith taught, “The devil could not compel mankind to do evil; all was voluntary.”¹⁰⁴

These evil spirits can then transfer their own evil desires onto their victim,¹⁰⁵ urging them on to greater and more serious sins. Elder Parley P. Pratt talked about this when he said they “suggest to the mind all manner of lasciviousness, all kinds of evil thoughts and temptations.”¹⁰⁶ That Saint is still accountable for the sins he commits despite the influence of any possessing evil spirit because he initially let the evil spirit in through his actions. Additionally, although it will be much more difficult, he can still resist the influence and expel the invading spirit. However, his unbelief has allowed him to be deceived and there is no excuse for being deceived. The sin of unbelief¹⁰⁷ can be the sin that opens one up to possession.

Elder Pratt went on further and said, “There are, in fact, most awful instances of the spirit of lust, and of bawdy and abominable words and actions, inspired and uttered by persons possessed of such spirits, even though the persons were virtuous and modest so long as they possessed their own agency.”¹⁰⁸ Although they are not all named specifically, there are spirits that cause plagues,¹⁰⁹ pain

¹⁰³ JD 11:29-30

¹⁰⁴ HC 3:358

¹⁰⁵ Pratt 1915 *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 111

¹⁰⁷ D&C 58:15

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Pratt and Lundwall 1946. 130

and sickness,¹¹⁰ fever, disease, and death.¹¹¹ Elder Pratt taught extensively on this subject.

[There are unclean] spirits who afflict persons in the flesh, and engender various diseases in the human system. They will sometimes enter human bodies, and will distract them, throw them into fits (epilepsy), cast them into the water, into the fire, etc. They will trouble them with dreams, nightmare (night terrors and disturbing dreams), hysterics (anxiety and panic attacks), fever, etc. They will also deform them in body and in features, by convulsions, cramps, contortions, etc., and will sometimes compel them to utter blasphemies, horrible curses (Tourette's Syndrome), and even words of other languages. If permitted, they will often cause death.¹¹²

Elder Pratt went on to describe how some possessed people will have a bad smell about them. "Some of these foul spirits, when possessing a person, will cause a disagreeable smell about the person thus possessed, which will be plainly manifest to the senses of those about him, even though the person thus afflicted should be washed and change his clothes every few minutes." He also said, "Some of these spirits cause deafness, others dumbness, etc."¹¹³ The Savior taught that there are spirits of blindness,¹¹⁴ deafness and dumbness,¹¹⁵ mental illness,¹¹⁶ and lunacy.¹¹⁷

Another notable characteristic of evil spirits is their ability for many of them to possess a single person at the same time. We know that Mary Magdalene was possessed by seven devils¹¹⁸ and that another man was possessed with a legion of devils.¹¹⁹ Many people have interpreted a legion to be one thousand, however, since Jerusalem was part of the Roman empire, we need to use the number that made up a Roman legion at the time of Christ. A legion consisted of ten cohorts totaling up to five thousand soldiers.¹²⁰

Another interesting characteristic of evil spirits is that smart spirits seek out smart victims to possess. This was taught by Elder Heber C. Kimball.

If those troops could have come in here, let me tell you, all the finest and smartest devils would have entered into the smartest bodies and come here to overturn us. You will not catch a mean, low, inferior, stupid devil in a smart man. I will tell you the Devil has his smart men. Says he, "You get into a smart body." Smart spirits do not get into inferior bodies. Would you? No. Well, then, do you suppose they would do what we would not do under the same circumstances?

Was not Lucifer a pretty smart lad? Just look at it—son of the morning—when all heaven wept when he fell. He was a smart man. It takes a smart man—that is, one who thinks he is, to act the devil.¹²¹

¹¹⁰ JD 3:95

¹¹¹ JD 4:133

¹¹² Pratt 1915 *op. cit.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.* 111

¹¹⁴ Matthew 12:22

¹¹⁵ Mark 9:25

¹¹⁶ Mark 5:2-15

¹¹⁷ Matthew 17:14-18

¹¹⁸ Luke 8:2

¹¹⁹ Mark 5:9

¹²⁰ En.wikipedia.org 2017. Roman Legion

¹²¹ JD 6:35

Another class of evil spirits are unclean spirits of religion. These spirits deceive members of other faiths and distort the original teachings of Jesus Christ. Elder Parley P. Pratt taught about them.

Among the diversified spirits abroad in the world, there are many religious spirits which are not of God, but which deceive those who have not the keys of Apostleship and Priesthood, or, in other words, the keys of the science of Theology to guide them. Some of these spirits are manifested in the camp-meetings of certain sects, and in nearly all the excitements called "revivals."

All the strange ecstasies, swoonings, screamings, shoutings, dancings, jumpings, and a thousand other ridiculous and unseemly manifestations, which neither edify nor instruct, are the fruits of these deceptive spirits.

We must, however, pity rather than ridicule or despise the subjects or advocates of these deceptions. Many of them are honest, but they have no Apostles nor other officers nor gifts to detect evil, or to keep them from being led by every delusive spirit.

Real visions, or inspirations, which would edify and instruct, they are taught to deny. Should Peter or Paul, or an angel from heaven, come among them, they would denounce him as an imposter (sic), with the assertion that Apostles and angels were no longer needed.¹²²

The last class of evil spirits are false or delusive spirits. The Lord warned us about them when he said, "there are many spirits which are false spirits, which have gone forth in the earth, deceiving the world."¹²³ These are the most dangerous and damaging of all the evil spirits.¹²⁴ These are unclean spirits whose job is to lead the Saints away from the only true, saving gospel of Jesus Christ. The Prophet Joseph Smith said that "nothing is a greater injury to the children of men than to be under the influence of a false spirit when they think they have the Spirit of God."¹²⁵ In addition to these spirits, there are people who assist them, knowingly or unknowingly.

However, Lucifer's forces of false spirits are further augmented by "false brethren" (D&C 122:5; 2 Cor. 11:26), who are not true and faithful in keeping the commandments and their covenants.

In addition there are other men in the flesh, such as "false teachers" (2 Ne. 28:12), "false prophets" (Matt. 7:15), and even "false Christs" (Matt. 24:24) who supplement the ranks of false spirits.¹²⁶

Even the very elect of God can be deceived by false spirits if they are not careful.¹²⁷ Many good Latter-day Saints have left the church through inactivity or apostasy because they were unable to discern the differences between the urgings and coercions of a false spirit and the Holy Spirit. Church Patriarch Hyrum G. Smith said that "the adversary's agencies, in their promptings, are usually of an urging, crowding, hurrying nature, while the Spirit of the Lord and his agencies are always of a quiet, sweet, peaceful and convincing character...."¹²⁸ Like a slimy used car salesman, evil spirits play on

¹²² Pratt 1915 *op. cit.*, 111-112

¹²³ D&C 50:2

¹²⁴ Pratt 1915 *op. cit.*, 112-113

¹²⁵ HC 4:573

¹²⁶ Brewster 1988. 174

¹²⁷ CR, Oct 1959. 73

¹²⁸ CR, Oct 1931. 27

emotions persuading through lies and a sense of urgency and excitement, while the Holy Spirit persuades through quiet reason.¹²⁹

How is it that the elect of God can be deceived? Because – (1) they lack *correct* knowledge of the doctrines and principles of the Gospel and (2) because of ignorance of the principles, laws, and order through which Heavenly Father gives inspiration and revelation.¹³⁰ This is very important to understand. Lack of correct knowledge and ignorance of how inspiration and revelation are communicated to mankind is how the Saint contributes to his own deception; he does not do as Joseph Smith said, “try the spirits.”¹³¹

False spirits are subtle beyond belief, but the Saints are unwittingly helping them. These spirits are *counting* on the laziness of the Saints in seeking out correct knowledge. Without a correct knowledge of the doctrines and principles of the Gospel, a person under the influence of a false spirit is susceptible to accepting counterfeit “truths.” These spirits offer the unwary Saint “falsehood and deception in the guise of truth”¹³² and “false spirits are giving revelations as well as the Spirit of the Lord.”¹³³

The devil can adapt himself to the belief of any person. If you believed in plurality he would make you think it was all right. If he could get you to swallow down one or two great lies that would effect your destruction, and which you would preach and destroy many others, he would not mind how many truths you might believe. He would be willing that you should believe a great many things absolutely true if he could only deceive you and lead you astray and get you to reject some of the fundamental principles of your salvation, and the salvation of the people.¹³⁴

Satan will package his deceptive information in such a way that it will seem logical and will agree with an unwary Saint's preconceptions and prejudices. Satan also will design his deception so that it will be similar enough to the Saint's secular education, his traditions, the teachings of his parents, his experiences, and the ideas and conversations he has with friends and teachers. Satan will include Gospel truths in his deceptions, but those truths may be distorted just enough and in such a way as to seemingly dovetail with his victim's experiences and education. Once he gets his victim to accept the initial distortions of the truth, it will be easier each successive time he doles out false information. This will continue until the Saint begins rejecting the quiet whisperings of the Holy Spirit and genuine truth.

For many of the Saints, their main source of spiritual knowledge comes from the three hours they spend in church, *if* they pay attention and do not get caught up in distractions and diversions. They also rely on other people for spiritual knowledge without checking the accuracy of the information. Many church members erroneously believe that the “basics” are all that is necessary to return back to their Heavenly Father. This is where false spirits can use false traditions and inherited lies to deceive. False traditions “taketh away light and truth.”¹³⁵ False traditions within the Church crop up as false doctrine that is often started because the Saints do not check information received from other members. This information is repeated on several different occasions making its way through the membership of the church. Eventually, many members begin claiming the information to be “doctrine”

¹²⁹ D&C 50:10

¹³⁰ Ward 1842

¹³¹ HC 4:572 *op. cit*

¹³² Smith 1919 *op. cit.*, 470

¹³³ DBY. 110

¹³⁴ JD 13:73

¹³⁵ D&C 93:39

accepting it at face value. These good people unintentionally become tools of false spirits.

