

Territorial Spirits

Are angels restricted to geographical boundaries?

Introduction

Most of my readers would be aware that the subject of territorial spirits (demons) refers to Charismatic errors that are perpetrated as part of the Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare programmes of C. Peter Wagner, John Wimber, Roger Forster, Graham Kendrick and many others. It has become an accepted part of fundamental Charismatic theology. From this base a number of other errors follow, such as: spiritual mapping, cell groups focused upon spiritual warfare, 'deliverance ministries', praise marches and so forth.

However, what has recently surprised me is the number of people who claim to follow the truth, and who oppose Charismatic extremism, but who still believe in the essential principles regarding territorial spirits and feel that confronting these spirits is fundamental to successful evangelism, especially in deeply pagan countries.

This paper seeks to evaluate the basics of this idea and show that it has no Biblical support whatsoever.

Did God ever demarcate countries as the bases of specific angelic ministries?

The proposition

The claim is that in the beginning God allotted specific angels to certain countries and that after the rebellion by Satan, his fallen angels continued in dealing with these specific nations. The idolatrous superstitions of pagan nations reveals this demarcation by the limits of specific spirits to a certain territory, which in some cases is marked on the land by an altar. For example:

Satan has assigned certain demons to certain territories, nations, cities and subcultures. These demons seek to pervert the peoples in their territory and to turn them against God (e.g. Ezek 28:12 the "King of Tyre"). Angelic beings were originally (see White, 1991, p59) given certain groupings of mankind to oversee. [Dr. John Studley, personal email quoting his MA thesis.]

In NW Nepal the territorial spirits are named *Masta* and the geographic extents of their territories are known to the local people. Where a *Masta* boundary crosses a path it is demarcated by an altar. When travellers reach the altar they place votive offerings in the niches to ensure safe passage and protection as they pass through the territory of the *Masta*. They are appeased with the help of a *Dharmi* (shaman). [Ibid.]

Satan has assigned a hierarchy of principalities, powers and rulers of darkness to specific territories on the earth. [John Dawson, YWAM, *Taking our Cities for God*, Creation House (1989), p158.]

Texts used to support the proposition

The following texts are used to support this idea.

When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, When He separated the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel.
Deut 32:8

Of course there is no support here at all, but the Septuagint text (LXX) reads,
When the Most High divided the nations, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the nations according to the number of the angels of God.

It is claimed that the phrase, 'sons of God' refers to angelic beings, though why this is mentioned in this context is a mystery since the LXX text here says 'angels' not 'sons'. However, the RSV says, 'sons of God' while the NRSV says, 'number of the gods'.

Well we can knock out this idea immediately as only being supported by two liberal translations based upon false (Alexandrian) manuscripts. No other mainline version says this, not even the NIV. While the LXX is often used by the apostles, there are wide deviations from the Hebrew; it is a human translation of the original inspired Hebrew text and therefore not trustworthy when it deviates from it. It is only safe to use the LXX where an apostle has first used it in that sense. Basing a new doctrine (that has no exposition by an apostle) upon a divergent meaning found in the LXX is no foundation for theology.

The translations of men (whether LXX or RSV) are not our source material but rather the original texts. In this case the Hebrew text is very clear and it says, 'Israel'. So, Deuteronomy 32:8 provides not an ounce of support for the idea of territorial spirits, angelic or demonic.

Son of man, take up a lamentation for the king of Tyre, and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "You *were* the seal of perfection, Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; ... You *were* the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; You were on the holy mountain of God; You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones. ..."' Ezek 28:12-19

This passage is often used as a description of the character of Satan since statements are made that cannot apply to the King of Tyre. However, Scripture does not say that this is referring to Satan and it is using poetic language. In this case we must be very careful what we extrude from such a passage. One problem is that it calls the king a cherub and cherubs are not angels but representations of living creatures.

However, whatever the problems of this passage (and there are many that vex commentators) it says nothing about the limits of angelic territories; unless it is claimed that Satan himself was limited to the area around Tyre. But this is nonsense since even in the OT we are told that Satan's preying ground was the whole earth (Job 1:7).

Therefore, Ezekiel 28 is an exceptionally weak basis for founding a theological argument about territorial spirits. This is based upon a speculative typological interpretation and not the text.

I saw in the visions of my head *while* on my bed, and there was a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven. ... This decision *is* by the decree of the watchers, and the sentence by the word of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men. Dan 4:13, 17

This is claimed to indicate the divine institution of a network of spiritual governors on the earth over certain segments of humanity. The argument is that some of these came under satanic influence and lost their spiritual authority but kept their posts. It is said [e.g. Thomas White & C. Peter Wagner, *Territorial Spirits*, Sovereign World, 1991] that these fallen powers coincide with the pagan gods and goddesses worshipped by the Greeks and Romans, i.e. territorial deities or 'princes' who sought the worship of men. Others became connected with the worship of certain planets and astral bodies (Zeus, Mars, Hermes).

I almost have to stop myself laughing out loud here; the jumps of speculative reasoning are enormous and ludicrous.

Firstly, the watcher comes down from heaven; he does not inhabit a territory of earth.

Secondly, the narrative regards a vision during sleep on a bed and not rational thought. It, accordingly, involves deeply figurative pictures (e.g. v14-15). This is not something to found new doctrines on.

