

DAVID M. MILLER

REDACTED

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The Secret History of

Exorcism



NASHVILLE

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Redacted

The Secret History of Exorcism


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FOREWORD

Pastor Win Worley was my grandfather; I grew up at his church during this incredible time. I personally witnessed countless demonic manifestations, supernatural miracles, and healings. Thousands of people flocked year-round for healing, deliverance, and to learn how to cast out demons themselves. He dedicated his entire life to the Full Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and was a pioneer of the rediscovery of deliverance ministry. He wrote a series of books and booklets on deliverance and spiritual warfare; his last book, *Harassing the Hosts of Hell*, was dedicated to the next generation of deliverance workers. He believed that those who surrender to God will see and experience revival power, which has been hidden for centuries.

Still the debate of validity to modern-day exorcism continues while even more so, deliverance is rising to the forefront of Christianity. To know where we are going, we must know where we have been. When David Miller first got in touch with me, I was apprehensive about being interviewed and suggested some others to seek out first. I got to know David over the next two years, and it did

not take long to see he was following the scripture; his methods and school of thought were in order, and he was walking the walk. I have seen him evangelize, preach, teach, and cast out devils, in the streets, in houses, and in churches.

When David first showed me *Redacted*, I realized that he was really writing the history of spiritual warfare. I found it fascinating as I had never read anything like it before. It was not written as opinion or as an instruction for or against a school of thought, but simply as an unredacted history of deliverance. I recommend *Redacted* to anyone looking into the historical nature of deliverance and spiritual warfare.

Brother Jason Worley



PREFACE

C. S. Lewis once said that we should all read old books. Why? Because we are beholden to biases, influences, and standards of thinking in our current culture and age, both their strengths and fallacies. By reading books from various periods, we expose ourselves to thinking not beholden to the same weaknesses of our own age. Those other ages had their own strengths and weaknesses, but they serve to challenge and balance our ways of thinking.

Today, Western evangelical Christianity has found itself in its own theological and cultural vacuum. We have our axioms. We repeat them in smooth phrases from the pulpit, make videos about them, put them on T-shirts, and shun any heretical influence that may say otherwise. This writing aims to expose my readers to the lives, theology, and ministry of other notable Christians throughout the great history of the Church, challenging some of our theological assumptions as it relates to deliverance and spiritual warfare.

Deliverance ministry has come to the fore more significantly in the last two years. The premise that many Christians are influ-

enced by demons that drive them into sin, sickness, insanity, character flaws, etc., and that they need deliverance through exorcism is an unpopular and uncomfortable thought to most evangelical Christians in the West. It seems unbiblical, unorthodox, and novel. However, you will find here that this concept is neither new nor fringed in theology.

This work began as a small research essay for a writing class of mine at Regent University. I chose to write on the subject, especially exorcism in the early Church, Reformation, and Pentecostal eras. What I found out during that short project astounded me. The commonality of exorcism and its incredible resistance throughout the history I researched was incredible, so I kept researching and discovering more. The same pattern was repeated: revival, deliverance, redaction, and collapse.

To be forward, I am an advocate of contemporary deliverance ministry. However, my goal for this book was not to preach deliverance but to provide an objective, non-biased examination of history, which speaks for itself. In this reading, I ask you to set aside your presumptions and thoughtfully consider what Christians throughout Church history have thought and done on this subject.

INTRODUCTION

In the last several years, especially the last several months, deliverance ministry has become a frequent point of discussion and contention in the Church. Deliverance proponents believe that this is the continuation of Jesus's commands in Matthew 10:1 and Mark 16:17, and these orders are binding on Christians today. They believe that demons have remained largely hidden and unchallenged in the Church, as this practice has fallen out of use, and today, they hide under the surface, causing problems such as sickness, mental illness, addiction, and habitual sin. We could see incredible results if the Church would rise to the occasion and cast out demons. Many have gone through such deliverance and report receiving partial or full freedom from the issues they sought to alleviate.

However, this is unscriptural for most protestants, and numerous arguments advanced. For those of liberal theology, demons and devils don't exist at all. References to them in the Bible are simply divine accommodations for the ignorance of the day; the demons were mental disorders that Jesus healed, like other diseases, calling it demonic so it would make sense to his original audience.

Those of a Reformed theology believe demons do exist but that there is never a need to exorcise them. Casting out demons is a miracle, like healing, and all miracles, with some rare exceptions, stopped after the apostolic age and the completion of the New Testament. Demons may indwell unbelievers, but you cannot exorcise them because it would be useless. Instead, leading them to the saving grace of Christ will immediately deliver them. Since this automatically exempts Christians from the possibility of demonization, exorcising unbelievers is either impossible or unethical.

For Pentecostals and charismatics, the primary objection is that a demon cannot indwell Christians because of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Some would allow the possibility of a believer who is not baptized in the Holy Spirit to have a demon. Either way, the reasoning is that the Holy Spirit and the demon cannot dwell in the same space, and therefore, a Christian cannot have a demon. These Pentecostals may be more willing to cast demons out of unbelievers or defer to missionaries and their exorcisms in distant lands.

Another group objects because these problems are not demonic but come from having a lack of faith, not knowing one's identity, or not having proper spiritual health. For this teaching, to accept the possibility of demonization is to lack faith in Christ; those who go to deliverance ministry are going to a man and not to God, lacking trust and faith in Jesus. All these supposedly demonic problems are really the flesh nature that needs to be crucified and renewed.

Some believe in casting out demons in some way but criticize deliverance ministries for their seemingly complicated methods when Jesus apparently cast demons out with a word. Others say that demons are used as an excuse and deliverance as a panacea

for people to ignore the process of sanctification. Needless to say, people have many objections to deliverance.

Despite these strong and well-entrenched criticisms, deliverance ministries continue to pop up and grow in popularity. More deliverance ministries, more videos about casting out demons, a stronger push to bring this type of ministry back to the front, and even a movie about deliverance ministry are all bucking the trend.

This debate about the legitimacy of deliverance ministry has occurred in the echo chamber of Western, twenty-first-century Christianity. Western, twenty-first-century protestants take issue with deliverance ministry, yes. But what about Christians in every other century and part of the world? Did they have anything to weigh in on the matter? Church history is *not* the authority of theology; it is a good litmus test of our biases and blind spots to the scripture. We all read with our own personal hermeneutic that our culture, mentors, and lives have influenced us with. Yet, this little personal view of the Bible isn't always right. Seeing how others understood the scripture who had different lenses is an important sounding board for orthodoxy.

This writing seeks to examine the thoughts and teachings throughout Church history on matters of spiritual warfare. How was warfare waged against Satan, if at all? For this writing, I will use the term "exorcism" to describe any kind of activity that seeks to expel demons, as opposed to deliverance. Though I personally prefer the latter, it is vague, especially when dealing with history. Further, I will use the term "demonized" to describe persons under the power of demons. Possession and oppression are misleading terms not present in Biblical Greek when it comes to demons, so I will generally avoid them unless they are used by an author we are examining.

