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## A Nonbiblical Exorcism Story

Exorcism stories were common in the Greco-Roman world and many people besides Jesus were reputed to have the gift to expel evil spirits that had forcibly taken control of a hapless victim.

This story is told of Apollonius of Tyana, a philosopher and miracle worker who is said to have been active in Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome during the first century CE (roughly contemporaneous with Jesus). It is taken from the book *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* by Philostratus, which was composed in the first half of the third century CE:

When he was treating of the best mode of offering libations, there happened to be present a young man who was very effeminate, and so proverbially luxurious, as fit to be made the subject of one of those songs that are used to be sung in the serving up of great feasts . . . the youth burst out into an immoderate fit of laughter. Whereupon Apollonius, looking steadfastly upon him, said, It is not you whom I consider as offering me this insult, but the demon within you: it is he who makes you in ignorance commit this folly. Till this moment the youth knew not he was possessed by a demon, though he laughed and cried in turns, without any apparent cause, and even sung and talked to himself. Many thought all this brought on by intemperance in his youth: but the fact was, he was

impelled by a demon, and committed all the wild extravagancies practised by people in that situation. As soon as Apollonius fixed his eyes upon him, the demon broke out into all those angry horrid expressions used by people on the rack, and then swore he would depart out of the youth, and never again enter another. Apollonius rebuked him, as masters do their cunning, saucy, insolent slaves, and commanded him to come out of the youth, and in so doing to give a visible sign of his departure.

Immediately the demon cried out, I will make that statue tumble, to which he pointed, standing in a royal portico, where the transaction happened. But who is able to describe the noise and tumult, and clapping of hands with joy, when they saw the statue first begin to shake, then totter, and then tumble down? The young man rubbed his eyes like one awoke from a deep sleep, and turning them to the sun's light, seemed quite shocked at the idea of standing so conspicuous and exposed to all beholders. He no longer retained the wild disturbed look of intemperance, but returned to his right mind, as if recovered by the use of medicine alone. Then laying aside his soft garments and all his fashionable Sybaritic airs, he adapted the homely simplicity and plain garb of a philosopher, and lived after the rules of Apollonius.<sup>1</sup>

1. Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, trans. Edward Berwick (London: T. Payne, 1809), 4.20.