Then there are those who “pride themselves on their strict observance of the rules and ordinances and ceremonies of the Church [and] are led astray by false spirits, who exercise an influence so imitative of that which proceeds from a Divine source that even these persons, who think they are ‘the very elect,’ find it difficult to discern the essential difference.”¹³⁶ Additionally there are Saints who are enamored of their “level headedness” and their secular education, and, consequently, are positive of the “correctness” of their interpretation of the Gospel. These are among those whom Joseph Smith referred to when he said, “There are a great many wise men and women too in our midst who are too wise to be taught; therefore they must die in their ignorance, and in the resurrection they will find their mistake. Many seal up the door of heaven by saying, So far God may reveal and I will believe.”¹³⁷ These Saints do not seek personal revelation and believe that all they have to do is rely on the prophet.

The most damaging of information used by false spirits to deceive and among the most difficult to eradicate are inherited lies. “...They are the very handcuffs, and chains, and shackles, and fetters of hell.”¹³⁸ Inherited lies are passed on from one generation to another because parents fail to search the scriptures and seek out correct knowledge from the writings of the apostles and prophets. It is so damaging because a child who is steeped in false traditions and inherited lies from birth rarely questions the teachings of his parents. When confronted with correct knowledge and truth, more often than not, he will reject that truth. Joseph Smith lamented about this.

But there has been a great difficulty in getting anything into the heads of this generation. It has been like splitting hemlock knots with a corn-dodger for a wedge, and a pumpkin for a beetle. Even the Saints are slow to understand.

I have tried for a number of years to get the minds of the Saints prepared to receive the things of God; but we frequently see some of them, after suffering all they have for the work of God, will fly to pieces like glass as soon as anything comes that is contrary to their traditions: they cannot stand the fire at all. How many will be able to abide a celestial law, and go through and receive their exaltation, I am unable to say, as many are called, but few are chosen.¹³⁹

From this quote, we learn that belief in false traditions and inherited lies will keep us from returning to our Heavenly Father, which is the ultimate goal of false spirits. “The scriptures assure us that God will do no injustice to any man. We must conclude therefore, that if an honorable person has been deceived, he has failed in some way. Either he has not sought for the truth diligently enough or he has not searched in the right place.”¹⁴⁰ “It appears that no matter how honorable and well intentioned we may be, if we permit ourselves to be deceived, we will fall short of the Celestial Kingdom.”¹⁴¹ For many Saints, contrary to past and present revelations, the need to be right or the inability to admit to being deceived is more important to them than their eternal salvation.

Finally, Elder Orson Pratt had this to say:

But, it may be inquired, how are the humble, honest souls to discern between truth and falsehood? Must they be condemned with liars, because they are deceived with lies? We answer, that all will be condemned who suffer themselves

¹³⁶ Smith 1913

¹³⁷ TPC: JS. 202 (see also HC 5:424)

¹³⁸ D&C 123:7-8

¹³⁹ TPC:JS. 520 (see also HC 6:184-185)

¹⁴⁰ Andersen 1967. 23

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 19

to be deceived: for there is a way for every person to come to the light of truth; and it is not in the power of the devil to invent lies so plausible as to prevent the really honest person from discovering the truth that pertains to his salvation. The scriptures have expressly declared, that "cursed is he that putteth his trust in man or maketh flesh his arm." Now any person who will put his confidence and trust in popular lies, invented by the devil to prevent the people from discovering the truth, must rest under that curse, and in the day of judgment be condemned with liars. What excuse can any one have for rejecting the truth, because the devil has made lies, and nearly all mankind believe them? The scriptures inform us that we are to "prove all things and hold fast that which is good." There must be some infallible rule by which to prove things and discern the good from the evil, or else we never should have been exhorted to do so. This infallible test by which to discover the truth, is the light which God has already given us, and which He will give us if we will but properly seek after it.

Elder Pratt's comment about those who "trust in popular lies, invented by the devil" is echoed in the temple when we are taught that Satan will mingle scripture with philosophy. One guaranteed way to keep from being deceived is to seek out correct knowledge no matter how much it may conflict with your traditions and education. If *your* inspiration conflicts with the scriptures or the teachings of the apostles and prophets, then you need to get down on your knees in prayer and ask for help to overcome the deception.

Satan's Government and Laws

As was previously stated, Joseph Smith taught that evil spirits have “laws by which they are governed, and the signs by which they may be known...” What is this government? While we do not know much about the government of evil spirits, we do have clues. The following two quotes are from the *Young Woman's Journal*.

I am about to relate an incident that I have in writing from the brother that experienced the wonderful event, and whom I afterwards met in intimate seclusion, when I received a more minute rehearsal of the event from his own lips. I will copy from the written statement, omitting all real names.

“Having been sick a long time, I sent for President Goodman and Elder Dry— (we will call the gentlemen by these names, for the sake of having names) on the 21st of January, 1889. They came in the evening and anointed me with oil, laid hands upon me and prayed for me earnestly. They remained with me until late in the evening. After they had left the house I was for a short time alone.”

The reason why he was alone, as he related to me, his wife went to a neighbor's house close by while the brethren were there, so as not to leave him alone with the baby, but as soon as she was gone the brethren went out.

“And a personage opened the door and entered the room where I was in bed. He began conversation as follows:”

“Well, that was a heavy lick we gave you.”

“I made no reply. Presently he continued, ‘But it was not quite enough to send you over.’”

“I replied, ‘While you were at it why did you not finish me?’”

“We were called on to halt.”

“I asked, ‘Do you make a practice of minding such calls?’”

“We have to,’ was his reply.”

“I said, ‘How is that?’”

“‘You know as well as I do,’ said he.”

“I inquired, ‘In case you should not?’”

“He replied, ‘When called upon by that authority, if we fail to mind, we get so roughly handled that for a time we scarcely know where we are, so we would sooner mind when called on.’”

“I asked, ‘Are you not sorry you were interfered with?’”

“‘No, not at all,’ he replied.”

“‘How is that?’ I asked.”

“He replied, ‘We have so much of the kind to do; it has long since ceased to be a pleasure.’”

“‘Well, then, why do you not quit the business?’”

“‘We cannot,’ was his answer.”

“‘How is that?’ I asked.”

“‘We live under the most despotic government you can conceive of,’ he replied,” and Brother Burgess (we will call him) said to me that he told more about that government than he was willing to repeat.

Well, Brother Burgess said to him, “Notwithstanding all you have told me, your room would be more congenial to me than your company.”

“‘Yes,’ said he, ‘I suppose so.’”

“And he retired by the same way he came in.”

It was related to me that he opened and shut the door as plainly as his wife did a few moments after the spirit retired.¹⁴² (Grammar and paragraph formatting standardized)

A person knew himself to be under the tormenting influence of an evil spirit, from whom he could not obtain release. After three weeks of suffering he sent for the elders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They came, and by the authority of the Priesthood rebuked the spirit of evil and the victim released saw the departing spirit, and said, "How do you like to be cast out?" The angel of torment answered, "I am glad." The man said, "Why, then, have you remained here and tormented me so long?" The answer was, "If you knew the torment I should have been subjected to, had I refused to torment you, you would not ask the question."¹⁴³

From these two quotes, we learn that Satan's government is tyrannical beyond belief. He compels obedience through torture and coercion. Alma taught that if a person dies in their sins they become subject to Satan.

Ye cannot say, when ye are brought to that awful crisis, that I will repent, that I will return to my God. Nay, ye cannot say this; for that same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world.

For behold, if ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold, ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth seal you his; therefore, the Spirit of the Lord hath withdrawn from you, and hath no

¹⁴² Huntington 1895

¹⁴³ Lesson XI - The Higher The Law, The Greater The Liberty, The Lower The Law, The Less The Liberty, 1919

place in you, and the devil hath all power over you; and this is the final state of the wicked.¹⁴⁴

What are these laws? One clue is, as was stated before, that Joseph Smith taught that if we become rebellious, or if we begin to dabble in sin we put ourselves in Satan's power. Elder George Q. Cannon said that "those who disobey God, who keep not His commandments, who yield to the power and spirit of Satan. They are his servants; they are under his influence. He takes possession of them when they pass from this mortal existence, and they experience the torments of hell."¹⁴⁵ Those subject to Satan and evil spirits "become angels to these infernal fiends, being captivated by them, and compelled to act as they act."¹⁴⁶ As was previously shown, if a wicked spirit does not cooperate, he will be tormented until he does cooperate. Elder Bruce R. McConkie gave us another clue when he said, "There must be *circumstances of depression and sin and physical weakness* that within the restrictions of divine control, permit evil spirits to enter human bodies" (Emphasis added).¹⁴⁷

Elder Cannon's statement regarding disobedience to God's commandments and Elder McConkie's statement regarding "circumstances of depression and sin and physical weakness" indicate that there are two different categories of possession that fall within the laws that Heavenly Father laid down for the governing of evil spirits: uninvited and invited through sin. This was taught in a Deseret News editorial.

The great object of evil spirits is to get bodies, and the only chance they have is to dispossess a soul of the spirit of the Lord, the light of eternal truth, and take possession of that body thus dispossessed; and when thus once in possession, it may truly be said there is a body possessed of the devil.

Jesus and his disciples in different ages have commanded the unclean and wicked spirits to depart out of those of whom they had taken possession, and they have departed; but there are those spirits which are not easily dispossessed, and go out only by prayer and fasting. And again, there are those spirits that will hardly go out at any price, except it is by the will of those who harbor them. *And of what class are they? They are invited spirits. Invited spirits? Yes, many spirits watch their opportunity to thrust themselves into a person when and where they are not wanted, and such are much more easily cast out than those who are invited guests* (emphasis added).¹⁴⁸

One of the laws then, applies to uninvited possession by evil spirits. There must be a physical weakness within a person's body that allows an evil spirit to force possession. There are many, many instances recorded in the scriptures and in Church history that demonstrate forced possession in which sin was not a factor. The following quotes demonstrate evil spirits power to force possession.

