

TRUTH FOR TODAY

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FREEDOM FROM BONDAGE #1

Where were you in 1973? Let's begin these thoughts with a mental exercise and travel back to 1973 - what happened that year? Perhaps the most memorable event during that time was that our government was in the midst of the Watergate hearings, as the White House scandal had become public; the investigation eventually led to the resignation of President Nixon the following year. Also, on an even more somber note, 1973 was the year when the Supreme Court handed down the infamous decision in the Roe vs. Wade case that led to the legalization of abortion. What a dark time that was - what horrific consequences as a result!

In 1973 a so-called energy crisis emerged, as Arab nations cut back oil production for political reasons. And, in 1973, feminists cheered loudly as the "battle of the sexes" tennis match was played between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs, with King winning the match in three straight sets (men would say he let her beat him.)

There was one smash hit movie that debuted in 1973; it received Academy Awards and broke box office records. People across the country stood in line for hours - at times in pouring rain - to get in and see this motion picture. At that time it became the second highest grossing film of all time. It was labeled the scariest movie ever and it was "*The Exorcist*," starring, among others, Linda Blair.

In 1973, I was your typical teenager - a freshman in high school, enduring the trials of puberty, wanting to be like everyone else - not wanting to be different, but wanting to fit in and be accepted by my peers. You see, everyone was talking about "*The Exorcist*" and everyone was going to see it, everyone that is, except *me*. Dad and Mom had gotten wind of what the movie was about and also the rating of the movie. The film concerned a young girl who became demon-possessed, and the efforts of priests to exorcize that demon. Also, the movie was rated "R." For those reasons, my parents expressly told me not to see that movie.

However, when you are told not to do something, and when everyone else is, and when

you are a teenager trying desperately to fit in - those are all powerful incentives and temptations to go ahead and do it anyway - and, I did. I rode with my friends - against the wishes of my parents and my own better judgment as a Christian - and saw *“The Exorcist.”*

The movie was a horrifying account of a young girl demon-possessed. She floated through the air, turned her head completely around in a circle, and said filthy words and did filthy things. In the end, the priest did expel the demon and the little girl was well - until the sequel came out, that is.

I had some explaining and repenting and apologizing (and pleading) to do when I came home because I had disobeyed my parents, and I had watched something I never should have watched in the first place. It was indeed a lesson learned the hard way!

Thankfully, *“The Exorcist”* was just a product of Hollywood. It made a lot of people a lot of money, it made some little-known actors big-time stars, but it was nothing more than fiction and make-believe, brought about by special effects and modern technology.

However, what we are about to discuss in this and ensuing articles is anything but fiction - anything but make-believe. It is a real life account of men who *were* actually possessed by many demons. And, it is a real life account of our Lord’s power over them through use of His mighty miraculous power.

At the outset, let’s remember that the overall purpose of miracles was to produce faith in Christ (*John 20:30-31*). Also, miracles were designed to illustrate the truth. On one occasion, Jesus fed multitudes with five loaves and two fish, and, on the next day, He told the people, *“I am the bread which came down from heaven”* (*John 6:41*). Additionally, miracles did reveal Jesus’ power over sin and Satan (as per this study).

One should also keep in mind certain characteristics of miracles. **First, they were**

genuine. When Christ and His men performed the supernatural, there was no doubt about it - even His most bitter enemies admitted such. **Second, those miracles were instantaneous.** Never were there long-term treatments; rather, the cure happened immediately. One of Mark's favorite words in his account of the Gospel was "*straightway*," i.e., immediately - right then and there on the spot the miracle and its results happened. **Third, these genuine, instantaneous miracles were complete.** No one ever had to return for "follow up" visits; no one had to come back for additional treatments.

We are going to discuss the healing of the wild men at Gadara. This miracle is found in three of the Gospel accounts - Matthew, Mark, and Luke - but since Mark's account is the most detailed, we shall use his for our primary text, giving additional details from the other writers where Mark omits.

