

The Accusation of Using Demonic Power (12:22–37)

(Mark 3:22-30; Luke 11:14-23; Matthew 9:32-34)

“If Jesus is the one to fulfil Is. 42:1–4, as maintained in Mt. 12:15–21, then his actions are empowered by the Spirit [Matthew 12:18]. But Jesus’ Pharisaic interlocutors propose the alternative that he is in league with Beelzeboul...”¹ Remember, Matthew has already reminded us “*I will put my Spirit upon him,*” (Matthew 12:18, ESV). The Pharisees insists that Jesus’ work in casting out demons is not by that Spirit but by another, Beelzebul.

There are three key words found in Matthew 12:14 – Matthew 12:45.

Against κατά

Matthew 12:14

But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.

From Isaiah:

Matthew 12:25

Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand.

Matthew 12:30

Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

Matthew 12:32

And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

Cast Out ἐκβάλλω

Matthew 12:20

a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory;

From Isaiah:

Matthew 12:24

But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.”

Matthew 12:26

And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?

Matthew 12:27

And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges.

Matthew 12:28

But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

Matthew 12:35

¹ Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 497). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.

Spirit πνεῦμα

Matthew 12:18

“Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.

From Isaiah:

Matthew 12:28

But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

Matthew 12:31

Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.

Matthew 12:32

And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

Matthew 12:43

“When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none.

Matthew 12:45

Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation.”

Introduction 12:22-24

Matthew 12:22 Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw.

a demon-oppressed man.... Or a man possessed by a demon. The Greek word is singular, does this mean there was one man who had demons or one demon who possessed a man? Verse 24 talks about casting out demons. Put this observation may be based on a collection of similar events in Jesus' life.

This is not the first time that Jesus or his disciples cast out demons.

“So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them.” (Matthew 4:24, ESV)

“That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick.” (Matthew 8:16, ESV)

“And when he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way.” (Matthew 8:28, ESV)

“As they were going away, behold, a demon-possessed man who was mute was brought to him. And when the demon had been cast out, the mute man spoke. And the crowds marveled, saying, “Never was anything like this seen in Israel.”” (Matthew 9:32–33, ESV)

“And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.” (Matthew 10:1, ESV)

“Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay.” (Matthew 10:8, ESV)

So, the question arises, why attack Jesus at this point, but not earlier? I think the answer to that question is found in verse 23.

“And all the people were amazed, and said, “Can this be the Son of David?”” (Matthew 12:23, ESV)

Now that this question is being asked, the Pharisees see the danger Jesus is to their religious hold on the people. This they cannot allow.

Then².... Then is an adverb of time suggesting a temporal relationship between what just occurred and the present material.

In Matthew 9:32-34 there was another story of a demon possessed man that was healed with the Pharisees attributing that work to the “*prince of demons.*” Whether this story is a repeat of that one with fuller detail or a separate one entirely is not clear. I tend to think that chapter 9 was a summary and collection of the many miracles that Jesus performed and this chapter gives us a more complete description of this event.

“As they were going away, behold, a demon-possessed man who was mute was brought to him. And when the demon had been cast out, the mute man spoke. And the crowds marveled, saying, “Never was anything like this seen in Israel.” But the Pharisees said, “He casts out demons by the prince of demons.”” (Matthew 9:32–34, ESV)

he healed him.... “Matthew’s abbreviated narrative mentions only the “healing” which was the visible effect. It is clear, however, from the following accusation and debate that neither Jesus nor the onlookers had any doubt that this was a case of possession and exorcism, not a physical healing alone.”³

Matthew 12:23 And all the people were amazed, and said, “Can this be the Son of David?”

² *Then τότε* “...a point of time subsequent to another point of time—‘then.’” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 634.

³ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 477.

amazed⁴.... They were out of their minds with excitement.

Can this be the Son of David?.... It was in fact this very question that the miracles were designed to generate. And this is the point of Jesus' response to John's disciples.

