

19 Mark 5:1-20 Jesus Restores a Demon-Possessed Man

Discussion: Which stories of human physical strength or power have most impressed you? Perhaps feats of endurance, examples from sports, or heroic acts?

| Mark 5 | Matthew 8 | Luke 8 |
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| <p>Jesus Restores a Demon-Possessed Man They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. 2 When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. 3 This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. 4 For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. 5 Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.</p> | <p>Jesus Restores Two Demon-Possessed Men 28 When he arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no one could pass that way.</p> | <p>Jesus Restores a Demon-Possessed Man 26 They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. 27 When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs.</p> |
| <p>6 When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. 7 He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God's name don't torture me!" 8 For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you impure spirit!"</p> | <p>29 "What do you want with us, Son of God?" they shouted. "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?"</p> | <p>28 When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!" 29 For Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.</p> |
| <p>9 Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many."</p> | | <p>30 Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him.</p> |

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| <p>10 And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.</p> | | <p>31 And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.</p> |
| <p>11 A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. 12 The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." 13 He gave them permission, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.</p> | <p>30 Some distance from them a large herd of pigs was feeding. 31 The demons begged Jesus, "If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs." 32 He said to them, "Go!" So they came out and went into the pigs, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and died in the water.</p> | <p>32 A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he gave them permission. 33 When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.</p> |
| <p>14 Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. 15 When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. 16 Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well.</p> | <p>33 Those tending the pigs ran off, went into the town and reported all this, including what had happened to the demon-possessed men.</p> | <p>34 When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, 35 and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. 36 Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured.</p> |
| <p>17 Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.</p> | <p>34 Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region.</p> | <p>37 Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left.</p> |
| <p>18 As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. 19 Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." 20 So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.</p> | | <p>38 The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, 39 "Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.</p> |

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As we read of supernatural events in the Gospels such as healings and miracles, it is tempting for the modern reader to consider whether there are alternative explanations. This is particularly the case when encountering the casting out of demons. Wouldn't we gain a more informed or educated insight into what was *really* happening if we reinterpreted these events in the light of a modern understanding of science and medicine? However, to do so denies the detailed evidence of eyewitnesses to the events and thus discounts Jesus' divine authority over *all* creation that Mark points to. These accounts are so packed with detail that we must consider them at face value.

Comparison

- Mark and Luke offer significantly more detail on this event than the seven verses given in Matthew's Gospel. However, the essence of the teaching is still present in Matthew.¹
- While the Synoptic Gospels all locate this event in the Gentile area of Decapolis on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, Mark and Luke use the regional name of the large city of Gerasa. Matthew refers to the area by the closer city of Gadara, more familiar to a Jewish audience as it was the centre of a Jewish revolt, resulting in its destruction by the Romans in AD 66.²
- Interestingly, Matthew chose to relate this as involving two demon-possessed men who spoke in the plural ("What do you want with *us*?") while the other Synoptics have one man speak in the singular even though there were many demons involved.
- In all three Synoptics, the townspeople begged Jesus to leave but in Mark and Luke, we see that Jesus would not permit the demoniac to depart with him. Unlike other healings and miracles at this stage of Jesus' ministry, he informed the man that he should go and tell other people in the region what had happened to him.

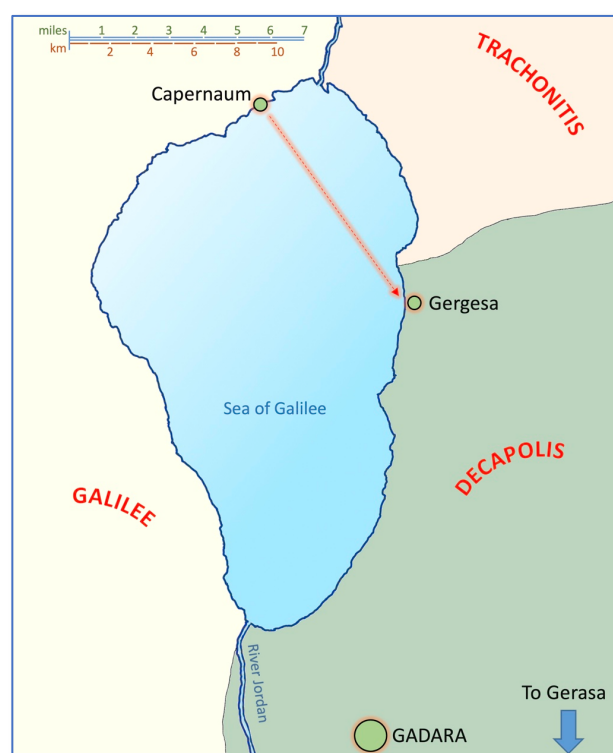


Figure 21: Sea of Galilee

Context

- Decapolis (literally, *ten cities*) covered an area of perhaps 800 sq. miles.³ While the specific location of this meeting with Legion is long forgotten, Gergesa was proposed by Origen (in about AD 230) and it is also named in some ancient manuscripts.⁴
- Our previous session concluded with the disciples filled with awe and fear having experienced at close hand the power of Jesus over the wild forces of nature, leading them to ask the question “Who is this man?”. They were about to witness the unparalleled *exousia* of Jesus in his equally astonishing control over the forces of evil that possessed this poor man; this was not just one demon but a whole army of them.⁵

