

**LAYING HANDS ON
DEMONS POSSESSED (LUKE 13:13)**
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Introduction

THE DOCTRINE concerning Christ's victory over Satan and his cohort by his death has been misunderstood mainly by many. Indeed, in the Cameroonian's union mission for example, pastors are missing the fact that Christ's victory over the forces of evil is ours through faith in him (cf. Luc 9:1-2; 10:17-20) and that the focus of this statement in our fundamental belief is not chasing demons, but the opportunity to growth in Jesus likeness. Some practices such as blessing salt and olive oil that pastors in our midst will sell for healing people.

Besides, in an article: "Faith, Science and Black Magic" presented in 2004 in the conference on faith and science at Abidjan, Ivory Coast by professor Brempong Owusu-Antwi, at that time working at Valley View University, which came out with a proposal recorded in "Spiritualism and the Adventist Church in Africa: Guidelines and Recommendations."

In this report, there are some specific guidelines concerning demon possession; among others that I fully agree with, but, one suggests that praying for a demon possessed can be accompanied by laying hand on him. The text, which has

been given in support is Luke 13:13.¹

The text of Luke has a phrase, which says, a woman “crippled by a spirit” (v. 11) might have been a description of a person demon-possessed, and that is why there is a reference to Satan.² Thus, the very fact that Satan is mentioned in this healing miracle corroborates this fact.

This essay will analyse this assertion, which seems very strange, when one consider the teaching of the laying hands in the New Testament (NT) as related to healing. The question that would be answered in this essay is: whether the usage of laying hands in the Bible allows for praying by laying hands over demons possessed. For answering this, we need first to look upon the role of laying in the OT and then in the NT, particularly in the Gospels-Acts. In addition a look on the text of Luke 13:10-17 will be done in order to assess whether this woman was possessed by a demon or whether she was simply sick.

Possession or simple weakness

The story of this crippled woman stand between two parables: (1) the parable of the barren fig tree, which show the readiness for the coming crisis (vv. 6-9), and (2) the pa-

¹“Spiritualism and the Adventist Church in Africa: Guidelines and Recommendations,” 4.

²S. Eitrem, *Some Notes on the Demonology in the New Testament*, Symbolae Osloenses fascicle Supplement, no. 20, 2d ed. (Oslo: Aedibus Universitetsforlaget, 1966), 39. On whether the woman’s condition resulted of demon possession, see J.Wilkinson, “The Case of the Bent Woman in Luke 13:10-17,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 49 (1977): 201-4; M.D. Hamm, “The Freeing of the Bent Woman and the Restoration of Israel: Luke 13:10-17 as Narrative Theology,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 31 (1987): 29, 32-32.

parable of the mustard seed symbolizing the likeness of God's kingdom (vv. 18-21). In the previous section the ministry of Jesus appeared as a period of crisis; the accent now falls again on the coming of salvation. A woman suffering from a spinal deformity was set free on a Sabbath by Jesus in the synagogue.

The synagogue leader argued that where life was not at stake the healing could well have waited until a weekday. Jesus replied that if cattle could be loosed on the Sabbath to be watered (as the Jews on the whole allowed), how much more could a woman be loosed from her illness. The disability has been understood in two ways: (1) either to mean that the illness has been caused by a spirit (v. 11), and (2) to be the result of demon possession that the women had.¹

Translation

He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. 11 And behold There was a woman who had a spirit of weakness (or being weak) for eighteen years and was bent over and not able to straighten up for all this time. 12 Seeing her, Jesus called out and said to her, "Woman, you are liberated from your weakness." 13 He placed his hand upon her and without delay she became erect again and began to glorify God. 14 Annoyed that Jesus had healed on the sabbath, the ruler of the synagogue responded and said to the crowd, "There are six days on which one must work; come and be healed on those and not on the day of the sabbath." 15 The Lord responded and said, "Hypocrites, doesn't each of you release his ox or his ass from the manger on the sabbath to lead it away to give it

¹Carson, D.A.; et al., *The New Bible Commentary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994).

a drink? 16And shouldn't this woman who is a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan bound these eighteen years, be liberated from this bondage on the day of the sabbath?" 17As he said these things, all his opponents were put to shame, while all the crowd rejoiced at all the glorious things which were being done by him.

