

**A response to Pharisees:
The Parable of the Unclean Spirit Who Returns**

1. The Parable of the Unclean Spirit Who Returns is seen in Matthew 12:43-45 and Luke 11:24-26. Make a chart of the accounts that show their similarities and differences.

Matthew 12:43-45	Luke 11:24-26
Jesus heals the demon possessed blind and mute man (vs. 22-23)	Jesus heals the demon possessed mute man (vs. 14)
Demons and the kingdom of God House divided cannot stand (vs. 24-28) Strong man's house (vs. 29-30)	Demons and the kingdom of God House divided cannot stand (vs. 15-20) Strong man's house (vs. 21-23)
Unpardonable (eternal) sin (vs. 31-32)	
A tree is known by its fruit (vs. 33-37)	
Scribes / Pharisees ask for a sign (vs. 38-42)	
Unclean spirit returns (vs. 43-45)	Unclean spirit returns (vs. 24-27)

2. Parables are fictitious stories or word pictures that are true to life (i.e. seemingly real and not a fable) that is intended to teach a specific truth. The deeper meaning is often found when one discovers whom Jesus is speaking to. Observe carefully: who are the possible groups of people that Jesus may be addressing? Who do you think is Jesus specifically speaking to?

Jesus may have been speaking to: 1) people who were exorcised, but did not come to believe in Jesus, or 2) the Jews who did not believe Jesus was the Messiah, or 3) the people who came to hear Jesus but did not believe.

The context of Matthew 12:23-42 indicates that Jesus was speaking to the Jews who did not believe in Jesus and more specifically to the Pharisees.

Preceding the parable of the unclean spirit who returns Jesus heals a blind and mute man. The exorcism invites charges from the Pharisees who accuse Jesus of being the prince of demons. Jesus deals with this blasphemy of attributing the deliverance to Satan instead of by the will of God in two ways:

1. The fallacy of the Pharisees' logic

Why would Satan destroy his own work?

If Jewish exorcists delivered by the power of God, why is Jesus' deliverance attributed to the power of Satan?

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2. The consequence of the Pharisees' blasphemy

The sin that is not forgiven is the failure to submit to the Holy Spirit's call despite the testimony of Jesus' life and display of His divine power.

Judgment will be based on the heart of each man.

Despite the words of Jesus, the Pharisees' request of a sign was born out of disbelief and not out of faith.

3. What is the parable's message?

The parable of the unclean spirit returning to the empty house was told while the Pharisees were challenging and disputing the good works of Jesus. That the parable is a story about demonic spirits, like references of evil spirits throughout the New Testament, indicates the wide acceptance of supernatural beings in the daily lives of people during that time, and it establishes the spiritual context of the moment.

As the religious and political party of Israel, the Pharisees were insistent that the Law of Moses, tithing, and ritual purity be observed. It is for these reasons that Jesus spoke specifically to them; they aspired to have their lives "swept and put in order." Jesus' parable reveals that living by the Law was insufficient; the Pharisees needed to recognize and accept Jesus as the Messiah and Lord for true redemption.

However, the Pharisees as a group failed to accept Jesus as the Messiah. Like the house that was swept clean and made worse after being left empty, the Pharisees who, as teachers of the Law had a greater knowledge of truth, and thus were more accountable when their time of judgment comes (James 3:1).

Jesus and His apostles knew the Pharisees as ones who enjoyed the benefits of status and socio-cultural respect (Matt 23:6-7; Rom 2:17-20; 1 Tim 1:5-7). This selfish perspective was contrary to the Law.

And as the oral tradition was the principle means of teaching, teachers were held to a higher standard in their use of words and behavior (Matt 12:36-37; Luke 12:48; James 1:3).

While this parable is directed towards the Pharisees, the figurative sense of leaving the swept house "empty" is pertinent to everyone today. In addition to Judaism, there are many other religions and philosophies intended to help one get their life "swept and in order." Then, as now, the only solution lies in whether Jesus Christ is the one who is invited into one's life.

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