Then we are not told what the watcher is, other than he is a holy one coming down from heaven. It could be a figurative description of the Trinity. This is supported by the fact that the watchers make a decree that decides men's fate. Angels do not decree anything but are servants of God's decrees. Whatever the meaning of the 'watcher' figure, it is not an angel.

The purpose of the watchers is to make known that God rules in the kingdom of men. This is diametrically opposed to the modern idea that territorial demons rule in the kingdom of men. These watchers are not demons.

Only by the most facile and superficial interpretation could you hope to establish any kind of support for the idea of territorial spirits from this passage. Such an idea is farcical.

But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia. ... Then he said, 'Do you know why I have come to you? And now I must return to fight with the prince of Persia; and when I have gone forth, indeed the prince of Greece will come.' Dan 10: 13, 20

This is the chief passage to support the idea of territorial spirits and it seems to have some foundation. We must approach this with care.

Firstly, we must accept that the book of Daniel contains some extremely difficult passages, containing very figurative and apocalyptic statements and difficult Hebrew, which have caused controversy for centuries. It is not a good place to initiate new doctrines.

Secondly, who are these princes? It is possible to interpret them as kings. The language is very figurative and difficult but Daniel explains in this book about the successive empires to appear before the Messiah comes. Of key importance is Cyrus who enabled the Jews to be freed from exile in Babylon. Also of importance is Alexander the Great who overturned the Persian Empire and paved the way for the Gospel in the establishment of Greek culture dominating the Mediterranean. The Prince of Persia could easily be Cyrus, who is described as the king of Persia (Ezra 1:8) and the prince of Greece could easily be Alexander. 'Prince' is often used for 'king' in Scripture; indeed the 'King of Kings' is also called the 'Prince of Peace'.

This completely complies with the context of Daniel. The Geneva Bible notes also took this line but substituted Cambyses the son of Cyrus. Calvin and other Reformers adopt this general view.

Against this other commentators believe that spirits are involved, Barnes, Keil & Delitzsch and many modern commentators adopt this view.

On balance I think that we have to note that there is an intended difference between 'prince' and 'king', which are two different Hebrew words. This, in turn does seem to imply that the princes are spiritual beings. Daniel's vision is taking us into a picture of the heavenly warfare that is going on for the people of God all the time. In this case the situation is one of great significance, the protection of the people of God in hardship, the development of the nations and the coming of the Messiah. Daniel was chosen to see these things in a vision where Gabriel explained the future and Daniel wrote them down to encourage the people of God forever.

Such a message was not going to arrive without a battle, and these verses describe the hindering of the message. It appears that the devil's agents who were preoccupied with tempting the monarchy in Persia fought with Gabriel and hindered the delivering of the message but Michael (lit. 'who is like God'), an archangel (or 'chief-prince'), aided Gabriel to ensure delivery. We know that Michael is an archangel (Jude 1:9), though some believe that it is a name only applied to Christ as the commander-in-chief of the angels (e.g. John Gill). Keil & Delitzsch say that the spirit of Persia is '*the supernatural spiritual power standing behind the national gods*' (Carl Keil).

After Michael's help, Gabriel remained with the monarchy in Persia. Keil & Delitzsch add, '*The plural, "kings of Persia," neither refers to Cyrus and Cambyses, nor to Cyrus and the conquered kings living with him (Croesus, etc.), ... The plural denotes, that by the subjugation of the demon of the Persian kingdom, his influence not merely over Cyrus, but over all the following kings of Persia, was brought to an end, so that the whole of the Persian kings became accessible to the influence of the spirit proceeding from God and advancing the welfare of Israel.*'

Regarding verse 20, there are great difficulties with the meaning of the Hebrew, it is best summarised by Keil & Delitzsch, '*Thus the following will be the meaning of the passage: Now shall I return to resume and continue the war with the prince of Persia, to maintain the position gained (Dan 10:13) beside the kings of Persia; but when (while) I thus go forth to war, i.e., while I carry on this conflict, lo, the prince of Javan [i.e. Greece PF] shall come - then shall there be a new conflict.*'

So, we see that there are great difficulties in the book and in these verses. Such difficulty of exegesis is not a basis for establishing new doctrines. But what have we learned?

If we concede that 'prince' here does refer to demons and that these demons are influencing kings by their deceit and lies, how does this establish any basis for territorial spirits? Answer, it gives no support at all. We will see in the exegesis of 1 Kg 22:19-22 that God often controls rulers of nations by using demons to put lies into their heads. Daniel teaches us that sometimes the lying spirits are countermanded to change a course of action. Everything we study on this only affirms that God is sovereign and in control of nations and that he steers them through the means of angels, both angelic and demonic. Nothing more can be asserted. The idea that demons rule towns, cities and kingdoms is nowhere taught in Scripture but it contradicts the doctrine of God's sovereignty and rulership of the earth which is taught everywhere (e.g. Deut 32:8; Job 14:5; Acts 14:16, 17:24-26).

Then *Micaiah* said, 'Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by, on His right hand and on His left. And the LORD said, "Who will persuade Ahab to go up, that he may fall at Ramoth Gilead?" So one spoke in this manner, and another spoke in that manner. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, and said, "I will persuade him." The LORD said to him, "In what way?" So he said, "I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets." And the LORD said, "You shall persuade *him*, and also prevail. Go out and do so.'" 1 Kings 22:19-22

This passage is of no use in the defence of territorial spirits at all. It demonstrates the sovereignty of God over kings and nations (as opposed to demons having power over nations) and that when God seeks to make a king travel down the wrong path he sometimes uses a fallen angel to tempt him. The spirit doing the tempting is not mentioned as being on earth and he prevails over Ahab through the means of human, not spiritual, accomplices – the false prophets. Thus we see that the work of evil spirits is done through the means of human agency. All of this is contrary to the principles of territorial spirit teachings.

