

Demons, the Dead, and the Disinherited: Where Did the Evil Spirits Come From?

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One of the most jarring aspects of the New Testament is the constant, almost casual, presence of demons. Jesus casts them out. They recognize His authority. They beg not to be sent into the abyss. But Scripture never pauses to explain where they come from. Who—or what—are these “unclean spirits”?

Most modern readers assume demons are just another name for fallen angels. But that’s not how the earliest Jewish readers understood them. According to the Book of *1 Enoch*, demons are the disembodied spirits of the Nephilim—the giant offspring of rebellious angels and human women.

This article traces the Enochic account of demon origins, compares it with ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman views, and shows how this background clarifies the New Testament’s handling of spiritual warfare.

The Enochic Explanation: Spirits of the Dead Giants

The Book of *1 Enoch*, written during the Second Temple period (ca. 3rd–1st century BC), provides the most developed account of demonic origins in ancient Jewish literature. After describing how 200 angels (the “Watchers”) descended to earth, married human women, and fathered the Nephilim (giants), Enoch explains what happened after the flood destroyed their bodies.

“And now, the giants who are produced from the spirits and flesh shall be called evil spirits upon the earth... And the spirits of the giants afflict, oppress, destroy, attack, do battle, and cause corruption on the earth.” (1 Enoch 15:8–11)

According to Enoch, the bodies of the Nephilim were destroyed in the flood, but their spirits remained. These restless, rootless spirits became what later Jewish texts referred to as *shedim* (demons), *unclean spirits*, or *evil spirits*. They were not part of God’s original creation—they were unnatural, the byproduct of cosmic rebellion.

“These spirits shall rise up against the children of men and against the women, because they have proceeded from them.” (1 Enoch 15:12)



The Sons of God, the daughters of men, and the giant offspring

In this framework, demons are the cursed remnant of an ancient, pre-flood race. They are not fallen angels themselves but the offspring of fallen angels and human women.

Other Ancient Views of Demons

Mesopotamian View: Demons as Chaos Beings

In ancient Mesopotamian belief, demons were often portrayed as ancient chaos spirits—half-divine, half-monstrous beings who dwelled in deserts, underworlds, or unclean places. Some were personifications of disease, nightmares, or madness (e.g., *Lamashtu*, *Pazuzu*). These spirits were not “fallen” but were feared as primordial entities that existed outside the divine order.

- Demons were believed to cause plagues, infertility, and possession.
- Rituals and incantations were used to drive them away.

Although not identical to the Nephilim-origin story, this worldview resonates with the idea of spiritual beings associated with disorder, illegitimate origins, and physical suffering.

Greco-Roman View: Daimones as Ambiguous Spirits

The Greek *daimōn* (δαίμων) originally referred to a spiritual force, neither inherently good nor evil.

- Plato spoke of daimones as intermediaries between gods and humans.
- Later, *daimones* included the spirits of the dead, particularly those who died violently or unjustly.
- Over time, in Jewish and Christian polemic, *daimōn* became associated exclusively with hostile spirits.

The key overlap is the idea that violent, restless dead become spiritually dangerous.



Restless, hostile spirits

The Biblical Picture: Demons as Unclean Spirits

While the Hebrew Bible is relatively restrained in its demonology, a few critical clues align with the Enochic tradition.

Old Testament Hints

- *“They sacrificed to demons who were not God, to gods they did not know.”* (Deuteronomy 32:17)
- The word for demon here is *shedim*, possibly linked to *spirits of the dead* or desert spirits.
- *“Wild goats shall call to one another; indeed, there Lilith shall settle...”* (Isaiah 34:14)
- This chaotic wilderness prophecy invokes a female night-demon figure (*Lilith*) rooted in Mesopotamian myth.

While demons are not a significant theme in the Old Testament, they begin to emerge in apocalyptic literature, such as *1 Enoch* and *Jubilees*, filling the gap between Genesis 6 and the New Testament.

New Testament: Demons and the Kingdom Clash

In the Gospels, demons are not theoretical—they are a frontline reality. Here are a few examples of how their behavior reflects the backstory in the Book of 1 Enoch:

Demons Fear the Abyss

“What business do You have with us, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?” (Matthew 8:29)

“And they begged Him not to command them to go away into the abyss.” (Luke 8:31)

These spirits know their fate is sealed. Their fear of the “abyss” (Greek *abussos*) mirrors the Watchers’ fate in *1 Enoch*—bound in darkness until the Day of Judgment (cf. 1 Enoch 10:4–14).

The Case of Legion:

“My name is Legion, for we are many... And the unclean spirits came out and entered the pigs.” (Mark 5:9, 13)



Jesus confronts Legion

This haunting account in the Decapolis—a Gentile region—matches the Enochic worldview precisely:

- A swarm of disembodied spirits seeks to inhabit bodies.
- The spirits fear banishment to the abyss.
- The unclean nature of pigs fits their status as *ritually defiled spirits*.

Jesus' power over Legion is not just an exorcism—it's a kingdom confrontation.

Apostolic Commentary

“For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness...” (2 Peter 2:4)

“Angels who did not keep their own domain... He has kept in eternal restraints under darkness for the judgment of the great day.” (Jude 6)

Both Peter and Jude appear to affirm the Enochic reading of Genesis 6. The rebellious angels (the Watchers) are bound in darkness, while their disembodied offspring—the demons—roam the earth as “unclean spirits.”

The Eschatological Endgame: Demons in Revelation

“And I saw... unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet.” (Revelation 16:13)

“Babylon... has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison of every unclean spirit.” (Revelation 18:2)

In Revelation, demons play a significant role in the end-time spiritual deception and judgment. Their presence signals a final resurgence of ancient rebellion. As in the days of Noah, spiritual corruption will once again saturate the world system. But their fate is certain:

“The devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire...” (Revelation 20:10)

Whether rebellious angel or Nephilim-spirit, all forces of evil are destined for destruction.

Why It Matters

Understanding the biblical and ancient context for demons sharpens our view of spiritual warfare. In the *1 Enoch* tradition echoed by the apostles:

- Demons are the disinherited spirits of the Nephilim—illegitimate offspring of rebellion.
- They are disembodied, restless, and hostile toward humanity.
- Jesus did not merely teach about demons—He confronted them as part of His messianic mission.

Their origin story ties directly back to Genesis 6—and therefore to the greater narrative of the war between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. The demonic is not incidental to the gospel. It is part of the spiritual conflict that the Skull Crusher came to end.

Sources and Suggested Reading

- *1 Enoch*, trans. R.H. Charles
- *Jubilees*, trans. James C. VanderKam
- Heiser, Michael S., *Demons: What the Bible Really Says About the Powers of Darkness*
- Collins, John J., *Apocalyptic Imagination*
- Stuckenbruck, Loren T., *The Myth of Rebellious Angels*
- New Testament passages: Matthew 8, Mark 5, Luke 8, 2 Peter 2, Jude 6, Revelation 16, 18, 20