Exorcism will be the primary focus of this examination, though we will highlight other concepts of spiritual warfare when appropriate. The legitimacy of contemporary deliverance ministry is challenged on several fronts, so we will examine several questions at the conclusion of each chapter to best understand our survey of Church history:

1. What context was exorcism used in? In other words, what was its purpose, and what problems did it seek to solve?
2. Who was casting out demons? Was there an “exorcist” office, or did pastors, or even laity, cast out demons? How common was it?
3. Since it is one of the most heated questions of today, were those exorcised Christians or unbelievers? What was the theology concerning the demonization of Christians?
4. For persons and times when exorcism was not written about/practiced, why? What were the theological, social, or other factors that led to this?
5. How was exorcism practiced? What method was used, and what did it look like?
6. How was spiritual warfare understood as a whole, exorcism or otherwise?
7. What factors drove changes in all the above throughout history?
8. Was this beneficial to the Church?

CHAPTER 1

THE FALL OF MAN

In the beginning, we know that God created the world and man to live in paradise, in perfect union with God, in peace and without bondage or affliction. God created Eden to be a colony of heaven, so to speak, and Adam was the provincial governor of the earth. In Genesis 1:27–30, God gave Adam the dominion mandate, giving him governmental power over the earth and all its creatures.

In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve rebelled against God's command at the prompting of the serpent. In doing so, they forfeited the dominion mandate to the Kingdom of Darkness, which assumed authority over the earth (Eph. 2:2, 2 Cor. 4:4.). The result is that all of mankind has been enslaved to this kingdom and feels the effects of this bondage.

St. Augustine, a fourth-century theologian, writes of two conflicting cities: the City of God, often referred to in scripture as the New Jerusalem, and the City of Man, or the world. He rightly describes these two cities as having separate origins and destinations, though they are both intermixed in our current time. Jesus

speaks of this temporary intermingling in Matthew 13, referring to the people of God as wheat and the sons of perdition as tares, a semi-toxic plant closely resembling wheat. The two grew up together in the same field, initially inseparable and indistinguishable, though at the time of harvest, the tares are gathered and burned while the wheat is harvested. Jesus explains this is a type of judgment on the final day.

The two cities, as we will call them, originated on Earth in Genesis 3. Adam and all his posterity were surrendered to the rulership of Satan and his kingdom. Leading up to the great flood, the wickedness of mankind increased at an exponential rate as each generation outdid the last in their levels of depravity. By the tenth generation from Adam, the sin of the earth was so great that God had no choice left but to holocaust all life in order to preserve the righteous lineage of the Messiah through the offspring of Noah.

After the flood, humanity quickly backslid again. By the time of Abraham, it seemed that the entirety of mankind was worshipping one pantheon of gods or another, so-called gods that were really Satan and his angels. As Satan built up his kingdom and once again went to work building up generational strongholds of iniquity, God was quietly at work in the bloodline of David to bring about the Messiah, the one who was pointed to throughout the Old Testament; this Messiah was the promised deliverer for the City of God, still cruelly occupied by the enemy.

God painted an intricate picture of this messianic promise through the entirety of his word in the Old Testament, showing how his Messiah would be primarily a deliverer from bondage. Every action of Israel reflected this spiritual reality of bondage and liberation. The Israelites were enslaved by Egypt, and God deliv-

ered them. The Canaanites oppressed them, and the Lord raised up judges. Then the Assyrians invaded, and God saved Jerusalem. Later, he would deliver his people from exile in Babylon. All this time, the prophets pointed out that the real bondage was never physical but spiritual. Physical liberation never brought lasting relief. But the Lord promised a time when he would vanquish his people's iniquity, change their hearts, and give them a new nature (Ezek. 36:26, Mic. 7:19).

Up until the time of Christ, attempts at expelling demons were limited to these "magical" exorcisms, both in Jewish and pagan circles. These lengthy ceremonies involved spices, incense, and various religious articles. Pagan exorcists would invoke various deities and use drugs, potions, or charms, while Jews would invoke names of God and multiple angels or archangels. For Jews, at least, the appropriate word at the right time was essential to the exorcism.¹ These attempts of humanity to throw off the shackles of Satan were marked by a position of weakness. Demons need to be placated, warded off, or appeased. At best, Jews may have been able to invoke the Lord's help. But at the end of the day, humanity was in bondage.

The great hope of humanity was that one day, the Messiah would come and crush the serpent's head; bring deliverance from bondage to sin, sickness, and the Kingdom of Darkness; and restore creation to the way it was intended to be.

¹ Patrick Toner, "Exorcist," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 5. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909), accessed July 12, 2021, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05711a.htm>.

CHAPTER 2

THE MINISTRY OF JESUS AND THE APOSTLES: THE LIBERATION OF MANKIND AD 30-80

And he came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was his custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. And he opened the book, and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed and to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord." (Luke 4:16-19)

As the Lord introduced his public ministry that day in Nazareth, he reminded the people of the hope of the Messiah: freedom. Each facet of this proclamation connects to liberation

from the satanically governed fallen world. Bringing good news to the poor, which we know in hindsight would be the saving message of grace, freedom to captives and prisoners, not of Rome, but sin, recovery of sight to both the spiritually and physically blind, and finally, the year of God's favor, reminiscence of a reversal of the curse. The earthly ministry of the Lord was a ministry of freedom. As he said in John 8:34–36, sin is a slave master, and he came to set the captives free.

For this historical study of spiritual warfare and exorcism, we will examine the major exorcisms of Jesus and the apostles as recorded in Acts. This chapter is not intended to be a theological exposition of all the New Testament says about spiritual warfare. Other resources have done that well already.²

The Seven Major Exorcisms of Christ

Christ's ministry was marked by preaching, exorcism, and healing. These three central ministries, along with teaching and training his disciples, represent his early ministry's thrust. We know that Christ expelled demons on numerous occasions and that it was often associated with healing (Matt. 8:16, Luke 13:31–32, etc.). However, the gospel writers give us seven more detailed pictures of Christ's ministry of exorcism, which we will examine more closely.

The Man in the Synagogue

³¹Then He went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and was teaching them on the Sabbaths. ³²And they were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with

² Ed Murphy's *The Handbook for Spiritual Warfare* is an excellent systematic theology on spiritual warfare.

authority.³³ Now in the synagogue there was a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon. And he cried out with a loud voice,³⁴ saying, "Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!"³⁵ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" And when the demon had thrown him in *their* midst, it came out of him and did not hurt him.³⁶ Then they were all amazed and spoke among themselves, saying, "What a word this *is*! For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out."³⁷ And the report about Him went out into every place in the surrounding region. (Luke 4:31–37).

v. 33. The first observation of this text is the location: the man was in the synagogue. Some scholars have suggested that the man and the other Jews were aware of his demonism and didn't care or do anything about it, but these arguments are unconvincing. Murphy points out that synagogues were attended primarily by pious people who were there to worship God. Further, Capernaum was a mixed city, and Jews in such mixed cities formed tight communities. The man was most likely an observant Jew, unaware of his condition and typically in his right mind.³ Lest it is thought that this was some anomaly, Mark tells us Jesus toured the synagogues throughout all of Galilee, teaching and exorcising demons regularly (1:39).