Interim conclusion

Having looked at the chief texts used to affirm the idea of ruling territorial spirits, we have seen that none give any substantive evidence to prove this assertion. There is no Scriptural basis for this idea. Neither is there even any Scripture data which shows that, before the rebellion of Satan, angels were given set geographical regions which they controlled.

The silence of apostolic teaching on territorial demarcation

The notion that demons rule your town, city, and nation is a very important aspect of God's decree and of great relevance to our spiritual warfare in practice. Therefore, it ought to have a significant amount of exposition by the apostles who bring to us the teaching of Christ by the ministry of the Spirit, who reveals the things of Christ and led the apostles into all truth. However, there is no teaching on this at all – only silence.

If there is no apostolic authority on this then the idea is redundant. There is no apostolic teaching on it and no apostolic precedent to support it – therefore the idea is baseless. It is a lie.

Scriptural teaching on the bounds of demonic activity

After the cross demonic forces are limited to aerial regions above the earth

They occupy aerial regions

The prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience. Eph 2:2

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.

Eph 6:12

The Greek word for 'air' in Eph 2:2 is *aer*, which refers to the denser lower atmosphere, the air just above the ground. In Eph 6:12 the word 'heavenly' is sometimes translated as 'high' but *epouranios* means 'the heavenly regions', 'heaven', 'the abode of God and angels', 'the lower heavens', or stellar space.

Far from angels or demons occupying earthly territories, they occupy the air, the atmosphere directly above earth that has no spatial limitations.

They occupy the cold lower atmosphere

For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast *them* down to hell and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment. 2 Pt 2:4

‘Hell’ here is a very rare Greek word, *tartaroo*, which derives from ‘Tartarus’ (the deepest abyss of Hades in Greek mythology, the abode of the wicked dead, the place of torment). It is curious that Peter uses such an unusual word for ‘cast down into hell’, rare even in classical Greek. Bullinger’s Critical Greek Lexicon unequivocally states that this is not Hades, nor Gehenna, and not the abode of men in any condition. It is only used here and denotes the extremities of the lower air (as in Eph 2:2). It is the bounds of material creation and so called for its coldness.

They are in chains in darkness

In addition to 2 Pt 2:4, we also have,

And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day. Jude 1:6

He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is *the* Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while. Rev 20:2-3

Demons are not free to have power of whole sways of earth’s political and cultural systems. God is in control of these and only allows demonic influences as he sees fit according to his eternal purposes. Thus demons are in chains, bound by God and restrained according to his wisdom. They do not have the power to deceive the nations according to their whims, but are bound so that they can only do what God decrees. The 1,000 years here is the church age between the cross and the Second Coming.

They are also in darkness, figuratively described as being in a bottomless pit. This is not enjoying freedom in the sunny territories of the earth but segregated into the cold domains of the atmosphere.

Demonic substance and character

Demons are fallen angels and angels are specifically stated to be ministering spirits (Greek ‘*pneuma*’, Heb 1:14). A spirit is a created being that has no material form, no body, and cannot touch physical reality without a special dispensation from God when used as his messenger to men (Gen 19:1).

The chief characteristic of demons is their dependence upon deceit. They continually lie and work in men through the use of deception to lead people astray. Jesus said of the devil that ‘there is no truth in him’, (Jn 8:44); demons always lie. Those who derive information from demons and then build up doctrines from this information are fools. Demons only deceive (1 Kg 22:22; Acts 13:10; Rm 1:25; 2 Cor 11:3, 13-15; 2 Thess 2:9-11; Rev 12:9, 20:3).

One method of deception is to fool men to believe that they occupy and govern tracts of land and which then requires all sorts of submission, prayer, rituals and worship. The demons then feed on this worship and national religions thus develop their specific pagan structures. Following their leader, a chief character trait of demons is pride. This pride is continually fed by the worship of pagans and occultists. The large number of demons is spread across the world, developing many forms of animism and paganism to satisfy their lust for pride.

Several strategies are used to inculcate the worship of men: fear, deception, threats, promises, healings, exorcisms, etc. but all are developed within deceit; nothing is as it

seems. Thus one demon will appear to work against another demon, sacrificing one aspect of Satan's kingdom, in order to gain more power for the demonic kingdom overall. So one demon will bring a person under sickness through deceitful hypnotic suggestion feeding on the person's fear, then another demon will enable the release from that sickness through a witch-doctor and overall the hold of demons upon that people is strengthened by greater dependence upon the shaman.

This technique is being used against Christians today who have succumbed to pagan ideas about territorial spirits, incorporated into Christian doctrine. The supposed defeat of demons in some missionary situation actually enables the strengthening overall of demonic error upon those who submit to it. Satan's purpose is to deceive Christians and get them to believe lies, thus depriving them of real spiritual power. Believing pagan notions about territorial spirits does this. You cannot obey God if you believe lies. This is why the apostles put so much emphasis upon knowing the truth.