Key Points

- In Mark 5:2 we encounter another occurrence in the Greek of the word *immediately* (Greek εὐθύς, *euthys*) adding to the sense of pace and urgency typical of Mark, here describing how Jesus was just getting out of the boat when the demoniac (a possessed person) rushed to meet him.⁶ The journey across the Sea of Galilee would typically have taken about two hours, but following the storm, we are not told what time of day the boat arrived and it could have been late evening or early next morning.⁷
- Mark tells of the man's pitiful condition as well as his *supernatural* strength. Living in the hewn-out caves among the tombs would have made him “unclean” to Jewish eyes because of his proximity to the dead, and doubly so by being possessed of an impure spirit.⁸ He cried out in agony, in unending suffering, hurting himself with stones, while Luke adds that he was always naked. Although he had been chained hand and foot in the past, no one using human strength alone could subdue him.⁹
- That the man ran towards Jesus is at first surprising, because it is clear from his opening words that the demon was in control of him at this point (**v7**). As a Gentile, the man was not likely to have known who Jesus was and therefore would not have come seeking help. However, the demon certainly recognised Jesus, falling before him and announcing Jesus as the “Son of the Most High”. This is not a Messianic title, it's a divine one, and further evidence to the disciples (who are not mentioned in this story) in answer to their question “Who is this man?”.¹⁰

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- Calling out Jesus' identity and falling before him was not an act of worship. It was simply a confession by the demon, compelled to bow before the superior power of Jesus.¹¹ This was not a battle between Jesus and the forces of evil; Jesus was in complete control.¹² The demon was speaking, not the man, and asked what Jesus wanted with it as if saying "Can't you just leave me alone?". It immediately begged for mercy, asking whether it would be tortured "before its time". The demon knew its ultimate destiny to be destruction at the end of time. But before then it could be sent out of the area or even banished to *The Abyss*, a prison for evil spirits (also referred to in Rev. 9:1, 20:1-3 as the bottomless pit) where the demon would expect to be tortured. The demon was begging for mercy in the hope of some other outcome, having been commanded to come out of the unfortunate man. Banishment to a wilderness place would keep it from further mischief.¹³ The demon accepted that it must leave its host, but the only question remaining was where Jesus would choose to send it.
- Demon possession is not presented here as a psychological problem of the person afflicted, but of alien occupation which is why Jesus is so far only dealing with the demon, not the man. Their objective was to destroy the image of God in mankind.¹⁴
- Jesus asked the demon's name, which they could not resist answering once demanded of them.¹⁵
- A Roman legion comprised between 5000 to 6000 men but the term had entered both Greek and Aramaic (from the Latin) to mean "a large number" rather than a literal number of demons. What is clear is that the number of demons possessing the man numbered "in the thousands" – he had an army of them within him!¹⁶
- Asking the demon's name was not part of some exorcism formula to gain control of the demon – Jesus was already master of the situation. It was about revealing the extent of the man's domination by demonic spirits.¹⁷ The reply was "Because we are many".
- The concession begged for was to be sent into the nearby herd of 2000 pigs and Jesus gave his permission, but the herd stampeded causing the pigs to drown, so the demons became "homeless".¹⁸ We can only speculate whether Jesus knew this would happen.
- The herdsman ran into town to report all that had happened and many townspeople came to see the outcome for themselves. The man had been saved from demonic possession, but in comparison, Jesus seemed unconcerned about the monetary value of

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the pigs lost!¹⁹ The man was now clothed and speaking with Jesus, fully restored. Consequently, the people became fearful of Jesus as they shared details of the events and the power he exhibited, so they asked him to leave the region. None of the onlookers, nor the man himself, could be left in any doubt as to the scale of the deliverance that had occurred.

- Jesus got back in the boat to leave, but the man asked to go with him. The language implies that he wished to become a disciple.²⁰ Of course, the choice of the twelve disciples had already been made, but Jesus was happy to accept him as another follower; this was a *positive* refusal.
- Instead, he set the man a different mission. Jesus commissioned him to spread the word throughout the Gentile region of the Decapolis, to tell everyone about what the Lord had done for him. Unlike the leper healed by Jesus on an earlier occasion back in Galilee (who was commanded not to tell anyone but then disobeyed), there was no risk here of misunderstanding Jesus' Messianic role (as the Gentiles were not awaiting a David-like saviour, so there was no need for any secrecy). Jesus would not be preaching here on this occasion, so the man became a powerful witness through his testimony to other Gentiles.²¹
- The consequence of this is that it laid the foundations for extending the ministry of Jesus to the Gentiles; when Jesus would next return to Decapolis (Mark 7:31-37) the Gentile people would know about him and have expectations of being healed.²²
- In the context of the Parable of the Sower, this man was *good soil* and he would produce much good fruit, but sadly the experience was rejected by most onlookers as the seed of Jesus' teaching and ministry fell on *bad soil* in their case.²³
- The conclusion we are left with is that when the full power of Jesus was on display (in the quelling of the storm or encounters with demons) the enormity of this power over all creation could be a truly frightening experience for those who witnessed it.²⁴ And yet this brings us hope, that Jesus is sovereign over everything, and on him we can trust.

Discussion: Do you know anyone who, by becoming a Christian, has had their lives dramatically turned around for the better?