In Luke's account, he clarified that this was an unclean, evil spirit, as the word "demon" would have been neutral to his Greek

3 Ed Murphy, *The Handbook for Spiritual Warfare*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 270–271.

audience. At some point in Christ's teaching, the demon reacted violently, arrested control of the man, and verbally protested. According to Murphy, the "question" isn't really a question but a protestation of Christ's teaching, probably on the salvation teaching quoted at the beginning of the chapter.⁴ The demon further protests that they have nothing and want nothing in common with Christ before rightfully acknowledging Christ's humanity (Jesus of Nazareth) and his divinity (Holy One of God).⁵ There is a change in pronouns from "I" to "we" throughout the demonic vocalization, probably suggesting that the demon was speaking for a group.⁶

v. 35. Jesus's first response was to silence the demon. In a panicked attempt to defend itself, the demon attempted to breach the messianic secret, which would hinder Jesus's earthly ministry, aggravating Jews and threatening Roman authorities.⁷ Next, Jesus commands the spirit to come out. A violent manifestation ensues. Mark adds that the spirit causes convulsions. This episode showed that Jesus's exorcism was not sterile but a battle. Wiersbe and Henry both call this a last, futile attempt to resist Christ's command, perhaps by attempting to injure the man on the way out.⁸ If this is the case, it was unsuccessful, as Luke explains, "... without injuring him."

vv. 36–37. This scandalous scene at Church leads to the beginning of Christ's fame. Both Luke and Mark record this as the first *public* miracle, directly leading to his rise in influence. Apparently,

4 Murphy, 272.

5 Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament*, vol 1, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2008), 113.

6 Murphy, *Handbook for Spiritual Warfare*, 273.

7 Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament*, 113.

8 Wiersbe, 113.

this exorcism was so superior to that of the Jews that it spoke of Christ having authority (v. 36) and was considered a notable miracle.

Summary

The following observations can be made from this exorcism: (1) Jesus exorcised observant Jews during synagogue meetings. The demonized man, and by extension those delivered throughout the region, i.e., Mark 1:39, were in their right minds, enough to the degree they could attend synagogue without causing a commotion. (2) The demon had a violent, physical, and vocal manifestation, which did not stop until it was completely dispossessed. (3) The demon made a truthful, though spiteful, confession. (4) Exorcism was a means of gaining both positive and negative attention in the ministry of Christ.

The Demonic of the Gadarenes

¹They came to the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gerasenes. ²When He got out of the boat, immediately a man from the tombs with an unclean spirit met Him, ³and he had his dwelling among the tombs. And no one was able to bind him anymore, even with a chain; ⁴because he had often been bound with shackles and chains, and the chains had been torn apart by him and the shackles broken in pieces, and no one was strong enough to subdue him. ⁵Constantly, night and day, he was screaming among the tombs and in the mountains, and gashing himself with stones. ⁶Seeing Jesus from a distance, he ran up and bowed down before Him; ⁷and shouting with a loud voice,

he said, "What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!" ⁸For He had been saying to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" ⁹And He was asking him, "What is your name?" And he said to Him, "My name is Legion; for we are many." ¹⁰And he *began* to implore Him earnestly not to send them out of the country. ¹¹Now there was a large herd of swine feeding nearby on the mountain. ¹²*The demons* implored Him, saying, "Send us into the swine so that we may enter them." ¹³Jesus gave them permission. And coming out, the unclean spirits entered the swine; and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea, about two thousand *of them*; and they were drowned in the sea. ¹⁴Their herdsmen ran away and reported it in the city and in the country. And *the people* came to see what it was that had happened. ¹⁵They came to Jesus and observed the man who had been demon-possessed sitting down, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the "legion"; and they became frightened. ¹⁶Those who had seen it described to them how it had happened to the demon-possessed man, and *all* about the swine. ¹⁷And they began to implore Him to leave their region. (Mark 5:1-17)

vv. 1-2 In contrast to the subtle, hidden demons in the man at the synagogue, here is an extremely severe case of demonization; this man was driven to insanity by these spirits, living among the tombs. These were caves cut out of the limestone hills on the lakeside.

vv. 3–5 Not only did this case of demonism cause insanity, but it produced supernatural strength in the victim. He was a menace to the surrounding people, who tried to subdue and bind him, though they were unsuccessful. Murphy points out that most commentators will use these severe symptoms of demonization as a rule for what any demonic activity would look like.⁹ Not only is this contrary to the experience of those in deliverance ministry, such as Dr. Murphy, but it is not congruent with the accounts of exorcism in the scriptures. This case was clearly the most severe of those recorded, standing above others in the Gospels and Acts in outlandish, supernatural symptoms.

v. 6 When the man sees Jesus, he runs toward him rather than away as we might expect. It is unlikely that the demons prompted the man to run toward Christ; when demons manifest in contemporary settings, they will more often run away from the authority of Christ.¹⁰ More likely, the man himself, in a moment of clarity, somehow recognized Christ and ran toward him. On this note, Murphy makes a case that the man was ethnically Jewish, seeing as how he acted in line with the Jewish understanding of demon possession, rather than another cultural disposition.¹¹ Further, if he were not ethnically Jewish, it would represent a break in the practice of Christ, healing and delivering almost exclusively Jews. It may also be noted that Matthew's account records two demoniacs confront-

9 Murphy, *Handbook for Spiritual Warfare*, 279.

10 I have seen on several occasions violent demonic manifestations where the victim ran away, in an unconscious state, from the source of authority. Others with prolonged experience in deliverance ministry have witnessed such episodes as well.

11 Murphy, 279. The theory Murphy puts forward, on the citation of other scholars, is that demons work within the cultural and psychological framework of their victim. In other words, demons act how their victim expects them to act.

ing Christ (8:28) and does not give as many details toward the resolution. Some have postulated that the other demoniac *ran away*, hence why Mark and Luke only record the one who was delivered.¹²

vv. 7–8 The demons react with the same defiance as the man in the synagogue, asking the rhetorical question about what they have in common. Further, they “implore” Christ to let them alone. This word can also be translated as “adjure,” a word used by Jewish exorcists to expel demons. The demonic host, in extreme defiance, was trying to deliver themselves from Christ’s presence! This defiance is further seen in v. 8, as Jesus “had been” commanding the spirits to come out. That means the spirits did not immediately obey Jesus, and we don’t know how long they resisted their defeat before they were finally expelled.

v. 9 After Christ’s typical method did not work, he asked the spirit his name. Some have suggested that this was simply for the benefit of the spectators to see what a great miracle it was,¹³ though this is unconvincing, seeing as how their defeat was delayed. Murphy suggests that it was to gain insight into the man’s situation,¹⁴ and this is possible. As we will see in the following pages, those battling demons have repeated this tactic throughout history. Somehow, it works well enough for Christ to use it. The scripture doesn’t tell us how exactly it works, and we must accept that we see through a glass darkly (1 Cor. 13:12).

vv. 10–12 The demons request that Jesus does not send them out of the region. Perhaps their ability or influence would have been

12 John Goguen, Th.M., in conversation with the author.

13 Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged*, vol. 5 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 387.

