Research: Healing of the Gadarene

Mark 5:1-3, 5-15

1And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes.

The exact location of this healing is uncertain. There are several sites that refer to this healing. Gadara and Gergesenes, are two of the most used ones. Both cities are on the southeastern side of the Sea of Galilee opposite Capernaum in Gentile territory, a Decapolis city. Today the site is called “Kursi” and one can visit an ancient church there.

“This healing takes place near the city of Gerasa in an area inhabited by Gentiles. Gerasa (now called Jerash) was one of a group of ten cities on the eastern border of the Roman Empire in Jordan, Israel, and Syria known collectively as the Decapolis. The Roman Tenth Legion—about 6,000 infantry and 120 cavalry—occupied the area, using a boar as the symbol on their standard. For a Jew, elements of ritual impurity—an unclean spirit, dwelling in tombs, a large herd of swine—are piled one on the other in this account. Jesus breaks down the barriers that separate Jews and Gentiles, the clean and the unclean, and heals the man” (Bible Notes, periodicals).

 2 And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit

Jesus had just demonstrated his power over the forces of nature by stilling the winds and the waves on the Sea of Galilee. He might have landed in the Decapolis area on the eastern side of the lake to avoid the crowds near Capernaum.

“To dwell in such tombs was, to the ordinary Jew, a thing from which he shrank with abhorrence, as bringing pollution, and to choose such an abode was therefore a sign of insanity” (Ellicott’s Commentary, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“From this verse it would appear that Jesus, on stepping out of the boat, was immediately confronted by the possessed man. The man actually saw Jesus from a distance and came running to him. Since it was already evening when they started across the lake, by the time they reached the other side it was probably dark. . . This wretched man had probably been driven from ordinary society into the tombs. Efforts had been made to control him, but without success. Although bound “hand and foot,” he had broken the chains; and no one was strong enough to subdue him” (Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Vol 8, p. 657).

**Unclean** is *akathartos* in Greek which means “foul, unclean, impure wither ceremonially or morally according to leviical law.”

3 Who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains:

Metaphorically speaking, tombs might represent the past, the yesterdays that are dead and gone. In Greek the word for **tombs** is *mnemeion* which can mean a sepulcher or tomb, but it can also mean a visible object for preserving or recalling he memory of any person or thing, a monument.

If one lived in the tombs, one would be considered ritually unclean, unable to worship in the synagogue, and unable to be around friends and family, a total outcast.

“St. Mark (whose account is the fullest of the three) notices that he had often been bound with fetters and chains, and that, with the abnormal strength often found in mania, he had set himself free from them. The insanity was so homicidal that “none could pass by that way,” so suicidal that he was ever cutting himself with stones, howling day and night in the wildness of his paroxysms” (Ellicott’s Commentary, www.biblehub.com).

“The Levitical uncleanness of the tombs would insure the wretches the solitude which they sought” (Pulpit Commentary, www.biblehub.com).

Where was this man mentally dwelling? Where did he live in thought, in his consciousness? Insanity refers to a mind that is split in two-- mentally, a fragmented thought. Isolated, lonely, in despair, he would have been considered an outcast, driven from ordinary society, from his home and family. Anyone possessed by demons had a disregard for personal dignity and thus his nakedness which might indicate his unprotected thought. Dwelling in a tomb might also refer to reverting back to the cave-like man.

 5 And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.

“This shows mentality unleashed, undisciplined, and filled with a dualism. The man’s dwelling is at both extremes. Night and day are extremes. Mountains and tombs are extremes.” (What Mark Recorded: Cobby Crisler)

“Cutting himself with stones - These are all marks of a madman - a man bereft of reason, a wretched outcast, strong and dangerous. The inspired penman says that this madness was caused by an unclean spirit, or by his being under the influence of a devil” (Barnes’ Notes, www.biblehubcom).

This poor man experienced abject misery and wretchedness. He continually cried out and shouted like a demon while trying to destroy himself by using stones to cut himself. It is as if the demons had possessed him and were using him as an instrument of self-destruction.