I believe I realize to a certain extent the feeling experienced by some of the Seventies in the time of Christ when they returned from their missions, and with joy reported that even the evil spirits had been subjected unto them by the name of Christ. I have also had a similar experience, when even the evil spirits have been subject unto us through the name of Christ. We had one in the mission field

¹⁴⁴ Alma 34:34-35

¹⁴⁵ Cannon and Newquist 1974, Vol 1. 77

¹⁴⁶ Pratt 1853

¹⁴⁷ McConkie 1979 *op. cit.*

¹⁴⁸ Deseret News 1853 *op. cit.*

afflicted with an evil spirit, and his body tormented and tortured by the possession of that evil spirit. I came into the room upon one occasion, and the evil spirit sprang upon me and seized me by the throat with a grip of iron, shutting off even my ability to speak and almost to breathe, while the elders stood round about, also my wife with a feeling of fear in her heart that the evil spirit would overcome me he shouted with a voice that was most terrific he declared himself to be the devil. "My name is Satan," he declared, "and I have more authority than you." And again tightening his grip upon my throat he declared, "I have more authority than you." I could not speak, but I looked the person in the eye, and releasing his grip and falling upon the bed, that same voice declared, "No, I have not more authority," and he hid his face in the pillow and was subject to the power of the Priesthood. Elder Kooyman, who was conference president, anointed him with oil, and with other elders I laid my hands upon him, and I began to confirm the anointing with oil. When I reached the point in prayer, that "in the name of Jesus Christ," I was going to say, "we rebuke the spirit," he sprang from the bed, and pleaded: "Do not use that name, do not use that name." We placed him upon the bed, and in the name of Jesus Christ I rebuked that spirit and commanded it to depart from him, and the person who was afflicted fell limp upon the bed and slept for hours, the first peaceful sleep he had enjoyed for several days. One of the greatest witnesses that have come into my life was upon this occasion.

I had been taught by my father and mother that there is power in the Priesthood. I had been taught it in the Sunday school and in the elders' quorum. I doubted it not, I felt that there was power in that Priesthood, but this was the first occasion which had come into my life where I had seen evil spirits subject to that power without even a word being spoken. I realize that those who are set apart and ordained to preside have authority to administer in the ordinances of the gospel and have power over unclean spirits.¹⁴⁹

A young lady came to me last winter and said: "I would like to have you and President Dark and Patriarch Warren P. Smith" (who was formerly the bishop) "go over to Lehi" (a distance of three miles) "and administer to a lady who is very sick."

I said, "Why, they have brethren over there who are just as good as we are, and I don't know why we should go over there."

She said, "Well, I just feel that if you brethren will go over there and administer to that girl, she will get better," "Well, if it is all right with the brethren over there, why it will be all right."

So we went over, and we met at the home where the girl was sick, and when we went into the room the grandfather of the girl came to the door. He said, "Now, brethren, this is a very peculiar sickness that this young lady has: she is out of her mind, she doesn't know what she is doing, and if she knows you brethren are here, we will not be able to hold her; you can come in, she is in the next room." We went in; a cousin of the young lady was present; also one of our brethren, a member of our high council; also President Abel John Evans. We heard the statement of the grandfather and of the mother of the girl. She had been in this condition for nearly two weeks; they had been unable to control her. She refused to talk, and she was

¹⁴⁹ CR, Apr 1926. 123-124

able to eat but very little, except what they could induce her to eat, with a great deal of effort, to maintain her existence. When we sat there deliberating upon what we should do, we thought perhaps she was possessed of evil spirits, and we remembered the saying of the Savior that this healing or administration should be done with fasting and prayer. We sat there deliberating upon the subject whether we ought to fast and pray first before we administered, or whether we ought to administer immediately to her. As we did so the thought came to us that if we let brother so and so go in, with whom she is acquainted, perhaps he could pacify her. As soon as we had decided that this brother should go in and talk to her, she sprang out of the arms of those who were trying to hold her and opened the door into the room where we were, then counted just like that (illustrating), and she went back and wrote on a piece of paper, "five evil spirits," and then she wrote underneath these words: "I don't want brother so and so to come in here; I hate him." Now how she knew that we had decided on that brother to go into that room I don't know, but after a great deal of persuasion the little girl who came to get us persuaded her to let a couple of the brethren come in and administer to her, and she said she would, and wrote it down. When the brethren went in she was standing with her face toward the wall; wouldn't look at them; they couldn't get her to sit down, but with the persuasion of this young lady, who seemed to have a great deal of influence with her, they persuaded her to sit down on a chair, and one of the brethren anointed her head with oil and the other brother confirmed the anointing and commanded and demanded that the evil spirit depart from her body and leave the room, when she sank down just like a limp rag. It was necessary to pick her up and place her on the lounge. She lay there just as weak as she could possibly be, without any strength, and before this, my brethren and sisters, the grandfather told me that he had strained his wrist trying to hold her, she was so strong.

About the third day after this administration, I received a telephone message to come to the home of this young lady who wanted us to go and administer to this girl, and I went up to the home, and when I arrived there, this young lady who had been administered to was present, just as well and normal as we are here now, talked sensibly and has been well ever since. Now, my brethren and sisters, I tell you this incident that the young people of Zion may know that the gifts of the gospel, promised to the believers, are with the Latter-day Saints, in order that they may be encouraged and feel that there is power in the Priesthood.¹⁵⁰

The second law regarding uninvited possession are those instances in which evil spirits force possession when permitted by Heavenly Father to teach lessons and give experience. At a conference in Kirtland, Ohio, the Prophet Joseph Smith was teaching a group of members and ordaining some to the priesthood. During the meeting, Satan decided to take a hand.

Joseph put his hands on Harvey Whitlock and ordained him to the high priesthood. He turned as black as Lyman was white. His fingers were set like claws. He went around the room and showed his hands and tried to speak; his eyes were in the shape of oval O's. Hyrum Smith said, "Joseph, that is not of God." Joseph said, "Do not speak against this." "I will not believe," said Hyrum,

¹⁵⁰ CR, Oct 1919. 168-169

"unless you inquire of God and he owns it." Joseph bowed his head, and in a short time got up and commanded Satan to leave Harvey, laying his hands upon his head at the same time. At that very instant an old man said to weigh two hundred and fourteen pounds sitting in the window turned a complete summersault in the house and came his back across a bench and lay helpless. Joseph told Lyman to cast Satan out. He did. The man's name was Leanon [Leman] Copley [Copley], formally a Quaker [Shaker]. The evil spirit left him and as quick lightning Harvey Green fell bound and screamed like a panther. Satan was cast out of him. But immediately entered someone else. This continued all day and the greater part of the night.¹⁵¹

While serving a mission in England, Wilford Woodruff was called upon to cast out an evil spirit from a woman. What happened next would have no other reason except to teach Elder Woodruff.

Had I acted upon my own judgment I should have refrained from administering to her in the company of those present; but as I was a stranger there, and Brother Clayton presided over the branch, I joined with him in administering to the woman. The unbelief of the wicked who were present was so great that we could not cast the devil out of her, and she raged worse than ever; I then ordered the room to be cleared, and when the company, except the few attending her, had left the house, we laid hands upon her head, and in the name of Jesus Christ I commanded the devil to come out of her. The devil left, and she was entirely healed and fell asleep.

The next day being the Sabbath, the woman came before a large congregation of people, and bore testimony to what the Lord had done for her. We had a large assembly through the day and evening, to whom I preached the gospel. *On Monday morning, the devil, not being satisfied with being cast out of the woman, entered into her little child, which was but a few months old. I was called upon to visit the child, and found it in great distress, writhing in its mother's arms. We laid hands upon it and cast the devil out; the evil spirits thereafter had no power over that household.* This was done by the power of God, and not of man. We laid hands upon twenty in Manchester who were sick, and most of them were healed (emphasis added).¹⁵²

There is one other sign that pertains to an uninvited spirit in which a person is sick or in pain. Whenever pain or an illness comes on suddenly for no apparent reason, or if there is no clearly identifiable medical cause, or if the sickness and/or circumstances make no sense, then that is when a deeper look needs to be taken behind the causes of the illness. This is demonstrated an incident from the life of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

I will relate one circumstance that took place at Far West, in a house that Joseph had purchased, which had been formerly occupied as a public house by some wicked people. A short time after he got into it, one of his children was taken very sick; he laid his hands upon the child, when it got better; as soon as he went out of doors, the child was taken sick again; he again laid his hands upon it, so that it again recovered. This occurred several times, when Joseph inquired of

¹⁵¹ Hancock 1836

¹⁵² Woodruff and Cowley 1909 *op. cit.*, 114-115

the Lord what it all meant; then he had an open vision, and saw the devil in person, who contended with Joseph, face to face, for some time. He said it was his house, it belonged to him, and Joseph had no right there. Then Joseph rebuked Satan in the name of the Lord, and he departed and touched the child no more.¹⁵³

Something else to consider is that while it is not specifically attributed to *possession* by evil spirits, they do have the capability of making people sick. Brigham Young said that Satan “has power to cause affliction and sickness, pain and distress, sorrow, anguish, and disappointment...”¹⁵⁴ He also said that they cause death.¹⁵⁵ Elder Orson Pratt taught that evil spirits have the power to “smite the earth with plagues.”¹⁵⁶ There is an interesting account of an evil power afflicting Joseph Smith.

...The Prophet rose one day from the table, walked to the door and began vomiting frightfully. Blood and poison came up, and so violent was the retching that his jaw was thrown out of place, and the poison acted so powerfully on him that it loosened his hair. With his own hands he replaced his jaw and then hurried to Bishop Whitney's bed. Bishop Whitney laid his hands upon his head and rebuked the evil power that was afflicting him, and instantly he was completely healed.¹⁵⁷

Additionally, there is an account from when the Saints were driven from Missouri to Nauvoo in which many mysteriously came down ill for no apparent reason.

