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DEMON POSSESSION

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≈ **His People Endure Forever** ≈
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Adventurous wanderers have always searched for answers to questions that excite their imagination. When they go on a search, they seem to always go to extremes. Astronomers gaze through telescopes in order to discover some new secret that might answer the riddle of life. However, the telescopes are never large enough to satisfy our desire to go to the extreme. Others will keep sending probes and space ships into deepest space in order to seek either knowledge or life or both. Geologists keep digging deeper into the earth's surface, hoping that they will uncover some fragment of the ancient past that will shed light on our history. We continually become doctors of philosophy,

hoping that we will come up with some new truth. We have always had a desire to uncover and discover that which we do not fully understand, and too often, simply cannot understand. Our inquisitive nature has always driven us to the limit of our senses. We are the same with our faith.

In the religious world, many people have for centuries sought to understand the spirit world. Hearsay and phenomenal “experiences” of supposedly wandering spirits and lurking demons have only excited our imagination to visualize things that go beyond the facts and beyond our senses. Our mystic inclinations have moved our minds beyond Bible facts. Too many emotional adventurers have roamed beyond reality into a world of self-deception and fantasy. Our concern here is what the Bible says about these things, and especially, what does it say concerning the subject of demon possession. This subject seems to fascinate the mystically excited and often biblically misguided religionist who cannot seem to place his or her faith in God’s word alone.

1. Demon Possession

Those who believe in modern-day demon possession contend that demons have the power to voluntarily and subjectively indwell and control any person they so choose. It is also believed by some that these demons can work miracles through those over whom they exercise control. As demons possessed individuals in the first century during the ministry of Jesus and His disciples, so it is believed that they possess people today. As they were cast out in the first century, so they must be cast out today.

It is not my purpose in this book to study either the history of or the current events surrounding the subject of demon possession that are commonly circulated among excited and misguided religionists. My purpose here will be **to study the subject in the Bible**. From this study we can then determine whether “modern-day demon possession” is the same as that which is explained in the Bible. Or possibly, we may

discover that what is commonly referred to as demon possession today is not really that which is defined in the Bible to be demon possession. If it is not so defined, then it must be called something else.

There are specific definitions in the New Testament that identify true demon possession. We do not want to allow ourselves to be deceived by the modern-day psychological phenomena that people claim to be demon possession. Therefore, we must seek to understand the characteristics of demon possession **only** as it is defined in the New Testament.

True demon possession must be defined by the Bible alone. At the same time, it is erroneous to associate New Testament demon possession with a modern-day psychological phenomenon, as the self-hypnotic trance of some witch or charmer, or the hysterical fit of some uncontrolled neurotic worshiper. It is wrong to identify epilepsy or physical sicknesses we observe today as the demon possession that is identified in the New Testament. In other words, **we must never define demon possession in the New Testament by what we may claim to be demon possession today.** We must do the reverse. We must first gather as much information as possible from the New Testament cases of demon possession in order to construct a definition of what true demon possession is. We would approach any subject of the Bible in this manner, and thus, we must do the same when studying the subject of demon possession.

With the above in mind, the following points and chapters give a brief description of the characteristics of demon possession in the New Testament. We must remember, however, that we do not have a complete picture of what occurred in every case of New Testament demon possession. **When we combine all the cases of possession,** we are still left without much information that would allow us to have a complete picture of this first century phenomenon. However, the New Testament does give sufficient information to identify first century demon possession to be different from the psychological phenomenon

that we see today that is often called demon possession.

The following is a list of demon possession cases in the New Testament. As we survey through these cases, there are some specific points of definition that are mentioned in each case that help us formulate a definition of the characteristics of true demon possession. One should not simply consider one case of possession. Consider all the cases together in order to develop a composite understanding of the nature of true demon possession.

CASES OF DEMON POSSESSION

1. Matthew 8:28-33; 9:32-34; 12:22,23 (15:21-28; Mk 7:24-33)
2. Matthew 17:14-18 (Lk 9:37-43; Mk 9:17-29)
3. Luke 4:33-37 (Mk 1:21-28,32-34; Lk 8:1-3,30-38; Mk 5:1-20)
4. Acts 8:7; 16:16-18; 19:11-16

From the above recorded cases of demon possession, consider the following characteristics or situations that surrounded the possession. These are important guidelines we must use in determining what true demon possession was.

A. The Beliefs Of Demons

Demons had an intellectual ability to believe in certain things. They were not raging characters with hideous animalistic manifestations that often characterize the descriptions of those who believe in the modern-day demon possession of Hollywood films. Their characteristics as defined in the New Testament do give us a glimpse of the hideous world of Satan and his hosts. Keep in mind that it was not the work of demons to strike terror in individuals. It was their purpose to lead the possessed from God and to manifest the wretched world of Satan.

