

Satan Cast Out by the Finger of God

As we slowly make our way through the Gospel, it is helpful to periodically pause along the way to remind ourselves where we are in the larger story Dr. Luke is telling. Beginning in **chapter 9, v. 51** we are told that when the time for Jesus' ascension was fast approaching (**Jn. 13:3**), He stopped what He was doing in Galilee and began to move straightway to Jerusalem (**9:53; 13:22; 17:11; 18:31; 19:11, 28**). We are further told that **the reason** Jesus was determined to go to Jerusalem was that "**the Son of Man** must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and be raised up on the third day" (**9:22**). He invited His disciples to go along with Him for the journey saying, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he [too] must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me" (**9:23**). While they travel towards Jerusalem together, Jesus will waste no time with His disciples. He will spend every precious hour teaching them what they must know both to follow Him AND to be His witnesses to the world once they are clothed with power from on high (**cf. 24:46-49**).

But as they near Jerusalem, not only will the **anticipation** of what Jesus is about to do **increase**, BUT so will the **opposition**, leading eventually to His crucifixion outside the walls of the holy city of God (**Heb. 13:11-12**). The conflict swirling around Jesus will primarily come from the religious leaders as they grow in intensity in their hatred for Jesus, until they finally determine that they must find a reason to have Jesus put to death (**Matt. 26:4; Mk. 14:1; Jn. 11:53**). What will be noticeably **absent** from this point forward in the Gospel, after we look at today's passage, will be any further encounters Jesus will have with demons. It is, as if after this confrontation the voices of hell grow strangely silent, as when all is quiet before the storm breaks out. The next encounter Jesus will experience will be when Satan suddenly enters into Judas Iscariot causing him to fulfill his purpose as the "son of perdition" (**cf. Lk. 22:3; Jn. 13:2, 27; 17:12**). But though Satan and his minions are absent from the narrative, there is little doubt that they are very much at work behind-the-scenes, prowling around Jesus, seeking to devour Him. The reader gets the impression that Satan has only transitioned from a direct assault to now making use of the Jewish leaders, who like Job's friends will not speak what is right concerning the Son of God (**cf. Job 42:7-9**). Like Satan, the scribes and Pharisees continually encircle Jesus, craftily "plotting against Him to catch Him in something He might say" (**Lk 11:53-54**).

Luke does not identify who it is who accuses Jesus of casting out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons (**Lk. 11:15** - "some of them"), but the other synoptists clearly identify his opponents as the Pharisees (**Matt. 9:34; 12:24**) and the scribes who have come down from Jerusalem to interrogate Jesus (**Mk. 3:22**). Luke merely keeps their identity as anonymous members of the larger crowd, some of them amazed at Jesus' power (**v. 14**). Luke has his own reasons for not yet identifying Jesus' opponents here (**cf. Lk. 11:53-54**) but their identity is not necessary to catch the full impact of what is being said about Jesus at this point of the story. It is however, absolutely necessary, that we take a step way back to look at the larger story of redemption before we can grasp the full significance of what Luke is showing us.

We want to try and understand how it is possible that anyone could look that what Jesus was doing and conclude anything else other than that He was casting out demons by the power of God. We may not be able to conclude what motivated this portion of the crowd to accuse Jesus of this (because they are not identified in Luke) but we can begin to understand how tragic and certainly dangerous it was for the crowd to make such an accusation.

Let's go ahead and step back to the beginning of the story of redemption where we first meet Satan, the accuser, and then we will see if we can then come back into our story from there with a deeper sense of what is going on here in Luke's Gospel.

We first meet Satan, the ruler of the demons, back in **Genesis 3** where he tempted Adam and Eve, our first parents, to rebel against our Maker, who loved us and made a beautiful world for us to love and serve Him in. I know we tend to throw this word around a lot, but ever since the fall it really is inappropriate to use the word "perfect" unless we are speaking of Jesus. However, the time before the fall, when Adam and Eve walked with God in the garden, couldn't be better described than "perfect." It was truly a perfect environment where Adam and Eve could delight in and enjoy God forever, where they had everything they needed to reflect God's glory perfectly.

But according to Scripture, Satan spoiled this perfect environment, first by showing up and then by tempting our first parents to question God's holy word (**cf. Gen. 3:4-5**), which led to their rebellion and death. Yes, Adam and Eve are fully responsible for the terrible choice they made, but there is a sense in the text of Scripture that they most likely would not have taken that disastrous bite had they not been enticed by the "father of lies" (**John 8:44**).

