

Part Ten

OBJECTIONS AND OBSTACLES

56

CONTROVERSIES AND OBJECTIONS IN JESUS' MINISTRY

FIRST PASSOVER Cleansing temple in Jerusalem (John 2).

Jewish officials challenge His authority to do it: "What sign have you to show?" (v. 18-20).

Does Nicodemus' coming at night indicate that Jesus was a controversial figure?

Beginning of Galilean Ministry 8 or 9 months after 1st Passover.

At Nazareth. Sermon in synagogue, illustrations of Gentiles, pushed to the cliff (Luke 4:23-30).

At Capernaum. Paralytic forgiven and healed; scribes and Pharisees thought it blasphemy to announce forgiveness of sin (Matt. 9:2-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:18-26. Note Pharisees from Jerusalem following).

At Matthew's house. Feast after his call; Pharisees said, "Why does he eat with publicans and sinners?" (Matt. 9:10-13; Mark 2:15-17; Luke 5:29-32).

Objection implied in the question of John's disciples, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" (Matt. 9:14-17; Mark 2:18-22; Luke 5:33-39).

SECOND PASSOVER

At pool in Jerusalem. Healed lame man on Sabbath; controversy on Sabbath work and making Himself equal with God; Jesus accused Pharisees of not believing Moses or seeking the glory of God; first mention of definite effort or desire to kill him (John 5, esp. v. 18).

In grain fields. 2nd Sabbath controversy; healed withered hand after challenging the watching Pharisees; Jesus looked upon them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart (Matt. 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11).

Capernaum (?). After the question from John; Jesus rebuked the unbelief and poor judgment of many; "Kingdom of heaven suffered violence"; "This generation like children," stubborn and

inconsistent against both John and Jesus (Matt. 11:7-19; Luke 7:24-35). Rebuke of cities which did not repent after many miracles (Matt. 11:20ff).

In house of Simon the Pharisee. Simon's mental objections to Jesus' letting the sinful woman touch Him (Luke 7:36-50).

At Capernaum. Very busy with great crowds; dumb demoniac healed; Pharisees claim He is possessed by Beelzebub; "You brood of vipers! . . . how can you speak good, when you are evil?" (Matt. 12:22-37; Mark 3:22-30). Demand for a sign; "an evil and adulterous generation . . . no sign." "Men of Ninevah shall condemn this generation" (Matt. 12:38-45). His family attempts to interfere, seeming to object to the strenuousness of His ministry (Matt. 12:46-50).

East side of Galilean sea, land of Gadarenes. Casts out demons; people ask Him to leave (Matt. 8:34; Mark 5:17; Luke 8:27).

At Nazareth. Last visit recorded; general unbelief (Matt. 13:54-58; Mark 6:1-6).

THIRD PASSOVER NEAR. Fed 5000; sermon on the Bread of Life at Capernaum, "What sign do you do?" "Give us this bread always." "How does he now say, I have come down from heaven?" "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" "This is a hard saying, who can receive it?" They forsook Him (John 6).

General Condition: "After this, Jesus went about in Galilee; he would not go about in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him" (John 7:1).

Capernaum. Jerusalem Pharisees publicly criticize Jesus for His disciples' eating with unwashed hands; Jesus counterattacks against their traditions which set aside the law of God (Matt. 15:1-20; Mark 7:1-23).

At Magadan. Pharisees and Sadducees test Him with a demand for a sign from heaven (Matt. 15:39; 16:1-4; Mark 8:10-12).

At Caesarea Philippi. Peter's objection to the first plain prediction of Jesus' death (Matt. 16:21-26; Mark 8:31-38; Luke 9:22-26).

At Capernaum (?). Jesus' unbelieving brothers object to His staying in seclusion and urge Him to go to the feast of Tabernacles (John 7:3-9).

FEAST OF TABERNACLES (Six months before His death). At the feast before Jesus came, many were looking for Him, but no man dared to speak openly about Him (John 7:11-13).

