

The Gospel of *Mark*

The Servant Leadership of Jesus

The Servant's Ministry in and around Galilee (cont) (1:14 – 9:50)

The stories in this chapter reveal the first key interactions between Jesus and the Gentiles.

A Period of Popularity: *The Healing of a Demon-Possessed Man* (5:1-20)

5:1 After Jesus calmed the storm ^{Mark 4:35-41}, He and His disciples continued across the Sea of Galilee to a region of the Gerasenes (Gadarenes ^{Matthew 8:28}) (probably near the town of Gersa, also known as Kursi or Gergesa), which was an area on the eastern shore and governed by the city of Gadara.

2 Upon getting out of the boat, Jesus was confronted by a demon-possessed man ^{Mark 1:23-26} who was coming out from the rock-carved burial chambers (tombs) in the rocky hillsides just outside of town.

In this story, Mark & Luke only mentioned one man, while Matthew ^{Matthew 8:28} mentioned two. Referencing only one man probably implies one of the men was distinctly more prominent.

The spirit in the possessed man was evil (*akathartos*: unclean, morally impure) ^{Luke 4:33}.

3-4 The tombs were used for burial, as well as shelter for the demented outcasts. The spirit was able to produce supernatural strength in the man's body that could not be restrained with normal means.

Dwelling among the tombs may have indicated the man was not Jewish. Had he been Jewish, the man's family and friends would have tried to keep him from being defiled among the dead bodies. Other reasons to believe he was a Gentile include: at this time, the east side of the Sea of Galilee was mainly a Roman/Gentile region (called the Decapolis ^{v.20}) and the mention of a large herd of pigs ^{v.11} (very unclean animals according to Jewish Law ^{Leviticus 11:7-8}).

There are recent documented cases of 4-5 men being required to restrain a possessed human.

Luke's account states the man was driven into solitary places ^{Luke 8:29b}. Satan wants to separate man from any support systems he may have, because alone, he is more vulnerable.

5 The man was in unceasing agony in his internal battle against the possessing evil spirit, indicated by his persistent crying out for help, as the spirit worked to destroy the man with jagged rocks.

6-7 It is hard to tell who was the main factor in making the direct move toward Jesus: the tortured man or the possessing, but terrified spirit; however, the evil spirit ^{v.8} does all of the communicating.

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He recognized Jesus immediately, ran to Jesus and fell on his knees before Him ^{Romans 14:11}, called Him by a correct title (“Son of the Most High” ^{Luke 1:32}) and begged Jesus not to torture him ^{Mark 1:24}.

You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that— and shudder. ^{James 2:19}

8-9 Jesus commanded the evil spirit to depart from the man, but allowed the dialogue to continue for a moment by asking the spirit his name. The spirit responded: “My name is Legion ... we are many”.

A Roman legion was a military unit of 5000-6000 infantrymen. The use of “Legion” may have indicated an approximate number or simply a way of conveying a great number of evil spirits.

10 Recognizing Jesus’ power, he (the many spirits are referred to with a collective “he”) repeatedly pleaded not to be sent away from the area of the Gerasenes where he had tormented the people.

Additional insights are gained by studying parallel passages in other Gospels. In Matthew, the evil spirits revealed an awareness of their prophetic destiny: “torture” ^{Matthew 8:29}; in Luke, the demons begged not to be sent into the “Abyss” (*abyssos*: bottomless pit) ^{Luke 8:31}.

11-13 Desperately wanting to avoid being sent to the Abyss, the spirits “begged” Jesus to send them into a herd of pigs grazing nearby. Jesus gave his permission, the evil spirits possessed the pigs and the demons forced the two thousand pigs to their destruction by driving them into the Sea of Galilee.

Perhaps Jesus granted the spirit’s request in order to show the man and everyone else there a graphic, visible and powerful lesson on the enormity of the evil that had possessed the man. In addition, it was proof against the many liberal/cultic theologians who have claimed these occurrences represented psychological disorders and not actual demon possessions.

Why did the spirits beg to be placed in the pigs and then drive them into the sea? Was it so they could join other spirits who had produced the storm in the previous chapter? ^{Mark 4:35-41}

The evil spirits needed Jesus’ permission to enter the pigs, but there is no indication in the Bible that a demon ever had to ask for permission to possess a human. Unregenerate people (especially those who have produced an entry by spending time involved in some aspect of the occult) are susceptible to being trapped by the devil, and captive to his will ^{2 Timothy 2:25-26}.

There is some disagreement in the Christian community as to who evil spirits (demons) are. Most scholars believe they are fallen angels who came out of heaven with Satan ^{Revelation 12:3-4}; however, there are some who believe the demons are separate spiritual beings, perhaps the disembodied spirits of the Nephilim ^{Genesis 6:4} (Anakim/Anakites, Rephaim/Rephaites).

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14-15 Being shocked at what happened, the pig herders went to town (Gersa? ^{v.1}) to spread the news.

The townspeople came rushing out to see for themselves what had occurred, but they were thrown off at the sight of the previously-possessed man. Note the characteristics of the man Mark chose: sitting (no longer agitated), dressed (normal appearance) and in his right mind (no longer frenzied).

16-17 The eye witnesses told the people from town the details of what had taken place, then the local people begged Jesus to leave, partially because of their fear and lack of understanding of His great power, but also because of their resentment over their great financial loss of the two thousand pigs.

“Those that had seen it...” included the pig herders (who were mostly concerned with the townspeople knowing everything that happened) and the Twelve (who wanted to make sure they knew about the relationship between the healing of the man and the behavior of the pigs).

18-19 Unlike the rejection of the townspeople, the healed man desired to remain close to Jesus.

As Jesus and disciples prepared to leave, the man “begged” with Jesus to allow him to go with them, but Jesus refused to let him, and told him to return to his family and tell them what had happened.

Many liberal/cultic theologians have denied Jesus ever claimed to be God, but here, Jesus referred to himself as Lord (*kyrios*) ^{v.19}, and Luke wrote that Jesus used “God” (*theos*) ^{Luke 8:39}.

During His early ministry (and in Jewish settings) Jesus did not want His actions to be spread inappropriately ^{Mark 1:25, 34, 44, 3:12}, because His time had “not yet come” ^{John 2:4} (He wanted to delay the anger of the Jewish leadership). However, because this was a Gentile area, Jesus wanted the man to serve Him by beginning the spread of the Gospel to non-Jews ^{Acts 1:8}.

20 The grateful man did what Jesus told him to do and more, because not only did he share the power and love of Jesus with his family ^{v.19}, but he also went throughout the entire area of the Decapolis.

The man’s ministry must have been very successful, because the next time Jesus came to this region, he was welcomed by crowds ^{Mark 7:31-35} (including His feeding four thousand ^{Mark 8:1-10}).

The Decapolis ^{Matthew 4:25} was a group of ten cities on the eastern frontier of the Roman Empire. All but one of the cities were east of the Jordan River and centers for Greek & Roman culture.

As with all of the accounts of the healings by Jesus, this story also has a spiritual meaning. The man was dead, already living in an area designated for the dead and he was controlled by unclean spirits (the man was a slave to sin ^{Isaiah 42:6, Romans 6:17}); however, Jesus came to release the man from his bondage to the sin (He set the man free ^{Isaiah 42:7, Romans 6:18}).