It is true that for most of human history the world of the supernatural realm remains hidden from man's natural eyes. The boundaries separating the earth from heaven and hell are fixed and rarely open for humans to see "behind the veil." But every once in awhile, humans have been allowed to catch a glimpse into that greater, invisible realm.

One such encounter happened when Moses was sent by God to represent Yahweh to the most powerful king on earth, the Pharaoh. As God's ambassador, Moses received a commission which couldn't have been any higher than what was given to him – he would be **as God** to Pharaoh (**Exodus 7:1-5**). This meant that not only would Moses verbalize the Word of God, but that that Word would come with such power that it would perform through Moses such miracles as if God were standing Pharaoh's midst. Let me explain. There were three miracles Moses performed before Pharaoh, which it appeared that Pharaoh's magicians could actually duplicate. Now, whether they – themselves – could actually imitate the miracle God performed it highly debatable. Whether it was only a trick – a slight of hand – or God allowed them temporary power that even shocked them to give Pharaoh a false-sense of security in the abilities of his sorcerers we do not know. But one thing is for sure, in each of these three moments, the abilities of Pharaoh's magicians were greatly limited. Let's look at each one.

The first miracle Moses performed was the throwing down of Aaron's staff before Pharaoh and it turning into a serpent (**vv. 8-10**), which would have been highly offensive to Pharaoh. Pharaoh ruled in Egypt on behalf of the goddess Wadjet, who is represented by a rearing cobra, which Pharaoh always wore upon his crown. You can imagine this highly electrified scene where Moses, who is representing Yahweh, the true God of the whole earth, challenges Pharaoh, who is representing Wadjet, the goddess of the Nile, to a duel. Aaron casts down his staff at the foot of Pharaoh's throne only to turn into a serpent as if Moses is throwing down the gauntlet to put Pharaoh's goddess to the test (**vv. 8-10**). In response, Pharaoh summons his sorcerers and magicians who duplicate the miracle. God permits them to do so by their "secret arts" (**vv. 11-12a**). But Aaron's staff swallows up their staffs clearly demonstrating the true and greater power of the true God (**v. 12b**). This miracle only leads to Pharaoh's heart being hardened by God as He promised (**v. 13, cf. v. 3**)

This then leads to a second miracle and the first of the ten plagues, turning the water of the Nile into blood (**vv. 19-21**). Once again, God permitted Pharaoh's magicians to actually duplicate the cursing Moses performed on Egypt (**v. 22a**). Stupid Magicians! In their defiance of the true God they actually make the curse worse for themselves by turning even more of their potable water into blood. The one thing they couldn't do was to reverse the curse God brought upon them by turning the bloody water back into drinkable water. Once again, the result was the same. God hardened Pharaoh's heart, just as the LORD had said (**v. 22b**).

This then leads to the final miracle that the magicians were enabled to duplicate, the multiplying of frogs throughout the empire (**8:1-6**). And again God permitted Pharaoh's magicians to replicate the miracle, once again making the curse worse for themselves (**v. 7**). In fact, the plague became so terrible that Pharaoh actually called Moses and Aaron back to plead with Yahweh to relieve Egypt of such a disturbing infestation (**vv. 8-11**). Why? Why couldn't Pharaoh just ask his sorcerers and magicians to reverse the plague by their secret arts? They obviously have no power in themselves other than what God permits, seeing that they have absolutely no control over the curse of God! Yahweh once again brought an end to the plague and as He promised, Pharaoh once again hardened his heart (**vv. 12-15**).

This then leads to the third plague, this time with a heart-stopping conclusion for Pharaoh and his magicians. This time Moses shows up and simply performs the miracle unannounced (**vv. 16-17**). The magicians once again repeated all their secret incantations and waved their hands around the dust of the earth but nothing happened (**v. 18**). They could neither reproduce the miracle nor turn it away. What happened to all "their" power? Did the batteries run out of their magic wands? Did they forget some of their secret words? It is clear by what they say next that we all find out how all these miracles have been done in the first place (**v. 19a**). It must have absolutely killed the sorcerers and magicians in Pharaoh's court to have to admit their defeat – this can only be the "finger of God!" All it took to defeat the gods of Egypt was the mere pinky of God! But once again God hardened Pharaoh's heart as He promised Moses and Aaron (**v. 19b**).