CONTROVERSIES AND OBJECTIONS IN JESUS' MINISTRY

Jerusalem during the Feast. Jesus accused the rulers of seeking to kill Him. They answer, "You have a demon" (John 7:14-24). Some of the people said, "Is not this the man they seek to kill?" "We know where this man comes from" (John 7:27). They sought to arrest Him (John 7:30). The Pharisees heard the people muttering about Him, and they sent officers to arrest Him (John 7:32); but they did not (John 7:45, 46). "Is the Christ from Galilee? He comes from Bethlehem" (John 7:40-44). "You are bearing witness to yourself; your testimony is not true." "Will he kill himself, since he says, "Where I go you cannot come?" "Who are you?" (John 8:21-29). Dispute over their freedom and fatherhood (John 8:31-47). "Are we not right in saying you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" Vehement objection to the promise that believers will never see death: "Whom do you make yourself to be?" "Before Abraham was I am." So they took up stones to stone Him (John 8:48-59).

Jerusalem. The man born blind healed on the Sabbath. The healed blind man investigated and berated and excommunicated. Brief exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees on blindness and guilt (John 9:1-41). Dispute among the Jews about the Sermon on the Good Shepherd. Some: "He hath a demon" (John 10:19-21).

Judea. Another dumb demoniac healed and again some said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebub" (Luke 11:14-26). Jesus rebuked the demand for a sign (Luke 11:29-36).

Dining in house of a Pharisee. Jesus did not wash His hands; Pharisee astonished. Jesus rebuked the self-righteousness of the Pharisees for (1) outward cleansing, inward filth; (2) tithing herbs, neglecting justice, etc.; (3) loving pre-eminence; (4) hypocrisy; and included lawyers for (1) harsh legal burdens; (2) persecuting prophets and apostles; (3) perverting God's message, neither accepting it nor letting others accept it (Luke 11:37-54). They press Him hard to catch something for which to accuse Him.

To great multitudes Jesus gave a warning against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees (Luke 12:1). "I come to cast fire on the earth . . . To bring . . . not peace . . . but division" (Luke 12:49-53).

In a synagogue on Sabbath. Healing a bent woman; ruler of synagogue indignant (Luke 13:11-17).

FEAST OF DEDICATION Jerusalem. Jews ask Him to tell plainly if He is the Christ. Jesus said, "I told you" and appealed to His works, saying, "I and the Father are one." They took up stones

OBJECTIONS AND OBSTACLES

to stone Him. He answered from scripture (John 10:22-33). They say, "You blaspheme." Again tried to arrest Him (John 10:34-39).

DEPARTURE TO PEREA (Three months before His death, John 10:40).

In Perea. Pharisees say, "Get away from here; for Herod wants to kill you," "I go on my way today and tomorrow and the next day; for it cannot be that a prophet should die outside Jerusalem (Luke 13:31-35).

In home of Pharisee on Sabbath. Man with dropsy: "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" Jesus healed the man and silenced the Pharisees (Luke 14:1-6). Jesus reproves guests for seeking chief places, and for inviting only those who might repay the favor (Luke 14:7-14).

Publicans and sinners come to Jesus. Pharisees murmur, "He receives sinners and eats with them." Parables of seeking the lost (Luke 15).

Teaching in Perea. "You cannot serve God and mammon." The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, scoffed at Him. Jesus rebuked them, "You justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts." Story of rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16).

After raising Lazarus from death. The chief priests and Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do?" Caiaphas said, "It is expedient that one man should die in place of the whole nation." So from that day they planned how to put him to death (John 11:43-54).

On last journey to Jerusalem. Pharisees tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" and "Why then did Moses command one to give a bill of divorcement and to put her away?" (Matt. 19:1-9; Mark 10:1-12).

At Jericho. Zacchaeus received Jesus, the people sneered, "He has gone to lodge with a sinner" (Luke 19:1-10).

A few days before the Passover. People looking for Jesus and wondering, "Will he come to the feast?" For the chief priests and Pharisees had given orders that anyone knowing where Jesus was must report Him so they could arrest Him (John 11:55-57).