1. Demons recognized final judgment.

One demon replied to Jesus, *“Have you come here to torment us before the time?”* (Mt 8:29; Mk 1:24). Demons, or the devil’s angels, know that they are destined for a final judgment and destruction that is

“prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mt 25:41). Demons are evidently fallen angels, and thus, have now been *“reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day”* (Jd 6). They are now *“reserved for judgment”* (2 Pt 2:4), after which they will face their destruction. They intellectually know their destiny.

2. Demons believe in God.

In view of the demon's recognition of the one God, James wrote that *“the demons believe—and tremble”* (Js 2:19). They believe in one God and are not polytheists, that is, they do not believe in many gods. The Gadarene demoniac confessed, *“What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?”* (Lk 8:28). It appears that demons are more willing to confess their belief in God than many of the world today.

3. Demons recognize the deity of Jesus.

In reference to their recognition of Jesus, demons cried out, *“What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God”* (Mt 8:29). One demon cried out, *“I know who You are—the Holy One of God”* (Mk 1:24; see Lk 4:34). Demons certainly recognized the heavenly origin and incarnation of Jesus. They knew that all things had been delivered into Jesus' hand, for He had power over their destiny (See Jn 3:35; 13:3; 17:2).

4. Demons recognized the power of Jesus.

In recognizing the sovereignty of Jesus, several demons *“begged Him that He would not command them to go out into the abyss”* (Lk 8:31). Jesus had the power to instantly condemn demons to confinement in the abyss (See Mt 8:29; Mk 5:7). Because the demons recognized this, they unquestionably subjected themselves to Jesus. Mark 5:6 describes the reaction of a demon possessed individual when the demon recognized Jesus: *“But when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped Him.”* Demon possessed people in the first century recognized the power and

authority of Jesus. The demons did not move the one whom they possessed to attack Jesus. They moved the possessed to fall down before Jesus.

5. Demons recognized their end.

When demons were confronted by Jesus, they recognized that their end was near. The unclean spirit in Mark 1 asked Jesus, *“Did you come to destroy us?”* (vs 24; see also Lk 4:33-36). The answer to the question was, **“Yes!”** Jesus did come to destroy their human possession and to keep them cast *“down to hell [tartarus]”* and delivered *“to chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment”* (2 Pt 2:4). Because of this power that Jesus exercised over demons, **they totally submitted to His will**, pleading as one did, *“I beg You, do not torment me”* (Lk 8:28).

Knowing that their end was imminent, the demons of Luke 8 *“begged Him that He would not command them to go out into the abyss”* (Lk 8:31). Instead, they asked Jesus for permission to enter a herd of swine (Lk 8:32). **They made this request in view of the fact that their days for possessing humans were drawing to a close during the ministry of Jesus.**

One important point that is understood from the demon possession case of Luke 8 is that **spirits seek to be embodied**. The demons of Luke 8 chose to indwell the bodies of pigs over being disembodied. Paul related that the final desire of Christians is not to be disembodied (unclothed), *“but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life”* (2 Co 5:4). *“For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven”* (2 Co 5:2).

We do not want to exist apart from bodily presence. Neither did the demons. For this reason, God allowed demons to have a brief taste of what could have been in their case in reference to their proper habitation (See Jd 6). God allowed them to briefly indwell bodies in history in order to give us evidence of their reality, as well as to manifest the great desire on the part of spirits to indwell a body. **It also reveals to us the great privilege that we have to indwell a body**

in the presence of this physical environment. Dwelling with a body likewise gives us encouragement concerning the new habitation that we will receive in our changed bodies in which we will dwell in heaven to come (See 2 Co 5:1-8).

B. Characteristics Of Demon Possession

When we consult the dictionary of the New Testament, there is definitely a difference between a Bible definition of demons, and those fantasies of demons that are conjured up in the minds of imaginative people today. The following is a listing of points that define demons as beings who were different from spirits:

BIBLE DEFINITION OF DEMONS

1. Demons could comprehend the prophecies of their doom (Mt 8:29).
2. Demons could speak (Mk 1:34).
3. Demons could carry on a coherent conversation with the living (Mk 5:7).
4. Demons could obey (Mt 8:16; 17:18).
5. Demons could entreat (Lk 8:31).
6. Demons had intellectual abilities (Mt 8:29; Mk 1:24).
7. Some demons enhanced the physical strength of those they possessed (Lk 8:29).
8. Some demons evidently caused physical deformities (Lk 13:11-17).
9. Some demons evidently caused one to be mute, or not be able to speak (Mt 9:17,24,32,33).
10. Some demons evidently drove the individual they possessed to suicidal mania (Mk 9:22).
11. Some demons evidently caused mental disorders (Mt 8:28,29; Lk 8:26-36).
12. Demons could easily be cast out by the word of Jesus (Mt 17:18; Lk 9:41,42).
13. Demons could easily be cast out by Jesus' disciples (Lk 10:17; At 16:16-18; 19:11,12).
14. Demons could pass through "waterless places" and not find rest (Mt 12:43-45).
15. Demons could leave people and enter animals (Mk 5:12-14).
16. Demons indwelt those who did not practice occult religions that promoted psychological and mental control that they called demon possession. (This seems to be the case of Mark 9:14-29. This possessed son had been cursed with

an unclean spirit from childhood.)

