



The Reflector

Published and edited monthly in the interest of calling people back to the Bible
by Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

December 2012



Edward O'Neal Bragwell, Jr.
November 2, 1956 – December 21, 2012

Eddie and his twin sister, Vicki (Mrs. Vicki Russell), were the first children born to Edward O'Neal Bragwell and Patsy Kathryn Martin Bragwell in Pontotoc, Mississippi. There were three other siblings born into the family, Martin Loyd, Carla Dawn, and Jonathan Tyler Bragwell.

In his early years, as the son of a gospel preacher, he moved from place to place in the Southeastern part of the USA, but he mostly grew up in Fultondale, Alabama where his parents lived for twenty two years. He graduated with honors from Fultondale High School in 1975, with his first year of college credit from the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) already under his belt. He received his B.S. degree from UAB in December 1977. He taught math the rest of that school term at Thompson High School in Alabaster, Alabama. The next two years he taught math at Fultondale High School while getting his Masters degree at UAB. As soon as he completed his Masters, in June of 1980, he immediately went to work with the church of Christ at Succosuna, New Jersey in preaching the gospel of Christ.

After two years, in New Jersey, he moved to Anniston, Alabama to work with the church at Golden Springs. During his work there he held a public debate with Roger Jackson on church

benevolence and church support of institutions separate and apart from the church. It was also during that period that he met, courted and married the love of his life, Vickie Kay Colwell of Albertville, Alabama, to whom two daughters, Laura Elizabeth and Kathryn Fay, were eventually born.

From Anniston, he and Vickie moved to work with the church of Christ in Hanceville, Alabama. After Hanceville, he worked with churches in Greenwood and Greenville, Mississippi. While in Greenwood, he returned to teaching math in the public school system in order to support his family so he could preach at those churches in Mississippi without having to rely on "outside support."

After Mississippi, in 1998, he moved to Russellville, Alabama. He taught math at Sheffield Junior High School for two years. Then he began work as a teacher with the C.I.T.Y. program which later became the S.P.A.N. program. This is a school for at-risk kids from age 12 through high school age. The last few years he served as Educational Coordinator and teacher for this program. During his years with this program, he preached twice on Sundays at the Five Points church of Christ not far from Russellville and attended Wednesday night services at Isbell and Eastside churches. He occasionally taught classes at Eastside. He also

maintained a website devoted to Bible teaching.

We are dedicating this issue of *The Reflector* to his memory as a loving son, husband, father and brother. Also remembering his work of preaching and teaching in the Lord's church and his work of molding the minds and future of young people, not only in his work in the S.P.A.N. program, but also his work with the young in churches where he preached and his voluntary work with Rustic Youth Camp through the years. As a tribute to him, all the rest of the articles in this issue are from his writings.

Editor ■

Do Demons Possess People Today?

Edward O. Bragwell, Jr.

Occasionally, I run into those who want to know whether or not demons possess people today. Sometimes we see accounts of supposed demon possessions in newspapers, in magazines, or on television shows. Demon possession has also been a favorite subject in Hollywood, with such moves as "The Exorcist" and "The Omen." With so much fanciful material bombarding our lives, it is no wonder that we run into people who have questions concerning this. Let's then, look at what the Bible says about it.

First of all, one who examines the Bible will have to immediately admit that demons or unclean spirits did possess people in the days of Christ. There are numerous examples. There was the man in the synagogue (Mark 1:23-28). There were two men of the Gergesenes (Matt. 8:28-34). There was Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9). There were others as well. Jesus demonstrated His power by casting out these demons, and was even wrongly accused of using Satan's power to cast them out (Matt. 12:24). The power to cast out these demons was also given to His disciples (Matt. 10:1; Luke 10:17). So no one can deny the fact that demon possession did occur at one time.