When the Saints moved to Nauvoo or Commerce, as it was then called, it might be called a deserted town, or partly so at least, as there were many empty houses, mostly built of logs and had stood so long that the mud had fallen from the spaces between them.

The Saints just driven from Missouri were glad to get such shelter as those old houses would afford, and they were all soon filled, sometimes two and three families in one house. Some houses had no floors, some no doors. Soon the inmates became sick— sickness increased until Joseph began to be alarmed and saw something very unusual in the new affliction. He looked into the matter as only a Seer and Prophet could look. He saw the trouble and where it came from. Those houses had been dens of iniquity. He instituted means to empty them again

by moving the people into tents and doubling up families in better houses. My father's family he took into his own house and tent.

I once heard him say concerning houses that had been inhabited by wicked people, that before the Saints moved into them they should be thoroughly cleansed, then fumigated with brimstone and whitewash. Afterward there should be a season of prayer in the house, and it should be dedicated unto the Lord for the use they designed it.

Those old houses had been owned or occupied by wicked, unprincipled men, gamblers, outlaws, licentious robbers, etc., and those that were of the same stamp had met there for evil practices and criminal purposes and there carried on their

¹⁵³ Whitney 1888. 270

¹⁵⁴ JD 3:95

¹⁵⁵ JD 4:133

¹⁵⁶ Pratt and Lundwall 1946

¹⁵⁷ Cannon 1914

orgies. While this was the pastime or work of men and women in bodies, disembodied spirits of the same ilk stood around in highest glee and in various ways manifested to one another their enjoyment of the performance of the vilest of sins.

When the owners or occupants of the houses were dead, they enjoyed each other's society with their new pals in the spirit state, and when the righteous took possession of their old houses, all combined to kill the new inhabitants, and hence so much sickness—for all evil spirits, whether in the body or out of the body, are opposed to this work and this people, and the spirits in the spirit world have means by which they can affect people on earth, and are as diligent there as here to do good or evil.¹⁵⁸

The last law regarding uninvited possession is reasons of depression. Depression can be caused by sin, but uninvited possession because of depression could stem from situations that arise because of the sins of other people, poor environment, inadequate nutrition, bad personal decisions not amounting to sin, hidden defects of various types from birth, etc. Depression can be continued because of a lack of correct knowledge and the ability to discern when the depression is being exacerbated by an evil spirit.

There is only one law that pertains to an invited possession by evil spirits and that is because of sin. Sins can range from mild to serious. Possibly the most dangerous types of sinning are through apathy,¹⁵⁹ unbelief,¹⁶⁰ and even ignorance. Without question, this is the most common reason for possession, either transiently or permanently depending on the attitude, character and lifestyle of the person. Transient possession happens when after being possessed, through desiring to no longer commit sin and by repenting, a person is able to expel the invading evil spirit. Permanent or prolonged possession happens when a person does not repent and/or the power of the evil spirit. The person's attitude and lifestyle also contribute to the permanence of the possession. He can be prideful, unbelieving, living in sinful circumstances, etc. Sin takes on a variety of forms ranging from mild to serious. As Joseph Smith stated, the second we turn from the path of righteousness, no matter how slight, we give evil spirits power over us. The following quotes are examples of how sin can lead to possession.

About a week afterwards the same spirit reentered (sic) the sister, and this time fully confessed his character. In answer to our inquiries, he said his name was "Legion." This explained how it was that the woman, after we had cast out an evil spirit, was under an evil influence, for there must have been many spirits. [See case of Mary Magdalene.--Mark xvi, 9. The Lunatic.--Mark v.] He also reviled our priesthood, but he had to submit to it at last, saying to us, "O! you have the priesthood, have you? Well, then cast me out, command me to come out," trying to shake our faith, and thus incapacitate us to rebuke him successfully. Failing in this, he tried another method by entering me. I felt seized by a strange influence, and to every question put to the woman, I knew the answer she was going to give, for I was possessed by a similar spirit. This broke the chain of our union and strength, consequently I requested the elders to rebuke the evil spirit from me, after which, at our united rebuke, he left the woman.

Previous to this, the sister had been a very faithful Saint, and she ever

¹⁵⁸ Huntington 1891. 467

¹⁵⁹ Sill 1974. 111

¹⁶⁰ D&C 58:15

afterwards was, but *she had given the devil ground by encouraging a spirit contrary to the order of the Church, taking upon herself to rebuke the elders, and he claimed his right by virtue of her transgression.*¹⁶¹ (Emphasis added)

A company of two hundred and forty-nine males, and two hundred and sixty-six females, a total of five hundred and fifteen souls, with twenty-seven tents, ninety-seven horses, twenty-two oxen, sixty-nine cows, camped about a quarter of a mile south of the Lord's House in Kirtland, on the fifth of July, 1838; and the next day started for Missouri. The journey was long and tedious; many difficulties were encountered and numerous obstacles overcome. *A spirit of murmuring was frequently manifested, much sickness was in the camp, and because of their disobedience, evil spirits plagued them by getting possession of their bodies* (emphasis added).¹⁶²

I had ample evidence of the fact that lying spirits had gone out into the world, for three persons whom I had baptized had been visited by Mr. Douglass, who told them that I denied the Bible and could not be depended upon; and *they yielded to his insinuations until the devil took possession of them*, and they were in a disaffected condition, and sent for me.

When I met them they were in great affliction, but when I instructed them in regard to the principles of the gospel, and administered to them, they were delivered from the evil influence and rejoiced (emphasis added).¹⁶³

Other spirits, not particularly invited or desired, gain an easy access to those who are careless, heedless, and but too indifferent to the statutes, ordinances, and duties of God's kingdom; who neglect their prayers, their assembling together, and doing as they would be done unto; and from these spirits arise contention, strife, evil thinking, evil speaking, evil surmising, detraction, revenge, law-suits, and a host of such perplexing annoyances, sufficient to disturb a nation; but the man who is obedient to his God *in all things*; who knows no will of his own, only to do the will of his father in heaven; is free from these spirits; the Devil has no power over him; for he resists him, and evil spirits are compelled to flee at his rebuke.¹⁶⁴

There is one other noteworthy law regarding evil spirits and righteous people. As taught by Elder Bruce R. McConkie, evil spirits are “precluded from taking possession of the bodies of the prophets and other righteous people.”¹⁶⁵

Finally, what are the signs by which evil spirits may be known? Some signs are very subtle such as spirits that spread false doctrine. The way to know the signs of these spirits is by having correct knowledge. If you receive “inspiration” that doesn't feel right, go and verify that information. If it is incorrect, then you need to seek out the correct information. The Holy Ghost will “bring all things to your remembrance...,”¹⁶⁶ however, you must have the knowledge in the first place before the Holy Ghost can bring it back. Otherwise you are an empty vessel that will be tossed about by every

¹⁶¹ Brown 1878

¹⁶² Roberts 1900. 195

¹⁶³ Woodruff 1882. 40

¹⁶⁴ Deseret News 1853 *op. cit.*

¹⁶⁵ McConkie 1979 *op. cit.*

¹⁶⁶ John 14:26

wind of doctrine.¹⁶⁷

Other signs of the presence of evil spirits are contention, strife, anger, frustration, lust, envy, jealousy, depression, lying, swearing, etc. Elder Parley P. Pratt also described a sign in which he stated, “A person on looking another in the eye, who is possessed of an evil spirit, may feel a shock, a nervous feeling, which will, as it were, make his hair stand on end, in short, a shock resembling that produced in a nervous system by the sight of a serpent.”¹⁶⁸ This shock may be very mild or may be significant depending on the type and power of the evil spirit. Also, depending on the type of evil spirit, when you look into its victim's eyes, it may even recognize you, although the victim will not be aware of it. The Saint who is not deceived by secular wisdom and possesses the gift of the discerning of spirits will be able to perceive this.

Probably the biggest problem in discerning signs of evil spirits is unbelief. Modern man is so conditioned into discounting the presence of evil spirits that it is considered an unscientific, quaint notion. All the afflictions of mankind are now explained away with scientific or medical reasons, and the majority of Latter-day Saints accept these explanations with little doubt as to their veracity. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

¹⁶⁷ Ephesians 4:14

¹⁶⁸ Pratt 1915 *op. cit.*, 110-111

Controlling Evil Spirits and Discernment

The Reason for the Power to Cast out Evil Spirits

The Savior knew about the reality of possession by evil spirits. He taught that to his disciples, and also to the modern Saints. Elder John Taylor said that one of the reasons the priesthood was given to the Church was “to fight the devils...”¹⁶⁹ The very first power the Savior gave to his disciples was power over unclean spirits.¹⁷⁰ Then the Savior said “these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils...”¹⁷¹ This is repeated three times in the scriptures.¹⁷² To the modern Saints, He gave this commandment: “Require not miracles, except I shall command you, except casting out devils...”¹⁷³ He also told the Saints, “...whoso shall ask it in my name in faith, they shall cast out devils...”¹⁷⁴ Note that like the first sign to follow those that believe is the casting out of devils and the power over unclean spirits was given to the apostles, the first exceptions to not requiring miracles and to those asking in faith was the casting out of devils.

Elder Orson F. Whitney explained why power to cast out evil spirits is given to the Saints.

Satan and his legions, those cast out of heaven, are all wicked spirits, and they wander up and down the world, endeavoring to lead mortals astray. Wherever possible, they take possession of the bodies of men and even of the lower animals. Therefore is power given to the Priesthood to "cast out devils." Against these fallen spirits, mortals must be ever on the defensive, lest their souls be ensnared.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁹ TLDP:336 (see also JD 9:14)

¹⁷⁰ Matt. 10:1; Mark 6:7

¹⁷¹ Mark 16:17

¹⁷² Mark 16:17; Mormon 9:24; D&C 84:65-67

¹⁷³ D&C 24:13

¹⁷⁴ D&C 35:9

¹⁷⁵ Whitney 1921 *op. cit.*

Elder Orson Pratt expanded even further on the reason for having power to cast out evil spirits.

It is very evident, however, that this was not the principal object of the Signs. "These signs shall follow them that believe. In my name" says Jesus, "they shall cast out devils." Although this power might, in certain cases, convince the unbelieving world, yet it is by no means to be supposed that this was the principal design. Devils and unclean spirits frequently took possession of the human tabernacle, tormenting individuals in various ways. Jesus promised believers that they, in his name, should cast them out. Now one object which Jesus had in view in granting this power, was to benefit the one possessed. Another object was to confirm the believer, that they, by having power over the devil in this life, might be more fully assured that they should obtain a complete victory and final triumph over him in the world to come. That person who cannot obtain power in the name of Jesus to cast out devils in this life, has great reason to fear lest the devil shall have power over him in the next. What assurance has any one that he shall obtain a complete salvation from the power of the devil, when his spirit shall leave the body, if he cannot claim, the promise of Jesus, and cast him out while in this world? *One of the purposes, then, which Jesus had in view in bestowing this blessing, was that believers might learn to prevail against the devil before they should enter the invisible world of spirits. And another purpose, as we have already named, was to deliver the unhappy demoniac from his miserable and wretched condition, and set him free from the grasp of this awful monster.*

17.—Now both of these purposes are just as essential for the good of mankind in this age as in the first age of Christianity. It would be equally as essential for a man who is possessed of devils, in this age, to be liberated, as it was in any former one. *And it would also be equally as essential that a believer should learn to command the devil in the name of Jesus, that he might obtain a complete victory over him in all things, as it was for ancient believers.* Therefore, as there is no Scripture to do away this promise, nor any reason to prove it unnecessary, it must be intended for believers of all ages, until the devil is bound (emphasis added).¹⁷⁶

In the above quote, Elder Pratt said, "That person who cannot obtain power in the name of Jesus to cast out devils in this life, has great reason to fear lest the devil shall have power over him in the next." If a person is too scared to confront and control evil spirits in this life, how can they expect to control them in the next life. Elder Melvin J. Ballard said that after we die, "every feeling will be greatly intensified."¹⁷⁷ "President Brigham Young said it is a hundred times easier to repent here on the earth than it is in the spirit world."¹⁷⁸ If, after we die, our fear is greatly intensified and it is one hundred times harder to repent, by extension, that would mean our fear would be one hundred times greater. As a result, how can that person expect to be used by Heavenly Father to perform missionary work in spirit prison? Evil spirits have the same access to spirit prison as do the missionaries. They spread their lies and deceptions there as they do here on earth. How could a person, who is fearful of evil spirits control and cast them out as a missionary in spirit prison when they could not control and cast them out in this life? He cannot and, therefore, will be of no use as a missionary to his Heavenly Father.

¹⁷⁶ Pratt 1856

¹⁷⁷ Ballard 1922. 14

¹⁷⁸ Hartman Rector Oct 1972. 74

Obstacles to Controlling Evil Spirits

Some of the major obstacles to controlling and casting out evil spirits include the sins of unbelief and blindness of heart,¹⁷⁹ lack of faith, lack of correct knowledge, and personal righteousness. Probably the biggest obstacle is the sins of unbelief and blindness of heart, and lack of faith. Unbelief and lack of knowledge were discussed somewhat in previous sections, but their importance cannot be emphasized enough. Unbelief causes people to “not understand the word of God....”¹⁸⁰ Blindness of heart is a lack of teachability; these are the Saints who are “walking in darkness at noon-day.”¹⁸¹ A lack of knowledge allows Satan to deceive the ignorant Saint. This is primarily because many Latter-day Saints believe more in science, secular education, and the wisdom of the world instead of God's wisdom.

Unbelief and lack of faith go hand in hand. “Because faith is wanting, the fruits are.”¹⁸² This is demonstrated in an incident from the scriptures in which the Apostles were unable to cast an evil spirit out of a young boy. When the Savior cast it out, the Apostles asked, “Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.”¹⁸³ “This New Testament rendering indicates the unusual amount of faith required to cast out devils. It requires greater faith than most healings.”¹⁸⁴ The footnotes to this scripture tells us that a factor in this unbelief is doubt.

The apostles witnessed the Savior heal the sick, cast out evil spirits, and raise the dead, yet they still did not believe; they still suffered from doubt. Why did the apostles suffer from unbelief and lack of faith despite seeing miracles performed with their own eyes? Because they were indoctrinated in the Law of Moses (into which false traditions had been added) and the prevailing wisdom of the day by different people in authority. It would have been their parents and religious leaders who taught the apostles, and these traditions and wisdom would have been implanted from infancy. The problem came when the Savior taught that he had come to fulfill the Law of Moses, which would be supplanted by a higher law. This was contrary to everything the apostles would have been taught.

Latter-day Saints have the same problem today. President Joseph Fielding Smith said, “Our sole objective where the truths of salvation are concerned should be to find out what the Lord has revealed and then to believe and act accordingly.”¹⁸⁵ Unfortunately, this is not happening. The U.S. Department of Education estimates that by 2021, ninety-one percent of children will be educated in public schools.¹⁸⁶ The public educators of today are not permitted to teach children anything about religion. Additionally, modern science, medicine, and psychology – subjects taught in one form or another to children – generally deny the existence of our Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, Satan, and evil spirits. To many of today’s educators and scientists, the idea that evil spirits possess people is a laughable, old fashioned notion that only ignorant, backward, uneducated people believe.

All too many Latter-day Saints accept these secular teachings to one degree or another, especially when it comes to evil spirits. The acceptance of these teachings is passed on to the next generation as false traditions and inherited lies. In speaking to all men, Nephi mourned about the unbelief of the people because “they will not search knowledge, nor understand great knowledge....”¹⁸⁷

¹⁷⁹ D&C 58:15

¹⁸⁰ Mosiah 26:3

¹⁸¹ D&C 95:6

¹⁸² HC 5:218

¹⁸³ Matt. 17:19-20

¹⁸⁴ McConkie 1997. 86

¹⁸⁵ Smith 1971

¹⁸⁶ Jennings 2013

¹⁸⁷ 2 Ne. 32:7

To break this chain of inherited lies and false traditions, the Saints must gain correct knowledge. “All true faith must be based upon correct knowledge or it cannot produce the desired results.”¹⁸⁸ Elder John A. Widtsoe taught, “The gifts of faith are two: knowledge and power. These are to each other as the palm and fingers of a hand, or the charge and the gun to the speeding bullet. Where one is there is the other.”¹⁸⁹

How important is faith? Let’s consider that question by asking another question: how often is the subject of faith mentioned or discussed in church? The word, “faith,” is mentioned approximately 641 times in the Bible, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. In talks given in the general conferences of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, from 1852 to 2017, the word, “faith,” has been used approximately 29,357 times. This does not include the words, “faithful,” or “faithfulness.” Next to Jesus Christ, faith is the most frequently mentioned topic.

Without faith, the Lord cannot perform miracles; a fact which He lamented about the Jews when He said to the Nephites, “...I could not show unto them so great miracles, because of their unbelief.”¹⁹⁰ As it states in the Doctrine and Covenants, “And your minds in times past have been darkened because of unbelief, and because you have treated lightly the things you have received— Which vanity and unbelief have brought the whole church under condemnation.”¹⁹¹ Treating “lightly” the truths we have received is not taking seriously or even mocking what the Lord has revealed. This leads to further unbelief and a greater lack of faith.

Lack of Correct Knowledge and Personal Righteousness

One of the hindrances to bringing evil spirits under your control is fear. There is fear of the unknown, invisible realm of evil spirits; there is the fear of what other people, in and out of the church, may think of you, and there is the combination of both. Then there is fear as a result of a lack of confidence, or a lack of faith in your own ability to cast out evil spirits. Fear is the antithesis of faith. How do you get rid of fear? “...If ye are prepared ye shall not fear.”¹⁹² Elder Thomas S. Monson said, “Preparation will dispel that hidden and insidious enemy who lurks within and limits our capacity, destroys our initiative and strangles our effectiveness. The enemy of whom I speak is fear.”¹⁹³ “Preparation includes...having a knowledge of the Gospel...”¹⁹⁴

The Elder who desires to be the instrument through which the Lord performs miracles must prepare himself to be utilized through correct knowledge. If he lacks faith because of fear, unbelief, or if he cannot overcome the handicap of secular education, inherited lies, and false traditions, his ministrations will be in vain. He must disabuse himself of the false secular teachings so prevalent in society that denigrate the very idea of evil spirits and belittle those who believe in and teach these truths. God has faith in himself, independently.¹⁹⁵ Faith is a higher law, a celestial law. Faith is one of the laws by which the worlds were made. Faith is the higher law by which mankind can access the power of God and miracles are performed. But what is a miracle? What mankind would call a miracle is nothing more than a higher law superseding a lower law. Medical science is a lower law, a telestial law for a telestial world and, subject to the will of God, can be superseded through the higher law of faith. Knowledge of and the use of faith gives power to the believing priesthood holder.

¹⁸⁸ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 1978 (Faith)

¹⁸⁹ Widtsoe 1945. 139

¹⁹⁰ 3 Ne. 19:35

¹⁹¹ D&C 84:54-55

¹⁹² D&C 38:30

¹⁹³ Bishop 1977

¹⁹⁴ Ibid

¹⁹⁵ Lectures on Faith 2:22

Joseph Smith said, “In knowledge there is power.”¹⁹⁶ As was previously stated, “...Evil spirits will have more knowledge, and consequently more power than many men who are on the earth.”¹⁹⁷ This is especially true of priesthood holders who lack correct knowledge. Satan is very old and very experienced. He and/or his minions have a complete knowledge of our pre-existent life and the plan of salvation, and of everything taught in this world. He knows us from the pre-existence and knows our weaknesses and strengths, our desires and spiritual aspirations. Due to the number of devils and subjugated unclean spirits who are assigned to each of us, Satan knows everything we have ever done or said or learned, and uses this knowledge against us.