17. Demons recognized and confessed the Son of God (Lk 8:28).

18. Demons confessed the one true God (Lk 8:28).

In the New Testament, demons are referred to as “devils,” “demons,” “evil spirits,” “unclean spirits” and the “angels” of the Devil. Demons had certain beliefs and characteristics. They caused certain effects in the individuals they possessed, but they did not cause a person to be diseased. Demon possession was not a disease.

Any so-called “possessions” today must be defined by the cases of demon possession we read about in the New Testament. Any effort to use a modern-day phenomenon to explain Bible revelation is unwarranted. The same would be true concerning the practices of witches and enchanters during the time of Jesus. **Any effort to use the beliefs and practices of sorcerers today to define the demon possession of Jesus’ time would be using a deception of Satan to explain the reality of evil that Jesus personally confronted.** Jesus confronted and conquered the real powers of Satan that God allowed at that time to be unleashed. Jesus did not show His power over Satan by confronting the tricks of some deceptive sorcerer of Palestine.

The battle between the super powers was fought in Jesus’ day between the real powers of the unseen world. Jesus won the battle. The victory was recorded. God does not have to prove that victory again by allowing demons to carry on today as they so desire.

We must remember, therefore, **that the Bible must be used as our only source to define true demon possession.** This is true because of the wild imaginations of those who are set on deceiving both themselves and others. The above list of characteristics of demons and their possession of individuals is taken from an overview of New Testament cases of demon possession. We must study these characteristics closely and then compare them with what is called

demon possession today. In doing this we discover that the phenomenon that is called demon possession today is not the same as the true demon possession that is recorded in the New Testament.

It is far too easy to allow modern-day psychological experiences, that we may personally not understand, to influence our understanding of demon possession in the New Testament. It is not right to label with a Bible word or phrase something that is entirely foreign to the Bible. Such is commonly practiced in the religious world today. The Bible alone must be used to define true demon possession. If we do not do this, then we are subject to stealing from the Bible any word or phrase we might so desire in order to “make biblical” some religious invention we might conjure up. The Bible is our only dictionary when discussing those things that relate to the spirit world. For this reason, we will contend that we first define and identify all things by what the Bible says. We will refrain from reading into the Bible those things that we experience of this world, lest we create a religion after our own experiences.

2. Purpose Of Demon Possession

God does things for a purpose. His final purpose is to get prepared people to a prepared dwelling in the new heavens and earth (See 2 Co 5:5; 2 Pt 3:13). Therefore, when considering the demon possession of the New Testament, we must remind ourselves that there was a purpose for which God allowed demons to possess people in the first century. Understanding this purpose helps us to understand why God limited the time when demons could possess people.

We must recognize that demon possession was actual and real during the ministry of Jesus and the early disciples. But this was a unique period of God’s work in the world. God allowed demons, who were representatives of Satan, to possess people for specific reasons. When we understand these reasons, then we will understand why demons have not been allowed to possess people today.

A. Demons Revealed Power Of Jesus

Demon possession existed in order to demonstrate Jesus' authority and power over Satan. Jesus came in order to *"destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil"* (Hb 2:14). He came to crush Satan (See the prophecy of Gn 3:15). He accomplished this work at the cross, *"having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them"* (Cl 2:15; see Mt 12:28,29; Lk 10:18; Jn 12:31). Therefore, God allowed demons to possess people during the ministry of Jesus and His disciples in order that He might openly manifest for us the power and authority of Jesus and His disciples over Satan and his hosts. Every time a demon was cast out it was a demonstration of the forces of righteousness over the forces of wickedness (See Mt 9:33; 12:22,23,28,29; Lk 10:17-19). Once this demonstration was completed and recorded, there was no more need to openly and visibly manifest the power and authority of Jesus and His disciples over the spirit world of Satan and demons.

Once God proved the superiority of Jesus and revelation of the gospel through Jesus, the environment in which the spiritual battle had taken place in the spirit world was forever changed. The enemy would never again be allowed to make himself visibly known through the possession of people. He would be able to make himself known only through the obsession of those who would seek to do evil.

It is very important that we clearly understand the above purpose of demon possession in the first century. When God accomplished this purpose in allowing demons to possess people, He terminated this open manifestation of the power and work of Satan. Once the purpose was completed, there was no more a necessity to prove the point.