The question that we want to address, however, is whether or not demons still possess people today. Let me say from the outset that I believe that the Bible strongly indicates that people ceased to be possessed by demons after the days of the New Testament. There are several things that causes one to come to this conclusion. First, the ability to cast out demons was usually connected with the ability to speak in tongues, heal people of diseases, and to prophesy (Mark 16:17,18; Matt. 10:1; cf. Matt. 7:22).

We know from I Corinthians 13 that the ability to prophesy and the ability to speak in tongues ceased with the coming of the complete revelation of God. We realize that, in general, the miraculous spiritual gifts that the early disciples possessed were given to them in order to confirm the word that was being revealed at the time (Mark 16:20). When the complete revelation had come, there was no more need for them. These spiritual gifts then ceased from the earth upon the completion of God's revelation, and one would assume that the ability to cast out demons ceased with the ability to speak in tongues and prophesy and heal the sick and so on. If the ability to cast out demons has ceased, then it would follow that the possibility to be possessed by demons no longer exists. It would be ridiculous to think that God would allow us to be possessed by demons with no way out of it.

I'm sure, however, that there may be some reading this who will say, "All right, I realize that the ability to prophesy and speak in tongues have ceased, because they are specifically mentioned as things that would pass away. But demon possession is not so mentioned, so how can you be so sure that it ceased at the same time?" I think that we can turn to Old Testament prophesy for that answer. Several Messianic prophesies tell us about what will take place during the time that the Messiah's kingdom is established. One such prophesy is found in Zechariah 13:1-4. Here Zechariah talks of a day when "a fountain shall be opened" to his people "for sin and uncleanness." This is clearly a reference to the time when the blood of Christ would be made available to take away sins. The prophesy goes on to say that three other things would happen "in that day." He says that the name of idols would be cut off from the land - a reference to the fact that those in God's kingdom do not worship idols but the true God. He goes on to say that he prophet and the unclean spirit would be caused to depart from the land. As we have already seen, eventually prophesy ceased in the kingdom; it was done away with. Now if one claims to be a prophet we know that he is a liar, as Zechariah says, "if anyone still prophesies," he will be told, "You have spoken lies." It is impossible for one to speak prophesies when prophesies have ceased; and if one does, you know he is a false prophet. But notice that at the same time the prophets were to depart from the land, the unclean spirit was to depart from the land. So just as surely as prophesies have ceased, people have ceased

to be possessed by unclean spirits or demons. Homer Hailey makes the following comment concerning this prophesy: "In the conquest of Christ over Satan and his forces, unclean spirits have ceased to control men as they did in the time of the ministry of Christ and the apostles" (A Commentary On The Minor Prophets, p. 392).

While demons do not possess men today, we need to realize that it is possible for us to allow Satan himself to control our lives. It is him that we need to be concerned with today and not some demons that might possess us. While the demons of Christ's day came in and took control of someone against their will, Satan can only control our lives if we allow him to do so. So we need to be diligent in our efforts to keep him from controlling our lives (I Pet. 5:8,9). We need to turn to Jesus and let him control our lives. ■

The Mystery Revealed

Edward O. Bragwell, Jr.

I often hear people say that the Bible cannot really be understood. One reason some give is that the Bible is a mystery that no one can understand. As proof they point to the fact that the Bible sometimes refers to itself as a mystery. Now it is true that in many passages the Bible does characterize the things within it as a "mystery." The question that must be asked is if these things continue to be a mystery. Let's first look at what is meant by the word mystery. A mystery is "something unexplained, unknown, or kept secret." (Webster's New World Dictionary) The Greek word "mysterion (moos-tay-ree-on)" which is translated mystery in the New Testament literally means "to shut the mouth" and means "a secret" according to Strong. So the things that are contained in the Scriptures are things that at least at one time God kept His mouth shut about or kept secret. But the question is whether these things are a mystery or secret any longer or have God made His will known to us so that we can understand. A careful consideration of a few Bible passages should give us the answer to this.

