

The Miracles Of Jesus Christ: Two Demon-Possessed Men Healed (Part One)

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Jesus stayed in Gadara only for a few hours, but during that time, He came across two demon-possessed men (Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-40). Although Matthew's account mentions two men, and Mark and Luke record only one, no contradiction exists between them. The simple explanation is that one of the men, acting as their spokesman, was more prominent and aggressive, and thus more noticeable than the other. Perhaps Matthew, directing his gospel toward Jews, emphasized their number, knowing the legal weight of two witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15).

Are the Devil and his demons real? The gospels leave no doubt that Jesus believed that the Devil and demons exist and that they have evil influence in and over human beings. Knowing that these powers of darkness are dreadful forces of evil, Jesus spoke of them with a serious intensity and authority. He also did not hesitate to declare openly the evil manifested in people's minds and bodies as coming from the source of evil, Satan the Devil.

Some background on demon possession may be helpful, as the subject has been greatly misunderstood.

1. How are demonic powers exercised?

Comment: Demons are angelic beings who rebelled with Satan and were expelled from heaven with their master. According to examples in Scripture, the Devil's power is exercised in a three-fold way: 1) directly by himself, 2) by the demons who are subject to him, and 3) through human beings whom he influences and/or possesses. People who have rejected God's authority and love are in subjection to the supernatural power of Satan and his wicked way of life. A person's personality and will is taken over by these deceiving, lawless spirit invaders.

2. What actually happens in demon possession?

Comment: When possessed, the human body and mind are intruded by a spiritual parasite, causing conflict and disharmony. Like hypnosis, demonic possession cannot take place without a willing subject. Satan entered Judas because the man opened up an entranceway for the Devil by betraying the Son of God. Judas first entertained a thought from Satan before Satan himself entered, as the apostle John explains, "The devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot . . ." (John 13:2, 27; see I Samuel 16:14; I Kings 22:21-23).

When a person loses control of himself, Satan can take control and evil spirits have the opportunity to enter suddenly. In addition, immorality often precedes demon possession. When a person gives in to his sensual desires or to hatred and greed, he sets himself up for possible possession, or at the very least, strong demonic influence.

3. Is there a difference between demon possession and influence?

Comment: Most people are at least somewhat demon-influenced through Satan's broadcast of his evil attitudes and are enticed to sin (see Ephesians 2:2; Revelation 12:9). A quick glance at society reveals a perverse influence to pursue wickedness. An evil thought is introduced into the human mind, and human desire is motivated to pursue the yearning: "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (James 1:14-15). Demon influence begins with subtle suggestion and enticement, but it can later lead to a person's becoming demon possessed, captive to the Devil, and as his slave, sinking into deep degradation.

4. Do demons take possession of just minds, or bodies too?

Comment: Evil spirits can take possession of human bodies. People sometimes invite demons to do so, and they become intimately acquainted, even friendly, with them. They are then called "familiar spirits" (Leviticus 19:31; 20:6, 27). God instructs ancient Israel to put to death anyone who intentionally invites a demon to enter him. Once possession takes effect, sensuality and violence become more evident, as the person finds it difficult to resist the demon's will. Physical, mental, and spiritual disorders increase exponentially during possession, and the confusion, anguish, and mental filth caused by unclean spirits can result in insanity.

5. Are all mental disorders the result of demonic possession?

Comment: Not all disorders are the result of demonic possession (Matthew 4:23, 24; 10:1; 11:5). However, insanity, epilepsy, blindness, fevers, and various mental illnesses are frequent accompaniments and symptoms of demon possession (Matthew 12:22; 9:32; Mark 9:17, 25; Luke 11:14-16). Even so, Scripture does not necessarily identify these disorders with demon possession, though they may have been aggravated by these dark powers.

In the case of the demon-possessed man in Matthew 8, he obviously suffered from some sort of insanity. Demon possession is not just another name for madness, as they are clearly distinguished in Matthew 4:24. The Gadarene demoniac's disease was the result of his own wickedness, and the extreme demonic element added to his madness.

The apostle Paul mentions that the Gentiles sacrificed to demons (I Corinthians 10:20; also Leviticus 17:7; II Chronicles 11:15; Psalm 106:37), and demon possession is still an undoubted fact in many areas of the world. The Devil, as the prince of the power of the air, regulates the present way of life of the world, working in children of disobedience (Ephesians 2:2). People yield themselves to his authority, and as a result, they become slaves to this evil power (Romans 6:16).

Part Two will explain Jesus' encounter at Gadara.