Now, turn back to **Luke 11** to see challenge, this time not between Moses and Pharaoh BUT between

Jesus and the Pharisees, who actually attribute an even greater miracle to Satan (**Luke 11:15**). You can now see how terrible such an accusation is in the face of what Jesus is doing for Israel. Let's first pause and reconsider what Jesus has just done for this mute Israelite, before we consider the blasphemy of the Pharisees.

Jesus comes up to a mute man, who clearly is not mute because of some physical defect but because of an oppressive, demonic visitor who is taking up residence within him AND He casts the demon out of him. The man's tongue is suddenly loosened and he speaks again in the presence of all. The crowds stand in complete amazement, never seeing anything like this before (**v. 14**). Matthew's gospel records the crowds admitting, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel" (**Matt. 9:33**). Another one adds, "He couldn't be the Son of David, could He?" (**Matt 12:23**). At least some in the crowd were ready to admit the true source of the miracle.

What shocks the reader is why the Pharisees were unwilling to admit what such a miracle demonstrated about who Jesus was OR at least by what power He was performing such a miracle. The Pharisees knew, just as we all know, that Satan and the demonic world simply cannot perform miracles. Yes, Satan is a spiritual being and has abilities that human beings do not possess – that is how God created them. But Satan and his minions are not divine. They do not have power to act contrary to nature. God alone is LORD over nature and He therefore alone is able to perform a miracle.

Further, Satan would never act contrary to his own **evil** nature. This is the line of argument that Jesus now seeks to develop (**Luke 11:17-19**). Satan seeks to destroy life, especially all life as it is dependent upon God. You remember what he sought to do to Job (**Job 1-2**), **where his ultimate desire was to see Job curse God (1:11; 2:5)** and Peter describes him as your "adversary, who prowls around the earth like a roaring lion seeking someone else to devour" (**1 Pet. 5:8; Job 1:7; 2:2**). Jesus uses this knowledge to counter the accusation of the illogical Jewish leadership. Jesus begins by stating a proposition which anyone would have to agree with – any kingdom that is divided against itself will not soon stand (**Lk. 11:17**). Could you imagine how vulnerable the United States would have been had we been attacked by a foreign government at the height of our own Civil War? A house divided cannot long stand! Jesus then moves to his second proposition that "if Satan is attacking **himself** then how could his kingdom stand?" (**v. 18**). Further, if the disciples (the sons of Israel) have been going around casting out demons, as even the crowds readily recognize, are the Pharisees ready to accuse them of casting out demons by Beelzebul? (**v. 19**). If so, the Pharisees need to be careful, because they will soon judge the Pharisees! Anyone following Jesus' logic up to this point will quickly recognize with what foolishness the Pharisees make their argument.

But think for a moment just how appalling is the Pharisees' accusation! Ever since Satan has disturbed the peace between God and man, putting them at war with one another, God has promised to set that relationship back right again (**cf. Gen. 3:15, et al**). God didn't abandon man in their rebellion but because of His eternal love He promised to one day send His own champion – His Messiah - to redeem man from sin and destruction AND ultimately bring him back into eternal

fellowship with God. In fact, throughout the Scriptures it is clear that **God Himself** would one day come and in Himself, through His own suffering and death, He would pay the penalty for man's rebellion and by His own stripes He would heal the broken relationship caused by man's transgressions (**Isa. 53**). This is what Jesus is doing for this man who is mute in **Luke 11:14** as a foretaste of what He will ultimately do soon in Jerusalem at the cross for all His people. This man has just received a taste of what the life of heaven itself is like, in which man will dwell in God's eternal presence where all sickness, disease, death is removed, where all oppression and bondage are forever broken and where peace and rest in God's love is where God's children will dwell forevermore.

And what do the Pharisees say about what Jesus has just done? How do they describe this gracious fulfillment of all that God has promised going all the way back to the garden? They accuse God's Son, His Messiah, the One upon whom the glory of God rests - of doing Satan's work (**v. 15**)!

