

The account of the deaf man in Mark 7 is a familiar story. But there is a story behind that story, which begins in Mark 5 (and is omitted in our current lectionary)...

Mark 5 [NIV]

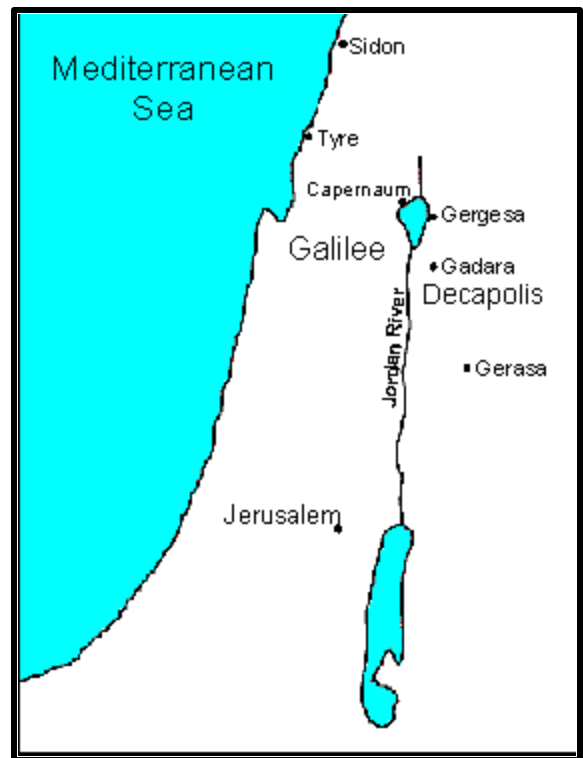
1 They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. [nkjv: Gadarenes]

Geography:

Most of Jesus' ministry was in and around city of Capernaum on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee (which was a fresh water lake that fed into the Jordan River). The Jewish region of Galilee was west of the lake. Non-Jews (Gentiles) inhabited the eastern side of the lake.

The territory southeast of the Sea of Galilee, and east of the Jordan River, known as the **Decapolis**, which is a Greek word meaning "Ten Cities." Prominent cities in the Decapolis were Gerasa, Gergesa, and Gadara. Therefore the inhabitants of that area were often called Gerasenes, Gergesenes, or Gadarenes.

Note that this area was outside of Israel, where people did not worship the God of Israel.



- 2 When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him.*
- 3 This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, 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.*

Today we would call him "homeless," mentally ill, self abusing.

The Bible says that this man's problem was, at it's root, a spiritual problem. Demons had taken over his thinking.

Demons are evil angels, who were created by God as good and holy, but they rebelled against God's authority, and now are, with their leader, Satan, waiting eternal judgment in hell.

How did this man get in this condition? Where did he open his soul to the powers of evil that they completely took over? The text doesn't say, but there are at least three possibilities:

- (1) Occult involvement - God gives us strict warning in the Bible not to even dabble in the occult.
- (2) Personal rebellion against God and His appointed authority. (Samuel told rebellious King Saul: "rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft" 1 Samuel 15:23.)
- (3) Surrendering mind and body to sensuality and moral impurity (see Romans 1).

Personal application: What about me? Do I make myself vulnerable to the trap into which this man fell by the choices I am making?

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? Swear to God [!?] that you won't torture [torment] me!"*

8 *For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!"*

Notice in verse 7 that the demons beg Jesus to "swear to God!" This is very ironic, since these rebelling angels have themselves turned their backs on God. Yet, in their appeal, they recognize God's ultimate authority, even though they have chosen to disobey His authority.

Also notice in verse 7 that the demons recognize that they deserve eternal judgment, and hell will be their ultimate destination, as they beg not to be sent there yet.

And notice that the demons feared Jesus, and recognized His authority over them (see verse 8).

If you know Jesus, "Greater is He who is you than he who is in the world." (1 John 4:4) We don't need to be afraid to challenge Satan's authority on Satan's turf.

"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith." [1 Peter 5:8-9]

[See Ephesians 6:10-20 for specific information about how we can effectively resist Satan.]

9 *Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many."*

10 *And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.*

Angels and demons are not omnipresent (everywhere at once) as God is. They have

limited power, limited knowledge, and limited locality.

There is a speculative doctrine taught in some churches that demons may be "territorial," preferring locations where communities of people have succumbed to demonic influence through their involvement in the occult or their sensual practices. This verse, along with Daniel 10 in the Old Testament, are usually cited in support of this theory.

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 evil 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.

Here we have a serious problems with the story. Non-Christians often criticize Jesus for killing the innocent pigs and robbing the local people of their livestock and their economy.

We can't criticize the people for raising pigs in violation of Jewish Kosher laws, because these people were not Jewish.