Satan is *"the prince of the power of the air"* (Ep 2:2). All demons are subject to him. Jesus came in order that the works of God might be manifested in Him (See Jn 9:1ff). In order for this to be done, God had to

allow Satan the opportunity to manifest his delegated power and authority in an open manner during the ministry of Jesus as Jesus was the revealed power of God in the world. Therefore, **God allowed Satan to develop an environment in the land of Palestine that would allow Jesus to enter and to prove His power over Satan.** When Jesus came, therefore, He came to demonstrate His power and authority over the kingdom of Satan. This is what Jesus meant when He said,

Or else how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house (Mt 12:29).

God allowed the strong man (Satan) the opportunity to build his house in order that Jesus plunder it. **We would never have known that Jesus had absolute authority over all that Satan represented if God had not allowed Satan to manifest his most wicked behavior.**

Satan was the strong man in the statement of Jesus in Matthew 12:29. Jesus was the one who plundered the strong man's house. John wrote, ***“For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil”*** (1 Jn 3:8). Jesus did this in order to bring salvation to mankind and in order that John and the other New Testament writers could write encouraging words as, ***“He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world”*** (1 Jn 4:4). When Jesus destroyed ***“him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,”*** He despoiled Satan's works, including demon possession (Hb 2:14).

Luke recorded that Jesus had and has greater power over the power of Satan.

When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all this armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils (Lk 11:21,22).

Jesus was stronger than Satan. Even in His “humbled state” of incarnation, Jesus had absolute power over Satan. In order to prove such, God allowed demons to possess people during Jesus’ ministry in order that we might have a record of the authority and power of Jesus over all things (See Mt 28:18).

We would never have known Jesus’ total authority over the realm of Satan if demons had not been permitted to possess people during the ministry of Jesus. After the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, a few representative cases of demon possession lingered in order to prove that Jesus’ delegated authority did not cease with His ascension to heaven. The prophecy of Mark 16:17 was thus fulfilled in the lives of those who believed. The disciples, as Jesus promised, did cast out demons. They continued to prove apostolic authority on behalf of Jesus throughout the early ministry of the disciples.

In the absence of the written word of God, the primary purpose of the early disciples was to represent the One who manifested power over Satan while on earth. Their mission was to preach the gospel that was all-powerful over the works of Satan (See Rm 1:16). God had proved Jesus’ authority and power during His personal ministry. He proved the continuation of that power and authority in the disciples’ exorcism of demons after the ascension of Jesus. **That proof was eventually recorded for us in the Scriptures.** There was no need, therefore, for God to allow demons to continue to possess people after He had proved His point. If we do not accept the Scriptures as sufficient proof of God’s final authority over all things, then we are doubting God’s invested authority in the Scriptures.

B. Demon Possession Revealed Sin

Demons demonstrated the hideousness of sin. God allowed demon possession in the first century in order to inform all Christians of all time that ...

... 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 (Ep 6:12; Gl 5:19-21).

This statement by Paul to the Ephesians defines the true nature of the Christian's enemy. However, Paul's defense mechanism for Christians in Ephesus, as well as for us today, was not the power of exorcism, **but the power of the gospel** (See Rm 1:16; Hb 4:12).

Paul's defense against the deceptions and temptations of Satan is the word of God. In Ephesians 6:10-18 he exhorted Christians to free-morally *"be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might."* Christians must *"put on the whole armor of God"* that they *"may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."* This is something that Christians must **do**. They must choose to act by submitting to these instructions of Paul and the other New Testament writers who wrote by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

God wants us to realize that Satan is real and that his nature is hideous. If Satan were allowed to exercise his full desires upon humanity, the result would be far greater than the wretched state of individuals who allowed demons to possess them in the first century. Though we do not struggle against demon possession today, we do struggle against the deceiver who has desires far beyond what God allows him to exercise in our present time. The only way Satan can get to God is by inflicting humanity. Because of his evil nature, he would destroy all humanity if he could, just to make an attack against God. He did such before in the days of Noah, and he would do it again.

C. Demons Validated The Disciple Of God

Demon possession demonstrated that Jesus and the disciples were from God. The scribes condemned Jesus by saying, *"He has Beelzebub, and by the ruler of the demons He casts out demons"* (Mk 3:22). But Jesus answered, *"How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand"* (Mk 3:23,24). *"And if Satan*

has risen up against himself, and is divided,” Jesus continued, *“he cannot stand, but has an end”* (Mk 3:26).

This brief conversation between the scribes and Jesus, therefore, openly manifested the proof that Jesus was not from Satan. Jesus’ casting out of demons demonstrated that He was from God. If He had been working for the kingdom of Satan, He would not have been doing those things that destroyed Satan’s work among men.

