

Jesus' Power of Demons and the Demonology of the Early Church

1. Jesus and His Power over Demons.
 - a. Jesus' ministry was marked by a vigorous interaction with the demonic forces of the first century AD.
 - b. Jesus repeatedly interacted with demons and spoke about them and their kingdom.
 - i. There can be no doubt that Jesus considered demons to be real spiritual entities with the power to cause harm to people.
 - c. A key aspect of Jesus' earthly ministry was the deliverance of the demon possessed.
 - d. Unlike the exorcists of Jesus' day, Jesus never uses occult paraphernalia or mystic formulae to exorcise these demons.
 - i. In contrast to the Jewish and Gentile exorcists, which were incredibly superstitious, Jesus' deliverance ministry was based on the power and authority he had over the created world as its Creator.
 - e. Jesus repeatedly differentiated between biological disease, demonic influenced disease, and maladies arising directly from possession.
2. The Interaction with Legion. **(Matt 8:28-34 / Mark 5:1-20 / Luke 8:26-39)**
 - a. Key Features:
 - i. This story directly follows Jesus' calming of the sea.
 - ii. Jesus and the disciples enter into the Decapolis, a region 10 cities (deca = 10, opolis = city).
 1. This is a predominately Gentile area.
 - b. This account is unique in a variety of ways:
 - i. It is the only account when Jesus' command to leave the man is not instantly obeyed.
 - ii. Jesus does not order the demon to be silent.
 - iii. It is the only time that Jesus asks the demon its name.
 - iv. It is the account that records the transference of a demon to another host.
 - c. Jesus meets the demonic right after he got out of the boat.
 - i. In all the accounts the demoniac seeks out Jesus
 - d. Mathew, interestingly enough, records 2 demoniacs.
 - i. The other Gospels may have left out the second demoniac because of the uniqueness of the one possessed by Legion.
 - e. The demoniac's unusual practices:
 - i. He lived amongst the tombs.
 - ii. He possessed supernatural strength.
 1. He easily broke the chains used to bind him.
 - iii. He roamed about naked.
 - iv. He shrieked wildly.

- f. After Jesus had commanded the demons to leave the man the demoniac falls down at his feet and begs Jesus to swear before God that he will not torture the demon.
 - i. Mathew adds, “before the appointed time” indicating the knowledge the demon had of its ultimate fate.
 - g. Jesus asks the demon its name.
 - i. Exorcists then believed, as do some now, that to know a demon’s name was to have power of the demon.
 - ii. Some has suggested that this is what Jesus was trying to do.
 - iii. However, Jesus’ deliverance ministry flows from his authority, not occult practices.
 - 1. He may have been asking the demon questions to highlight the severity of this unique event.
 - h. The demoniac replies that his name is Legion because he is many.
 - i. A Roman legion was a group of soldiers numbering 6000 strong.
 - ii. This does not necessarily mean that he had 6000 demons but it probably just means he was possessed by many demons.
 - i. The demons then bargain with Jesus over their fate and ask to be allowed to enter into a nearby herd of pigs.
 - i. In Mark they request not to be sent out of the area. In Luke they beg not to be cast into the Abyss.
 - 1. The requests were repeated and may have been expressed in multiple ways.
 - 2. The Abyss is vague but likely refers to a place of detention or punishment.
 - ii. Jesus allows them to do so and the pigs run down into the sea and are drowned.
 - iii. The writers do not explain the significance of the drowning pigs but it may have been preserved to show the destructive power of the demons.
 - j. The pig herder goes to town and tells the people what happened and they beg Jesus to leave their area.
 - k. The healed demoniac asks Jesus if he may accompany him but Jesus tells him to go home and spread the news of what God had done for him.
 - i. This is likely because Jesus wished for him to spread the Gospel into a Gentile region where Jesus would not personally carry God’s message.
3. The Healing of the Epileptic Boy (**Matt 17:14-21 / Mark 9:14-29 / Luke 9:37-43**)
- a. The boy’s father comes to Jesus and asks him to heal his son.
 - i. The father describes the boy’s condition:
 - 1. the demon has made him mute
 - 2. the demon seizes him

3. the demon causes seizures in which the boy is thrown into fire or water, screams etc.
- b. Some believe that the boy was merely suffering from epilepsy
 - i. This is argued based on the boy's symptoms as well as the use of the Greek word *seleniazomai* which can refer to epilepsy
- c. However, Mathew clearly distinguishes natural epilepsy from demonic possession induced epilepsy.

Mathew 4:24

²⁴ The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, *demoniacs*, ^U*epileptics*, paralytics; and He healed them.