14 Murphy, *Handbook for Spiritual Warfare*, 282.

limited due to a connection with the regional principalities and powers. Further, we see that they prefer some sort of flesh, in this case, pigs, over being expelled into the “dry places” (Luke 11:24).

v. 13 After the spirits go into the pigs, the herd is driven insane and goes into the water. It’s often questioned why Jesus allowed this. If the herders were Jewish, then it’s clear that they were violating the law anyway. If not, it may be that the demise of the herd proved the deliverance on a wider scale than would have otherwise been possible.¹⁵

vv. 14–17 The response of the crowds is telling. Rather than rejoicing at such a miracle, they are terrified and “implore” Jesus to leave the region, echoing the same request of the demons that were just defeated.

In this account, we see Jesus delivering the most severely demonized person in scripture. We observe that (1) unlike other accounts of Jesus’s exorcism, this one was not settled in a matter of seconds with one command. These spirits resisted for an undetermined period of time. (2) Despite the severe degree of demonism, the man still ran toward Jesus, and Christ didn’t exorcise someone who didn’t want freedom.¹⁶ (3) The Lord used a simple form of what we will later call combative dialogue. (4) In this case, the demonization was so severe it appears the demons were in a constant state of manifestation, unlike the other accounts in the Gospels.

The Syrophenician Woman

²¹ Jesus went away from there and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²² And a Canaanite woman from

¹⁵ Murphy, 282.

¹⁶ The man’s desire for freedom is further clarified by his response in vv. 18–20.

that region came out and *began* to cry out, saying, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed." ²³ But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came and implored Him, saying, "Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us." ²⁴ But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." ²⁵ But she came and *began* to bow down before Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" ²⁶ And He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." ²⁷ But she said, "Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." ²⁸ Then Jesus said to her, "O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed at once. (Matt. 15:21–28)

vv. 21–22. The Lord comes to the district around Tyre and Sidon, his only recorded ministry outside of Israelite territory. A woman called a "Canaanite" here is the only reference to such an ethnicity within the New Testament. The point is that she was *not* an Israelite and was outside of the Abrahamic covenant, which is central to the account. Despite her Gentile, pagan background, she acknowledges him as the Messiah, calling him the "Son of David." Henry points out that the woman's description of her daughter's condition is "cruelly" possessed, as an especially severe degree of demonization.¹⁷

v. 23. The Lord initially ignored the woman's cry. The disciples began to ask the Lord to dismiss her, as she was apparently insistent

¹⁷ Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 176.

to the point of their irritation. The response makes sense when we understand the Lord previously forbade the disciples to minister to Gentiles, so he would ignore them himself while they attempted to send her away. The reluctance shows the rule of faith by which Christ healed and delivered: “Your faith has made you well” (Matt. 9:22, Mark 10:52, Luke 18:42, etc.).

v. 24. After the woman had insisted for some time, the Lord qualifies his silence by exemplifying his mission to the wayward people of God. As mentioned, the Lord himself commanded his men only to heal, exorcise, and minister to those in Israel.

vv. 25–27 The woman avails herself of humility, faith, and submission to Christ. She now identifies herself with God’s people as much as she can. The Lord further confirms that his ministry does not belong to the Gentiles or *unbelievers* but belongs to the “children” of God. It isn’t right to take that ministry and give it to unbelievers. The woman’s response represents a further condition of faith and humility; she begs for whatever little bit of help the Lord is willing to offer her.

v. 28 Christ acknowledges the legitimacy of her faith and delivers her daughter. Wiersbe explains that Christ was using this line of questioning to flush out and build up the woman’s faith.¹⁸ This is true, though I would add that the Lord knew this woman’s faith was adamant from the beginning. What he did was more for the benefit of the disciples and readers of the Gospels to see the rule of faith; the Lord did not exorcise unbelievers; he calls deliverance the children’s bread and the right due to God’s people. The short delay in deliverance was not truly due to this woman’s ethnicity but to

18 Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament*, 54.

show the disciples that faith was necessary for coming to Christ for salvation or any other benefit. However, this concept would not be fully understood until later in Acts. Further, this deliverance did not require the laying on of hands or even a verbal command from Christ. He willed her free from a distance, and she was free instantly.

This case shows that the Lord was interested in ministering to a particular group of people, namely those who had faith in him. The Gentiles were initially excluded, not because of their ethnicity, but their religion. As we see later in Acts, the Gentiles come to Christ in droves; those who put their faith in him are the principal recipients of supernatural ministry.

Exorcism of the Mute

³²As they went out, behold, they brought to Him a man, mute and demon-possessed. ³³And when the demon was cast out, the mute spoke. And the multitudes marveled, saying, "It was never seen like this in Israel!" ³⁴But the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the ruler of the demons." (Matt. 9:32–34, NKJV)

v. 32 Shortly after healing two blind men in the preceding verses, the crowd brings forward a mute man, whose muteness was caused by a demon. Wiersbe points out that the scripture delineates between demonic problems and illness, but at times, demons cause physical ailments, as seen here.¹⁹

v. 33 This particular miracle caused a great excitement among the lay people. Though this was perhaps not as dramatic as other

¹⁹ Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament*, 36.

exorcisms or healing miracles, it was especially public, unlike many of the private miracles. Despite the pangs of the crowd, and previous attempts to maintain the messianic secret, there was no attempt to conceal this miracle or take the man aside to deliver him.

v. 34 The religious leaders, by contrast, accused Jesus of black magic and bringing about the miracle by the Devil's power. This claim would return again in Jesus's ministry and in Jewish propaganda.

This relatively short account shows us that (1) demons can cause physical ailments and need to be cast out to bring about that cure. (2) Jesus performed exorcisms publicly, and they proved to be a major source of his popularity. Though he never "brought aside" a person he was exorcising, this was an especially public miracle. (3) Jesus's exorcism caused persecution from religious authorities.

Exorcism of the Mute and Blind

¹⁴Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed. ¹⁵But some of them said, "By Beelzebul, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons." ¹⁶Others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven. ¹⁷Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: "Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. ¹⁸If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebul. ¹⁹Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your followers drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. ²⁰But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon

you. ²¹When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. ²²But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder. ²³Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. ²⁴When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' ²⁵When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. ²⁶Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first." (Luke 11:14–26, NIV)

v. 14 Again, we have another deliverance from the demonic that results in healing. It is similar to the abovementioned account, where a mute was healed through exorcism. However, Matthew tells us that this man was both blind and mute (12:22). As soon as the demon left, the man was healed from his muteness (and blindness, though Luke does not recount that) without any additional action on the part of Christ. Like elsewhere, this miracle sparked incredible amazement.

v. 15 The Pharisees were not impressed. They attributed his miraculous power over demons to him secretly colluding with them. This accusation certainly got its mileage; later, critics of Christianity fabled that Christ had learned black magic while he spent a portion of his childhood in Egypt. Through such sorcery, he could cast out demons, heal the sick, and do other wonders. Even today, some occultists maintain that Jesus was, in fact, a master

black magician who can even be learned from.²⁰ The name Beelzebub was a satirical demotion of the Canaanite god, Baal, who was considered a chief demon by the Jews of that time.²¹ Beyond the exegetical particulars, the reaction of the religious establishment toward the ministry of deliverance was adverse, so much so that they called it a satanic counterfeit.