Interim conclusions

- Demons are spiritual beings that have no corporeal reality. Their nature is an immaterial substance. Thus demons cannot actually occupy physical places in any real sense.
- Demons occupy the air directly above earth. They do not actually exist upon the earth.
- Demons do not rule any area of the earth; God is the ruler of the whole earth (see later).
- Demons are chained; that is they are bound by the power of God and can only operate under God's direction. Any power they manifest is limited and used only according to God's plan.
- Any influence they have upon earthly nations is through deceitful temptations of people in power or upon leaders of religion.
- The notion of territorial spirits is one of these demonic deceptions to fool Christians and make them spiritually ineffective.

Other arguments against the notion of territorial spirits

The ministry of angels

Hebrews tells us that the ministry of angels is dedicated not to a certain piece of land but to a certain group of people – the elect,

But to which of the angels has He ever said: 'Sit at My right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool'? Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation? Heb 1:13-14

Here we have a black and white apostolic statement about angels – they are sent by God as his messengers to safeguard the elect until they inherit salvation. There is no need for them to guard believers because they have God dwelling within them. Why need an angel when God dwells in you? However, before conversion the elect are often in great danger and it is the task of angels to protect the people of God to ensure that they reach conversion.

As an aside, this is also a reason why Christians should not centre their attention on angels at all; in fact this would offend an angel who is submitted to God's purposes. The modern fad of looking for angels and seeing them everywhere is detrimental to the faith of believers.

If angels are sent to minister to individuals, then there is no sense of them being centred in certain tracks of land. God does not work through rigid administrative structures; these are

worldly methods of operation, God works through individuals. Just as the method of divine operation is through the loving community of the Trinity, each Person having a specific function, so God's working on the earth is through loving individuals who are all gifted to work in a particular fashion in the church. Christ is Lord of the earth for the church, 'He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all' (Eph 1:22-23)

God's people, though now in many nations, have in many centuries been in very limited areas. Before the flood there were millions of people populating many lands but only eight people were chosen by God as being righteous. Angels were only present with Noah's family at that time. After the Passover God's people were only found in Israel (and not even all of them but only a faithful remnant; Deut 4:7-8, 14, 32-34, 7:6-8, 10:15; 2 Sam 7:22-24; Ps 147:19-20; Isa 5:7, 51:2-3; Acts 14:16). Therefore angelic ministry was only situated in the land of Israel and not elsewhere.

We can see that in divine providence certain nations have been favoured by God while other nations have been neglected having only a few conversions. For centuries after the cross certain nations had no faithful witness following the death of the apostles, who had travelled to distant lands such as China and India. Places such as Japan and the Americas were left in idolatry. Subsequent to the missionary movements many nations were evangelised but even so many are quite resistant to the Gospel with only small pockets of converts. Angels, by Biblical definition, were not present in those geographical areas where there were no Christians.

Since angels are not demarcated to geographical areas, then neither are demons. This is not to say that demons do not influence men of all nations and that there deceit lies behind idolatry. In fact Paul tells us that this is the case. But this is not proof of a demonic demarcation of geographical areas.

Insufficient demons to go round

The Charismatic presupposition is that angels were originally earmarked by God for ministry in certain geographical areas; this we have proved to be false. However, even if this were true and the original divine basis was for angels to occupy geographical places on earth, which was then taken over by rebellious angels, could it be possible to think that God would have left them to continue in that office and remain in that area? Of course not; Scripture tells us that they were thrown out of their heavenly situation and put under chains. In fact, Daniel 10 shows us that when a demon was in the way of divine providence for Persia and Israel, he was dealt with in a heavenly battle.

Furthermore, if the original geographical demarcation was true, then all the angels would have been given responsibility for all the earth. However, in his rebellion, Satan only took with him a third of the heavenly host (Rev 12:4). He would not have enough angels to do the job!

The pantheons of false gods

Advocates of territorial spirits affirm that the gods of false religions correlate with actual territorial spirits. In this they derive their understanding from paganism and not Scripture. Whilst demons are attracted by the worship of men and use idolatry to cement their hold on men, Scripture does not tell us that this is the work of territorial demons, just demons in general. Demons always lie and use deception to trap men into following them; thus false teaching is the doctrine of demons (1 Tim 4:1). It is very dangerous to build doctrinal platforms based upon the works of demons in pagan cultures. In fact most pantheons arise from a different source.

The origin of the original pantheons was the deification of kings and queens in rebellion against God, men seeking to be God, which is what Scripture tells us is the basis Adamic sin and the basis of the number 666. This occurred at first in the deification of Nimrod as the sun god and his wife Semiramis as the moon goddess at Babel.

The Babylonian occult religious system that Nimrod established was the model for all the occult false systems that followed; they were varieties of the same basic idolatrous system. This affected the mythology and worship of all nations but also the mystical and occult techniques used in all nations. Thus modern magic is only a development of Babylonian magic; mystical emotional worship leading to passivity and suggestibility based upon loud rhythmic music is not new, it comes from Babylon. More recently than Babylon, Egypt shows us this deification of kings very clearly. Greek mythology shows us the deification of kings along with associating them with natural forces; sun, storms, water, fire etc. Norse, Celtic and Indian mythology also shows us gods of natural processes, as do many others. Even the concept of pyramids and towers to reach towards heaven is worldwide, but it began at Babel. It was the deception of demons inciting men to rebel against God that led to men deifying themselves and demanding public worship. The demons did not, at first, deify themselves. They stimulated the pride of men to seek to become gods.