In preparation for one of their preaching tours, Jesus gave authority to His disciples to cast out demons (See Lk 10:17). Therefore, their authority over the realm of darkness was visually manifested to all as Jesus’ exorcism of demons manifested His authority over Satan and his angels. These cases of Jesus and the disciples’ power and authority over Satan were recorded in the New Testament. Therefore, we have a record that we must believe in order to trust in God. God does not need to continue this visible power over Satan today.

The power of Jesus and His disciples over any power Satan **was manifested in the first century**. The manifestation of this power has been recorded in the New Testament for all to read and believe. Therefore, we must read the record, the New Testament, in order to gain faith in the power of Jesus over Satan.

D. Demons Proved The Disciple’s Power

After Jesus’ ascension, demon possession demonstrated that God’s people could overcome anything of Satan just as Jesus had overcome. Paul said that when God seated Jesus *“at His right hand in the heavenly places,”* He wanted all Christians of all time to realize that Jesus is *“**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**”* (Ep 1:20,21). Therefore, God put all things under Jesus’ authority *“and gave Him to be head over all things”* for the sake of the church (See Ep 1:22). Peter recorded that Jesus *“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 3:22).

Jesus' open manifestation over Satan during His personal ministry on earth clearly demonstrated His authority and power over Satan. This demonstration of power continued in the lives of the early disciples as they commanded the supernatural in the working of miracles and the casting out of demons (See Mk 16:17). Christians today must answer Paul's question that, *"if God is for us, who can be against us"* (Rm 8:31)? The answer is, **no one**. Paul's conclusion to this matter is expressed in the words of Romans 8:38,39:

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Christians must be confident that Jesus now has authority over all things. God had given all things into His hands while He was on earth (See Jn 13:3; 17:2). He is now at the right hand of God with all authority.

Christians have an inspired record of the victory of Jesus over Satan. They must trust in this record and believe that they ***"are more than conquerors"*** through the One who loved us (Rm 8:37). John summed up the matter in Revelation 17:14:

*These will make war with the Lamb, and **the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords, and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.***

We must believe these words. When it comes to anything that we cannot explain, we must resort to the word of God for an explanation. If we do not do this, then we will be led astray by the deceptions of Satan. We must stay with the sixty-six inspired books of the Bible. If we read books of men today that report contrary information to what is reported in the Bible,

then we must not add to that which is written in the Bible (See Rv 21:18,19). In a world of misguided religionists, we must search only the Scriptures for evidences of God's power and authority. Though the universe manifests that there is a great God out there (See Rm 1:20), one must discover the revelation of this God in the Bible in order to understand His nature and character. It is the Bible that reveals this one true God and how He has worked in the lives of people.

We should not allow ourselves to be deceived into believing modern-day deceptions of deceived people who seek a following in order to enrich their bank accounts. We must not allow ourselves to be deceived by the clever of people as Simon, the sorcerer. Concerning Simon, Luke wrote,

To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying 'This man is the great power of God.' And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time (At 8:10,11).

Throughout the world there are many crafty people who have held captive by their deceptions many innocent victims who are ignorant of the Bible. Therefore, we must remember Jesus' admonition, ***"Take heed that no one deceives you"*** (Mt 24:4).

3. Casting Out Demons

Because demons were allowed to possess individuals in the first century, Jesus and the disciples were given the authority and power to cast them out. **No one could cast out demons in the first century other than Jesus and His disciples.** If unbelievers could cast out demons either in the first century or now, then Jesus' power over the influence of Satan would be nullified. In other words, **if a sorcerer could actually cast out demons, then the power and authority of Jesus and His disciples over Satan would be brought to naught.**

In the same manner, it would certainly be confusing today if God allowed false teachers to cast out demons. Nevertheless, there are those today who

claim to be exorcists with the ability to exorcise their make-believe demons. According to the word of God, however, the modern-day rituals and incantations of deceived people contradict the New Testament examples of casting out demons.

The Bible teaches the proposition that only Jesus and His disciples could exorcise demons in the first century. If such were true in the first century, **then it would certainly be true today in the presence of any so-called demon possessed people.** Exorcism is classified as a miraculous work in Acts 8:6. And only Jesus and His disciples could work miracles. If we claim, therefore, that one casts out demons today, then we must affirm that the exorcist is a Christian and that he or she has authority over the supernatural. However, from our understanding of how one comes into a covenant relationship with God through obedience to the gospel (faith, repentance and baptism), then we would affirm that such modern-day fakes are not Christians. Therefore, they are not truly casting out demons because they are not Christians.

The real work of Satan is in the lives of false exorcists who teach the doctrines of demons. These false teachers existed during the time of Jesus and the early disciples as in the case of Simon, the sorcerer of Samaria. Such false teachers have always existed. This is why there are so many warnings against such in the New Testament. Paul warned, ***“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons”*** (1 Tm 4:1).

