

Matthew 12:43-45

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-12/matthew-1243-45/>

Jesus describes a strange truth about demon-possession and likens it to this evil generation.

The parallel gospel account of this teaching is found in Luke 11:24-26.

After Jesus met the challenge of the scribes and Pharisees about giving them a sign to prove that He was the Messiah and His historical rebuke of their lack of faith, He returned to the topic of evil *spirits*. In the Pharisees' third challenge against Jesus, they accused Him of casting out demons by the power and authority of the ruler of demons (Matthew 12:24).

Jesus explains what happens *when an unclean spirit goes out of a man*. The term, *unclean spirit*, is another name for a demon. Jesus says the demon *passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find it*. It is not certain what Jesus means by *waterless places*, but from the context it seems to apply to being in a state of not being in a man. This could be a reference to the fact that a human body primarily consists of water. When *the unclean spirit* is not inhabiting a human, it cannot *find rest* as *it passes through these waterless places*. The *rest* it is seeking appears to be to possess another *man* to torment.

When *it* does not find *rest*, *the restless unclean spirit* says (possibly to itself) *I will return to my house from which I came*. After going *out of a man*, the demon *comes* back to his *house* (the man) in order to *find rest*. And when *the unclean spirit* returns *it finds the man unoccupied, swept, and put in order*. The *man* is spiritually empty and *unoccupied*. Jesus says that *the house is swept and put in order* to indicate that *the man* is ready to be reoccupied. His *house* is ready to be moved into once again.

But *the unclean spirit* does not immediately move in as we might expect *it* to do. Instead, *it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there*. Instead of moving in immediately, it finds other demon friends *more wicked than itself* and then they all possess the man together. Perhaps this restless demon, who has been evicted once, recruits reinforcements, to better secure the potential to remain in possession of the man. Instead of being agitated by one *unclean spirit*, the *man* is now afflicted with eight *evil spirits*. Jesus points out *the last state of that man becomes worse than the first*. It is bad for *a man* to be the host of one demon. It is *worse* for *that man* to be the host of eight.

Jesus then likens this demon-possessed *man* to *this present, evil generation*. He says *that is the way it will also be with this evil generation*. What does Jesus mean by this comparison?

He may be trying to describe the nation of Judea. The account that Jesus just gave about *the man, the unclean spirit*, and the *seven other wicked spirits* may have allegorical meaning in addition to being a literal description of supernatural *evil*.

The metaphor might be as follows. *The man* is Judea, or the spiritual leaders of Israel, such as the scribes and Pharisees. *The unclean spirit* is the sin of pagan idolatry, which the children of Israel and both the Northern and Southern kingdoms constantly struggled with until the Babylonian exile. The *casting out of the spirit* is the Babylonian exile and return under Ezra, Nehemiah, and later the Maccabees when the Jews renewed their commitment to the Law and God's commandments.

But even as they externally pretended to keep the Law, they did not do so, because they did not obey from the heart. They neglected the core teachings and spirit of the Law. Even as they praised God with their words and external rituals, internally they were empty and *unoccupied*. When the unclean spirit of paganism returned with the Roman occupation, it found the Jews ready to be repossessed, but instead of merely reinstating the old forms of Paganism, the unclean spirit also invited seven other demons such as religious legalism, social elitism, and sectarian strife. At which point the Jews were in a *worse* predicament *than* they were at *the first*. If Jesus had something like this in mind, then His point is that *this* present *generation* had become *worse* than the unfaithful generations throughout Israel's history.

Biblical Text

Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came'; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation.