

73 CASTING OUT DEMONS

Introduction: The prevalence of demon possession in the gospels is puzzling because of its complete absence in the Old Testament. In the synoptic gospels, demons take possession of people, requiring exorcism to cast them out. Possessing demons, so prevalent in the gospels, was a common belief of the day. Jesus did not dispute this folk belief, but simply demonstrated, with His divine power, that demons were of no account. We will seek to show that “having a demon” was a first century label for maladies, with perhaps anomalous behaviors, and was not due to an infestation of demon-gods in the land during Jesus’s day.

Background: In the first century, the belief in demons (Gr #1140) was widespread. All the influencing nations of Judea—Egypt, Persia, Greece, Rome—were polytheistic and the belief in demons had seeped into the every day life of first century Jews. However, there was no uniformity as to what “having a demon” meant. It’s interesting to note, John’s gospel, which articulates a more theological expression of Jesus’s ministry, does not contain instances of Jesus casting out demons. Please note that Jesus referred to Beelzebul, Mammon and demons at various times, but such naming does not affirm their reality.

1. Definitions of polytheism and monotheism:

A. Polytheism: 1. The worship of or belief in more than one god. 2. The doctrine of, or belief in, a plurality of gods. 3. The belief in the existence of many gods. (American Heritage Dictionary)

B. Monotheism: 1. The doctrine or belief that there is only one God. 2. The doctrine or belief that there is but one God. 3. The belief in a single god (one God). (American Heritage Dictionary)

2. The Old Testament states demons (Heb. #8163, #7700) are idols or false gods. Believing in the power of demons is idol worship.

A. “They [Israel] shall no more sacrifice their sacrifices to the goat demons [#8163], after which they play the prostitute.” Lev 17:7. (The goat demon was a Pan-like demon worshipped in Egypt.)

B. “They sacrificed to demons [#7700], not God, to gods that they didn’t know, to new gods that came up recently, which your fathers didn’t dread.” Deut 32:17

C. “Yes, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons [#7700].” Ps 106:37

3. Similar to the Old Testament, Paul states demons [Gr #1140] are idols or false gods. Believing in the power of demons is idol worship.

A. “But I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I don’t desire that you would have fellowship with demons.” I Cor 10:20

B. “You can’t both drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You can’t both partake of the table of the Lord and of the table of demons.” I Cor 10:21

C. “But the Spirit says expressly that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons.” I Tim. 4:1

4. What the Old Testament called sickness, the gospel of Matthew called “possessed with demons”.

A. “When evening came, they brought to him many possessed with demons. He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, ‘He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.’” Mt 8:16-17

B. “Surely he has borne our sickness and carried our suffering; yet we considered him plagued, struck by God, and afflicted.” Is 53:4

5. Jesus was monotheistic. Believing in other gods, like demons, is polytheism. Therefore, we can logically conclude, that casting out demons in the gospels was a customary expression of the day, although likely thought to be actual by many of the people in the first century.

A. “Hear, Israel: Yahweh is our God. Yahweh is one.” Dt 6:4

B. “Jesus replied, ‘This is the most important of all the commandments: Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.’” Mk 12:29

C. “It was shown to you... that Yahweh is God and that there is none else besides Him.” Dt 4:35

D. “Yahweh, He is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is none else.” Dt 4:39

E. “All the peoples of the earth may know that Yahweh, He is God. There is none else.” 1Ki 8:60

F. “I am Yahweh, and there is none else. Besides Me, there is no God.” Is 45:5

6. “Demon possession” was not connected with the paranormal, but to serious maladies with, often, anomalous behaviors. (no levitation or other paranormal demonic signs seen in movies.)

A. Boy with seizures: “A man said to him [Jesus], ‘Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that makes him mute. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams at the mouth, grinds his teeth, and becomes rigid.... When the spirit saw him, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell on the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.’” Mk. 9:17-18, 20

B. Man living among tombs: “As Jesus stepped ashore, a certain man from the town met him who was possessed by demons. For a long time this man had worn no clothes and had not lived in a house, but among the tombs.” “Each night and every day among the tombs and in the mountains, he would cry out and cut himself with stones.” Lk 8:26-27, Mk 5:5

C. Man in synagogue: “Now in the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon and he cried out with a loud voice...” Lk 4:33

7. Examples of “demon-afflicted” individuals with extreme suffering.

A. Boy with seizures: “It [demon, illness] hardly ever leaves him alone, torturing him severely.” Lk 9:39

B. Man living among tombs: “No one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. For his hands and feet had often been bound with chains and shackles, but he had torn the chains apart and broken the shackles in pieces. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Each night and every day among the tombs and in the mountains, he would cry out and cut himself with stones.” Mk 5:3-5

8. Examples of the “demon possessed” fearing Jesus apparently due to cruel treatment they had experienced in the past.

A. Man living among tombs: “When he saw Jesus, he cried out, fell down before him, and shouted with a loud voice, ‘Leave me alone, Jesus, Son of the Most High God! I beg you, do not torment me!’” Lk 8:28

B. Man in the synagogue: “Leave us alone, Jesus the Nazarene! Have you come to destroy us?”

9. Those healed from “demons” believed in the power of Jesus.

A. Boy with seizures: “Immediately the father of the child cried out with tears, ‘I believe. Help my unbelief!’” Mk 9:24

B. Man living among tombs: “When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him.” Mk 5:6

C. Man in synagogue: “He cried out with a loud voice... ‘I know who you are – the Holy One of God.’” Lk 4:34

D. Others: “Demons also came out of many, crying out, ‘You are the Son of God!’” Lk 4:41

10. Jews appear to equate demon possession and insanity: “Many of them [Jews] said, ‘He [Jesus] has a demon and is insane!’ Why do you listen to Him?’ Others said, ‘These are not the sayings of one possessed by a demon. It isn’t possible for a demon to open the eyes of the blind, is it?’” Jn 10:19-21

SUMMARY:

Some argue that because the Bible sometimes states Yahweh is greater than all the gods, this implies there are other gods. When people are steeped in polytheism, they don’t let go of their gods easily. A first step is to affirm Yahweh is the greatest of all the gods. In Acts 17, observing the array of gods in Athens, Paul didn’t tell the Athenians all their gods were of no account. He kindly and simply took them a step toward Truth; he told them he knew who their unknown God was—the creator of all things.

Some claim that Christians who don’t believe in the traditional view of demons, Satan and fallen angels, do not have a “supernatural world view”. This is specious and perhaps even manipulative. Anyone who believes in God has a supernatural world view. Correctly stated, those who believe in Yahweh as the only power, do not have a polytheistic supernatural world view. They have a monotheistic supernatural world view.

Notes:

For a more detailed treatment of demon passages: please see chapter 4 of Duncan Heaster’s “The Real Devil”, <https://www.realdevil.info/devilcontents.htm>

For more Preterist Papers scrutinizing the traditional view of “Satan” and fallen angels, please see: Preterist Papers #59 through #72.