In the whole history of redemption NO ONE has accused one of God's prophets of doing the devil's work! Kings and queens may have cursed God's prophets, refused to listen to them and even have a few of them killed – but no one looked at the hand of God and claimed to see Satan at work! But leave it to the Pharisees, who so hated Jesus, that they would be willing to rather watch logic die than to fall humbly before Jesus and worship Him as God's promised Davidic King, the Redeemer of Israel, the bringer of the LORD's Jubilee (*cf. Luke 4:18-19*). Is it any wonder that in Mark's gospel, Jesus follows the Pharisees' accusation here with the warning that "all the sins of the sons of men can be forgiven except this one – the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit of God" (**Mark 3:28-30**) – what the Pharisees were doing here by attributing what Jesus was doing by the power of the Holy Spirit to the ruler of demons. This sin is guilty of **eternal sin** and will never be forgiven by God.

This brings us to a much clearer evaluation of what is going on here in the story. We have heard from all sectors of the crowd who witnessed the miracle which Jesus had just performed. While some were amazed, others were unwilling to believe – instead their hearts were hardened! But what should be shocking to every reader of the Gospel is that **no one** who witnessed what Jesus did **denied that He performed a miracle!**

In apologetics, as well as New Testament studies, we often judge a scene like this one by what has been called the "**criterion of embarrassment**." What do we mean by this? It means basically that no Gospel writer would just make up something like this. No Gospel writer is ever going to sit down and write his gospel, with the purpose of trying to convince someone that Jesus is the promised Son of God, and have one of his characters in the story saying that Jesus is doing miracles by the power of Beelzebul, unless, of course, he is simply recording **what actually happened!** And what is clear by this event is that Jesus has indeed just performed **a miracle** that no one in the story is denying.

In fact, with what we know about Who alone can perform a miracle, and if we judge rightly that Satan would not be in the business of working against the purposes of his own kingdom, then their can be only ONE conclusion as to how Jesus has performed this miracle. It is exactly the same conclusion that Pharaoh's magicians and sorcerers were forced to admit – **Jesus is casting demons**

out by the finger of God!

And what does it mean that Jesus is casting out the demon, not by the power of Satan, but by the **finger of God?** It surely means what Jesus goes on to explain in vv. 21-23. While Satan may be strong – no one is denying this – what Jesus did in v. 14 is to prove that someone vastly stronger than Satan is here! The Stronger Man has appeared and He has plundered Satan's kingdom and by merely speaking He has released the man who was mute from Satan's domain. Further, He did so with complete ease – **merely by the finger of God!**

Now, when I read the Gospels and am overwhelmed by the testimony of passages such as this one, where I am boxed-in by God's Word and have no where else to turn but to the overpowering conclusion that Jesus was and is exactly who He said He was, then as a minister of God **I must warn** anyone here this morning that if you are going to reject Jesus as your Savior, for any reason, **you better be absolutely sure that He is not who He says He is!** Let's be clear - we are not talking about what the followers of Jesus have done. You won't be judged on whether or not you agree with everything Jesus' followers have said or done. Rather, if you can look at what Jesus has done and simply walk away, branding Him as nothing more than a messenger of Satan, you better be certain just who you are walking away from because you will certainly face Him again some day!

Jesus has arrived on the scene. The long-awaited promise of God is now fulfilled. God has returned to make all things new, to set all things right again. **To attribute what He has come to do to Satan is unconscionable!** Satan's kingdom is indeed under attack, but not from the within its doors, but from the Stronger Man who has now appeared to break his doors wide open. It is not a matter of a kingdom divided, but a kingdom overpowered by the true King sent by God. **Satan's end is coming!** God is now engaged in the complete destruction of his kingdom, which will soon fall by the greater, rival Kingdom that has come. Satan is now bound so that the Gospel might be preached freely to the nations (**Rev. 20:2-3**). The goal of Jesus' first advent was only the inauguration of that greater Kingdom, so that where God's Messiah appeared, there the Kingdom of God was suddenly revealed (v. 20). It was a strange way to inaugurate the greatest Kingdom the world has ever seen. It came not in power and might like all the other kingdoms that came before it – but rather it came through the cross at which, as Paul says:

¹⁵ When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him (**Col. 2:15**).

That was just the beginning of Satan's certain end – Jesus' D-Day invasion of Satan's kingdom. The mop-up work needs to now run its course until that final day - Jesus' V-Day, when He returns on the Day of the LORD

¹⁰ And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever (**Rev. 20:10**). **Amen! -SDG-**