But who was really responsible for the death of the pigs? It wasn't Jesus. For years the demons had urged the man to similarly kill himself, without success (see verse 5). Something, or rather Someone, had restrained them. (See Job 1:12 and Job 2:6 for examples of restraints which God places on Satan's mischief.) While the demons were in the man, God restrained them, so that they were unsuccessful in their attempts to kill him. Once there were out of him, they no longer had that restraint. (We learn later in the story that the community that owned the pigs rejected God's authority. A consequence of this spiritual rebellion may include the loss of divine protection.)

Satan is the destroyer of life. Jesus called him "a murderer and a thief, who comes to steal, kill and destroy." Why? Because Satan hates the creator of life. He hates the life giver, God.

Satan's influence on our culture is very evident on this point. Our culture is preoccupied death, even entertained by death - not just teens who dress in black. In the old days, you had to go to the Coliseum to enjoy a good bloody killing. Now you only need to turn on your TV to bring violent death into your living room.

Today we see our culture advocating killing innocent people as a moral good and a legal right:

- Abortion
- Infanticide
- Physician Assisted Suicide

Was Jesus really unfair to the pigs and their owners? Perhaps we should ask the man in our story what he thinks about the morality of Jesus allowing the demons to enter the pigs in order to free him.

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.

17 Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

What were the people afraid of?

The economic loss of the pigs was bad enough. But what really scared them was seeing *"the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind."* Jesus had spiritual authority much greater than they had ever seen before, and they did not know how to deal with that. Jesus' authority also threatened Satan's domain and the demonic spirits which the people worshipped, so that the people may have been responding to the fear from those spirits.

The people treat Jesus with respect, but they still asked Him to leave. Not even the demons dared to do that when they had the chance. The demons only cowered in Jesus' presence, and begged for mercy.

Jesus exercised His authority against the demons. But in this instance, Jesus let the people exercise authority over Him. He let them have their way completely.

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 family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you."

Here again we have a big problem.

This man was a new baby Christian, still spiritually weak and vulnerable. Jesus wanted to send him back to the environment that dragged him down into demon possession?! That is like sending a sober alcoholic back into the bar to witness to his friends. That would be a big mistake. The temptation to fall is much too great. This man needed protection. This man needed nurturing. He needed training.

But that was not the Lord's plan. The man had a story to tell... and Jesus instructed him

to go tell it! Since the people didn't accept Jesus, this man was their first missionary -- even without any training.

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.*

In the rest of **chapter 5**, Mark reports Jesus' ministry in the region of Galilee, raising Jairus' dead daughter to life. In **chapter 6**, Jesus and His disciples crossed the Sea of Galilee, likely to the north or northeast shore, where He fed 5000 people. When He returned to Galilee (walking part of the way there on the water), Jesus continued his teaching ministry.

In **chapter 7** Jesus went far west and north, near the Mediterranean coast, near the cities of Tyre and Sidon. There Jesus saved the demon-possessed daughter of a Syrophonecian woman.

Mark 7:

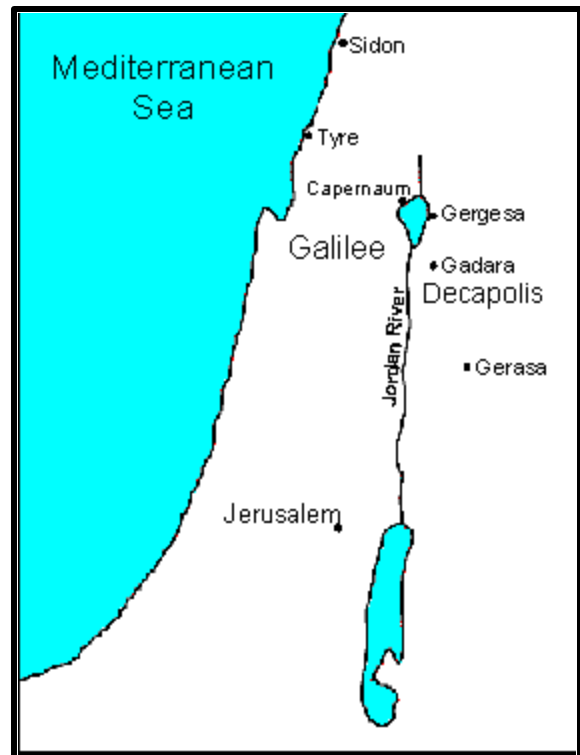
31 *Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis.*

So Jesus came back to the Decapolis, to the same area where He saved the possessed man whom He had found living in the tombs, to the same area where people had earlier asked Him to leave. But this time Jesus received a very different kind of welcome:

32 *There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man....*

Jesus sent an untrained missionary to go home and tell his people about God's mercy. The man simply had a story to tell. When Jesus returned two chapters later, the people's attitude about Him had completely changed. It is interesting that they brought to Jesus a man who was physically unable to hear the wonderful story about what Jesus had done for the demon-possessed man.

What has Jesus done for you? You have a story.



“Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how He has had mercy on you.” (Mark 5:19)

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