The parallel pantheons across the world demonstrate this influence of a certain historic model based upon Babylon. If geographical individual demons were the basis of all national pantheons then they would all be different; but they are not; there are many similarities. Neither do we see invading armies change their gods once they occupy a new land to associate with the territorial principality. Instead they proclaim that their gods were stronger and inflict the new gods upon the conquered people. If territorial spirits were behind national gods, then ancient pagan peoples would have been too frightened to invade other countries for fear of offending unknown God's who are only placated by unknown rituals.

When pagan national deities are mentioned in Scripture, we are never told that they are demonic 'principalities'; despite this Charismatic commentators, such as C. Peter Wagner declare that they are [*Wrestling with Dark Angels*, 'Territorial Spirits', Monarch, (1990) p90.] This is eisegesis, reading something into the text which is not there; it is the basis of false teaching.

Demons inhabit idolatrous worship but the idols themselves are nothing (called 'nonentities', *elilim*, in the OT, 1 Chron 16:26; Ps 96:5, 97:7). Paul specifically states that, 'an idol is nothing in the world' (*oudeis*, 1 Cor 8:4). Thus the pagan gods are nothing; Zeus, Vishnu, Isis etc. are nothing, merely empty concepts. The prayer and sacrifices to such nonentities go to demonic forces (Deut 32:17; 1 Cor 10:20). As God inhabits the praises of his saints, so demons inhabit pagan sacrifices. Demons built up this false system of nonentities by deceiving pagan people through a series of temptations and false direction to men in history. However, there is no Biblical information that there is a territorial limit of demons in this, merely that the system is demonic.

The temptation of demons in building up these false religions was for kings to deify themselves and pattern themselves after natural forces (such as sun, storms etc.). Even in such a rational, organised, enlightened society as the Roman Empire it was not long before emperors adopted self-deification and demanded sacrifices to themselves. Such is the hubris of man always trying to be God; always playing out the temptation of the fall.

Another point is that if pagan pantheons were based upon territorial spirits, each land having their own principality and religion, then why did these religions largely die out? The

demon did not perish, but the religion did. No one worships Athena today; where did the territorial demon of Athena go? Where did the demon behind Loki go? If Odin was really a demon who was restricted to Norway, what happened to him when people stopped believing in the gods?

In a similar way false teaching in the church is also said to be demonic; resulting from false teachers whose mind has been captivated by the devil to do his will (1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 2:26). This teaching goes beyond geographical boundaries and has nothing to do with a territorially limited demon; it is just demonic. All false teaching, whether pagan or errors in church, is demonic and the result of demonic deception. However, there is no specificity in this regarding demarcation of demonic boundaries.

Scriptural instruction on demonic ranking

Supporters of territorial demons often describe a sort of ranking system based upon Eph 6:12.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.

An example would be stating that ‘principalities’ refers to princes over nations (such as Persia). However, different writers fail to agree on what these terms mean and what term applies to what geographical space. There is no unanimity amongst Charismatics on this; and there never can be because Scripture does not define these titles.

In fact, Scripture gives a number of various titles to Satan’s legions. These include:

- Angels (Rm 8:38), meaning fallen angels.
- Demons (Lev 17:7; Mk 6:13).
- Principalities (*arche*, Eph 3:10, 6:12; Col 2:15; ‘rulers’ in NASB).
- Powers (*exousia*, Eph 3:10, 6:12; Col 2:15; ‘authorities’ in NRSV, and NASB in Eph 3:10 & Col 2:15).
- Powers (*dunamis*, Rm 8:38). [Though this could be referring to human authorities.]
- Rulers of the darkness of this age (Eph 6:12).
- Spiritual hosts of wickedness (Eph 6:12).

Other titles are less certain, such as thrones (*thronos*, Col 1:16), dominions (*kuriotes*, Col 1:16), powers (*exousia*, Col 1:16) since Paul could be (in fact, is likely) talking about elect angels here. So too, ‘**principality and power and might and dominion**’ in Eph 1:21. In other cases we cannot be certain that human agencies are not in view, such as 1 Pt 3:22, ‘**angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him**’; or Eph 1:21.

Now we are not told what relationship such titles have to one another, or even if any genuine differences exist at all. Frequently God is spoken of with several titles of power that all refer to one person, e.g. ‘Lord, God, Almighty’; we do not have to assume that powers and principalities are necessarily different beings or demons with different functions. This is an interpretation and not a statement of fact.

Secondly, the lists of power (whether angelic or demonic) vary in their order of rank. See:

- Col 1:16: *thronos, kuriotes, arche, exousia*.
- Eph 6:12: *arche, exousia*.

Scripture seems to have deliberately avoided consistency.

Thirdly, why are some titles at the head of a list and then never mentioned again elsewhere (e.g. *thronos*).

In other words, there is no consistent approach by the apostles to specify ranks of fallen angels; indeed they seem to have gone out of their way to avoid this. If the apostles had wished (under God's inspiration) to give us a detailed ranking and function of demons, they would have done so clearly. They did not, so we should not try to second guess their intentions and imagine our own list of ranks. This is why Pentecostal / Charismatic writings on this have differed (and disagreed) for decades.

There is every indication that the various titles attributed to angels (good and bad) include all these terms, which affirm their power. In other words, angels are all these things; they are all principalities, thrones, dominions, power etc.