*"And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them."
(Matthew 11:4–5, ESV)*

"They are beginning to draw the conclusion which Jesus had expected John the Baptist to draw from his miracles (11:2–6)."⁵

From his miraculous works, they have come to the right conclusion or at least are asking the right question. From these examples, Jesus expected John to draw a conclusion; no doubt a correct one. The people and the Pharisees are not so quick to "get it."

Son of David.... This is the second time this title is used of Jesus and in each case, it is used referencing a healing of a blind demon oppressed man.

*"And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, "Have mercy on us, Son of David."
(Matthew 9:27, ESV)*

This verse is in a section right before the Matthew 9:32–34 story mentioned above which again suggest this is a retelling of that story.

"The uncertainty expressed by the form of the question ... may be in part owing to the fact that Jesus, for all his unmistakable authority in healing and teaching, has shown no inclination to fulfill the more political aspect of popular Davidic expectation."⁶ They are confused by his political and military indifference. They were hoping for a Son of David that would come riding in on a white horse and knock some Roman heads together. His behavior, so far from their expectations, has confused them. "Their doubt was due to the fact that Jesus was so unlike the picture of the Son of David in which they had been brought up to believe. Here was no glorious prince with pomp and circumstance; here was no rattle of swords nor army with banners; here was no fiery cross calling men to war; here was a simple carpenter from Galilee, in whose words was wisdom gentle and serene, in whose eyes was compassion, and in whose hands was mysterious power."⁷

⁴ *amazed ἐξίστημι* "To remove out of a place or state. In the NT applied only to the mind, meaning to be out of one's mind, beside oneself... to be transported beyond oneself with astonishment, to be amazed, astounded...." Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

⁵ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 477). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

⁶ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (pp. 477–478). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

⁷ William Barclay, ed., *The Gospel of Matthew* (vol. 2; The Daily Study Bible; Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster John Knox Press, 1976), 35.

Matthew 12:24 But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.”

Jesus warned his disciples that this type of attack was coming.

“It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.” (Matthew 10:25, ESV)

Beelzebu⁸.... “Supernatural power demands a supernatural source, and if they are not prepared to admit that it is divine, there is only one alternative.”⁹ That alternative they insists is that “Jesus is in league with the powers of evil ... and because the prince of the forces of evil is at work in him he is able to do things that ordinary people cannot do. They were spectators of some of the wonderful things that God did through Jesus and were perverse enough to ascribe these divine works to the forces of evil.”¹⁰

“Some such charge remained for some centuries a staple element in rabbinic Jewish polemic against Jesus as a magician who by his black arts “led Israel astray.” **It assumes the reality of a supernatural power, but questions its nature and origin.** We have therefore moved beyond “academic” debate on the validity of Jesus’ teaching and practice to the realm of personal abuse and character assassination. The accusation of complicity with the devil is not only extremely offensive, but is intended to destroy Jesus’ credibility in the eyes of a God-fearing public. It is also potentially extremely serious, since sorcery was, according to the Mishnah, a capital offense.”¹¹

“It deeply perverts what Jesus is about by claiming that precisely the Jesus who was far removed from any magic and who used his power to work miracles in the service of suffering humanity should act in the name of the devil! His opponents see at work in the figure of Jesus the devil himself, whose rule Jesus saw broken by the coming of the kingdom of God (cf. v. 28–29)! Thus labeled, Jesus’ exorcisms evoke fear instead of liberating.”¹²

These charges against Jesus would not be dismissed out of hand for this audience was aware that sorcerers and magicians were at work in the world.

“There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets

⁸ *Beelzebul* Βεελλζεβούλ “In the OT, Beelzebub meant Lord of flies or fly-god (2 Kgs. 1:2) and was in common use among the Jews in Christ’s day as the title of Satan as the prince of the demons.” Zodiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

⁹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 478.