v. 16 Others, rather than go straight to blasphemy, challenged Christ to give a sign in the heavens as more sure proof that he was from God. Henry points out their logic: a pact with Satan may provide some power on Earth, but to summon some great thunder cloud, like Samuel or Moses, would prove His divine commissioning.²² Even a clean-cut, quick exorcism that resulted in miraculous healing was no proof of anything. Deliverance ministry was not the package the Jews had ordered, and they wanted a “cleaner” miracle, somewhere preferably in the sky, that provided awe but no help for the sons of Adam.

vv. 17–18 Jesus refuses their request outright. In the first, they tempt God, which is a sin (Deut. 6:16). Further, it is an insult after the Lord has done something so wonderful to have the miracle reviled, and a “better” one asked in its place. The Lord, however, does not point this out. He simply explains the illogic of their accusation. Satan cannot effectively bring deliverance to people from himself. Not only is it a detriment to his kingdom, but it is against his nature to do good. Sure enough, there are exorcisms through the use of magic, though they cannot do what Christ

20 The Temple of Witchcraft in Salem, NH, published a teaching called “Jesus of Nazareth” that painted Jesus as magician who ought to be emulated, when understood through an occult lens.

21 Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament*, 215.

22 Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 561.

here does: bring actual deliverance resulting in the healing of two major maladies. This exorcism was entirely objective in its result and could not be a counterfeit, and Satan would never truly shoot himself in the foot.

vv. 19–20 The Jews also exorcised demons by invoking God’s names, burning incense, and reciting scriptures. If Jesus was casting out demons by magic, what power were these Jews using? Surely, black magic cannot outperform God in Israel? In reality, it was the Jews who used a system of ritual; though it may at times have been effective, by God’s mercy, being the only possible source of help, it more closely resembled a magical incantation. The Lord ironically turns the table on his opponents. His exorcism was not only in God’s name but by his “finger” or Spirit. Here, Jesus connects his exorcisms with the arrival of the Kingdom of God. As the Kingdom of God arrives, it cannot do so without upsetting, dislodging, and pushing back the Kingdom of Darkness.

vv. 21–22 Jesus likens Satan to a strongman that holds his possessions, fully armed. Henry points out the contrast that pagan exorcists did not disturb the goods, i.e., even if one demon fled, another would come and take its place, and the souls of men remained captive to Satan.²³ However, Christ is stronger than Satan and needs no other power to invoke besides himself. He himself overpowers Satan, disarms him, and plunders him of souls.

v. 23 At the point of resistance to Jesus’s deliverance ministry, he points out that there is no neutrality; people either engage with him in this war of dispossession or are his opponents. He says this not of healing or preaching but only of exorcism. Not only are they

²³ Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 562.

not with him, but they “scatter” or, by their opposition or passivity, are hindering this campaign.

v. 24–26 The danger of passivity in this was shown by the Lord, who explains how demons may leave a man, their “house,” and come back. Once a spirit left, if the house were vacant, it would come back and invite all his friends, making the last state worse than before. This is often the case in magical exorcism.²⁴

The theological significance in this account is not in the exorcism itself, which comprises only one verse and contains no new theological insight. The significance is in the response of the Pharisees and how Jesus confronted them. The religious establishment was disturbed by Jesus’s ministry and accused it of being satanic. Jesus confronts them with the ignorance of such an accusation and, in Matthew’s account, accuses them of blaspheming the Holy Spirit, a sin that could never be forgiven.

The Moonstruck Boy

¹⁷A man in the crowd answered, “Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. ¹⁸Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.” ¹⁹“You unbelieving generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.” ²⁰So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it

24 Observed by contemporaries in deliverance ministry. Magical, pagan, or otherwise satanically induced exorcism often results in the temporary cure of the condition, only later to be replaced by something worse.

immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. ²¹Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he answered. ²²"It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." ²³"If you can't?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes." ²⁴Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" ²⁵When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." ²⁶The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently, and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." ²⁷But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up. ²⁸After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" ²⁹He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer." (Mark 9:17–29, NIV)

vv. 17–18 This account takes place immediately after the transfiguration. Jesus comes down the mount with Peter, James, and John and finds the rest of his disciples arguing with a group of Pharisees. I surmise it had to do with the previous failure of the men to drive out the demon, as we later find out. Jesus inquires about the argument, but before receiving a reply, the father of the boy calls out to him and explains what is wrong with the child; a demon caused the child to be mute, a case we have seen before. However, this spirit also periodically seized the child, causing a condition similar to

epilepsy. The nine apostles present were unable to expel the demon from the child.

v. 19 The Lord responds with frustration over the condition of that generation. Henry cites two opinions: it is either a rebuke to the disciples for their inability to exercise the power he gave them or a rebuke to the scribes who rejoiced over the defunct deliverance. In Matthew's account, he also calls them a "perverse" generation. It may be that "faithless" is a rebuke to the disciples and "perverse" a rebuke to the scribes.²⁵

v. 20 As soon as the boy comes close to Christ, the spirit goes into a demonic manifestation. Contemporary deliverance ministries often observe that spirits will go into manifestation when they are threatened for whatever reason. The described epileptic condition manifests itself as well.

v. 21–22 While the demon is manifesting, Jesus does not immediately expel the spirit, nor does he command the manifestation to cease. He asks the father when this condition began. It began very early in the child's life, and now the father adds that it often tries to kill him by throwing him into water or fire. His emotions probably escalate as he remembers the horror and watches the manifestation before him, and he bursts into a desperate plea for help.

vv. 23–24 Jesus is taken aback by the doubtful statement as to whether or not the Son of God would be able to deliver the boy and explains all things are possible with faith. The father cries back, asking for help in his faith. Faith, here, is the central question of the passage, showing that it is the necessary ingredient for the supernatural.

25 Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 413.

vv. 25–27 *When Jesus saw a crowd was gathering rapidly* and thus threatening to expose the messianic secret, he finally commanded the spirit *by name or function* to leave the boy and forbid it to enter him again. Once Jesus rebuked the spirit, the convulsions *increased* as the spirit departed until finally, the boy collapsed. The violence of the manifestation and collapse of the boy was what probably gave occasion for the audience to assume he was dead. The Lord took the boy and raised him up, proving his life and freedom.

vv. 28–29 The disciples later question him about why they could not cast out the demon. The Lord explains that *this kind* only comes out through prayer and fasting. In Matthew's version, he says that their unbelief was the reason for the failure. Some have connected *this kind* with the unbelief that the Lord speaks of in Matthew, denoting that their unbelief will not depart without prayer or fasting. A more honest reading will connect *this kind* with kinds of demons, of which this spirit was particularly powerful. Henry explains, "The disciples must not think to do their work always with a like ease; some services call them to take more than ordinary pains; but Christ can do that with a word's speaking, which they must prevail for the doing of by *prayer and fasting*."²⁶

In this passage, we see again a confrontation between the spiritual warfare of Christ and his followers and the religionists. Faith appears as the central fuel for exorcism's success or lack thereof. Further, in this case, the symptoms of demonism were not always present but only came in severe episodes. We also learn that there are degrees of demonic power and, likewise, various degrees of effort that must be exerted to deal with it.