Satan knows the extent and type of your secular knowledge, whether false or true, and your belief in or skepticism of it. He will then influence you to believe that knowledge, but in a skewed way that blends in the false knowledge. If you have fear, doubt, or if you lack faith, he knows this as well. He wants to keep you deceived so he can continue to have more power and knowledge than you, and lead you away from the truth. The best way to combat deception is to gain intelligence. Elder David A. Bednar described intelligence as: (1) seeking out correct knowledge; (2) gaining an understanding of that knowledge through the Holy Spirit; and (3) implementing that knowledge and understanding in your life.¹⁹⁸ Doing this leads to personal righteousness.

As we change our lives, Satan will try even more to influence us to let go of the iron rod and stray from the path of righteousness. Joseph Smith said, “...The nearer a person approached to the Lord, the greater power would be manifest by the devil to prevent the accomplishment of the purposes of God.”¹⁹⁹ Elder Heber C. Kimball went on to teach:

As we progress in the reform, as we confess our faults and make restitution to those we have wronged, asking pardon of those we have offended, the opposition of the devil will proportionally increase, and his power be manifested in a greater degree; and this is going to be a mighty time.²⁰⁰

As Satan increases his influence and attacks, you *must* maintain consistency in obtaining knowledge, prayer, fasting, church attendance, etc. If you wish to cast out evil spirits, if you wish to help those afflicted, you must live your life as close as possible to the example of the Savior. You must *try* to be as the prophets of old: “...there was not any man who could do a miracle in the name of Jesus save he were cleansed every whit from his iniquity.”²⁰¹ In this context, when a person says, “I’m trying,” it means that he makes steady, consistent progress in overcoming the weaknesses of the spirit.

About those who have been baptized and have received the priesthood, Brigham Young said:

...We have power over him which the rest of the world do not possess, and all who possess the power of the Priesthood have the power and right to rebuke those evil spirits. When we rebuke those evil powers, and they obey not, it is because we do not live so as to have the power with God, which it is our privilege to have. If we do not live for this privilege and right we are under condemnation.²⁰²

¹⁹⁶ HC 5:340

¹⁹⁷ HC 4:588 *op. cit.*

¹⁹⁸ Bednar 2011

¹⁹⁹ Andrus and Andrus 2004. 176

²⁰⁰ JD 4:142

²⁰¹ 3 Ne. 8:1

²⁰² JD 12:128

The Gift of the Discerning of Spirits

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught the early Saints more about the gift of the discerning of spirits than any other subject.²⁰³ The beginnings of his instruction on discernment began when he initially attempted to remove the golden plates from their hiding place and was prevented from doing so by Moroni.²⁰⁴ One little known fact regarding discernment is that the terms, “gift of discernment” and “spirit of discernment” are not scripturally correct. These two terms cannot be found in the scriptures and none of the early prophets of the Church ever used them. The correct term is the “gift of the discerning of spirits.”²⁰⁵ Why is it important to use the correct terminology? That is answered in part by an editorial written by Joseph Smith in the *Times and Seasons* titled, “Try the Spirits,”²⁰⁶ in which he discussed the gift of the discerning of spirits. *He taught that the gift of the discerning of spirits is about discerning which spirit, good or evil, is prompting or influencing you.*

It is evident from the Apostles’ writings, that many false spirits existed in their day, and had “gone forth into the world,” and that *it needed intelligence which God alone could impart to detect false spirits, and to prove what spirits were of God.* The world in general have been grossly ignorant in regard to this one thing, and why should they be otherwise—for “the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.”²⁰⁷ (Emphasis added)

The editorial contained more than 5,400 words. Joseph barely mentioned the discerning of good spirits that influence us, devoting only a few sentences to this in the entire editorial. Most likely, this is because, by the laws of God, good spirits cannot deceive us. Joseph taught at *great length* about the evil spirits that cause so much confusion in this world, because so little was known about them. This demonstrates the importance of having the Holy Spirit as our constant companion. Evil spirits use deception and can appear as an angel of light,²⁰⁸ and use the ignorance of the Latter-day Saints against them. “There always did, in every age, seem to be a lack of intelligence pertaining to this subject. Spirits of all kinds have been manifested....”²⁰⁹ “One great evil is, that men are ignorant of the nature of spirits....”²¹⁰ Why would this be a great evil? Because of the *needless* torment, devastation, deception, and chaos caused by evil spirits through ignorance of their methods, power, and the laws by which they are governed.

...Who can drag into daylight and develop the hidden mysteries of the false spirits that so frequently are made manifest among the Latter-day Saints? We answer that no man can do this without the Priesthood, and having a knowledge of the laws by which spirits are governed; for as no man knows the things of God, but by the Spirit of God, so no man knows the spirit of the devil, and his power and influence, but by possessing intelligence which is more than human, and having unfolded through the medium of the Priesthood the mysterious operations of his devices....²¹¹

²⁰³ Ehat and Cook 1980

²⁰⁴ Ibid

²⁰⁵ 1 Cor. 12:10; D&C 46:23

²⁰⁶ TPJS. 202-215 (see also HC 4:571-581)

²⁰⁷ Ibid

²⁰⁸ 2 Cor. 11:14, D&C 128:20

²⁰⁹ Ibid

²¹⁰ Ibid

²¹¹ Ibid

As we have noticed before, the great difficulty lies in the ignorance of the nature of spirits, of the laws by which they are governed, and the signs by which they may be known; if it requires the Spirit of God to know the things of God; and the spirit of the devil can only be unmasked through that medium, then it follows as a natural consequence that unless some person or persons have a communication, or revelation from God, unfolding to them the operation of the spirit, they must eternally remain ignorant of these principles....²¹²

As was previously stated, “the discerning of spirits is about discerning which spirit, good or evil, is prompting or influencing you.” “The problem that most men have is to discern the spirits, so that they may know what is of God and what is not.”²¹³ However, this has been changed in the church, today. The gift of the discerning of spirits has morphed into the “gift of discernment” and the “spirit of discernment.” Getting away from the correct term has eliminated the critical aspect of the discerning of evil spirits. Now, it is used in a somewhat generic term for discerning between good and bad choices. “Bad choices” have taken the place of evil spirits and *how* they influence us externally and through being possessed.

Elder George Q. Cannon taught extensively on the subject of the discerning of spirits.

One of the gifts of the Gospel which the Lord has promised to those who enter into covenant with Him is the gift of discerning of spirits—a gift which is not much thought of by many and probably seldom prayed for, yet it is a gift that is of exceeding value and one that should be enjoyed by every Latter-day Saint.... No Latter-day Saint should be without this gift, because there is such a variety of spirits in the world which seek to deceive and lead astray.²¹⁴

No matter what many members believe, the fact remains that possession by evil spirits is the single most common affliction of mankind. Because of this, being able to discern when a person is hounded, tormented, and/or possessed is a vital gift if we will only strive to obtain it. Elder Cannon taught more on this subject.

A man that has had the light, the truth, the Spirit of God and has grieved that Spirit, when the other spirit takes possession of him, there is a complete transformation. Those who know see it in his face and feel it in his spirit. They cannot associate with him without discerning that there is a spirit of darkness and evil taken possession of him, and so it is with all who take this course.²¹⁵

Elder Cannon went on to say that by using the gift of the discerning of spirits we can recognize that evil spirits are trying to possess *us* as well as those people who have become possessed.

Now, the gift of discerning of spirits not only gives men and women who have it the power to discern the spirit with which others may be possessed or influenced, but it gives them the power to discern the spirit which influences themselves. They are able to detect a false spirit and also to know when the Spirit of God reigns

²¹² Ibid

²¹³ McConkie 1966

²¹⁴ Cannon and Newquist 1974, Vol 1 *op. cit.*, 198

²¹⁵ Ibid. 66

within them.²¹⁶

Why is it a vital gift? In addition to detecting false spirits, when you are able to discern when an illness, mental or physical, is the result of possession by evil spirits or if they are merely afflicting someone, you may be the instrument the Lord uses to bring great relief by casting evil spirits out or away from the afflicted person. You may be able to end needless suffering.

²¹⁶ Ibid. 157

Helping the Afflicted, Cautions, and Warnings

Sins and Physical Weakness: How Do Evil Spirits Enter the Human Body?

Understanding when evil spirits know when it is possible to force entry into a human body is helpful when it comes to understanding the causes of physical weakness. While there is nothing from official Church sources regarding the method evil spirits use to actually possess someone, we do have accounts from two different near death experiences (NDE) that give specific information. The first is by Dr. George Ritchie who died for nine minutes. While his body lay on a gurney, his spirit was escorted around the world showing him different scenes. One of these scenes was of a bar in which people were drinking alcoholic beverages and getting drunk. Dr. Ritchie describes what happened.

Gradually I began to notice something else. All of the living people we were watching were surrounded by a faint luminous glow, almost like an electrical field over the surface of their bodies. This luminosity moved as they moved, like a second skin made out of pale, scarcely visible light. At first I thought it must be reflected brightness from the Person at my side. But the buildings we entered gave off no reflection, neither did inanimate objects. And then I realized that the non-physical beings didn't either. My own unsolid body, I now saw, was without this glowing sheath.

At this point the Light drew me inside a dingy bar and grill near what looked like a large naval base. A crowd of people, many of them sailors, lined the bar three deep, while others jammed wooden booths along the wall. Though a few were drinking beer, most of them seemed to be belting whiskies as fast as the two perspiring bartenders could pour them.

Then I noticed a striking thing. A number of the men standing at the bar seemed unable to lift their drinks to their lips. Over and over I watched them clutch at their shot glasses, hands passing through the solid tumblers, through the heavy wooden counter top, through the very arms and bodies of the drinkers

around them.

And these men, every one of them lacked the aureole of light that surrounded the others.