¹⁰ Morris, L. (1992). *The Gospel according to Matthew*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary (p. 314). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

¹¹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 475–476.

¹² Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 203.

omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD. And because of these abominations the LORD your God is driving them out before you. You shall be blameless before the LORD your God, for these nations, which you are about to dispossess, listen to fortune-tellers and to diviners. But as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you to do this." (Deuteronomy 18:10–14, ESV)

"You shall not permit a sorceress to live." (Exodus 22:18, ESV)

"Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they, the magicians of Egypt, also did the same by their secret arts." (Exodus 7:11, ESV)

"But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith." (Acts 13:8, ESV)

"As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling." (Acts 16:16, ESV)

"Perhaps Jesus was just like these others. What guarantee do we have that this is from God?" "The charge was serious because the *Mishnah* prescribed the death penalty as punishment for sorcery."¹³ This would be the second time in the last few verses that the Pharisees are attempting to kill Jesus. The first is because he broke the law and healed on the Sabbath and now because he is a sorcerer. "...this controversy is merely a continuation of the Sabbath disputes that issued in the plot to destroy Jesus (12:14)."¹⁴

the prince of demons.... "The attempt to discredit Jesus by claiming that he did his miracles through the agency of an evil spirit was probably made on more than one occasion...."¹⁵

"The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who is seeking to kill you?" (John 7:20, ESV)

"The Jews answered him, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" (John 8:48, ESV)

"The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.'" (John 8:52, ESV)

"Many of them said, "He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?" (John 10:20, ESV)

¹³ Roger L. Hahn, *Matthew: A Commentary for Bible Students* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2007), 159.

¹⁴ Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew* (Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching; Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993), 137–138.

¹⁵ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (vol. 2; International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 335.

that this man casts out demons.... "...the charge of casting out demons by Beelzebul presupposes Jesus' undoubted success at exorcism. His opponents evidently did not deny his seemingly miraculous deeds but rather took the course of attributing them to a dark power...."¹⁶

"The Pharisees, we may observe, refer to Jesus not in the second person but in the third person. **They are not arguing with the healer but with the onlookers.**"¹⁷

"The narrative accordingly implies that what the Pharisees are interested in above all is **keeping others from belief.**"¹⁸

Jesus will now provide the guarantee and explain the rationale of his miracles.

First Argument 12:25-26 A Kingdom Divided Against Itself

Matthew 12:25 Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand.

... kingdom ... city ... house.... "The effect is to make a more comprehensive statement: from the largest collective to the smallest, internal division wreaks havoc."¹⁹

"The image here is of civil war within a kingdom and the desolation brought by it."²⁰

Jesus' words... take for granted that Satan, like God, has a kingdom, a well-ordered and organized host of powers and influences that heed the beck and call of their dark Lord. Over against the kingdom of God is the kingdom of Satan."²¹

Matthew 12:26 And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?

"If it is by Beelzeboul that Jesus casts out devils, then Satan is in effect casting himself out: he would then be enabling Jesus to deliver people from his own power. That would mean hopeless division in the ranks of evil, with demon ranged against demon. In that

¹⁶ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (vol. 2; International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 336.

¹⁷ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (vol. 2; International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 335.

¹⁸ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (vol. 2; International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 335.

¹⁹ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (vol. 2; International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 337.

²⁰ Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 499). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

²¹ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (vol. 2; International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 336.

case how could Satan effect his purpose? Satan would be removing Satan from the afflicted man and thus diminishing his sphere of influence while delivering the man over into the sphere of goodness. It is not to be presumed that Satan is stupid: the Pharisees were taking up an impossible position.”²²

“...they have assigned Jesus’ power to evil forces, not God. Jesus responds by constructing a *reductio ad absurdum*²³ which affirms Satan’s rational behaviour. Would it make sense for the devil to give a human being power if that power was in turn used to ransack the kingdom of demons? Once one grants that Jesus has in fact delivered souls from spiritual bondage and given them their health in body, mind, and spirit, it is foolhardy to see him in league with Satan. Satan would not knowingly and willingly destroy his own dominion.”²⁴

Some have argued that although Satan is not divided against himself, he nevertheless might perform such a miracle in order to create creditability for the one casting out the demons that he might then use this servant of evil to entrap many others in the cause of evil. In other words, he would be willing to lose one to gain thousands. However, the total of Jesus argument as it is unpacked would seem to overcome this objection.

