

Exegetical Paper: Mark 5:1-20

Jesus Heals a Man with Demons

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Introduction

A raging evening storm¹ would probably have been enough excitement for one day. Still, Jesus then embarked on what would've been a harrowing experience for anyone else as He proceeded to heal a demoniac in the 'dead' of the night after a short trip from one side of the Sea of Galilee to its eastern shore and the land of the Gerasenes².

Mark's Message: Healing a Demon-possessed Man

Sandwiched between Jesus' calming of a storm and raising Jairus' daughter from the dead³ lies an account of exorcism and regeneration. In the story of the demoniac's healing, Mark presents the light of Christ against the stark background of night, evil, superstition, and fear.⁴ In it, he reveals that a host of at least 2,000 evil spirits⁵ had possessed and abused a man⁶ leaving him naked, scarred, and out of his mind. Jesus succeeds in exorcising the demons who, fearful of coming judgment, beg to remain 'in the country.' Jesus acquiesced and sent them into a herd of

¹ Mark 4:35-41, New American Standard Bible (NASB).

² "If this is to be taken in close connection with what goes before—and that is Mark's intention—it must have happened late in the evening or even when the night had fallen. The story becomes all the more weird and frightening when it is seen as happening in the shadows of the night. ... It was a part of the lakeside where there were many caves in the limestone rock, and many of these caves were used as tombs in which bodies were laid." Barclay, W. (2001). *The New Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Mark* (p. 135-136). Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press.

³ Mark 5:21-43, NASB.

⁴ See footnote #2.

⁵ 12.39 πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον: an evil supernatural spirit which is ritually unclean and which causes persons to be ritually unclean—'unclean spirit.' Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., pp. 587–588). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁶ Mark 5:9, NASB.

pigs to be drowned in the Sea of Galilea. The ex-demoniac then proclaimed Jesus and the miracle throughout his hometown and the surrounding villages of the Decapolis. ⁷

Substantive Comparison (to Matthew 8:28-34 and Luke 8:26-39)

All three Gospel accounts corroborate several key points: Jesus' encounter with a dangerous demon-possessed man in the country of the Gerasenes and his healing; Jesus' status as the Son of God; The demons' fear of what will eventually be their destination and demise (hell/abyss);⁸ and Swine as the new host of the demons. Additional information is needed to clarify the latter point. Mark uses the term *country*, Matthew writes "before the time,"⁹ and Luke refers to the *abyss* to imply that the demons knew their time of judgment and relegation to hell will come; however, their preference was to put off the inevitable for as long as possible. Were there significant points *not* unanimously revealed? We find a few echoed by Mark and Luke but left out by Matthew (e.g., the man became clothed after being naked, his evangelism of Christ in his home territory, etc.). We also find what at first appears to be an oddity in Matthew's account?

⁷ 93.460 Δεκάπολις, εως f: a league of ten cities in a region east of the Jordan—'Decapolis' (Mt 4:25; Mk 5:20); Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 834). New York: United Bible Societies.

⁸ 1.20 ἄβυσσος, ου f: (a figurative extension of meaning of ἄβυσσος 'pit,' not occurring in the NT) a location of the dead and a place where the Devil is kept (Re 20:3), the abode of the beast as the antichrist (Re 11:7), and of Abaddon, as the angel of the underworld (Re 9:11)—'abyss, abode of evil spirits, very deep place.' Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 5). New York: United Bible Societies.

⁹ Revelation Chapter 20, New American Standard Bible (NASB); 67.1 καιρόσα, ου m; χρόνοςb, ου m; ὥραα, ας f: points of time consisting of occasions for particular events—'time, occasion.' καιρόσα: καὶ ἐν καιρῷ τοῦ θερισμοῦ ἐρῶ τοῖς θερισταῖς 'and when the time of the harvest comes ... Mt 13:30. χρόνοςb: καθὼς δὲ ἤγγιζεν ὁ χρόνος τῆς ἐπαγγελίας ἧς ὡμολόγησεν ὁ θεός 'and when the time drew near for God to keep his promise' Ac 7:17. Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 627). New York: United Bible Societies.

Matthew presents *two* possessed men; Mark and Luke's accounts of a single man seem contradictory. However, the number is not a finite quantity but is a symbolic representation.¹⁰ All three Gospel accounts support this likelihood by their mixture of 'he' and 'we' as though the man sometimes spoke of or for himself and on behalf of or by the demons at other times.

Conclusion & Contemporary Application

This story weaves a complex fabric of contemporary superstition and fear, theological symbolism, and glimpses of the Holy Spirit's power throughout history to the eschaton. Still, it is pregnant with confidence builders and concepts applicable even today.

All three Gospel accounts report that the demons knew of the 'Most High God' – something Jesus' brother James confirmed.¹¹ The corroborating accounts of God's existence and sovereignty should add depth to *our* faith in Him, the Christ, and the Scriptures. Conversely, Mark's report should reinforce a healthy respect for the power of darkness we overcome through the blood of Jesus. And, the same Spirit that empowered Jesus also empowers us to exercise Kingdom authority through healing and exorcism among other miracles. Finally, the *time* feared by the demons should remind us of our coming blessed hope¹² and reconciliation with the Creator.

¹⁰ 60.11 δύο, gen. and acc. δύο, dat. δυσί—'two.' δύο δαιμονιζόμενοι 'two possessed of demons' Mt 8:28. In a number of languages it is not possible to use numbers as pronominal substitutes for specific references to animate or inanimate objects. Accordingly, in Mt 8:28 one must often translate as 'two men possessed by demons.' Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 604). New York: United Bible Societies. δύο, two, (as a symbolical number, see note under "THREE.") - Matt. 4:18, 21, Matt. 6:24, and Matt. 8:28. Bullinger, E. W. (1908). *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament* (Fifth Edition, Revised, p. 826). London: Longmans, Green, & Co.

¹¹ James 2:19, New American Standard Bible (NASB).

¹² Titus 2:13, New American Standard Bible (NASB).

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