



The Devil Made Me Do It

Part 6: Other Demonic Assignments in the New Testament

In our current study of the abilities that Satan and his forces have to affect the lives of humans, we are continuing to examine instances in the New Testament in which evil spiritual beings were involved in carrying out “assignments” in people’s lives. In our last issue we focused on assignments directly involving the life and death of Jesus Christ. We will now broaden that focus.

The vulnerability of godly men and women to demonic assignments is further illustrated in the life of the Apostle Paul. Here again, however, Satan was used to serve the purpose of God. In view of the extraordinary revelations Paul had experienced, God did not want pride or arrogance to hinder the effectiveness of Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles. Therefore, He had Satan send a demonic affliction to “torment” him. Many debates have taken place over the nature of this “thorn in the flesh.” Whatever it was, it was apparently something that caused an almost constant irritation or “torment” in Paul’s life and gave him some sense of physical weakness. Interestingly, God’s will was for Paul never to be delivered from this demonic affliction but to trust in God’s sufficient grace and the power that *He* would provide in Paul’s life in spite of it (2 Cor. 12:7-9).

The Apostle Paul himself dictated a demonic assignment against the man who had committed the grievous sin of having an incestuous relationship with his father’s wife. In this case Paul instructed the church body to deliver this man to Satan for the “destruction of the flesh” so that his spirit would be saved on the “day of the Lord.” Since Satan would certainly not be involved in destroying the fleshly sin nature, this assignment most likely entailed bringing the physical destruction of this man’s body. Whether this would be a wasting illness or death itself is unclear, but in spite of this severe punishment at Satan’s hand, this man would seemingly not lose his salvation (1 Cor. 5:1-5).

Although we don’t know the compelling details, Paul launched another demonic assignment against Hymenaeus and Alexander. In this case he “handed them over to Satan” so that they would learn not to blaspheme (1 Tim. 1:20). This was probably not blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as that would have been an unpardonable sin (Mat. 12:31; Mark 3:28), and the purpose of the discipline here seems to be remedial in nature. Therefore, this assignment seemingly involved bringing some kind of demonically afflicted suffering on these men. A quick recall of the misery Satan brought upon Job assures us that Satan is well equipped to do this.

In summary, a “demonic assignment” involves a usually temporary negative effect brought upon a person by evil spiritual beings for a specific purpose. Although we often hear of people involved in witchcraft and other occult practices sending curses and demonic attacks against people, Scripture seemingly gives no example of this. Instead, it records many accounts of demonic assignments being initiated by God to serve *His* purposes as well as a few being directed by Satan or godly people. Believing Christians are not exempt from such assignments, but any attack launched by Satan against a believer must seemingly gain God’s approval first.

When “on assignment,” Satan’s forces can negatively impact a person’s physical, mental, and/or spiritual health. They are seemingly capable of influencing one’s thoughts, words, emotions, and actions to such an extent that the person may even do things that are contrary to the intentions of his heart. In Job’s case they were also able to direct the forces of nature and bring death to his children. With Jesus in the wilderness, Satan seemingly enabled Him to experience extra-dimensional travel and vision.

Satan’s capabilities must certainly not be underestimated, but neither should we be intimidated by his bulging “tool kit.” How comforting it is to know that God is still sovereign over him! He holds the reins and is lovingly protective of His children!