Then, the cocoon of light must be a property of physical bodies only. The dead, we who had lost our solidness, had lost this "second skin" as well. And it was obvious that these living people, the light-surrounded ones, the ones actually drinking, talking, jostling each other, could neither see the desperately thirsty disembodied beings among them, nor feel their frantic pushing to get at those glasses. (Though it was also clear to me, watching, that the non-solid people could both see and hear each other. Furious quarrels were constantly breaking out among them over glasses that none could actually get to his lips.)

I thought I had seen heavy drinking at fraternity parties in Richmond, but the way civilians and servicemen at this bar were going at it beat everything. I watched one young sailor rise unsteadily from a stool, take two or three steps, and sag heavily to the floor. Two of his buddies stooped down and started dragging him away from the crush.

But that was not what I was looking at. I was staring in amazement as the bright cocoon around the unconscious sailor simply opened up. It parted at the very crown of his head and began peeling away from his head, his shoulders. Instantly, quicker than I'd ever seen anyone move, one of the insubstantial beings who had been standing near him at the bar was on top of him. He had been hovering like a thirsty shadow at the sailor's side, greedily following every swallow the young man made. Now he seemed to spring at him like a beast of prey.

In the next instant, to my utter mystification, the springing figure had vanished. It all happened even before the two men had dragged their unconscious load from under the feet of those at the bar. One minute I'd distinctly seen two individuals; by the time they propped the sailor against the wall, there was only one.

Twice more, as I stared, stupefied, the identical scene was repeated. A man passed out, a crack swiftly opened in the aureole round him, one of the non-solid people vanished as he hurled himself at that opening, almost as if he had scrambled inside the other man.

Was that covering of light some kind of shield, then? Was it a protection against...against disembodied beings like myself? Presumably these substanceless creatures had once had solid bodies, as I myself had had. Suppose that when they had been in these bodies they had developed a dependence on alcohol that went beyond the physical. That became mental. Spiritual, even. Then when they lost that body, except when they could briefly take possession of another one, they would be cut off for all eternity from the thing they could never stop craving.²¹⁷

The next NDE occurred when "Spencer's" spirit left his body for a period of time. He, too, was escorted around the world and shown several different scenes. One scene in particular happened in the home of a normally good Latter-day Saint, who had problems with pornography.

I realized even more powerfully from seeing this that all addictions are purely selfish; they guarantee the instant gratification of the flesh. Relationships are not

²¹⁷ Ritchie and Sherrill 2007. 59-61

guaranteed, and the gratification, the positive payback of the relationship, must be carefully maintained and worked at. This is the reason that people turn to addictions, because they are instant, require little work, and the results are guaranteed. It is also the reason evil uses them and promotes them so carefully, because they push the user away from all meaningful relationships, especially those with the divine.

I understood that he had been awakened from his sleep by one of these tempters who had been influencing his dreams, urging him to awaken and need a sexual high. As soon as he made the choice to get out of bed and actually partake, the disembodied spirits had joined in. They were drawn to him like a moth to a searchlight in a dark sky. They came at once. By accepting the temptation, and deciding to do it, he had given them permission to enter him and experience his sexual thrill with him. I saw many disembodied spirits competing to enter the small room with him. The evil spirits remained at just four.

When he made the decisions to partake, all of his good intentions and desires were immediately drowned out by the passions and the control of the evil spirits. The good spirits that had been near him as he slept were forced a distance away until he could not hear them. Eventually they left, driven away by his choices.

When he reached a pinnacle of lust in his body, a black tear or rip appeared at the crown of his head. In that instant the disembodied spirits began to attack. They looked like football players tackling the guy with the ball. They were hoping to share just a moment of his physical feelings and excitement. They acted like hungry dogs going after the same carcass. There was fierce competition among them to be in him longer. They fought to go next, screaming and cursing, throwing each other aside to enter. As soon as one or two spirits entered, no more could enter. The evil spirits screamed and dove at him repeatedly until a weaker one inside was expelled and they took its place. It seemed to me that the ones who were expelled were exhausted, jerking on the floor as if they were in a sexual thrall themselves, mimicking the actions of the young man at the computer. I tried to turn my face away in disgust, but I could not. The image was before me no matter which way I turned. The evil ones quickly recovered and rejoined the fight to reenter over and over.²¹⁸

In Dr. Ritchie's account, he described an "aureole of light" that surrounded living persons, but not disembodied spirits, nor inanimate objects. He speculated that the aureole was a property of living, physical bodies. What is remarkable is that in both accounts, which were widely separated by decades, an opening appeared at the crown of the head giving the unclean spirits access to the persons' body. Also, in both accounts, the unclean spirits had to wait to possess either person until the opening appeared. Another thing to point out is that the unclean spirits could see the aureole, as well as the moment it opened permitting entry. Lastly, something these men did caused the aureole to split.

The above points are important in explaining how evil spirits enter human bodies. The "aureole" must surely be the result of a synergistic effect between the body and the spirit. "Synergistic" means the interaction or cooperation between two things that produce a combined effect greater than either thing can produce separately. Somehow, the mating of the spirit with the body creates the aureole; the spirit enhancing the body and the body enhancing the spirit. The aureole must be a protective barrier that prevents evil spirits from forcing entry when it is intact.

²¹⁸ Pontius 2012. 105-106

As was shown, something the men did caused the aureole to split. In the case of these men, while not both of them were Latter-day Saints, both of them did things contrary to God's laws. So, it would seem that in the case of these two men, breaking God's laws in the case of someone who does not have the law or sinning, creates some type of disturbance in the synergistic balance of the body and spirit. One man's sin was of a grievous, sexual nature, while the other man was transgressing by consuming a prohibited, mind altering substance. Remember that a sin is anything that is "malum in se," meaning that the act is wrong or evil in itself, while a transgression is "malum prohibitum," meaning that it is wrong because it is formally prohibited.²¹⁹

While the mind's awareness of the spirit and its premortal existence is suppressed, the spirit still knows the truth and right from wrong. The disturbance probably was caused because of the spirit's intimate knowledge of God's laws and the conflict between that knowledge and the body's indulgence in sin. When that disturbance reached a certain point, the synergistic balance between the body and spirit was disrupted causing the aureole to split, thus inviting evil spirits into the body. The same thing must also apply to things like anger, frustration, jealousy, lying, or any other behavior, transgression, or sin that grieves the Holy Spirit. In the case of physical weaknesses, the synergistic effect creating the aureole must somehow be out of balance because of a defect within the body. There could be any number of reasons for this, which will be mentioned later.

As was previously noted, there are two types of possession: uninvited and invited. With the uninvited, no permission of the afflicted person is necessary to cast out an evil spirit. You are not abridging the agency of that person since the possession was the result of physical weakness or was permitted by Heavenly Father for some other reason. One thing to note was the Savior's admonition regarding certain types of possession: "...This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting."²²⁰ Most likely, this is the result of the power of an individual evil spirit and/or multiple spirits possessing a single person at the same time.

"Prayer is the act by which the will of the Father and the will of the child are brought into correspondence with each other."²²¹ The power of *humble, heartfelt, sincere* prayer and fasting cannot be emphasized enough. Fasting and sincere prayer tells the Lord that you are not relying on the arm of the flesh. It tells Him that you are acknowledging the supremacy of His power and calling on His tender mercies. You are saying that *He* is performing the miracle, not you. You also are telling Him that you recognize that you are merely the instrument through which He shows forth His marvelous power. It also tells Him that you recognize your "total dependence on Him."²²² Humble, heartfelt, sincere prayer will call down the powers of Heaven. It brought the Father and the Son to Joseph Smith, as well as ministering angels. Any member of the Church can receive these same blessings.

Casting out evil spirits from someone who invited in those spirits though sin cannot be done without the permission of that person. To attempt to do so is abridging the agency of that person since he originally invited the spirit(s) in. However, even when a person requests a blessing to have the invited spirits cast out, those evil spirits can easily take up residence once again if that person continues to commit sin. Elder Heber C. Kimball said that "a Saint that turns back to the Devil takes into his tabernacle the worst spirits, which make him many times worse than he was at the first."²²³ The person who wishes to be freed from invited possession must repent and change his life. The Elder(s) who have been called upon to cast out an invited evil spirit should sit down with the afflicted person and explain this to him. He *must* understand that if he does not repent, if he does not change his life and lifestyle, those same spirits will be free to return and his state will be much worse than before the evil

²¹⁹ CR Oct 1993. 98

²²⁰ Matthew 17:21; Mark 9:29

²²¹ BD Payer

²²² CR Apr 2007. 6 (see also Scott 2007.8)

²²³ JD 6:52

spirits were cast out.²²⁴ That is the only way he can be permanently free of this affliction. There also may be times that the Elder will be constrained by the Holy Ghost to not cast out the evil spirit. This may be because the person requesting the blessing has no intention to change his life and lifestyle.

When giving a priesthood blessing to an individual, the Church handbook says that we should anoint with oil, which “has been consecrated for anointing and blessing the sick and afflicted.”²²⁵ Something to consider is that while a possessed person may not be physically sick, they are always afflicted. This is the case with mental illnesses and behavioral addictions, and compulsions. While not all illnesses, diseases, and afflictions, both physical and mental, are caused by evil spirits,²²⁶ a very large number *are* caused by them. Another thing to consider is that mental or physical illnesses that are not directly caused by evil spirits or possession can, and most likely will, be exacerbated by evil spirits.

Nephi, the prophet at the time of the Savior’s appearance in the Americas, cast out devils and unclean spirits.²²⁷ In his narrative, Mormon goes on to explain that those who “had devils cast out from them, and were healed of their sicknesses and their infirmities, did truly manifest unto the people that they had been wrought upon by the Spirit of God, and had been healed....”²²⁸ Notice the sequence and wording that Mormon used. He did not say those who “had devils cast out from them” *and also those who* “were healed of their sicknesses and their infirmities....” His wording tells us that these were *not* two separate groups: one group that had evil spirits cast out and another, separate group that was healed from their illnesses and infirmities. No, the wording tells us that these were the same people who were healed of their sicknesses and infirmities as a result of having devils and unclean spirits cast out.