At a feast in Bethany. Judas objected to Mary's anointing Jesus, "Why this waste?" (Matt. 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8).

CONTROVERSIES AND OBJECTIONS IN JESUS' MINISTRY

TRIUMPHAL ENTRY. Crowds praising Him. Pharisees said, "Teacher rebuke thy disciples" (Luke 19:37-40).

Next day (Monday). Cleansed temple again; said, "You have made it a den of robbers" (Matt. 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48).

Healing in the temple. Children praise Him; chief priests and scribes object (Matt. 21:14ff). They sought a way to destroy Him, but feared Him and the crowds.

Next day (Tuesday). In temple, Jesus authority challenged by priests, scribes, elders. Counter question about John's baptism; no answers (Matt. 21:23-37; Mark 11:27-33; Luke 20:1-8). Parable of two sons (Matt. 21:28-32). Parable of wicked husbandmen (Matt. 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19). A trap question about tribute to Caesar (Pharisees with Herodians. Matt. 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26). The Sadducees' question about marriage in the resurrection. The lawyer's question about the greatest commandment. Jesus' question about David's son being David's Lord (Matt. 22:23-46; Mark 12:18-37; Luke 20:27-44). Disciples warned against the Pharisees and their hypocrisies (Matt. 23).

Late Tuesday or Wednesday. Reflections about the coming of Greeks to Jesus, "Who is this son of man that must be lifted up?" Hardened unbelief; many believed but would not confess for fear of the Jews. Jesus said, "The word that I have spoken will judge on the last day" (John 12:20-50).

Thursday night. Trials before Annas, Caiaphas, Sanhedrin, Pilate, Herod, Pilate. Mockings and charges at the trials and at the Crucifixion.

For Further Study:

Foster, R. C. *Studies in the Life of Christ*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1938, 1962, 1968. Pp. 426-439, 445-6, 455-461, 655-674, 690-698, 868-879, 1125-1183. Comment on some of the controversies in which Jesus was engaged.

Harrison, Everett. *A Short Life of Christ*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1968. Pp. 123-135. Discusses Jesus' conflicts with the Pharisees.

Stott, John R. W. *Christ the Controversialist*. Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970. Discusses how Christ answered His critics.

NOTES ON DEMON POSSESSION

One of the four following conclusions must be true concerning the reality of demons as mentioned in the Gospel accounts. No other is possible, and only one of these can be true.

Either, 1, Jesus did cast out real demons as represented; or, 2, Jesus did no such things but the accounts are entirely false; or, 3, Jesus did go through the motions and the pretense of casting them out, while He knew there were no real demons; or, 4, Jesus was as ignorant and superstitious on this subject as the people and honestly thought He cast out spirits in healing sickness.

Which of these views fits the facts and the testimony? The true meaning of a word or an expression may be put into its place in any account; and the definition will fit as well as the word it defines. Just read the accounts of Jesus' intelligent conversations with demons, supplying the word "disease" as the explanation for the word "demon."

I. MEANING OF THE WORD "DEMON"

1. Not the same as the Greek word for "devil." There is only one devil but many demons.
2. Oldest meaning: divine power, deity. Homer (c. 850 B.C.) used it interchangeably with the word God.¹
3. A being between man and God. Plato attempted to fix this definition. He used it in both a good and bad sense. Plato held that they included departed spirits of good men. Socrates spoke constantly of his "demon." Ignatius says that Jesus told His disciples after the resurrection, "I am not a disembodied demon."² This shows his way of expressing what Luke 24:37-39 says. See also Luke 4:33, "spirit of an unclean demon."
4. Elsewhere in the New Testament demons are always evil spirits, messengers and ministers of Satan.
 - a. Heathen deities (Acts 17:18; I Cor. 10:20; Rev. 9:20).
 - b. Ones who believe and tremble (or bristle) but are lost

¹ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, i. 2.8. See Acts 17:18 and Alexander Campbell's, *Popular Lectures and Addresses* (Nashville: Harbinger Book Club, 1861), Pp. 379-397 for older uses.

² Ignatius, *Epistle to Smyrna*, iii. 2.