Second Argument 12:27 By Whom Do Your Sons Cast Them Out?

Matthew 12:27 And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges.

In the Old Testament there is no record of a prophet of God casting out a demon. Yet, from what Jesus here says, it has happened.

“Exorcism, as distinct from physical healing, presupposes a hostile supernatural force which can be countered only by a more powerful spiritual authority, and Jewish exorcists were understood to be acting by the power of God. The Pharisees can be assumed to be as much in favor of the practice as other Jews; why then should Jesus’ exorcisms be any more sinister?”²⁵

That argument was sound enough but, not every exorcists was a man of God.

“Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, “I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.” (Acts 19:13, ESV)

Jesus himself warns about exorcists.

²² Morris, L. (1992). *The Gospel according to Matthew*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary (p. 315). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

²³ “*Reductio ad absurdum* is a mode of argumentation that seeks to establish a contention by deriving an absurdity from its denial, thus arguing that a thesis must be accepted because its rejection would be untenable.” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/reductio/>

²⁴ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (vol. 2; International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 337–338.

²⁵ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 479). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

“On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’”
(Matthew 7:22, ESV)

Were there not evil men doing evil for their own purposes? If they actually cast out demons, then how does this impact on Jesus argument?

your sons.... The phrase “is not to be taken literally. Because Jesus is addressing the Pharisees, the phrase must refer to members of the Pharisaic sect or to Pharisaic sympathizers....”²⁶ Or does it simply mean sons of Israel?

“The Pharisees would have vehemently denied that their sons were in league with the evil one, but they had not realized that such exorcisms said something about Jesus also. Therefore *they will be your judges*; your own sons will prove you wrong! The logic of a Pharisaic denial that their followers cast out demons through the evil one meant that Jesus did not use the powers of evil either.”²⁷

be your judges.... Perhaps they would be so as witnesses for the prosecution.

Third Argument 12:28 By The Spirit of God

Matthew 12:28 *But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.*

the Spirit of God.... We are still in the context of Isaiah’s prophecy about the “servant” and the “beloved”.

“Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.” (Matthew 12:18, ESV)

“Reference to the Spirit points further to a claim here by Jesus that his exorcisms are instances of the manifest presence of the activity of God.”²⁸

cast out demons.... Is Jesus addressing many demons from this one man or many demons from the totality of his ministry? It is not clear that this man had more than one demon but it is clear that Jesus cast out many demons in his lifetime. This may be important to Jesus’ argument. He may be addressing not simply this one man but the many men and demons that he has cast out. In that case, he would be saying that the proof of the coming of the kingdom is not simply this one exorcism but the many that

²⁶ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (vol. 2; International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 338.

²⁷ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (The Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 316.

²⁸ Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 500). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

you have observed over a long period. It is the total and prolonged effect of his ministry that he calls upon as proof of his coming from God.

kingdom of God.... Jesus' miracles, especially casting out demons is proof that the kingdom of God is present. "The coming of the kingdom is to be discerned in Jesus' defeat of the demons."²⁹

"What is certain is that Jesus knows that his exorcisms, performed by the Spirit of God, prove that the kingdom age has already dawned."³⁰

has come upon you. Earlier we read that the kingdom of God was at hand.

"From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17, ESV)

"And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" (Matthew 10:7, ESV)

But now, with the progression of Jesus ministry, we read that is **has come upon** them. It is not simply near, it has arrived.

