

Israel's Rejection of the Messiah

Luke 11:14-32

Luke 11:14-23: And He was casting out a demon, and it was mute. So it was, when the demon had gone out, that the mute spoke; and the multitudes marveled. 15 But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebub,[a] the ruler of the demons." 16 Others, testing Him, sought from Him a sign from heaven. 17 But He, knowing their thoughts, said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls. 18 If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? Because you say I cast out demons by Beelzebub. 19 And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. 20 But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. 21 When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. 22 But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils. 23 He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters.

Background Notes

In Luke 11 we have the critical point of Israel's rejection of their Messiah, when some of the people actually attributed the wonderful works of the Lord to the power of Satan. According to the parallel passage in Matthew 12, this sin was unpardonable. Matthew 12:22-33: *"Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were amazed and said, "Could this be the Son of David?" Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, "This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons."*

But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.

"Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come."

The occasion was the Lord casting out a demon from a man who couldn't speak. The demon had caused the man's inability to speak, showing that demon possession is real, and that demons can cause physical problems. Of course this does not mean that all speech problems are caused by demons - certainly not. Some Christians wrongly jump to the conclusion that every physical problem is caused by demons, but this is not so.

After the Lord cast out the demon and the man spoke, the multitude marveled (v14). But some in the multitude (and Matthew 12 says that it was the Pharisees) said that the Lord did His wonderful work through the power of Beelzebub. Beelzebub literally means "Lord of flies" and it was one of the names the Jews used for Satan, the ruler of the demons. In essence, the Pharisees and leaders of Israel were saying that the Lord Himself was demon-possessed and Satan was the source of His supernatural power! This incredible statement was the last straw – the critical turning point in the nation's rejection of their Messiah.

Doctrinal Points

1. Israel rejected Jesus Christ by attributing His miracles to the power of Satan.

In response to the Pharisees' terrible charge that the Lord Jesus was casting out demons by the power of Satan, the Lord used two logical arguments to refute this lie.

a. If He was casting demons by satanic power, then Satan would be divided against himself and his kingdom would fall.

To paraphrase, it would be like "shooting yourself in the foot."

b. If the Lord was using satanic power to cast out demons, then by what power were the Jewish exorcists casting out demons? God enabled some exorcists in Judaism to cast out demons. The Lord's point was obvious. To accuse Jesus of using satanic power to cast out demons brought into question any power displayed by Judaism. But if the Lord's power was the finger of God, as was Moses' power before the Egyptian magicians, then the Kingdom of God had come upon them!

That's exactly what the Lord's message had been all along: the Kingdom of God was at hand. These miracles testified to the fact that the King had arrived. Would Israel receive the King and the Kingdom He offered? Satan was like a strong man guarding his house (v21), but Jesus Christ was stronger than the strong man, and He was proving it by casting out the demons (v22).

Whoever did not acknowledge this fact was against Christ (v23): "*He who is not with Me is against Me.*" There was no middle ground. The Pharisees and leaders of the nation chose to reject the King and his Kingdom. Israel rejected Christ by attributing His miracles to the power of Satan.

2. Israel rejected Christ by demanding heavenly signs as proof of His claims.

Luke 11:27-32: And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, "Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!" 28 But He said, "More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" 29 And while the crowds were thickly gathered together, He began to say, "This is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. 30 For as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so also the Son of Man will be to this generation. 31 The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here. 32 The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.

A woman in the crowd, impressed by the words and deeds of the Lord, called out for a blessing on the mother of Jesus. The Lord did not detract from Mary in any way, but He showed clearly that being in His spiritual family through His Word was far more important than physical family relationships, including His relationship with His mother.

Addressing the crowds, the Lord denounced the Pharisees and leaders of the nation by saying (v29), *"This is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet."* What greater sign could these unbelievers want than the Lord's miracles? But God is not pleased with people who are always looking for "signs," because they're just sensation-seekers. People who are "convinced against their will are of the same opinion still." Miraculous signs will never convince a closed-minded unbeliever. In the arena of spiritual realities, it is not "seeing is believing" but "believing is seeing"!

The parallel passage in Matthew 12:40 says that the "sign of Jonah" mentioned here is the resurrection of Christ. But the nation would not even accept that amazing sign - they would simply deny the evidence. The queen of Sheba believed the evidence without needing a sign - and she was a Gentile. The people of Nineveh believed the preaching of Jonah and probably the account of his miraculous experience, too - and they were Gentiles. At the future judgment, those believing Gentiles will rise up with condemning evidence against the unbelieving Jews of Jesus' day. Someone greater than the queen of Sheba and Jonah was present, right in their midst - the King and the offer of His Kingdom! But Israel rejected the King and His Kingdom. Israel rejected Christ by demanding signs as proof of His claims.

Practical Application

Beware of reformation without conversion.

Verses 24-26: "When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' 25 And when he comes, he finds *it* swept and put in order. 26 Then he

goes and takes with *him* seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last *state* of that man is worse than the first.”

In the context here, the Lord was speaking of the nation of Israel. When the Jews went into captivity in Babylon, they were purged of their idolatry. But the fact that they would not receive the Messiah would lead to even greater idolatry in the future. The book of Revelation speaks of many Jews who will be given over to the idolatry and worship of the antichrist of the End Times.

These verses have a personal application as well. It's possible, apart from true salvation and conversion, to have an outward “reformation.” For example, many people have “turned over a new leaf” in life and tried to make a change in their ways. But if there's no true conversion, there often is nothing to take the place of the old ways – nothing to fill the void. Then their “last state can be worse than the first” - including even demonic possession and oppression.

So beware of reformation without conversion in the lives of others - and in your own life, if you are not yet a true Christian. Beware of reformation without conversion.