NOTES ON DEMON POSSESSION

(James 2:19).

- c. They recognize Jesus as Son of God (Matt. 8:29; Mark 1:23, 24, 34; 3:11; Luke 4:41).
- d. Agents of Satan (Matt. 12:24-26; Luke 10:17, 18; 11:15-22).

II. EVIDENCES THAT THEY ARE IMMATERIAL, INTELLIGENT BEINGS, NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH DISEASES OR FIGURES OF SPEECH.

1. The Old Testament legislation proceeded upon the assumption that there is such a thing as a "familiar spirit" (Lev. 19:31; Deut. 18:9-14).
2. In the New Testament they are regarded as personalities (for example, James 2:19, believing; Rev. 16:14, working signs). Jesus founded a parable on their conduct, (Luke 11:24-26).
3. Jesus distinguished between them and diseases. So did His disciples (Matt. 10:8; Luke 10:17-20).
4. Jesus addressed them as persons and they answered as such (Mark 5:8, 9; 9:25).
5. They manifested desires and passions (Mark 5:12, 13).
6. They showed superhuman knowledge of Jesus (Mark 1:24, 34; Matt. 8:29, and of His apostles, Acts 16:16, 17; 19:15).

III. VIEWS OF THEIR IDENTITY AND ORIGIN

1. Plato: departed men, some good.³ Josephus: spirits of evil men have died.⁴ Alexander Campbell held firmly to the view that they are (or were) the ghosts of dead men. He said all pagan writers, the Jewish historians, and the Christian fathers expressed this opinion. He thought it was implied in Scripture (I Tim. 4:1).⁵
2. The *Book of Enoch* says demons are fallen angels. Consider II Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 on "angels who sinned." Matthew 25:41—"the devil and his angels." Ephesians 6:11, 12—"We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (See Eph. 3:10; Col. 1:16; Rom. 8:38; Col. 2:15). Their immediate

³ Plato, *Symposium*.

⁴ Josephus, *op. cit.*, vii. 6.3.

⁵ Campbell, *op. cit.*, Pp. 384-389.

OBJECTIONS AND OBSTACLES

recognition of Jesus might indicate former acquaintance with Him or supernatural knowledge. In the Bible they do not seem to be confused with ghosts; but in the one case of a dead man reappearing (I Sam. 28:11-19) he does not act as a demon.

3. Other spirits, neither human, nor of the rank of angels. (See Judg. 9:23; I Sam. 16:14; 18:10; 19:9; I Kings 22:19-23).
4. The word might be used of a combination of all of these.⁶

IV. RATIONAL SUPPOSITIONS OF PROBABILITY.⁷

1. Any non-materialistic (idealistic or spiritual) view of the universe makes it likely that man is not the only product of the cosmic process.
2. Experiences of missionaries may be best explained by assumption of demon possession.
3. Lack of experience with demons in Christian countries may be explained.
4. The mysterious hinterland beyond surface consciousness is hardly known at all; so we cannot rule out the possibility of spiritual intelligences being able to affect it by entry from without.
5. It is common experience (as well as teaching of scripture) that the powers of darkness and evil do influence our moral freedom. Then it is just possible that they may act through man's physical nature upon his rational, or vice versa.
6. It is a well-ascertained fact physiologically that the conditions of a man's mental and spiritual nature exert influence upon the body and are influenced by the body: e.g., fever produces delirium; dyspepsia produces despondency; etc.
7. If effects between man and man can be produced by animal magnetism or by hypnotism, so might demons influence and disturb both the physical and rational natures.

V. EFFECTS OF POSSESSION, OR ACCOMPANYING CIRCUMSTANCES

1. Physical ills or diseases.
 - a. Matthew 9:32, 33, "dumb man" spoke when the demon

⁶ J. Hering, "Demons", *A Companion to the Bible*, ed. by J. J. vonAllmen, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958). Pp. 83-85.

⁷ See R. C. Foster's comments on Balmforth's observations on the reality of demons, *Studies in the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968). Pp. 416-417.