These deceiving spirits are the real instruments of Satan. These are those who are practicing the deceptive practices of trickery in order to lead people to believe that they have control over the supernatural. Those who teach the illusion of demon possession today are teaching the doctrines of demons. James explained this. ***“But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above,***

but is earthly, sensual, demonic” (Js 3:14,15). This is why John said, ***“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world”*** (1 Jn 4:1; see vss 2,3).

Satan and his hosts work today through the deceptive teachings of false teachers. Christians who believe their false practices of exorcism and false teachings are being deceived into believing the doctrines of demons. They are being deceived by “wisdom” that James calls demonic.

This is precisely what Jesus warned in **Matthew 24:23,24**. Before the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus knew that there would be those who would seek to deceive the disciples into believing that they were the Christ. Jesus’ instructions to His disciples concerning such false christs was, ***“Do not believe it.”*** He said that these deceivers would show ***“great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect.”*** The deceivers would pretend to command the supernatural. However, their great signs and wonders were only tricks, set forth to deceive. Jesus said, ***“Do not believe it.”***

When we hear today of supposed miraculous wonders here and there, we are safe and confident to follow Jesus’ advice. Even if such things are written in books with appealing covers and words, it is the Bible that must be our final authority to determine that which is miraculous. This is necessary for there are those who are eager to read of fantastic stories of this or that supposed miraculous work of some deceiver.

This is illustrated in Jesus’ message to the churches of Asia in Revelation 2 and 3. There was a group of false Jewish teachers in Ephesus who Jesus called ***“a synagogue of Satan”*** (Rv 2:9). By their blasphemy, they led others into their false teachings. Among the disciples of Thyatira, there was the sinful apostate Christian named Jezebel ***“who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and beguile My servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat things sacrificed to idols”*** (Rv 2:20). This false prophet

was teaching the doctrine of Satan (See Rv 2:24). Those in Philadelphia were undergoing a similar attack by those of the *“synagogue of Satan”* who were teaching lies (Rv 3:9). Satan was not miraculously working among the disciples of Asia. However, he was working. He was working through his most powerful medium, through the lives of self-deceived individuals who had given up a knowledge of the truth of the gospel and had run after the workings of error (See 2 Th 2:9-12). **Satan’s greatest workers are self-deceived religious leaders of this world.**

What was going on among the disciples in Asia is the same thing that has continued throughout history. Satan was venting his frustrations against the early Christians through lies and immoral influences. John pictured this war of Satan against the church in Revelation 12. In verse 17 John wrote,

And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

It is evident, therefore, that Satan’s war against the people of God is through deception and evil influences. We must not be led astray by the demon theology of modern-day witches and religionists who seek a following by preaching doctrines of fear to innocent victims.

It is important for every Christian to understand the true practice of exorcism as it is explained in the New Testament. This will help us separate what is true from that which is deceptively practiced today by false teachers who are teaching doctrines of demons.

As in defining true demon possession, so we must understand the exorcism of demons by allowing the New Testament to be our only dictionary. We must not allow the deceptions of modern-day exorcists to define for us what exorcism is. We must go to the New Testament in order to discover what actually went on when a demon was exorcized from someone. In an indirect way, this also helps us to understand the true nature of demon possession.

A. Exorcism In The Name Of Jesus

In the New Testament demons were always exorcised (cast out) by the disciples of Jesus in His name, that is, **by His authority**. When the seventy disciples returned from their mission to which Jesus had sent them in Luke 10, they reported, *“Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name”* (Lk 10:17). In Philippi, Paul cast out a spirit of divination from a young girl by the same authority. Paul said to the spirit, *“I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her”* (At 16:18). There was no “exorcism formula” performed here by Paul or any of the other disciples. The demon was simply cast out by the authority of Jesus’ name.

One of the first indications of false demon possession and exorcism today are the formulas or rituals supposed exorcists go through in order to cast out their imagined demons. When compared to the exorcism of real demons in the first century, such modern-day rituals and formulas appear ridiculous. In the first century, exorcism was simply in the name of Jesus. This was the only authority that was needed to get the job done. The power was in the name of Jesus, not in some ritual.

B. Only Disciples Could Cast Out Demons

In the case of demons in **Matthew 9:32-34**, it is clear that only Jesus could cast out demons at this particular time in His ministry. **The actual casting out of demons had never before been seen in Israel**. Notice what the observers of this event stated, *“It was never seen like this in Israel”* (vs 33). Later in His ministry, Jesus gave the power of exorcism to His disciples (See Lk 10:17-20; Mt 10:1). Those who witnessed Jesus’ casting out of the demon in Matthew 9 **had thus never seen such before**. This is clear evidence that the practice of real and actual exorcism had never been successful before Jesus came. We would conclude, therefore, that only Jesus at the time of the events of Matthew 9 could cast out demons.

