

Gospel of Mark 9 – Chapter 5, verses 1 – 20: Events in the country of the Gerasenes:-

We need to note that the event referred to in these verses is a 'one off'. The Lord Jesus Christ takes the boat across the Sea of Galilee to the eastern shore to meet with the demon possessed man and heal him. He then returns to the boat and goes back to his own country (see Matthew chapter 9, verse 1).

In this confrontation with evil there is a continuation of his earlier experiences in Mark chapter 1, verses 12 – 13 ; 23 – 28 and 32 – 34. There is much teaching in this event in Gentile country as we shall see.

Some background:- Modern archaeologists have found the ruins of a small town called Kersa on the east coast of the Sea of Galilee which is a possible site of 'Gera'. An alternative reading gives 'Gadarenes'. This would refer to the town of Gadara about 6 miles south-east of the Sea. The town itself is within the area known as the Decapolis with a mixed population which was predominantly Gentile as is shown by the presence of swine and herdsmen. Jews were forbidden even to keep swine.

As we move on to look at the text read Psalm 65, verses 7 – 8 (the version in the Book of Common Prayer says "*Who stilleth the raging of the sea: and the noise of his waves, and the madness of the people*" verse 7). It is possible that the 'Stilling of the Storm' and this healing of the demon possessed were seen as a fulfilment of this Psalm.

Chapter 5, verses 2 – 5; The condition of the man with an unclean spirit:- His wretched condition is vividly described in these verses.

- 1) He dwelt alone in what was regarded as the haunt of demons – a graveyard:- verse 2 - 3
- 2) He was beyond all help and control:- verses 3 - 4
- 3) He was 'beside himself' - continually screaming and crying:- verse 5
- 4) He 'self harmed' - gashing (not just bruising) himself with stones:- verse 5

Chapter 5, verses 6 – 10; His encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ:- The man did not wait for Jesus to come to him but ran to meet him. He then "*prostrated himself before him*". This action and the use of the full title for the Lord Jesus in verse 7 reveals that the man had a high spiritual knowledge of the person of Jesus. This was not just a 'teacher' or a visiting rabbi but the Incarnate Son of God. This knowledge must have been inspired by the evil spirit. At this stage in the ministry of Jesus, the disciples were still asking "*Who is this?*" (chapter 4, verse 41). Demons themselves believe in God and are afraid! (see the epistle of James, chapter 2, verse 19).

We are reading here of a direct confrontation between the Lord Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God and the demonic evil of agents of Satan. The 'torment' of which the demon spoke was that reserved for the Devil and his angels as referred to in the Book of Revelation chapter 20, verse 10. The significance of the phrase "*out of the country*", verse 10 is to be found in the version recorded in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 8, verse 31 - "*they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss.*" again the place of torment for the Devil and his angels on the Day of Judgement".

Chapter 5, verses 11 – 13; The strange event of the herd of swine:- The Gospel of Mark gives the number as 2000. when the evil spirits entered into the swine they became mad and rushed down the hill into the sea and were drowned. This brief statement raises a number of questions! Did the Lord Jesus command the demons to go into the pigs or just 'permit' them? This is unanswerable by our worldly knowledge – compare with the Book of Job, chapter 1, verses 8 - 12 and chapter 2, verses 3 – 6. It would seem that evil in this imperfect world is permitted by the Lord rather than willed by the Lord. In the Gospels this event is most probably included as an example of the Lord banishing from the land that which is unclean.

Chapter 5, verses 13 – 20; The ongoing witness to the population in that area:- Note that the people who came to see what had happened, were afraid. Not of the man who had been completely healed but of the One whose power had been demonstrated in that healing! Unknowingly they begged the source of potential blessing and salvation to depart out of their country. The man was not delivered from bondage merely for his own enjoyment of God given freedom, but in order that he could witness to others what the Lord had done for him. The ministry of the healed man was to be among his own people. Remember that this was to a majority Gentile population as opposed to Jewish. The Decapolis (Ten Towns) was Grecian in both organisation and culture. There is here a foreshadowing of the mission to the Gentiles in the Acts of the Apostles – chapter 11.