²⁶ Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 413.

Woman with the Spirit of Infirmity

¹⁰And He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. ¹¹And there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent double, and could not straighten up at all. ¹²When Jesus saw her, He called her over and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your sickness." ¹³And He laid His hands on her; and immediately she was made erect again and *began* glorifying God. ¹⁴But the synagogue official, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, *began* saying to the crowd in response, "There are six days in which work should be done; so come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath day." ¹⁵But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall and lead him away to water *him*?" ¹⁶And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?" ¹⁷As He said this, all His opponents were being humiliated; and the entire crowd was rejoicing over all the glorious things being done by Him. (Luke 13:10–17)

vv.10–11 As in the first account we examined, the Lord Jesus is again teaching in the synagogue, though he is not alone. A woman there had a severe deformity that prevented her from standing up straight for eighteen years. Though it was probably unknown to the other congregants, Christ saw that hers was not a natural ailment, but a

deformity caused by a *spirit of infirmity*. This is the third of seven accounts where demonization is expressed only through an infirmity.

vv. 12–13 The Lord calls the woman and brings her ailment into the public. Wiersbe points out that Jesus “exposes” her disease in front of everyone when we cross this with Matthew 12:13 and that this was to “expose” Satan.²⁷ This was not a private healing. Jesus did not take the woman into the back room to deliver her, nor did he see it as an interruption of the meeting. The Lord exercised and healed the woman by first verbally saying that she was “loosed,” or untied, unbound from her infirmity. He then laid his hands on her, and she straightened up. It is possible the “loosing” expelled the demon and the laying on of hands enacted the healing. Her response, naturally, was glorifying God.

v. 14 The synagogue administrator was not thrilled about the healing. Much like several previous accounts, deliverance for the captives seems to have been a big point of contention with the enemies of Christ. He didn’t have the audacity to rebuke Christ, who was teaching after all, so he rebuked the congregation. His rebuke is obnoxious, saying that the people ought to come on other days to be healed. Who would heal them? He didn’t think his statement through or was perhaps comparing Christ in the same category as “quacks and mountebanks.”²⁸

v.15 Unlike the synagogue official who beat around the bush, Christ rebuked him directly, pointing out that everyone was willing to “loose” their animals to be fed and watered on the Sabbath. It’s commonly understood that it was *cruel* to do otherwise. Is not

27 Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament*, 225.

28 Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 584.

the loosing of an animal to water it, however mundane and easy it is, more work than speaking a word and touching with a hand?

v. 16 Now if we can untie the ox and the ass, why not loose this *daughter of Abraham*? Wiersbe rightly points out that this refers to the woman's spiritual condition, not her physical ethnicity. That means she was a converted person who was bound by a demon, an uncomfortable reality Wiersbe is hesitant to admit.²⁹ Henry, on the other hand, sees no problem with the fact. Rather, he loosely connects this passage with the Syrophoenician woman, pointing out that as a believer, she is the very person "entitled" to deliverance.³⁰

v. 17 Christ's clear rebuke was a humiliation to his opponents and pointed out the rightness of what was done for the woman. The rest of the crowd accepted the miracle and its logic and praised God.

This passage is so abundantly clear that a believer was bound by a demon it is almost impossible for commentators to wiggle out of its implications without resorting to theological gymnastics. But the reality is that this exorcism was not the exception; it was the rule. Derek Prince writes that the people the Lord delivered from the demonic were "observant Jews who met every Sabbath in the synagogue and spent the rest of the week caring for their families, tending their fields, fishing the sea and minding their shops."³¹ In all seven of these passages, there is no clear example of a person being delivered who did not express some faith in God, somehow or another. Several cried or ran to Christ. Several were found worshipping God in the synagogue. In one case, the Lord withheld

29 Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament*, 225

30 Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 585.

31 Derek Prince, *They Shall Expel Demons: What you Need to Know about Demons—Your Invisible Enemy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 1998), 21.

deliverance until faith was proved; in another, the Lord calls the woman healed a legitimate believer.

Exorcism in the Ministry of Jesus

Exorcism was not new when Jesus began to cast out demons. However, the way in which he did it was revolutionary. Previous exorcisms were performed from a place of weakness, seeking to invoke some stronger spiritual force to subdue a possessing demon. However, Jesus was himself a stronger spiritual force and delegated that strength to his followers. The exorcisms of Jesus were the most dramatic confrontation with the Kingdom of Darkness in his ministry and most directly connected with the arrival of the Kingdom of God.³²

*Table I
The Exorcisms of Jesus*

The Account	Reference	The Victim	The Malady	The Cure
The Man in the Synagogue	Mark 1:21–28, Luke 4:31–37	A man in a synagogue at Capernaum. Most likely a regular worshipper who was unaware that he was demonized.	The scripture gives no indication. We can surmise that it was a subtle oppression.	The demon manifests and verbally engages Christ. The Lord forbids the spirit to speak further and commands it to come out verbally. The spirit convulses the man and then leaves.

32 Graham H. Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus: Exorcism among Early Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 128.

<p>The Demonic of the Gadarenes</p>	<p>Matt. 8:28–34, Mark 5:1–20, Luke 8:26–39</p>	<p>The man was probably a Jew living in the Decapolis. We do not know the background of his faith, but on seeing Christ, he ran to him.</p>	<p>The man was driven to insanity, living in a near-constant state of demonic manifestation. He cut himself, lived in the tombs, and howled like an animal. He also displayed supernatural strength.</p>	<p>The Lord verbally commands the spirit several times without it coming out. He interrogates it, finds its name, and then allows it to go out into a herd of pigs.</p>
<p>The Syrophoenician Woman</p>	<p>Matt. 15:21–28, Mark 7:24–30</p>	<p>The woman in the account intercedes for her daughter, who is demonized. Both are Gentiles, who most likely were pagans. However, the woman displayed legitimate faith.</p>	<p>The demon seemed to have caused some sort of physical suffering, though the woman knew that the suffering was demonic and unnatural.</p>	<p>The Lord granted the woman's request and proclaimed that the daughter was healed, without seeing her, without even commanding any spirits.</p>
<p>The Exorcism of the Mute</p>	<p>Matt 9:32–34</p>	<p>Most likely a Jew.</p>	<p>The spirit caused muteness.</p>	<p>The passage gives very little detail, but it was most likely a verbal command.</p>

The Exorcism of the Blind and Mute	Matt 12:22–32, Mark 3:20–30, Luke 11:14–23	Most likely a Jew.	The spirit caused both blindness and muteness.	The passage gives very little detail, but it was most likely a verbal command.
The Moonstruck Boy	Matt. 17:14–20, Luke 9:37–43	A young Jewish boy, whose father supplicated on his behalf for his healing.	The spirit caused severe epilepsy and suicidal tendencies.	The Lord interviews the father and then commands the spirit to come out. He indicates to the apostles that prayer and fasting would have been effective here.
The Woman with the Spirit of Infirmary	Luke 13:10–17	A devout, older woman whom Jesus classified as a daughter of Abraham.	The spirit bent the woman's back supernaturally, so she could not stand up.	The Lord commanded the spirit to go and laid hands on the woman.