- d. When Jesus hears that the demon could not be cast out by the disciples he replies by saying "O unbelieving and perverse generation... how long shall I stay with you?" (Matt 17:17)
 - i. It is clear that this is a reference to the lack of faith in the disciples as well as the people who are listening.
- e. Jesus speaks with the father and the father tells Jesus this has been happening for some time.
 - i. The father begs Jesus to do something "if he can."
 - ii. Jesus tells him that all is possible for those who believe.
 - iii. The father responds to this challenge by declaring his faith while at the same time humbly acknowledging his weakness.

Mark 9:24

²⁴ Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, "I do believe; help my unbelief."

- f. Jesus rebukes the demon and in Mark's gospel commands it never to return.
 - i. This may indicate that under normal circumstances repossession was possible.
 - ii. Jesus may be highlighting the permanent nature of his work in the boy.
- g. Both Mathew and Luke refer to the exorcism as a "healing."
 - i. This is not to indicate that the boy was not demon possessed, instead it indicates that from the perspective of the boy, he has been relieved of his affliction, the one caused by the demon.
- h. This is the only account in the New Testament where the disciples of Jesus were unable to exorcise a demon.
 - i. Mathew 17:20 attributes this failure to a lack of faith.

Mathew 17:20

²⁰ **And He *said to them, “Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith ^[i]the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.**

- ii. The previous successes the disciples had in exorcism may have made them feel this was a power they had under the control.
 - 1. This arrogance may have led to their failure.
- iii. Jesus adds in Mark that this kind can only be removed by prayer and fasting.
 - 1. This most likely has to do with an emphasis on God’s power in the exorcism rather than some sort of exorcism ritual.
- 4. The Parable of the Restless Demon (**Matthew 12:43-45 / Luke 11:24-26**)
 - a. Jesus describes demons as wandering in wastes in search of a person to possess.

Mathew 12:43-45

⁴³ **“Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find *it*. ⁴⁴ Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came’; and when it comes, it finds *it* unoccupied, swept, and put in order. ⁴⁵ Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation.”**

- b. Several key points can be identified from this passage:
 - i. demons exist outside of their hosts
 - ii. demons desire to possess people
 - iii. demons frequent desolate places or find their expelled state to be unpleasant
 - iv. demons can re-posses the same person again and again
 - v. multiple demons can possess a man
 - vi. it also seems that the re-possession can be prevented
 - 1. (we will cover this point again when we discuss possession in greater detail)
- 5. Demons in the Book of Acts:
 - a. The Ministry of the Disciples

Acts 5:16

¹⁶ **Also the ^[a]people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick ^[b]or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed.**

- i. Once again, true sickness and demon possession is clearly differentiated.
- ii. Here we see that the disciples were continuing the ministry of Jesus, including deliverance from demon possession.

Acts 8:5-8

⁵ Philip went down to the city of Samaria and *began* proclaiming ^[a]Christ to them. ⁶ The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the ^[b]signs which he was performing. ⁷ For *in the case of* many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out *of them* shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed. ⁸ So there was much rejoicing in that city.

- iii. Here it is interesting to note that Phillip, who was not an Apostle,
 - 1. He was one of the 7 deacons chosen in Acts 6
 - 2. Some contend today that this type of ministry only belonged to the Apostles.
- b. The Garments of Paul
 - i. Acts 19 describes a very unusual form of demon exorcism via Paul.

Acts 19:11-12

¹¹ God was performing extraordinary ^[e]miracles by the hands of Paul, ¹² so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out.

- ii. Note that the Scripture here notes that even in the realm of miracles, this is an unique and extraordinary occurrence.
- c. The Slave with Divination
 - i. Acts 16 records a confrontation in which Paul casts out a demon that had given its host a form of divination.

Acts 16:16-18

¹⁶ It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, “These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you ^[a]the way of salvation.” ¹⁸ She continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!” And it came out at that very ^[b]moment.

- ii. This demon was making the masters of the slave rich through its divination.
 - 1. This divination would be easy for a demon to perform given the ability of demons to gather information in secret.
- iii. Once again we have a demon who recognizes the truth of scripture.
- iv. Note how Paul follows Jesus' example of deliverance ministry.
 - 1. There are no spells, formulae, amulets etc. He simply commands in the name of Jesus Christ.
- d. The Failure of the Jewish Exorcists
 - i. Acts 19 also records the failed attempts of Jewish exorcists to remove a demon.

Acts 19:13-16

¹³ But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." ¹⁴ Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. ¹⁵ And the evil spirit answered and said to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" ¹⁶ And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

- ii. We can note that Jewish exorcists were active at the time.
- iii. The name of Jesus had become famous in the region as having power over spirits.
- iv. These Jewish exorcists simply added the name of Jesus to their bag of magical formulae, hoping to capitalize on it.
- v. However, the name of Jesus is not a magical formula for men to manipulate.
 - 1. The name of Jesus only has power for the man who has humbled himself before the cross in faith.