Charismatic errors on demonic ranking

In opposition to the Scriptural position, which gives no clear evidence regarding the ranks of demons, certain men claim to have more knowledge on this matter than God has given us. This is an act of both hubris and delusion. One example of this is Thomas White, who says,

The study of both the Old and New Testaments, with additional evidence from Apocryphal texts reveals three categories of fallen angels. [*Territorial Spirits: Insights on strategic-level spiritual warfare from nineteen Christian leaders*, 'Understanding Principalities and Powers', ed. C. Peter Wagner, Sovereign World (1991), p60.]

These three categories are then described as:

1. Angels who fell with Satan's rebellion.
2. Angels who committed fornication with women and are now bound in chains (Gen 6:2).
3. Angels who are responsible for watching and ruling over certain people groups.

The first thing to state is that any evidence from extra-Biblical sources must be dismissed as not inspired. Secondly, there is no Scriptural support for this system of classification anywhere. Then, we have already dealt with the question of 'watchers' earlier, showing this claim to be false and without foundation.

Regarding Gen 6:2, this is an old red herring, long since dismissed in academic studies. Firstly, a spirit has no material form whatsoever and without a corporeal dimension could not have sex with a human being. The fact that God endowed angels from time to time to appear as men to communicate with saints is irrelevant; this was an act of divine permission and power and may not even have been in actual corporeal form, just appearance of it. The term 'sons of God' may occasionally refer to angels but usually refers to men. In this passage it means the sons of the godly line of Seth who wrongly took wives from the lineage of Cain, and this led to the worldwide apostasy which ended in the judgment of the flood.¹

Thus White's thesis is entirely speculative and without any Scriptural foundation at all. Why on earth would anyone accept it, let alone build a new doctrine on it?

¹ For classic academic discussions of this text see: John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, Eerdmans, (1981) Appendix A, p243-9 or CF Keil & F Delitzsch, *Comm. on the OT*, (1949) Vol. 1, p127-139. The description of Scripture is not a division between humans and angels but between those who began to call on the name of the Lord (Gen 4:26) as separated from the line of Cain. Note that the judgment for this sin fell upon men not upon fallen angels. Also worthy of consideration is that Jesus told us that angels do not marry, i.e. do not have sexual relations. They are of a different creation to men.

Roger Forster built upon this concept and developed the heresy further to include the idea of governing functions of the world ruled by angels but which fell into devilish hands when Satan rebelled; these are administrative structures which uphold the created order. God could not remove these functions with disturbing the world order and allowed demons to keep their governmental positions in the world. In time these governmental positions will be occupied by believers, but there are not enough of them to do this task yet. Until this number is complete, Christ's return will be delayed. He also states that, confusingly, the spiritual powers involved in Satan's rebellion (principalities) sometimes repent and improve! He even suggests that negotiations are under way with demons to find a way forward.

The effect of this utter nonsense is staggering in its import. It teaches that God does not have full control over his own creation and that he is dependent upon fallen angels in order to keep it from falling apart. It teaches that fallen angels can repent when Scripture tells us that they cannot. He states that Satan's rebellion put God in a predicament, (this results from his near Socinian Arminianism) when Scripture tells us that God's eternal decree predestined all that takes place in time is according to a divine plan for his own glory.

Clearly, all of this arrant, superstitious nonsense is a grave dishonour to the sovereignty of God and rests upon nothing but human imagination and not upon the Bible. In fact, Scripture does not even suggest that the created order is devolved to angelic agencies, good or bad, but is directly controlled by God himself; a subject to which we must now turn.

The sovereignty of God over the earth

God is sovereign. This is the fundamental truth of the Bible that God is Lord over all and glorious in all his ways. There is nothing that God is not sovereign over, absolutely nothing. God is sovereign because he is the creator, he made everything and is thus the owner of all things. He is also sovereign because he is the king, he is the governor of all things in creation, and this includes the realm of angels, who are created beings.

The source of this information is God's own word which he gave us so that we would have instruction in all matters. There is nothing we need that God's word does not cover, or give us directions whereby we can derive principles from to deal with (2 Tim 3:16). Therefore any matter that is not explained to us (such as the ranking of angels) is not something of importance to us.

A few important texts to support the truth that God is sovereign over all things, good and bad follows:

God is sovereign over 'good' things

Good and bad are only conceived as such from our subjective perspective. In reality, everything God does is good, that is, everything he does is fitting for its perfect purpose. For instance, the sentencing of evil men to hell is good; it is suited to its purpose, which is to glorify God's wrath, justice and judgment. It is the righteous response to sin; but to sinners this appears to be bad. Here are just a few texts regarding God's sovereignty over good things.

He increased His people greatly, and made them stronger than their enemies. Ps 105:24

The people asked, and He brought quail, and satisfied them with the bread of heaven. Ps 105:40

He brought out His people with joy, His chosen ones with gladness. Ps 105:43

He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.
Matt 5:45

God is sovereign over 'bad' things

They consoled him and comforted him for all the adversity [*ra'* = evil] that the LORD had brought upon him. Job 42:11

That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting that *there is* none besides me. I *am* the LORD, and *there is* no other; I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity [*ra'* = evil]; I, the LORD, do all these *things*. Isa 45:6-7

Indeed with my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness; their fish stink because *there is* no water, and die of thirst. I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering. Isa 50:2-3

Who *is* he *who* speaks and it comes to pass, *when* the Lord has not commanded *it? Is it* not from the mouth of the Most High that woe [*ra'* = evil] and well-being proceed? Lam 3:37-38

If there is calamity [*ra'* = evil] in a city, will not the LORD have done *it?* Amos 3:6

Thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I am fashioning a disaster [*ra'* = evil] and devising a plan against you.' Jer 18:11b

Sometimes God uses Satan and his demons, or men, to accomplish 'bad' things according to his predetermined plan.

