

IS THERE DEMON POSSESSION TODAY AS THERE WAS DURING THE TIME OF CHRIST'S INCARNATE MINISTRY?

By Paul T. Butler

It is my opinion that there is no demon possession of human beings today in the precise manner such as manifested in the phenomenal way it was during Christ's incarnate ministry (and perhaps as it was during the remainder of the ascendancy of the Roman empire).

It is my opinion that the "binding of Satan" in Rev. 20:1-6 was initiated and resulted from the redemptive work of Christ in His Incarnation. It was completed when the "beast" of the 4th universal empire (as Daniel predicted), Rome, fell. At that time, it is my opinion, demon possession, as manifested in the Gospels and Acts apparently was to cease. All binding of Satan is relative. He has always been "bound" to some degree or other due to the fact that God is Almighty. God is the only being who is Almighty. It is my opinion a part of Satan's binding has to do with the restriction imposed by God that Satan's demons are no longer able to "possess" human bodies as they were during the time of Christ's incarnation.

1. To have this opinion does not mean I deny the power of Satan to deceive the minds of people today who deliberately choose to believe falsehood perpetrated by "lying signs and wonders." If the definition of demon possession means simply that Satan has captured the minds of men by unbelief, I would agree.

"Satan entered into Judas . . ." (Lk. 22:3 and Jn. 13:27) but he was not what other scriptures describe as "demon possessed."

2. Do the alleged demons possessing people today ever enter into animals? (See Mt. 8:28-34; Lk. 8:26-36; Mk. 5:1-16.)
3. Do the alleged demons possessing people today ever testify to the identity and deity of Christ or the messengers of Christ and what their work is? (See Acts 16:17; 19:15; Mt. 8:29; Mk. 1:24 and above references.)
4. Do the alleged demons possessing people today ever speak out as recognizable separate individuals—definitively separate from the human whose body they possess?
5. How may demons (alleged) today be exorcised? Is the exorcism always miraculous and always instantaneous? If not, is it simply a matter of conversion by the power of the gospel regenerating the mind through preaching and teaching? When there is an unsuccessful exorcism, or casting out, are those possessed by alleged demons doomed to suffer such possession until they die?
6. Only Jesus could give power to exorcise demons. That was a direct gift and a supernatural power. It apparently did not require being a "born again" believer to receive this power—Judas apparently was given this power—he was one of the twelve (cf. Mt. 10:1, 8).
7. On the other hand, many pseudo-faith-healers today, and "ministers" from all differing theological and doctrinal positions, claim they have

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

cast out or exorcised demons. Whom are we to believe? Who has that power today among all who claim it? What are we to conclude from their claims? Who is to decide which are "real" demons and "real" exorcists? By what criteria?

8. Demons in the scripture were not "ecto-plasm"—they were (and still are, in the abyss) real persons!
9. The psychic powers of the human mind over matter have been well documented. What some think is demon possession could very well be such psycho-somatic phenomena. Voodooism, etc., may be classified under this heading.
10. The most destructive power of the devil is not possession of a human body but a mind or soul (cf. Mt. 10:28). It appears that while demons possessed bodies of some humans during Christ's incarnation—the mind or soul of that person was not possessed. Demons merely "troubled" humans (Lk. 6:18); they "drove" people to do, physically, what they did (Lk. 8:29).
11. Of all the miraculous gifts the Corinthian Christians were given, exorcism of demon possessed was not among them (I Cor. ch. 12-14).
12. How do we know when someone is demon possessed? What is the criteria by which distinction is made between demon possession and epilepsy, mental illness, perverted maliciousness and crazed murderousness (e.g. Hitler, de Sade, etc.)?
13. Is it not possible that all the mania for the occult and the practice of it is being used by the devil to get people to think he has powers which he does not really have (Rev. 13:13-15)?
14. If demon possession could only come to those who were willing—was the "little daughter" of the Syro-Phoenician woman a "willing" victim? In other words, demon possession had nothing to do with the willingness of the possessed. Therefore, exorcism was not done by "conversion" but by the exercise of divine authority in a miraculous way.
15. It seems apparent that only Jesus and the apostles, or specially endowed disciples (Lk. 10) could exorcise demons. This they did, not by "conversion" but by miracle. There is no evidence from the scriptures that this miraculous power could be given by any other than Christ Himself and that while He was in His incarnate ministry.
16. If miracles of healing, speaking in foreign languages, prophecy, including "discernment of spirits" (I Cor. 12:10), etc., ceased with the end of the New Testament era and the death of the apostles (or the ones to whom the apostles imparted these gifts), so that we can only be certain of the documented miracles of Scripture, then the same principle ought to be applied, for the same reason, to demon possession and exorcism.

IS THERE DEMON POSSESSION TODAY?