6 But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him,

“Worshipped him - Bowed down before him; rendered him homage. This was an acknowledgment of his power, and of his control over fallen spirits” (Barnes’ Notes, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“And when he saw Jesus from afar. These words, "from afar," explain the fact of our Lord being immediately met by the man as soon as he left the boat. They describe the ordinary condition of the demoniac, and his sad wild life from day to day. From the high ground which he frequented he had seen the boat, in which Jesus was, nearing the shore. He had seen the other boats. Perhaps he had seen the sudden rise of the storm and its equally sudden suppression; and he, like others who witnessed it, was affected by it. So he hastened to the shore; he ran and worshipped him” (Pulpit Commentary, www.biblehub.com).

7 And cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.

“The demon addresses Jesus by shouting ‘at the top of his voice.; His cry, ‘what do you want with me?’ was a way of saying ‘what have we in common?’ The demon recognizes that he is in the presence of one who threatens his very existence. In addressing Jesus, the demon uses his personal name. Had he heard it from the lips of the disciples? Or had Jesus’ fame already spread into this territory?” (Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Vol 8, p. 658).

8 For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit.

“For he said unto him—that is, before the unclean spirit cried out.

“Come out of the man, unclean spirit!—Ordinarily, obedience to a command of this nature was immediate. But here, a certain delay is permitted, the more signally to manifest the power of Christ and accomplish His purposes” (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown, www.biblehub.com).

The unclean spirit had possessed this man’s mind, and he was being used like an instrument.

Jesus has the power to call him out and destroy him.

9 And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many.

The name of someone refers to his character and identity. A legion in the Roman Army was a group of usually five or six thousand men. By identifying his identity as ‘legion’, he was telling Jesus that his mind was split into many parts, a split personality perhaps. There was confusion, mental frenzy, and irrational thought, a lack of oneness.

Did Jesus heal the man through understanding his wholeness, his oneness with God? Was his integrity, his wholeness broken apart and fragmented? Whatever is behind insanity is related to the swinish nature in human thinking, and the swinish nature has no defense against it.

“In the eighth chapter of the Gospel of Luke we have an account of a healing accomplished by our Way-shower, Christ Jesus, in which a raving maniac was transformed into a living witness to Truth and Love. It is recorded that when Jesus, with his disciples, entered the country of the Gadarenes, "there met him ... a certain man, which had devils long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in any house, but in the tombs." No material fetters had been able to restrain this man. Jesus beheld with compassion the man who according to deluded belief was the habitat of evil, and the Master knew that God's image and likeness was the only reality and could not be other than perfect.

“Commanding the unclean spirit to come out of him, Jesus completely separated the false concept from the perfect man. His rebuke was addressed only to the evil. His question addressed to the Gadarene, "What is thy name?" brought forth the declaration, "Legion"; for it was believed that "many devils were entered into him." Jesus was not dismayed at the seeming magnitude of the task before him, neither was he afraid of evil. His rebuke exposed its nature, and entering a herd of swine nearby, evil hastened to its destruction. The man was free from the lie that so long had bound him. He must have been aroused to some apprehension of his real selfhood.

“This realization led to the second step of progress. When those who saw "what was done" spread the word in the city and in the country, the people came to see what had taken place. They found the man who had been previously untamed "sitting at the feet of Jesus," apparently humbly receiving instruction from the great Teacher. The record indicates that the humility of the Gadarene made him receptive to the truth. One feels that he learned from the Master valuable lessons in obedience, gratitude, and unselfed love and that these prepared him for the third stage of steady growth.

“When Jesus was asked to depart from that country, he sent the man back to his own people, there to let his light shine and to show what great things God had done for him. This could not have been an easy assignment. It perhaps took courage and perseverance and above all a newborn love for God and his fellow men to face those who knew of his former condition. But the Gadarene obediently accepted the challenge” (Steady Progression, by Lucette S. Ragsdale, July 1956, CSJ).

10 And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country.

Jesus might have wanted to give tangible evidence to the man and the people that the demons had actually left him.

11Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding.