SAMPLE

Spiritual Warfare in Acts

In the “Great Commission” of Matthew 28, the Lord commands the apostles, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit teaching them to observe *all* that I commanded you” (vv. 19–20a, emphasis mine). The Lord commanded and taught the apostles to preach, heal the sick, and cast out demons (Matt. 10:1, 8).

In Acts, we see primarily the story of the growth and development of the early Church. However, Luke prefaces his account by

explaining that it is what Jesus *continued* to do and teach through the apostles (1:1–2). Therefore, it is not surprising that much of the activity of Christ’s ministry is reflected throughout Acts, including confrontational spiritual warfare. There are three passages in which spiritual warfare is especially highlighted.

Mass Deliverance in Samaria

⁴Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word. ⁵Philip went down to the city of Samaria and *began* proclaiming Christ to them. ⁶The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing. ⁷For *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. ⁸So there was much rejoicing in that city. ⁹Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; ¹⁰and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, “This man is what is called the Great Power of God.” ¹¹And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts. ¹²But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike. ¹³Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed. ¹⁴Now

when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John,¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷Then they *began* laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." ²⁰But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹"You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. ²²"Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³"For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity." ²⁴But Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me." (Acts 8:4–24)

v. 4 The context of the previous passage is the persecution of the infant Church at Jerusalem, which began at the death of Stephen. Hellenistic Jews were the easiest targets, standing out from the native Hebraic Jews, hence why the apostles remained (v.1), and the Hellenistic Jews were scattered.³³

33 Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament*, 434.

v. 5 Philip broke a traditional barrier and went to a people who were theoretically further from God than the Jews, though not as far as Gentiles. Most commentators are most interested in this fact as far as the expansion of the gospel is concerned. This is not within the scope of our subject. What is important to note is that the Samaritans had the Torah and were also awaiting the Messiah, making Philip's preaching relevant.³⁴

vv. 6–8 The first matter of spiritual warfare in this passage. The Samaritans pay very close attention to Philip's preaching. The reason they did was because they both *saw* and *heard* the miracles he was performing. The exorcism of *many* with unclean spirits is mentioned first, followed by people being healed from lameness and paralysis. Dr. Murphy connects the demonization with the physical ailments,³⁵ a reasonable theory given the frequent connection in the Gospels. Were those delivered converted before or after their deliverance? Commentators are divided on that matter, though there is general agreement that the miracles convinced the multitude of them to turn toward Christ. Finally, the result of all the miracles and conversion was great joy.

vv. 9–11 Simon Magus, as he was often called by later writers, was a magician who had previously captivated the people of the area. Marshall explains that the title "Great Power of God" was some sort of claim to divinity, be that either a heavenly being or some representation of God.³⁶ Murphy attributes the severe demo-

34 Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary: Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 271.

35 Murphy, *Handbook for Spiritual Warfare*, 316.

36 I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 165.

nization of the city to this rascally magician, who had so ensnared them with demonic power.³⁷

vv. 12–13 Whatever magical powers Simon displayed, real or fictitious, paled greatly in comparison to the Gospel trident of evangelism, exorcism, and miracles, in the estimation of both the people and Simon himself. Luke tells us that Simon believed and was baptized. It is difficult for many commentators to accept that this means he was *born again*, especially in light of Peter’s rebuke in vv. 22–24. Henry correctly states, “The Church and its ministers must go by a judgment of charity, as far as there is room for it,” thus, Philip rightly baptized him.³⁸ It is difficult to imagine, having been a sorcerer one’s whole life, that years of bad thinking would be erased in the baptistry on hearing and accepting the gospel. Conversion, especially *mass* conversion, is typically complete with an instant change in thinking. In Acts 19, some Christians had believed for some time and still practiced magic! woman in our Church was born again from the occult about two years before this writing. It took her three months to realize that much of her occult practice was displeasing to the Lord when she repented and abandoned it. We have here a similar situation. I agree with Dr. Murphy, who attributes most negative accounts of Simon to legend, and that we all have a trace of Simon Magus within us.³⁹

vv. 14–18 Though these verses contain rich theological insight, they are beyond our subject. Suffice it to say that this author maintains that the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is an experience after conversion, as seems clear in this account. Fernando also points out

37 Murphy, *Handbook for Spiritual Warfare*, 316.

38 Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 80.

39 Murphy, *Handbook for Spiritual Warfare*, 320.

that “there must have been some external manifestations, such as speaking in tongues, that gave unmistakable evidence,” seeing as how Simon “saw” the spirit fell on the people.

vv. 19–24 Simon was especially drawn to this power, which seems to be painted as superior to the healing and delivering power of Philip. Peter very strongly rejects this offer. Marshall comments that Peter was consigning Simon and his money to damnation if he didn’t repent.⁴⁰ This strong imprecation is comparable to Peter’s rebuke in Acts 5, which resulted in two deaths. Simon’s reply, and the fact that he did not die on the spot as Ananias and Saphira, may speak to the legitimacy of his conversion. Peter’s description in v. 23 may be evidence that Simon was still demonized, though this is not certain.

This account shows evangelism, healing, and exorcism going hand in hand, in the same manner as the Gospels. Philip, being the only named evangelist of the New Testament, was involved in preaching, exorcising, and healing. In evangelism of unreached areas, there is often confrontation with occultists, which may either result in a confrontation, such as in Acts 13, or it may be a crude conversion.

The Girl with Python

¹⁶It 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. ¹⁷Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, “These men are bond-servants of

⁴⁰ I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 168.

the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation.”¹⁸She 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 moment.¹⁹But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities,²⁰and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, “These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews,²¹and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans” (Acts 16:16–21)

v. 16 Paul and the apostolic team made their ministry in Philippi by the river at the place of prayer. While doing so, there was a young girl who was demonized by a spirit of divination, or more accurately, Python, whom her owners were using for profit. The spirit of python was related in Greek culture to the oracles of Apollo at Delphi. Marshall explains that Python was also connected with ventriloquism.⁴¹ This ability no doubt enhanced the girl’s reputation.

v. 17 The girl was going about proclaiming that the apostles served the Most High God and proclaimed the way of salvation, a message that would not have been alien to a Greek audience.⁴² At first glance, this is a strange confession coming from the Kingdom of Darkness. However, we may remember that demons had made

41 Marshall, 285

42 Marshall, 285.

truthful acknowledgments about Christ in the Gospels. In fact, in no exorcism in the Gospels or Acts did a spirit, while being confronted, speak a lie. In several Gospels' accounts, demonic acknowledgment of Christ may have been a maneuver to prematurely expose the messianic secret, though this explanation would not apply here. Henry makes two possible suggestions: (1) that the spirit was forced to acknowledge the gospel for God's glory, and (2) that it was attempting to legitimize its messages, either to the Church or the Gentiles, or both.⁴³ Of the two suggestions, I find the second more likely, since it is reflected more commonly throughout Church history,⁴⁴ though the first is not impossible.

v. 18 This happened many days before Paul took action, which puzzled commentators. Various theories have been surmised, such as Paul perhaps not realizing it was demonic at first or not caring. If our understanding of the exorcisms in the Gospels is correct, I suggest that Paul avoided exorcising the girl for the same reason Christ initially denied the Gentile woman her request. That is, she was not a believer, and deliverance from the demonic was the "children's bread." Whether that be the case or not, in the end, it was annoyance that motivated Paul; perhaps the girl's proclamations were muddying the waters between Christianity and paganism, or maybe she was gaining the interest of new believers, or perhaps Paul was personally annoyed. Whatever the case, he turned to cast out the spirit. NASB and most modern translations do a disservice to this verse, making it seem as though the spirit left instantly. The Greek reads that it came out within the hour. Henry

43 Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 168.