Otherwise, we are in a quandry to decide about modern claims of demon possession and exorcism among religious groups from one end of the doctrinal spectrum to the other. There are also pagan exorcists making claims.

17. There really is not any documentation of demon possession in the Old Testament such as occurred during the Incarnation (with an exception or two, e.g. King Saul).
18. It appears, then, that demon possession in the precise manner in which it occurred during Christ's incarnate ministry was uniquely for the purpose of affording historical evidence that Christ (and His apostles) possessed the Sovereign Spirit of God—that their message was one of victory and power over Satan and all of hell.
19. A recent case in point, excerpts from article in Joplin, Mo., *Globe*, 3-8-81:

Catholic priests were "attempting" to rid an 11 year old boy in Brookfield, Conn. of "demons." (The boy's name is unknown.)

A 19 year old friend was watching these sessions, challenged the demons "to take me on. Control me. Leave this boy alone," acc. to tape recordings of the sessions. Arne Johnson was the friend.

Johnson allegedly stabbed to death a co-worker (Alan Bono) after Bono had quarrelled at Bono's apartment.

Johnson is now pleading that "he is not responsible for his acts" because of "demonic possession."

Ed and Lorraine Warren, who worked on the Amityville Horror case were asked to help the boy who "appeared to be possessed" (the 11 year old boy). The Warrens said they found "movement of objects and frightening manifestations" in the house. The Warrens said "the boy was indeed possessed," and he seemed to be possessed "off and on, 24 hours a day," said one family member. Tape recordings the Warrens made of some of the sessions have the boy making guttural and hissing sounds, cursing his mother, and threatening to stab and kill those present in the room.

Photographs of the sessions show family members attempting to restrain the boy, who the Warrens said seemed to have superhuman strength.

A priest named Virgulak was called to investigate the case; he has made several reports to the bishop of the diocese, but no public reports. He has "declined to discuss the reports but said no formal exorcism has ever been requested or performed on the boy."

There were "prayer sessions" called "a deliverance" which is supposed to be "a lesser form of exorcism that does not require approval of the bishop."

The Warrens say Johnson's attempts to help the boy were amateurish

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

because "the only way to order demons out of a person is by using the name of Jesus Christ."

Mrs. Warren said, ". . . (Johnson) he challenged what was within the child to take him on—and none of us ever do that, not even priests."

Problems with this account:

- a. Based on a number of "begging the question" statements such as, "appeared to be . . .," "seemed to be . . .," "seemed to have . . .," "no public reports . . .," "supposed to be . . .," "approval of the bishop. . . ."
 - b. "In the name of Jesus" means in the Bible, "by the authority of Jesus." Does Roman Catholicism have the "authority of Jesus" to exorcise? The "name of Jesus" is to be used in exorcism by only those authorized to use it (cf. Acts 19:13-16). Whom are we to believe now has that authorization? What credentials do they present for it? Do such exorcists agree doctrinally with the Word of the Holy Spirit in the Bible? If not, are we to believe they have the power of the Spirit?
20. There are two Old Testament prophecies, clearly Messianic, which predict the cessation of "sorceries and soothsayers" (Micah 5:12-13), and "unclean spirits" or demon-possession (Zech. 13:2). Homer Hailey, in his book, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets*, pub. Baker, sums up Zechariah 13:1-6 in these words, "A fountain for sin and uncleanness will be opened for all the people. At that time the falsehood of idols will cease, prophesying will be discontinued, and the unclean spirits will pass out of the land." Mr. Hailey contends that Zechariah 13:1-9 is entirely Messianic and says, "Once the foundation was laid and the new revelation was complete, the need for prophets would cease. Daniel indicates the same in a strong Messianic prophecy, when he said of the anointed one, the prince, that He would bring in everlasting righteousness, and seal up vision and prophecy. Likewise, unclean spirits, the antithesis of the prophets, would cease. In the conquest of Christ over Satan and his forces, unclean spirits have ceased to control men as they did in the time of the ministry of Christ and the apostles."
- Of course, these prophecies from Micah and Zechariah do not preclude the *attempts* of human beings and Satan to try to *deceive* the world that demon possession and sorceries are still supernaturally viable. We believe the Bible clearly indicates what is alleged today to be supernatural demon possession is no longer a possibility. *Lying* wonders and *deceiving* signs remain very much a possibility so long as men and women refuse to believe and love the truth and prefer to believe what is false (see II Thess. 2:10-12; II Tim. 4:3-4, etc.).
21. The crucial and ultimate question about modern (alleged) demon possession is: *Whose testimony is reliable?* Whose testimony is inerrantly, infallibly reliable besides the testimony of the Scriptures? None! Any man today, without the inerrancy and infallibility of the Holy Spirit to verify his experience and accredit his testimony may be either deceived or a deceiver.