Fourth Argument 12:29 Plundering a Strong Man's House

Matthew 12:29 *Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house.*

plunder³¹.... "The robbing of the strong man recalls the imagery of Isa 49:24–25, where it symbolizes God's rescue of his people from their oppressors."³²

"Can the prey be taken from the mighty, or the captives of a tyrant be rescued? For thus says the LORD: "Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken, and the prey of the tyrant be rescued, for I will contend with those who contend with you, and I will save your children." (Isaiah 49:24–25, ESV)

"Jesus' exorcisms, far from being in collusion with Satan, are a direct assault on his "possessions"; his "kingdom" is under attack."³³ Captives are being taken and prey is being rescued.

²⁹ Morris, L. (1992). *The Gospel according to Matthew*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary (p. 317). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

³⁰ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 289). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

³¹ *plunder ἀρπάζω* "...to forcefully take something away from someone else, often with the implication of a sudden attack—'to rob, to carry off, to plunder, to forcefully seize.'" Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 583.

³² France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 481). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

³³ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 481). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

binds³⁴.... Interestingly, this word is used in Revelation of binding Satan, just as it is used here of binding Satan.

“And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years,” (Revelation 20:2, ESV)

We are specifically told that Satan is **bound (20:2)**. Now of course, God does not bind spiritual beings with physical chains. Because we are material beings, we need material symbols to grasp spiritual lessons. The point is clear; however, this is a verbal picture that describes severe limitations placed on Satan by God. Remember what Martin Luther is reported to have said, “The devil is God’s devil.”

Of course, **Christ was making the point that it was He who had bound the strong man and plundered his house of souls held in bondage.** He again addressed the same subject in Luke when he said,

When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are undisturbed. But when someone stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away from him all his armor on which he had relied and distributes his plunder. (Luke 11:21–22, NASB95)

The point is made again; Christ has overpowered the strong man. It is He who plunders Satan’s possessions. We are not in the habit of thinking that Christ did this at His first advent. It is assumed that this will someday become true when He returns. However, Christ was not speaking prophetically; He was speaking of His then current ministry.

But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. (Matthew 12:28, NASB95)

That was the point He was trying to make, the kingdom of God had indeed come upon them. The proof: He cast out demons. However, to do that he first had to bind the strong man. Again, he cast out demons therefore, he bound Satan.

John, the writer of Revelation, in his gospel uses a similar, but not identical, metaphor when he says,

Now judgement is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. (John 12:31, NASB95)

“The casting out of Satan was not to wait the second coming but was *now*.” Luke records something similar saying,

The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.” And He said to them, “I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning.” (Luke 10:17–18, NASB95)

Paul also commented on this saying,

³⁴ *binds* δέω “...to tie objects together —‘to tie, to tie together, to tie up.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Colossians 2:15, NIV)

The author of Hebrews enters the discussion saying,

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.... (Hebrews 2:14, NASB95)

The meaning of this binding of Satan then is that Christ, at His first advent, brought about a conclusive victory, leaving Satan impotent to prevent the success of God's kingdom.³⁵

“The tying up represents not an exorcistic technique, but the comprehensive superiority of Jesus' authority over that of Satan, and so the coming into force of the kingship of God. It is that “tying up” that distinguishes Jesus' all-out assault on Satan's kingdom from the little local forays of other exorcists of the time.”³⁶

How do these individually or collectively make Jesus' point, which was that he legitimately cast out demons in the power of the Spirit of God and not at all by the power of Satan?

A part of Jesus' argument might also be based on the “quality” of miracles performed by others, especially Jews compared to those by Jesus. Josephus gives us this account of a demonic cure brought about by incantations supposedly handed down from Solomon.