44 Montanans being a notable example of demonic replication of charismatic gifts that sought to infiltrate the Church. See chapter 3.

rightly observes on this point that it took the apostle Paul time to expel this spirit, perhaps because it was strongly entrenched.⁴⁵ If our theory is correct, and most instances of deliverance in scripture were for or on behalf of believers, and this girl was not converted, then the elongated struggle further makes sense.

vv. 19–21 It should not come as a surprise that some people were very displeased with the deliverance ministry of Paul. The girl's owners took a profit loss. Not only did the girl most likely lose the ability to tell fortunes, but Apollo and his snakes were defeated in public by the name of Christ, discrediting their divinity. The owners rounded up a mob, pressed trumped-up charges, and ended up having Paul and Silas flogged and imprisoned, treatment illegal for Roman citizens.

This account shows exorcism continuing in public, accompanying the apostle's ministry. In typical fashion, Luke pits Christ's forces against the world's various occult powers, in this case, through a direct power encounter. Further, as was so often the case with Christ and would continue to be the case throughout the next twenty centuries, deliverance ministry was stiffly resisted. Paul had carried out evangelism, prayer, and teaching peaceably and only encountered persecution when he confronted the Devil.

Christians and Magic in Ephesus

¹¹ God was performing extraordinary 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. ¹³ But also some

⁴⁵ Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 169.

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.¹⁷ This became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified.¹⁸ Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices.¹⁹ And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.²⁰ So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing. (Acts 19:11–20)

vv. 11–12 Ephesus was a center of occult magic during the first century, which is perhaps why Paul was empowered with "extraordinary miracles" beyond those seen in other apostolic missions. In this case, even objects associated with Paul could exorcise spirits and effect cures.

vv. 13–14 Paul's deliverance ministry had come to such notoriety that Jewish exorcists attempted to invoke the name of Jesus in the exorcisms. This reflects magical ritualism; the power of the spell

rested not in the exorcist or spirit behind him but in the names invoked and the words used. Likewise, these men attempted to use the name of Christ as a magic spell, devoid of any relationship to him. “Sceva” was most likely not any real chief priest, but the title was adopted to give credibility to the family business.

vv. 15–16 During an exorcism, these Jewish magicians attempted to invoke the name of Christ. The spirit readily recognized the name of Jesus and Paul, who rightly used his name by challenging the magician’s authority to use the name.⁴⁶ The demonized man quickly overpowered the seven, beating and stripping them.

v. 17 This story circulated the area widely and brought a strong sense of the fear of God.

vv. 18–19 The fear and reverence inspired not only unbelievers but put a repentant fire under the Church as well. What is astounding is that “those *who had* believed” (emphasis mine) began to confess magical practices. The pluperfect tense leaves no room for doubt that these were believers for some time before they had confessed their practices. Marshall comments, “Christians are not fully converted or perfected in an instant, and pagan ways of thinking can persist alongside genuine Christian experience.”⁴⁷

In this passage, we see the deliverance ministry of Paul as an expansionary element in the Ephesus mission. Further, the deeply ingrained occult thinking of legitimate Christians took time to dialogue fully. We also observe that demons continued to recognize Christ and his servants, as they did in the Gospels.

46 It is common in the experience of contemporary deliverance ministers, for demons to recognize and revile persons who are involved in deliverance.

47 Marshall, *Acts of the Apostles*, 330.

Conclusions

Within the ten passages we examined, the following can be drawn. Exorcism was not limited to any particular context. The gospel writers saw fit to record diverse situations in which deliverance took place. Christ and the apostles used exorcism to cure physical ailments and mental disturbances and deliver those who may not have even known they were bound. These encounters occurred in conjunction with healing and preaching, in the synagogues, in the streets, and even in a cemetery. The war was fought on all fronts.

In the Gospels, Christ is the initial deliverer and shortly appoints the apostles especially to preach and drive out demons (Mark 3:14). This commission was later expanded beyond the twelve to include seventy other non-apostolic followers (Luke 10). Despite these specific appointments, the ministry of deliverance was not limited to Christ or those he appointed. Mark 16, if the reader accepts its validity as scripture,⁴⁸ qualifies any believer to drive out demons. Further, in Luke 9:49, a nominal follower of Christ is found casting out demons to the consternation of the apostles. However, Jesus endorses the action in his name. Exorcism appears to have been an all-inclusive ministry in the New Testament.

The people who were delivered in the Gospels and Acts were consistently those who either expressed some faith in Christ or were making some move toward him. It cannot be said that they were all “believers” in the strictest sense, in that there was no New Birth during the life of Christ. However, by Old Testament

48 Though the longer ending of Mark was probably not written by the original John Mark, it is still in the canon of scripture. We believe that the Holy Spirit preserved the scripture, and that protestant canon represents that preserved scripture, regardless of authorship.

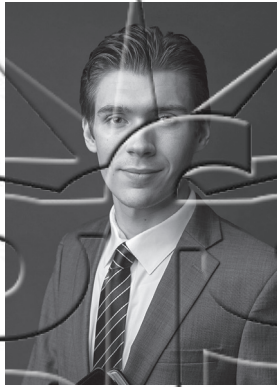
standards, it seems that, generally, those who were delivered were those who were putting their faith in God. For those examples in Acts, there is not enough context to say they were believers or not, though there is a strong possibility that some were. Per the scripture, the doctrine of the demonization of demons is more strongly affirmed throughout the Bible beyond a simple examination of the exorcisms of Jesus. However, that topic is beyond the scope of this work, beyond examining it from a historical perspective.

Their general brevity and charismatic approach characterized the exorcisms of the New Testament. The power came from Christ himself, either through his person, as in the Gospels, or through believers, as in Acts. There was no power in rituals or objects. The closest possible examples are the items Paul used to expel demons in Acts 19, though this is only an incidental resemblance to ritual exorcism.

The significance of exorcism in the ministry of Christians would continue from the Gospels and play a significant role in the early Church. Those deliverances recorded above, and the great victory of Calvary, represent the beachhead to an extended campaign through the Devil out of the known world.

SAMPLE

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