NOTES ON DEMON POSSESSION

was cast out.

- b. Matthew 12:22, "blind and dumb."
 - c. Matthew 17:15, "epilepsy"; but Mark 9:25, "deaf and dumb spirit."
 - d. Mark 5:15, wildness.
 - e. Mark 7:25; Matthew 15:22ff, "grievously vexed," literally, "badly demonized" with no specific disability indicated.
 - f. The woman "whom Satan had bound" (Luke 13:16) "had a spirit of infirmity" but is not said to have been possessed. Deformity of the back.
2. There are some cases in which no physical ill is attributed to the demon (Mark 1:21; Luke 4:31ff). Jesus was charged with demon possession when no malady was apparent, but simply because of His speech and mental attitude, John the Baptist was similarly charged because of his manner of life (John 7:21; 8:48, 52; 10:20; Matt. 11:18).

Note that all these same physical ills, except the being "bowed together" are represented in the Gospels as separate from demon possession in other cases: deaf and having impediment, Mark 7:32; dumb, Matthew 15:30, 31; blind, Luke 18:35ff; John 9; epilepsy (KJV, lunatics), Matthew 4:24, literally "moonstruck," meaning epileptic, not insane.

3. Effects other than disease.

- a. Superhuman knowledge (Mark 1:24; 5:7; 3:11, 12; Luke 4:41; Acts 16:16-18).
- b. Fear of torment (Luke 4:33, 34; 8:28-31; Matt. 8:29).
- c. Conversation as of third person (Mark 1:24, 25; Luke 4:34, 35).
- d. Manner of departing (convulsions) (Mark 1:26; 9:20; Luke 4:35).
- e. Extraordinary strength (Mark 5:3, 4; Acts 19:13-16).
- f. Fierce wildness (Matt. 8:28; Mark 5:4, 5; Luke 8:29; cf. John 10:20).
- g. Desire to enter into some body (Mark 5:12, 13; Matt. 8:31; Luke 11:24, 25).
- h. Multiplicity (Mark 5:9; 16:9; Luke 11:26; 8:30).

VI. NATURE OF PERSONS POSSESSED

1. Mostly grown men, but two were children (Matt. 17:15; Mark 7:25-30; 9:21; Matt. 15:22). Some were women (Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2, 3).

OBJECTIONS AND OBSTACLES

2. Some made very faithful helpers of Christ after they were released (Mark 5:20; Luke 8:2, 3).
3. They always appear to be pitied rather than blamed, treated as unfortunate rather than immoral. Jesus was interested in the persons, not the demons. At least their demons are something else than unbreakable bad habits.

VII. OTHER REFERENCES TO THE WORKING OF DEMONS

1. I Timothy 4:1, doctrines of demons and seducing spirits.
2. James 3:5, factious wisdom is demoniacal ("devilish," KJV).
3. Revelation 16:14, "working signs" and going "forth unto the kings of the whole world, to gather them unto the war of the great day of God."
4. I Corinthians 10:14-22, involved in idolatry and heathen worship.

For Further Study:

Alexander, W. Menzies. *Demon Possession in the New Testament*, Joplin, Missouri: College Press, reprint of 1902 edition. Investigation of the historical, medical and theological aspects of the topic.

Chalk, John Allen and others. *The Devil You Say?* Austin, Texas: Sweet Publishing Company, 1974. Seeks to guide one to a Biblical perspective on understanding demons and the occult.

Edersheim, Alfred. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 8th edition. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1900. Vol. I, Pp. 479-485; 607-613; and on Jewish nations and traditions, Vol. II, Pp. 755-763; 770-776. Good background on Jewish views.

Osterley, W. O. E. "Demon, Demoniacs," *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, ed. by James Hastings. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, Vol. I., Pp. 438-443.

Sweet, Louis Matthews. "Demons" and "Exorcism," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. by James Orr. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1939. Vol. I, Pp. 827-829; 1067-1068.

Unger, Merrill F. *Demons In the World Today*. Wheaton: Tyndale Press, 1971. A study of spiritual forces behind the present world unrest.