The adversity that the LORD had brought upon him. Job 42:11; with, Satan went out from the presence of the LORD, and struck Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. Job 2:7

The anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, 'Go, number Israel and Judah.' 2 Sam 24:1; with, Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel. 1 Chron 21:1

Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death. Acts 2:23

God owns and rules the earth

Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the LORD your God, *also* the earth with all that *is* in it. Deut 10:14

Who has preceded me, that I should pay *him?* Everything under heaven is mine. Job 41:11

Yours, O LORD, *is* the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all *that is* in heaven and in earth *is yours*; yours *is* the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head over all. 1 Chron 29:11

The earth *is* the LORD's, and all its fulness, the world and those who dwell therein. Ps 24:1

For the world *is* mine, and all its fulness. Ps 50:12

The heavens *are* yours, the earth also *is* yours; the world and all its fulness, you have founded them. Ps 89:11

The Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses. Dan 4:25

The earth *is* the LORD's, and all its fulness. 1 Cor 10:26

God is in control of nations

And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings. Acts 17:26

You drove out the nations with your hand, but them you planted; you afflicted the peoples, and cast them out. For they did not gain possession of the land by their own sword, nor did their own arm save them; but it was your right hand, your arm, and the light of your countenance, because you favoured them. Ps 44:2-3

He also drove out the nations before them, allotted them an inheritance by survey. Ps 78:55

You have brought a vine out of Egypt; you have cast out the nations, and planted it. Ps 80:8

He gave them the lands of the Gentiles, and they inherited the labour of the nations. Ps 105:44

God controls all natural processes

He called for a famine in the land; He destroyed all the provision of bread. Ps 105:16

He sent darkness, and made *it* dark. Ps 105:28

He turned their waters into blood, and killed their fish. Ps 105:29

He spoke, and there came swarms of flies, *and* lice in all their territory. Ps 105:31

He gave them hail for rain, *and* flaming fire in their land. Ps 105:32

He struck their vines also, and their fig trees, and splintered the trees of their territory. He spoke, and locusts came, young locusts without number, and ate up all the vegetation in their land, and devoured the fruit of their ground. Ps 105:33-35

God controls the days of men

Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when *as yet there were* none of them. Ps 139:16

Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. Matt 10:29-31

But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. Lk 12:7

We could continue giving thousands more references but we already have more than enough. The point is established; God directly rules over all things, even things men consider to be bad; 'being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will' (Eph 1:11). He rules the earth and everything in the spiritual (heavenly) sphere. This means that there is nothing on earth or heaven that is ruled over by either angels or demons.

Demons effect their governing power through tempting men to sin and follow their deceptions. However these are all under the control of God's predestined purpose to glorify his name and bring forth the elect as a glorious church. Even the plans of the enemy are subservient to the eternal purposes of God.

Furthermore, Scripture plainly states that Christ is victorious over the realm of demons now, not in the future. He is Lord over all.

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.' Matt 28:18

His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church. Eph 1:19-22

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Phil 2:9-11

You are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. ... Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. Col 2:10, 15

You have put all things in subjection under his feet. Heb 2:8

Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him. 1 Pt 3:21-22

What could be clearer, Jesus is sovereign over heaven and earth; that includes Satan and his demons. There is no fight necessary to establish the sovereignty of Jesus, he is already Lord. Our job is merely to have faith in that victory and apply it now. Faith is necessary because we do not yet see the victory of Jesus operating on earth because God is patiently waiting for all the elect to be born and saved.

The stewardship of the earth was originally given to Adam, but his fall meant that it was taken from him. It was not then given to Satan but was given to Christ, the second man, the firstborn of a new creation of men.

The teaching of Forster and many others is that something has to happen before Satan's world government is overthrown, but Scripture clearly teaches us that this happened at the cross. But Satan never ruled the earth at any time, it was always in the domain of God.

The essence of spiritual warfare

The basis of the concept behind territorial spirits is the direct confrontation of these demons in particular ways. Some weave complex strategies regarding the method of defeating a 'principality' as opposed to a 'power'. It is variously suggested that a church or group of churches are needed to defeat a principality but and individual can defeat a single lesser demon. Whole books and multiple seminars are produced in order to explain the complex details of spiritual warfare at various levels.

All of this is absolute junk. There is no other term suitable; it is rubbish.

There is no Biblical teaching anywhere, that I am aware of, which teaches believers to confront demons as non-entities; in an immaterial way. In early Charismaticism and classic Pentecostalism prayer meetings often had to be prefaced by an individual coming

against the spirits before the prayers could begin; any localised spirit had to be bound in a certain way. There is no Biblical precedent or teaching on such superstition; we are never told to bind spirits before we can succeed on some venture. God always hears the prayers of his saints, as long as they are ministering in the new nature and not in sin.

The only time a believer may need to actually confront a demon is when he is witnessing to a pagan who requires help to rid himself of his evil past in the process of conversion. This is not always required but it may be necessary on occasion if someone is steeped in the occult. There is no Biblical evidence for the demonisation of Christians who have God dwelling in their hearts and no basis for a specific ministry of 'deliverance' (i.e. exorcists).