Since Matthew 9:33 is stating that such had never

before happened in Israel, **then it is logical to conclude that such has also not happened since the close of the first century.** In other words, one is not being objective if he or she contends that demon possession and exorcism have occurred since the first century. **This is true simply because we have no knowledge that such had occurred in the history of the world until the first century.**

This also helps us understand the absence of discussions concerning demon possession in the Old Testament. If demon possession were as common in the Old Testament times as some claim it is today, **then we wonder why there is no discussion of such in the Old Testament Scriptures.** Why are there no recorded cases of exorcism in the Old Testament by the prophets of God?

The case of demon possession and exorcism of **Mark 9:38-41** is often used to argue that people who were not disciples of Jesus were able to cast out demons. John said to Jesus, *“Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us”* (Mk 9:38). In John’s statement the problem is revealed. He said, *“Follow us.”* There seems to have been some sectarian pride manifested here on the part of the disciples. John should have said, *“Follow You.”* **The point is that the one who was casting out demons was following Jesus, for he cast demons out in the name of Jesus.** He was just not in the inner circle of disciples where John and the other disciples thought he should be in order to cast out demons. Therefore, Jesus said to all the apostles, *“Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me”* (Mk 9:39). Jesus’ statement concerning what the man was doing, verifies the fact that he was a disciple of Jesus. He was casting out demons in the name of Jesus.

There were many disciples of Jesus who were not of the immediate inner circle of followers. In Luke 10, authority had been given to seventy disciples to

cast out demons. Therefore, not only did the twelve disciples have such authority to cast out demons, others did also. But their authority to exorcise demons was given to them **directly by Jesus**. The disciple of Mark 9 could have been one of these disciples who was originally a part of those whom Jesus sent out to preach.

C. Exorcism Was By Word Only

Jesus *“cast out the spirit with a word”* (Mt 8:16). The casting out of demons by a simple spoken word manifested Jesus’ unquestionable power over the demon world. This leads us to conclude that those who go through exhausting performances and rituals are actually trying to talk the possessed into coming to his or her senses. This point again proves the argument that if one uses rituals or ceremonies to cast out demons, then that which is being cast out is not a demon.

Exorcism is not a mental process through which one must go in order to come to his or her senses. It was an instantaneous action on the part of the one who had the authority to cast out demons.

D. Exorcism Was By The Finger Of God

Jesus’ authority was manifested in the fact that He cast out demons by the **finger** of God (See Lk 11:20). Since God has no “finger,” the term “finger of God” is here **a metaphor that would refer to the smallest effort on the part of God to accomplish a particular work**. If Jesus had used the metaphor “arm of God,” then emphasis would have been on the great power of God. But in the case of demons, there was little power that was needed to cast them out in reference to any power the demons had.

Because of His authority over Satan, Jesus gave His power to the seventy disciples in **Luke 10** to also cast out demons. Therefore, the casting out of demons is associated only with the working of God through Jesus and His early disciples. The miraculous authority given to them was given in order to manifest

the insignificant power of demons, for the disciples also cast out demons by the “finger” of God.

E. Exorcism Was By Command

In **Acts 16:18** it is recorded that Paul was able to cast out demons by a simple command. Luke recorded, *“But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, ‘I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.’ And he came out that very hour.”* Paul did not use long involved rituals. There were no ceremonies performed. He simply spoke the word and the demon departed.

The emphasis in the New Testament was that Jesus and His disciples had instant and total command over the demons. The reason for this was to prove that there was absolutely no contest between the authority of Jesus in relation to any powers of Satan’s world. Power and authority that were manifested in Jesus were meant to prove to us that Jesus reigns supreme over all principalities and powers of the underworld.

By understanding the little power that is needed to cast out demons, we begin to understand the purpose why God allowed demons to possess people in the first century. **The purpose lies in the fact that God wanted to reveal to us that there is no comparison between His power and authority and that of Satan and his demons.** Jesus and the disciples simply spoke the word, and the demons vanished from the presence of those in whom they dwelt. There was no struggle. There was no confrontation between any disciple of Jesus and a demon. There was no fear involved on the part of the possessed or the disciples. The word was simply spoken. The demon immediately left the possessed. This is certainly a different picture than what we see today with those who promote demon possession and other abnormal human behavior.

We must keep in mind that **there are no cases of ritualistic exorcism in the New Testament.** Exorcism was by command, not by potions and rituals. In **Acts 19** there were some Jewish exorcists who

attempted to assume the authority of exorcism that had been invested in Paul. However, their attempted exorcism went wrong when the man in whom the evil spirit dwelt, leaped on them.

