

Every Kingdom Divided Against Itself Will Be Ruined

Matthew 12:25-29 and Mark 3:23-27

DIG: What precipitated this exchange between our Lord and the Pharisees and Torah-teachers? What four defenses did Jesus give in answer to their accusations then? What four defenses does He have today? Why did Jesus point to what the Pharisees' followers were doing? Why was that a problem? Who is the strong man in Christ's illustration? The thief? When will Satan ultimately get what is coming to him?

REFLECT: When are we adopted into the kingdom of God? How does Yeshua picture Himself as more powerful than Satan? How do you think the Son of God felt having to defend Himself against the claims of the sinful, prideful Pharisees and Torah-teachers? How do you think He feels about having His name blasphemed by godless sinners of today? Are you doing your part in defending His name against satanic attacks today?

The Gospels gradually reveal more and more about whom Yeshua was and who He was not. After His second messianic miracle of healing a blind mute, Jesus was rejected as Messiah by the Sanhedrin (see Lg - The Great Sanhedrin) who claimed that He was possessed by Beelzebub! They claimed: By the prince of demons He is driving out demons (see Ek - It is only by Beelzebub, the Prince of Demons that This Fellow Drives Out Demons). Although the Pharisees and the Torah-teacher's who came down from Jerusalem were speaking to the crowd beyond the Lord's hearing, He knew their thoughts. So Jesus called them over to Him and began to speak to them (Mark 3:22a-23). Not awed by their position, Jesus defended Himself against their satanic attacks in four specific ways:

First, the accusation could not be true because it would mean a division in Satan's kingdom. Yeshua could not let such serious charges go unanswered. Being omniscient, He knew their thoughts and began to speak to them in parables: Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. If Satan opposes himself, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? He will have destroyed himself and his end will have come (Matthew 12:25-26; Mark 3:23-26). Why would the Adversary want to perform a miracle by driving himself and other demons out? That would make no sense. While it is true that evil is destructive by nature, it is also true that although there is no harmony, trust, or loyalty in Satan's kingdom, he certainly tolerates no disobedience or division. Consequently, Satan cannot be divided against himself. Out of jealousy and self-righteousness, the Pharisees had become blind to the obvious. By driving out demons and healing people, Jesus was destroying the Adversary's kingdom, not building it.

Secondly, they themselves had long recognized that exorcism was a gift from God. Messiah showed that the Pharisees accusation was also prejudiced, revealing the corrupt, wicked bias of their cold, black hearts. It should be noted that other rabbis had also driven out demons. So Jesus asks those religious leaders accusing Him of demon possession: **Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons drive them out?** The word sons is often used as a description for disciples or followers in the TaNaKh, as sons of the prophets as used in **Second Kings 2:3 NASB**. Certain followers or sons of the Pharisees had driven out demons, and the Jewish historian Josephus tells us that they used many strange, exotic incantations and cultic formulas in their rituals. They would never have claimed those activities were ungodly, much less satanic. To put His opponents on the theological hot seat, Jesus suggested that the Pharisees let their exorcist followers be their judges. He said: **So then, they will be your judges (Matthew 12:27; Luke 11:18-19)**. The implied suggestion was that they ask those followers by whose power they drove out evil spirits. If they said, "By Satan's power," they would condemn themselves and the Pharisees who supported them. But if they said, "By God's power," they would undercut the Pharisees' accusation against Yeshua.⁶⁶⁰ Once again the Lord had them in checkmate. Oh, how they hated that!

Thirdly, the healing of the blind mute authenticated the claim that Jesus was the Meshiach. Only the true God of Isra'el would want to build up His Kingdom in such a positive manner. **But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you,** or is in your midst (Matthew 12:28). If Jesus did His work by the Spirit of God, then His miracles were of God and He had to be the Messiah, the son of David, just as all the people said He was (Matthew 12:23). In one sense, Yeshua will not reign on earth until His messianic Kingdom, and after that the Eternal State (see my commentary on Revelation Fq - The Eternal State). But in its broadest sense, Christ's Kingdom is the sphere of His rule in any place or dispensation. He is the King wherever He may be, and those who love Him are His subjects; therefore, His Kingdom was always with Him during His earthly ministry. For God has rescued us from the domain of darkness, Rabbi Sha'ul says, and transferred us into the Kingdom of His dear Son (Colossians 1:13 CJB). All believers are adopted into His Kingdom the moment they receive the King as their Lord and Savior (see Bw - What God Does for Us at the Moment of Faith).

Fourthly, Jesus shows that He is stronger than Satan. He is invading the domain of the Adversary. The kingdom of God is breaking in taking Satan's possessions, or lost souls away from him. Yeshua is releasing people from the devil's power. The Pharisees were spiritually blind, for they could not see that everything the Lord said and did was opposed to Satan? Jesus used the figure of a thief who planned to rob a strong man's house while he was there. The thief knows that unless he first ties up the strong man, he has no chance of being successful and, in fact, risks being arrested or seriously beaten up in the process.

Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house (Matthew 12:29; Mk 3:27). It must, therefore, be someone stronger than **Beelzebub** who is able to deliver us from such **demonic** oppression. The deathblow to **the Adversary** was inflicted at the cross and will be fully realized in the future, but before that ultimate victory **Messiah** repeatedly demonstrates **His** limitless and unrestricted power to achieve **His** desired purposes.

Besides being a dynamic testimony in first-century Isra'el, this situation is a joyful reminder for all believers in our day. While **the devil still prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (First Peter 5:8)**, we are promised divine protection as we keep on **the armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18)**. Although we have a promised victory, we should also be wise enough to realize that the spiritual battle **will last until Satan is finally thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet will be thrown. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever (see my commentary on Revelation Fm - Satan Will Be Released from His Prison and Deceive the Nations).**⁶⁶¹

How is the Good Shepherd defended against satanic attacks today? Once again, there are four specific ways:

First, the Spirit testifies that Jesus is the Christ. Jesus encouraged His apostles by the promise of the Spirit's work in the world. As the work of Yeshua was to promote the Father and not Himself, so the Ruach will witness to Jesus as the Messiah: The Spirit of Truth who goes out from the Father - He will testify about Me, and I know that His testimony about Me is true (John 5:32 and 14:26b).

Secondly, the universal Church testifies that Yeshua is the Meshiach. The Spirit is sent from the Father (John 14:26a), just as the Son was sent from the Father. Yet this mysterious work of the Ruach is not done in isolation from the Church. The talmidim were to bear witness to the facts that they came to know: And you must also testify (Yochanan 15:26b). As the Twelve witnessed, the Holy Spirit convicted, and people were saved. The same combination of human obedience to the divine command (Acts 1:8) coupled with the witness of the Ruach HaKodesh is needed in every generation.⁶⁶²

Thirdly, the Word of God testifies that the Lord is the Expected One. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. And the Word was with God, and we have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son. And the Word was God, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (Yochanan 1:1 and 14).

Fourthly, and as His ambassadors, we need to testify that He is the Anointed One. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us (Second Corinthians 5:20a). As in our day, being an ambassador in ancient times was an important and highly regarded duty. An Ambassador is both a messenger for and a representative of the one who sent him or her, and believers are messengers and representatives of the court of heaven. Though our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20), we testify that the Savior of Sinners is the Messiah, where we live as aliens and strangers (First Peter 2:11). As His representatives, we don't have to be perfect (sometimes our halo slips), but we do need to be aware of our responsibility to testify that if you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

*Lord Jesus, by Your cross, you opened the way for us to know freedom. Teach us to trust in Your victory over the devil. Empower us to live by faith in You, waiting for the victory You have promised.*⁶⁶³