“Those who herded the swine may have been Jews—doing so illegally, since to the Jews, pigs were anathema—or Gentiles, who often used them for their pagan sacrifices. . . Some miss the point of this story because of a concern for the pigs or the farmer whose animals are destroyed. To catch the intended meaning, however, it is the symbolic on which we must focus. Forbidden for Jewish consumption, the swine were "symbols of gentile impurity" (WBC). Likewise tombs, unclean spirits, and the pagan beliefs of the region, which figure in this story, all represented impurity to the Jewish audiences of Jesus' time. WBC sees the story operating on two levels: "The story of the deliverance of a man becomes the story of the deliverance of a land." The destruction of the herd of swine was thus symbolic of the elimination of evil from the land, and perhaps was meant to convey the ultimately self-destructive nature of evil.

” (Bible Notes, periodicals).

“*a great herd swine*] The lawless nature of the country, where Jews lived mingled with Gentiles, the Evangelist denotes by the circumstance of the two thousand swine, emphasizing the greatness of the herd. If their owners were only in part Jews, who merely trafficked in these animals, still they were not justified before the Law. The territory was not altogether Jewish” (Cambridge Bible, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“The Jews were not allowed to eat swine's flesh. But Jews were not the only inhabitants of that district. It had been colonized, at least in part, by the Romans immediately after the conquest of Syria, some sixty years before Christ. It was in this district that ten cities are said to have been rebuilt by the Romans, whence the territory acquired the name of "the Decapolis." And though the Jews were forbidden their Law to eat this kind of food, yet they were not forbidden to breed swine for other uses, such as provisioning the Roman army” (Pulpit Commentary, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“The demons were bent on destroying. Not having been able to destroy the man, they destroyed the pigs” (Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Vol 8, p. 658).

12And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them.

“Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them—Had they spoken out all their mind, perhaps this would have been it: "If we must quit our hold of this man, suffer us to continue our work of mischief in another form, that by entering these swine, and thus destroying the people's property, we may steel their hearts against Thee!" (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown, www.biblehub.com).

13And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea.

“And forthwith Jesus gave them leave—In Matthew (Mt 8:32) this is given with majestic brevity—"Go!" The owners, if Jews, drove an illegal trade; if heathens, they insulted the national religion: in either case the permission was just.

“And the unclean spirits went out—of the man.

“and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently—rushed.

“down a steep place—down the hanging cliff.

“into the sea (they were about two thousand)—The number of them is given by this graphic Evangelist alone.

“and were choked in the sea—"perished in the waters" (Mt 8:32). (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown, www.biblehub.com).

14And they that fed the swine fled, and told *it* in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done.

“No doubt many of these swineherds lived in the country districts; and so the fame of the miracle was spread far and wide. The swineherds would take care that the owners should understand that it was through no fault or carelessness on their part that the swine had perished; but that the destruction was caused by a power over which they had no control. And they - **i.e.** the owners - came to see what it was that had come to pass. Their first care was to see the extent of their loss; and this was soon revealed to them. They must have seen the carcases of the swine floating hither and thither in the now calm and tranquil sea; and when they had thus satisfied themselves as to the facts, "they came to Jesus." (Pulpit Commentary, www.biblehub.com).

“The result of the stampede and destruction of the pigs was the flight of the herdsman to ‘the town’ and ‘countryside to tell what had happened. This brought the people to the scene of the miracle. When they arrived, they could scarcely believe their eyes!” (Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Vol 8, p. 658).

15And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid.

“Sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind - There could be no doubt of the reality of this miracle. The man had been well known. He had long dwelt among the tombs, an object of terror and alarm. To see him all at once peaceful, calm, and rational, was proof that it was the power of God only that had done it.

“They were afraid - They were awed, as in the presence of God. The word does not mean here that they feared that any evil would happen to them, but that they were affected with awe; they felt that God was there; they were struck with astonishment at what Jesus had done” (Barnes’ Notes, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“The man who had been known as ‘crazy,’ who had been so violent that he could not even be controlled by chains, they saw now sitting quietly. Before he had roamed naked through the tombs, now he was ‘dressed.’ Before he had been possessed by powerful evil forces; now he was in his ‘right mind.’

“Instead of rejoicing because of the marvelous deliverance of the man from his pathetic state, the people ‘were afraid.’ Their fear was no doubt caused by the presence of one with power to perform such a miracle” (Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Vol 8, p. 658).