The Jewish exorcists of the Acts 19 context represent false exorcists who lived at the same time Paul lived. However, their false exorcism was unfruitful. This is evident in the fact that they saw that Paul's casting out demons was real and actual. **Because they had no faith in their own practices, they resorted to calling on “*the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits ...*”** (At 19:13). If their previous rituals and practices had been effective, then they would not have tried Paul's practice that did work. It is evident that they recognized the authority and power of Paul to be greater than anything they pretended to do.

The evidence in the text that these Jewish false teachers were presumptuous and had no authority to do as Paul, is proclaimed by the demon possessed man himself. The evil spirit in the man stated, “*Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?*” (At 19:15). This seems to indicate that simply using the name of Jesus in exorcism was not enough. **Authority had to be given to the exorcist in order for him to be able to cast out demons.**

Modern-day exorcists have not been divinely commissioned to cast out demons. **Their false teachings confirm that their exorcism is false. Therefore, the disciples of Jesus today should not be deceived by the false claims of religiously misguided and self-appointed exorcists.** Why would any Christian want to believe the declarations concerning supposed demon possessions today that are made by those who are not Christians and who have no understanding of demon possession as it is defined in the Bible?

Paul's exhortation in **Ephesians 6:10-18** is to trust in the written word of the Spirit. He exhorts us to have faith and believe the gospel. Faith and gospel are the Christian's defenses against Satan. Throughout

the New Testament, exhortations are given to the disciples of Jesus in order that they arm themselves against the work of Satan. In view of Satan's work, however, **there are no New Testament instructions or exhortations given to Christians that they must practice exorcism in order to fight demon possession.**

We must conclude that exorcism **was not** to be a continuing practice throughout history among Jesus' disciples. Since this is true, then we would rightly conclude that God would not allow demons to continually possess people as they did in the first century. This would leave one without any biblical authority for the practice of exorcism today. And indirectly, this would leave one without any biblical evidence for a belief in a continued real and actual fact of demon possession after the manner by which demons possessed people in the first century. In other words, because God was going to terminate demon possession, **He knew there would be no need to give Christians instructions on exorcism.** The practice of exorcism, and the fact of demon possession, existed together in the first century. **Both passed away together after the first century.**

It has been argued that it is one of Satan's deceptions to lead people to believe that there is no such thing as demon possession today. But we would ask, What would be the purpose of such possession? We would also ask, Why would God allow Satan to continue to manifest the underworld in only random areas, for such "possessions" are prevalent where they are believed and practiced? **Could we not also respond by saying that it is a deception of Satan to lead people to believe that demons actually possess people today in order to keep people in fear?**

Satan works in order to control us through fear. If our life is controlled by fear, then we have not yet been made perfect in love. ***"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made***

perfect in love" (1 Jn 4:18).

Only Jesus and His disciples could cast out demons in the first century. Therefore, if a so-called demon possesses someone today, **then only a disciple of Jesus can cast out that demon**. If we hear of a demon being cast out by some individual, then that exorcist must be a Christian. If it turns out that the exorcist has not obeyed the gospel, and thus not a disciple of Jesus, but a teacher of false doctrine, **then we affirm that the exorcism he or she performed was false**. The demon he or she supposedly cast out was also false. It was not a true case of demon possession. There was no demon and there was no exorcism. Everyone involved in the situation was deceived. The question is whether those who believe in Jesus will become involved in such deception in order to spread a lie. If one does not have a love for the truth of the gospel, then God will send him or her strong delusions in order that he or she believe a lie (See 2 Th 2:10-12).

The miraculous authority of exorcism does not continue among the disciples of Jesus today. We concluded from the preceding chapters that God does not allow demons to possess people today because He has not continued the authority and power through Christians to cast them out, for only the true disciples of Jesus in the first century were invested with the authority and power to cast out demons. In fact, this was one of God's proofs that one was a true disciple. ***"In My name they [Jesus' disciples] will cast out demons ..."*** (Mk 16:17). **If we believe that a certain individual supposedly casts out a demon today, then we must be prepared to accept the fact that that person is not a disciple of Jesus.**

Since Jesus said that only those who were of the group of His disciples could cast out demons, **then only those who were of the group of His disciples cast out demons in the first century**. If this point was true in the first century, then it is true today. Therefore, we must caution some in their eagerness to accept the exorcisms that are supposedly carried out in some

village or town across the country. If an exorcism is supposedly carried out, then we must assume that Christians are not at work in the situation. However, in order not to be deceived, we must take our Bibles with us when we go and check out the supposed exorcism. If the teaching of the exorcist is contrary to the gospel, **then we know that no exorcism took place**. We must remember the exhortation of Jesus, *“Be not deceived.”* If one is willing to believe the fantasies of misguided religionists, then he or she will be deceived.



ABBREVIATIONS

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**

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