The text presents a problem. If we consider that this woman "had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years" (KJV; NKJ; DBY, see RSV), that's mean the construction is considered as aramaism showing that the disability was caused by a spirit¹

Luke's construction is difficult to understand, yet what can be said, is that these types of syntax emphasise the adjective. For example, καὶ ἰδοὺ ἄνθρωπος χεῖρα ἔχων (Mat 12:10) "and behold a man which had his hand withered" or over the genitive in Luke's case: καὶ ἰδοὺ γυνή πνεῦμα ἔχουσα ἀσθενείας (Luk 13:11). This will signify her great physical inability.

The noun pneuma is simply qualified by the word astheneias, is first a state of incapacity weakness or illness (Matt. 8:17; Lk. 13:11f; Acts 28:9; 2 Co. 11:30; 13:4; 1 Tim. 5:23; Heb. 11:34), besides, it is never used in the case of a demon possession, this qualifying word best describe illness that are only distinguished from demon possession.

Consequently, this phrase γυνή πνεῦμα ἔχουσα ἀσθενείας may as well express the idea that this woman « was showing a weak spirit» or she was simply sick because of her spirit. The book of proverb shows as well how the mental may influence the physical: "a broken spirit drieth the bones"

¹Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke, Anchor Bible*, 2 vols (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 1012; H.L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1965), 2:198; 4i; 521,524-26.

(Prov 17 :22 ; cf. 18 :14). Thus, she may have been sick because of her mental attitude.¹

It remains uncertain whether we should consider a “spirit of weakness” as descriptive of a demon for many reasons. First of all, the phrase: *συνὴ πνεῦμα ἔχουσα ἀσθενείας* is an idiom having a debilitating disease coming from a depressing mental,² and the normal vocabulary for stating a possession is *daimonizomai* (Matt 8:16; Luke 8:36).³

Second, “Satan bound” in v 16 is not a decisive indicator, since “healing all who were oppressed by the devil” in Acts 10:38 referred to healing in general. It appears that Luke provides a theological perspectives on illness and is suggesting that it is on of the cause of Satan, since he is the works of Satan is behind the scene of all suffering and so all weakness

¹Ἡ γυνὴ ἐξουσίαν ἔχειν, “la femme doit avoir la marque de l'autorité” 1 Cor 11:10) ; γυνὴ δραχμὰς ἔχουσα δέκα, “une femme ayant dix drachmes” (Luc 15 :8).

²Nolland, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 35b: Luke 9:21-18:34, (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, Publisher) 1998. Dans le livre des Actes, une expression similaire existe: “une servante qui avait un esprit de Python” (παιδίσκητινὰ ἔχουσαν πνεῦμα πύθωνα) [Act 16:16]; et dans l'Apocryphe de la genèse (1 Q Genesis Apocryphon 20:26, cf. 16-17), il y a des expressions similaires: “un esprit de purulence” (*wruḥ šlḥny*) ; “un esprit de châiment” (*wruḥ mkdš*); un esprit méchant (*ruḥ b'yš*); voir cf. P. Grelot, “sur l'apocryphe de la Genèse (XX,26),” *Revue de Qumrân* no 2 (Octobre 1956): 273-76; André Dupont-Sommer, *Les Ecrits Esséniens Découverts Près De La Mer Morte*, 4eme ed. rev. et aug., Bibloithèque Historique (Paris: Payot, 1979), 300-301; Florentino Garcíá Martínez and J.C. Tigchelaar Eibert, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 28

³Normally when this construction means a demon possession, the verb comes first, ex., ἔχοντα πνεῦμα ἄλαλον, “which hath a dumb spirit” (Matt 9:17); ἔχων πνεῦμα δαιμονίου ἀκαθάρτου, “which had a spirit of an unclean devil” (Luke 4:33).

have a “Satanic dimension.”¹ In all other respects the language of the account suits a healing context better than an exorcism. The crippled woman is indeed delivered not from demons, but from her illness (Astheneia, v.12). ἀσθένεια connotes “a state of incapacity” or “impotence” hence infirmity. It is the opposite of δύναμις, “might, strength.”²

While Luke can both describe a healing like an exorcism (4:38–39) and an exorcism like a healing, but here the healing language compels us to choose a healing rather than an exorcism. It is difficult to think that a demon is intended in Luke 13:11. Jesus has already met with a demoniac (4:31–37); generally, he addressed directly the “evil spirit” (Matt 9:17,25; 17:18). Jesus in this pericope does not at all address any demon. He does not chase away the spirit as elsewhere (Mat 8:16, 28–32; 9:32–33).

Besides, the atypical expression of exorcism, « go out » is absent from the story (Mc 7:30; Luc 4:35,41; 8:2). Also, the fact that the opening unit is paralleled by another Sabbath healing in 14:1–6, which forms the closest parallel with sickness shows also that it was not a possession (cf. chap. 4:33–36), this fact militate rather for a healing process.