Apostolic teaching makes it plain that the battle against the hosts of wickedness is for the mind and it is usually located in the battle against deceit. There is also information about the spiritual battle involving persecution against the church by an oppressing human government, but this is a corporate battle by the church; the individual battle is for the mind.

Thus we are told,

For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. 2 Cor 10:4-5

The pulling down of strongholds in spiritual warfare is in changing our mind in the renewing of it and repentance and the casting down of false teaching. It is dealing with everything which is against the knowledge of God – i.e. error.

But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. Rm 7:23

The war is against the evil lusts in the old nature; the mind chooses to sin or to be righteous and this leads to war. Demons tempt us to sin and so this warfare is in the mind, in the soul, to throw off the temptation to sin.

For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Heb 4:12

Ephesians tells us that the sword of the Spirit must be used in our warfare against demons. Here this sword of God is shown to be something that operates in opening up the personality to God's word to reveal the intents of the heart and mind; in other words God's truth is applied to us internally to show us where we are going wrong.

Jesus told us that 'out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies' (Matt 15:19). Spiritual warfare is based upon getting us to think wrongly and rebel against God, to sin, to shift allegiance. The battle for this begins in the mind and heart, for out of the heart comes the directions of life (Prov 4:23). Spiritual warfare is in the mind.

This is why the centre of the Christian armour in Ephesians 6 is the belt of truth, which girds the person up and enables him to fight. It also explains why we need a helmet, the word of God, to protect our mind. It also shows us that above the heart we must have a

breastplate of righteousness; the warfare is about obeying in righteousness, about confronting sin in the heart and mind.

The fight of the Christian is about truth. The devil uses deceit to turn men away from the truth but the Holy Spirit empowers people to uphold the truth and this sets them free (Jn 8:32). Spiritual warfare centres upon the fight for truth and the defeat of error. It is a satanic temptation to lead men away from this into a pretended war against Satan through a number of supposedly direct confrontations. Such exploits are delusions and evidence that people have fallen for a detailed satanic temptation. We know this to be true because there is no Biblical basis for them whatsoever. The delusions of the Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare of Wagner are actually a falling into a type of paganism and occult delusion.

Prayer is also a chief feature in spiritual warfare, as Ephesians 6:18 demonstrates, ‘praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints’. The purpose of this prayer is for perseverance against all obstacles, both for me and for the church (‘all the saints’). The battle for truth in the mind is sealed with prayer for the church and me. Therefore much prayer should be undertaken that God’s people enter into the truth and win this battle of the mind against the deceit of the enemy. Prayer in spiritual warfare is not about finding the name or character of the local demon and praying against him, but praying that God’s people will fight for truth, grow in grace and walk right. Then they will walk right and thus can properly put on the preparation of Gospel preaching (Eph 6:15). The people who are effective in spiritual warfare will be effective in evangelism. The people who win the battle for their mind and fill it with truth we be able to share that truth with others and bring peace.

Conclusion

A chief problem with the territorial spirit emphasis is that it continually directs the attention of the saints on to demons and away from Christ. In some Charismatic prayer meetings you would think that the members’ complete attention was on demons and an imaginary fight against them with little mention of the Lord Jesus at all. But Scripture tells us that Christ is pre-eminent and that we are to centre upon him. Any attention given to demons, real or imaginary, is a waste of time and a distraction.

However, worse than that, this over-attention on demons actually leads us into playing according to Satan’s rules and not God’s. Focusing on demons leads into our actions being determined by Satan’s strategy (i.e. the product of false teaching) and not God’s direction or leading by the Holy Spirit. For instance, the Charismatic practice of ‘binding the spirits’ before a meeting has no Scriptural warrant at all but is a mistake; doing this leads us into a satanic diversion before the meeting has even begun. It also can inculcate fear into weaker members and does terrible damage to the purpose of edification. We must not conduct meetings according to Satan’s rules.

The foundation of the notion of territorial spirits is based upon upon paganism and not Scripture; indeed apologetic works for territorial spirits contain many anecdotes from the mission field or from occult-ridden primitive cultures to support their arguments; but extra Biblical information must not be used to formulate a doctrine. Some individuals, such as Rita Cabezas, actually name individual demons and principalities gained by demonic confessions and Charismatic subjectivism (‘words of knowledge’), which are actually a mix of wrongly applied Biblical descriptions and titles derived from occult dictionaries. Worse than that, some apologetic studies have even used the myth of the

Bermuda Triangle to support their case; this urban legend has been repeatedly dismissed by investigative specialists as having no support whatsoever. The fact that idolatrous pagan nations believe that gods only rule over certain nations is no reason for us to believe it.

The teaching of territorial spirits is also dangerous because it provides a theological platform to foster the idea of taking the world for Christ and ruling it as a political entity. The error continually exhorts people to take cities, regions and nations for Christ in a concerted action of fighting demonic spirits. This further endorses the dominionism, which characterises the current radical Charismatic movement. The movement to take control of nations politically is aided by the notion that, first, Charismatics must take those nations spiritually by defeating territorial spirits. The notion of territorial spirits is just a further plank of demonic deception that is operating in the apostate Charismatic movement.

Scripture quotations are from The New King James Version
© Thomas Nelson 1982

Paul Fahy Copyright © 2011
Understanding Ministries
<http://www.understanding-ministries.com>