“God also enabled him to learn that skill which expels demons, which is a science useful and sanative to men. He composed such incantations also by which distempers are alleviated. And he left behind him the manner of using exorcisms, by which they drive away demons, so that they never return, (46) and this method of cure is of great force unto this day; for I have seen a certain man of my own country whose name was Eleazar, releasing people that were demoniacal in the presence of Vespasian, and his sons, and his captains, and the whole multitude of his soldiers. The manner of the cure was this:—(47) He put a ring that had a root of one of those sorts mentioned by Solomon to the nostrils of the demoniac, after which he drew out the demon through his nostrils; and when the man fell down immediately, he abjured him to return into him no more, making still mention of Solomon, and reciting the incantations which he composed. (48) And when Eleazar would persuade and demonstrate to the spectators that he had such a power, he set a little way off a cup or basin full of water, and commanded the demon, as he went out of the man, to overturn it, and thereby to let the spectators know that he had left the man; (49) and when this was done, the skill and wisdom of Solomon was shown very manifestly; for which reason it is, that all men may know the vastness of Solomon's abilities, and how he was beloved of God, and that the extraordinary virtues of every kind with

³⁵ Bass, R. E. (2004). *Back to the Future: a study in the book of Revelation* (pp. 432–434). Greenville, SC: Living Hope Press.

³⁶ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 481). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

which this king was endowed may not be unknown to any people under the sun; for this reason, I say, it is that we have proceeded to speak so largely of these matters.”³⁷

We should note William Whiston’s comment on this passage. “I entirely differ from Josephus in this his supposal, that such books and arts of Solomon were parts of that wisdom which was imparted to him by God in his younger days; they must rather have belonged to such profane but curious arts as we find mentioned, Acts 19:13–20, and have been derived from the idolatry and superstition of his heathen wives and concubines in his old age, when he had forsaken God, and God had forsaken him, and given him up to demoniacal delusions.”³⁸

In the apocryphal book of Tobit, we have another story of interest. “Tobit is told by the angel that he is to marry Sara, the daughter of Raguel. She is a beautiful maiden with a great dowry, and she herself is good. She has been in turn married to seven different men, all of whom perished on their wedding night, because Sara was loved by a wicked demon, who would allow none to approach her. Tobit is afraid, but the angel tells him, “On the night when thou shalt come into the marriage chamber, thou shalt take the ashes of perfume, and shalt lay them upon some of the heart and liver of the fish, and shalt make a smoke with it; and the devil shall smell it and flee away, and never come again any more” (Tobit 6:16).”³⁹

“Then the young man questioned the angel and said to him, “Brother Azariah, what medicinal value is there in the fish’s heart and liver, and in the gall?” He replied, “As for the fish’s heart and liver, you must burn them to make a smoke in the presence of a man or woman afflicted by a demon or evil spirit, and every affliction will flee away and never remain with that person any longer.... When you enter the bridal chamber, take some of the fish’s liver and heart, and put them on the embers of the incense. An odor will be given off; the demon will smell it and flee, and will never be seen near her any more.”⁴⁰

Compare all this to the life and ministry of Jesus. “Jesus healed with his word and not with the animal parts, smoke, magical incantations, and tricks that we find in these texts from Tobit and Josephus.”⁴¹ “What a difference between Jesus’ word of power, and this witch-doctoring which the Jewish exorcist used!”⁴² I would think that this manner of

³⁷ Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987) 8. 2. 5.

³⁸ William Whiston, Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987) 8. 2. 5.

³⁹ William Barclay, ed., *The Gospel of Matthew* (vol. 2; The Daily Study Bible; Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster John Knox Press, 1976), 38–39.

⁴⁰ Darrell L. Bock and Gregory J. Herrick, *Jesus in Context: Background Readings for Gospel Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 95.

⁴¹ Darrell L. Bock and Gregory J. Herrick, *Jesus in Context: Background Readings for Gospel Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 94–95.

⁴² William Barclay, ed., *The Gospel of Matthew* (vol. 2; The Daily Study Bible; Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster John Knox Press, 1976), 38.

Jesus' healing compared to what Jews were normally familiar, would be a decisive factor in their conclusion concerning Jesus. He cured by a word.