Moreover, the leader of the synagogue’s reaction does not resemble to the astonishment of deliverance (Luke 13:14 cf. Mat 21:15).³ The tone of this narrative fits best the general circumstances of healing rather exorcism.

¹Sidney H. T. Page, *Power of Evil: A Biblical Study of Satan and Demons* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 119.

²Timothy and Barbara Friberg, *Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (2000), s.v. “Ἀσθενεία,” “δύναμις.”

³Bien que la délivrance peut être une guérison (Matt 12:22; 15:22), mais la guérison est différenciée de la délivrance (Marc 1:34,39; 6:13; 16:17–18).

When one considers the term “spirit” in Luke, it appears that it comes usually with an adjective (Luc 1:15,35,41,67; 4:1; 6:18; 7:21; 8:2; 11:13,21). A close look will also reveal that the term mostly used with ἅγιος for the Holy Spirit (1:15,35); it may also be signifying the evil spirit (4:33, 35; 6:18;7:21;8:29)

or with a genitive, signifying the spirit of someone, (1:17,47; 4:18 cf. 1:67).

Laying of Hands

The text now says: “He placed his hand upon her and without delay she became erect again and began to glorify God.” Jesus did actually pronounce her healing, and then that made her to be straight. If the disability was caused by a fusion of vertebrae, thus, Jesus was setting her straight again,¹ given that the chief officer considered Jesus’ laying hands as a work (here Jesus is accused to work for his reputation), may prove Jesus action as in v. 14.²

At this time, an analysis of laying hands required. In the Old Testament, laying hands has three major usages. It appears during the benediction (Gen 48:14ff); during the sacrificial, which requires that a sinner would lay his hands upon the victim (Ex 29:10,15,19; Lev 1:4; 3:2,8,13; 4:4,24,29; 8:14; 16:21); even those that were testifying against someone who blasphemed God, were requested to lay their hands upon the (Lev 24:14).

¹While there a lot of speculations, an informed modern medical diagnosis is spondylitis ankylopoietica or skoliasis hystérica, which produces fusion of the vertebrae. See Wilkinson, 196-200.

²The Pharisee at that time forbade only healing by a physician; they debated the propriety of prayer for the sick on the Sabbath.

In the NT, the laying hands mark consecration for a ministry in the early Church (Actes 6:6; 13:3; 1 Tim 4:14; 5:22); the reception of Holy Spirit (8:17-19; 19:6), which is maybe equivalent to the reception of a spiritual gift (2 Tim 1:6). This became in the Early Church a formal doctrine (Heb 6:2).

The laying on of hands may be an influence from Mark 6:5. It is but one of Jesus' approaches in healing (see at 4:38-39). Linked to healing this practice is exclusively tied to the healing not to exorcism in the NT (Marc 6:5; 7:32; 8:23; Luc 4:40 ; Marc 16 :18 ; Actes 28 :8). It was believed that this gesture would allow even resurrection (Matt 9:18; Marc 5:23; Actes 9:12,17; 28:8) or bring benedictions on a simple touch (19:13,15; Marc 10:13-16; Luc 18:15). In Jesus commission to his disciples, this act is not at all linked to exorcism, but rather with healing:

And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover (Mark 16:17-18).¹

Conclusion

This article tried to show that Luke's account of the bent woman has much to do with healing than exorcism. The characteristic features of exorcisms in the NT are missing, since nothing is said about a demon; Jesus addresses the woman and her illness directly rather than to a demon.

¹ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου δαιμόνια ἐκβαλοῦσιν (Marc 16:17), χεῖρας ἐπιθήσουσιν, καὶ καλῶς ἔξουσιν (v. 18).

Luke text being unique, and may lead many astray, this article suggests that the laying of hands must never be used as a means of chasing away those that are demons possessed. While Jesus laid hands on the woman, it seems that it was more to make her straight, even though, it was normal laying hands, it something he seems to avoid with demoniacs. Luke does not present the healing of the bent woman as an exorcism, and there seems no real reason to think that it was. The practice of laying hands in the Bible does not encourage anyone to do that.

The secret of exorcism is given by Jesus Christ himself, “cast out devils by the Spirit of God” (Matt 12:28). In fact, there is no power on laying hands, but only in God and we get this power because of Jesus’ death on the cross through the Holy Spirit. We shall not be afraid to use the Word of God to compel demons to leave out of those that have been trapped (cf. Luke 9:1-2; 10:17-20).