In the book of Mark, Jesus is depicted as a Being of action - here, particularly with regard to miracles. In the fifth chapter of Mark, Jesus, the true miracle worker, used His supernatural powers to attain victory over demons (*Mark 5:1-20*), disease (*Mark 5:21-34*), and death (*Mark 5:35-43*).¹ Our study concerns the first. Let's begin with a brief discussion of what little we know about demon possession;² we'll follow that with an exposition of the text, and conclude with an application for us.

A DISCUSSION OF DEMONS

Demons (translated "*devils*" KJV) were neither funny nor phony!³ What were they? Matthew, Mark, and Luke always mention demons as being unclean, that is, wicked. There was no "Casper the Friendly Ghost" - they all were bad. As to their origin, there are three basic theories.⁴ Some believe that demons were evil angels who were released from Tartarus (*Jude 6*). Others maintain that demons were the spirits of persons who inhabited the earth after the

creation of Genesis 1:1 and before the creation of Genesis 1:3. We, of course, must reject this view, as it is derived from the erroneous Gap Theory. We concur with the prevailing view of the Jews of that day:

Demons were evil spirits that took possession of people; that appears to have been the accepted idea among the Jews. With them, demons were the departed spirits of wicked men. There is no evidence that Jesus and his apostles deviated from the Jewish idea of demons. How the spirits of wicked dead men took possession of people we know not.⁵

It was the practice of demons to take possession of living people and control them. A distinct, evil being -- foreign to the person possessed -- could take control of that individual without his consent.⁶ Whatever these were, Scripture indicates that they were immaterial, intelligent beings, having personalities and desires, the ability to talk, and even possessing knowledge about God and Christ. Apparently, some demons were stronger than others. In one account, Jesus stated that some were so powerful they could not be expelled without prayer and fasting (*Matthew 17:21*). Demonic possession should not be equated with diseases of the body, mental insanity, or epilepsy, as Christ and His men distinguished between such (*Matthew 10:8*).

What was their purpose? As Christ could work good, the devil was permitted to work evil. Christ came as our Redeemer; thus, as the Lord began His work, one would expect the devil to begin his most intensive activity to multiply opposition to it:

....the devil realized that the Redeemer had come for the salvation of the world and the destruction of his kingdom and that hence he made very determined efforts to counteract the work of Jesus and the apostles, using all means at his command, physical and spiritual, in opposing the coming of the kingdom of God.⁷

[continued next month]

ENDNOTES

1. Warren W. Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary, Vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989), pp. 125-128.
2. Some prefer the term “*demonized*” to the phrase “*demon possessed*,” arguing that possession implies ownership, while demons own nothing. C. Fred Dickason, Demon Possession and the Christian (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), p. 38.
3. There are those skeptics, of course, who attribute the accounts of demon possession in the Bible to Babylonian and Persian beliefs and superstitions that had become part of the belief of the Jews: “Rejectors (sic) of the reality of demonic forces go on to say that Jesus accommodated His language to the idea, rife in those days, and that as a part of His divine mission He assumed the role of a corrector of popular beliefs by commanding the **supposed** spirits to come out of the possessed.” Herbert Lockyer, All the Miracles of the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1961), p. 187.
4. Summation notes on demons given in a class taught by Curtis A. Cates, “The Life of Christ,” Memphis School of Preaching, 1983-1984.
5. R. L. Whiteside, Annual Lesson Commentary, (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1939), pp. 276-277.
6. Lockyer disagrees, stating “demonic possession...cannot take place without the consent of the human will,” and that “moral depravity often precedes demon possession.” In the case of the Gadarene demonic, he suggests “his disease was the result of his own wickedness.” Lockyer, p. 187. However, one is hard

pressed to find evidence to substantiate his views.

7. William Arndt, Bible Difficulties & Seeming Contradictions (St. Louis: Concordia, 1987), p. 111.

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GOSPEL MEETING

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Mel Futrell, speaker

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