(1) Rom 16:25-27: "Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith – to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever.

Amen." Notice that although the "revelation of the mystery" had been "kept secret since the world began" that Paul says it "now has been made manifest" and "by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations." Does that sound like the things in the Scriptures are still covered up (kept secret) or have they been uncovered (revealed) so that we know can know and understand God's will?

(2) 1 Cor 2:7-10: "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.' But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God." Notice here that Paul said that he and others spoke the "mystery" or "hidden wisdom" of God. But they were able to speak these things because "God has revealed them to us." When the Holy Spirit made known the things of God to Paul and others, it no longer was secret. It is no longer a mystery, but can be known and understood.

(3) Eph 1:7-10: "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth -- in Him." We see here again that the "mystery of His will" has been "made known to us." It is no longer kept secret. We can know it and understand it.

(4) Eph 3:3-12: "How that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be

made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him." There are several things brought out here. We see that Paul had the "mystery" revealed to him. This mystery had not been revealed in "other ages," but had now been "revealed" or uncovered. Paul wrote down what he received and when we read it we can "understand" what he was revealed to him. Also Paul had within his power to "make all see" what was once a "mystery" that had been "hidden in God," but obviously no longer was hidden. God's word is therefore no longer a mystery, but something that has been revealed so that we can understand it.

(5) Col 1:24-29: "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily." Notice again that here the "word of God" is characterized as "the mystery which has been hidden," but "now has been revealed."

These passages ought to be enough to convince us that the Bible is not a mystery which cannot be understood by us today. On the contrary, God's will was once a MYSTERY shut up in His mind UNTIL He saw fit to REVEAL it to us by the apostles and prophets, who wrote it down in what we now know as the Bible. We can understand it now. All we have to do is read it and follow it. ■

Immanuel

Edward O. Bragwell, Jr.

In prophesying of the birth of the Christ, Isaiah said, "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14). Matthew then records the fulfillment of this

prophecy in the New Testament. An angel told Joseph that the child that Mary was carrying was "conceived in her of the Holy Spirit." Matthew then explained that this was to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy and went on to say that Immanuel meant "God with us." (Matt. 1:18-25) Thus the angel, as the prophet before him, proclaimed that this person who was entering our world was not, nor ever would be, an ordinary man. He was and is God. As John testifies, he "became flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1:14-18).

While here on earth, Jesus proclaimed himself to be "God with us." He proclaimed his dual nature in his questioning of the Pharisees and showed them that the parentage of the Christ would be both divine and human. He was physically the son of David, but was also God, therefore David called him "Lord." (Matt. 22:41-46). Although in the flesh, Jesus proclaimed himself to be the same as his Father. He proclaimed himself to be God. (John 14:9) The Jews clearly understood what Jesus had claimed, but chose not to believe the claims. It was because of his claims that some felt justified in killing him. (cf. John 10:33).

Jesus not only made such claims, but he also demonstrated by his actions that he was indeed "God with us." He demonstrated his power "on earth" to forgive sins, something that those who observed him even recognized that "God alone" could do. (Mark 2:1-12). He exhibited the ability to know the thoughts of other men. (Matt. 9:3-4; Mark 2:8; Luke 5:22; 6:7-8; 9:46-47; etc.). Again this is something that only God can do. (cf. 1 Cor. 2:11; Heb. 4:12-13) He also demonstrated His deity by accepting worship from others, something that men cannot and must not do. (Matt. 8:2; 14:33; John 9:38; etc.) There can be no doubt that he was "God with us."

Being "God with us," he took on the form of a man and experienced the things we must experience in a fleshly body. This made him the perfect Savior of mankind and Mediator between God and man. (Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 2:10-18; 4:14-16). God came and dwelled here on earth. He has now returned to heaven, leaving us an example to follow. (1 Pet. 2:21). Truly, "great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed in the world, Received up in glory." (1 Tim. 3:16). ■