Consider the teachings of Joseph Fielding Smith.

These evil spirits have great power to tempt, persuade and entice men to deny the correct origin of man. We do not see them, but we do feel their presence, and unconsciously we hearken to their whisperings. Having been denied bodies they, at times, steal them. It is a common error, especially in scientific circles to scoff at such a thing as the temptation by the devil and more especially so to ridicule the idea that these wicked spirits have power to possess living bodies and subdue the spirit within them. But all the scoffing and ridicule does not change the fact. The stories of possession as recorded in the New Testament are true. The scoffer cannot explain away successfully the casting out of devils by Jesus Christ, when they called him by name and he commanded them to hold their peace; the story of the devils asking to enter the bodies of swine; the story of the seven sons of Sceva, and numerous others listed in the scriptures. There are scores of such incidents that have occurred in this dispensation. Our missionaries can give the evidence in such cases. *No, it is not always a diseased mind that disturbs the normal thinking, the possession by devils is a positive fact* (emphasis added).²²⁹

The Saint who possesses the gift of the discerning of spirits should be able to discern when a sickness or illness is caused by evil spirits. If you suspect an afflicted or sick person to be possessed, you can be guaranteed that not only are they possessed, but that there will be other evil spirits immediately around them. When you give a blessing, it is important to bless the person using consecrated oil. President Jedidiah M. Grant expounded on this.

²²⁴ Matthew 12:45

²²⁵ Family Guidebook 2006

²²⁶ HC 2:147

²²⁷ 3 Nephi 7:19

²²⁸ 3 Nephi 7:22

²²⁹ Smith J.F. 1954. 294

If any are sick among you, let them send for the Elders of the Church to pray for them, and to lay their hands upon them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith shall save the sick. People neglect to anoint with oil when they should and might use it. I have seen the Elders try to cast out devils, and to accomplish it they have fasted, and prayed, and laid on hands, and rebuked the devil, but he would not go out. I have then seen them bring consecrated oil, and anoint the person possessed of the devil, and the devil went out forthwith. That taught me a good lesson—that God Almighty, when He speaks, means what He says; and if a man's works are right, his faith will be right; and if his faith is wrong, his works are wrong. When a man whose faith is right goes forth to administer to the sick, he will anoint with oil, as well as lay on his hands and pray. Unless you anoint with oil, your prayers will not rise higher than the fog, and you know that it seldom rises much higher than the tops of the mountains.²³⁰

What is the purpose of laying your hands on a person's head while giving a blessing? Brigham Young explained the purpose.

When I lay hands on the sick, I expect the healing power and influence of God to pass through me to the patient, and the disease to give way. I do not say that I heal everybody I lay hands on; but many have been healed under my administration. Jesus said, on one occasion, "Who has touched me?" A woman had crept up behind him in the crowd, and touched the hem of his garment, and he knew it, because Virtue had gone from him. Do you see the reason and propriety of laying hands on each other? When we are prepared, when we are holy vessels before the Lord, a stream of power from the Almighty can pass through the tabernacle of the administrator to the system of the patient and the sick are made whole; the headache, fever or other disease has to give way.²³¹

In the two previous NDE's, the possessed peoples' aureoles split at the crown of the head permitting evil spirits to enter. When we anoint with oil, we also place the oil on the crown of the head. Then we place our hands on the head, also, and pronounce a blessing allowing the flow of power from God to pass through us into the head and body of the afflicted person. Then, while our hands are still on the afflicted person's head, we command the evil spirits to depart. Is this coincidence?

Remember that you and the afflicted or sick person are surrounded at all times by evil spirits unless they are cast away. When the Elder arrives at the home of the afflicted person, it is recommended that you rebuke any evil spirits from the area where you are giving the blessing before you enter the home. This is because, as was discussed before, evil spirits can and do project thoughts into your mind. Casting them away from the area will help to keep your mind clear and help you hear the whisperings of the Holy Spirit.

As was mentioned before, a victim of an invited possession must change his life. Once again, before giving this person a blessing, you must make it clear to him that he will continue to be a lawful victim to the same or other evil spirit(s) that once possessed him if he continues in the path of sin. Additionally, he needs to understand that, like everyone else, he will continue to be afflicted, influenced, and tempted by evil spirits even if he completely repents and never turns back to sin. For the person who invited the possession through sin and has a desire to change, he needs to understand

²³⁰ JD 2:276-277

²³¹ DBY. 251-252

that getting the evil spirits cast out is *just the beginning*, not the end. He will have bad habits to overcome, but he will be able to overcome them without the internal influence of the evil spirit. This will give him a fighting chance to repent.

Remember that Elder McConkie said that possession can come about because of sin, depression, and physical weakness. If a person is sick, it may not be the result of evil spirits. However, quite often this is the case. It bears repeating that one of the signs to look for when it comes to sickness caused by evil spirits is that it comes on suddenly and virulently. The victim will become extremely sick in a very short amount of time. Also, at times, a doctor probably will not be able to provide an explanation for the sickness, although this will not always be the case. At the same time, there are instances in the scriptures where people were healed through the casting out of evil spirits after being afflicted for many years.²³²

Something that very few people think about or realize is that Satan has some power over the elements and is capable of causing plagues.²³³ Joseph Fielding Smith talked about this when he said, "It may seem strange to us, but it is the fact that Satan exercises dominion and has some control over the elements..."²³⁴ Brigham Young taught that "God gave Lucifer power, influence, mastery, and rule, to a certain extent, to control the life pertaining to the elements composing the body..."²³⁵ A classic example of this is when Satan "smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown."²³⁶

For those with mental illnesses, this can be a complicated matter. Once again, not all illnesses, both mental and physical, are caused by evil spirits. This can only be determined by someone who has the gift of the discerning of spirits. Unfortunately, all too often, Latter-day Saints accept the world's explanation that the writers of the Four Gospels were mistaken in claiming that the Savior actually cast out evil spirits that caused physical and mental illness. It seems that the reasoning is that the writers were uneducated in the sciences and mistook things like schizophrenia and epilepsy for possession by evil spirits. What this reasoning is actually saying is that the Savior did not know the difference between someone possessed and ill and someone who is ill because of physiological causes. Going further, many people who believe the wisdom of the world often think that those who believe otherwise are uneducated and superstitious. One LDS psychiatrist had a good, worldly explanation for this belief.

Many Latter-day Saints, like other sincere people, operate out of a set of superstitions rather than religious belief. This tendency may manifest itself in such simple ways as mistaking wishful thinking for answer to prayer, or such complex ways as dissociative reactions, autohypnosis, or overt psychosis. These are often misinterpreted as possession states, to be treated by casting out demons. Searching for evil spirits to banish from a schizophrenic psychosis is a futile task, demoralizing the giver of the blessing when it doesn't work, and heaping guilt upon the suffering of the victim. Casting out devils has appeal for some, but far less efficacy than a little antipsychotic medication.²³⁷

In one way, the psychiatrist's explanation is accurate. If a Saint lacks genuine faith, he may be superstitious rather than have an honest belief. If this is the case, his attempts to cast out evil spirits *will* be "wishful thinking."

²³² Luke 13:11-16

²³³ Pratt and Lundwall 1946, *op. cit.*

²³⁴ Smith 1947. 210

²³⁵ JD 3:277

²³⁶ Job 2:7

²³⁷ Moench 1985

Cautions and Warnings

When a victim is possessed as a result of physical weakness, that weakness needs to be addressed if possible. Physical weaknesses can come about because a person is born with them. The weakness can also develop later in life because of environmental conditions. We have all the myriad of problems caused by modern society through pollution, environmental toxins, pesticides on food, etc. There also are weaknesses caused because of poor nutrition in processed foods and factory farmed animals.

Conditions in the home environment will heavily contribute to the problems of evil spirits in the home. Most of the family members may be living a Christ-like life, doing all that is required to invite in the Holy Spirit, but all it takes is one person who is sinning to invite in the worst of spirits. For example, if just one person is looking at pornography on the home computer, this invites some of the worst possible spirits into the home. When this happens, those invited evil spirits will do their best to cause contention, anger, frustration, depression, anxiety, stress or any possible disturbance to the harmony of the home environment. If contention and anger break out, this will grieve the Holy Spirit and he will withdraw. This will leave the home open to even more contention, arguments, anger, frustration, etc.

Satan has counterfeits to everything from our Heavenly Father. There are those who claim to have alternative methods of healing or to have power from God without being ordained to that power to cast out devils and unclean spirits and heal the sick. There are Latter-day Saints who are taken in by these counterfeit methods and unauthorized people because they lack correct knowledge and/or have frustration with the holders of the priesthood who cannot cast out evil spirits. Sometimes that Saint is looking for a quick and fast way because they are not willing to do what is necessary to develop the necessary faith.

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that are signs and key words through which we can recognize when someone is authorized by God to pronounce a blessing. He said, "What is the sign of the healing of the sick? The laying on of hands is the sign or way marked out by James and the custom of the ancient saints as ordered by the Lord, and we should not obtain the blessing by pursuing any other course except the way which God has marked out."²³⁸ He went further and said, "The Lord says do so and so, and I will bless so and so. There are certain key words and signs belonging to the priesthood which must be observed in order to obtain the blessings."

The sign, then, of the healing of the sick and afflicted is when an authorized representative anoints with consecrated oil and lays his hands on the person's head. The wary Saint should be suspicious of anyone who deviates from the method and order laid down by Heavenly Father.

Satan's power will continue to increase as more unclean spirits join his ranks. The time will come when the limits on his power and activities are removed just when the tribulations begin prior to the Second Coming of the Savior. Gaining correct knowledge, which in turn will help build our faith, will allow us to successfully combat Satan and his forces, and save our families.

²³⁸ Ehat and Cook. *op. cit.*, 108

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