

8:28 *Come to the other side*- The Gospel records often paint a broad scene and then zoom in upon the person of Jesus. Mark does this by using a plural verb *without an explicit subject* to paint a picture of the disciples or crowd generally; and then follows this by a singular verb or pronoun referring specifically to Jesus. Here are some examples: "They came to the other side... and when He had stepped out of the boat" (Mk. 5:1,2); "when they came from Bethany, he was hungry" (Mk. 8:22); "they went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples..." (Mk. 14:32). The grammatical feature is more evident in Greek than in English. If the writer of Mark had been a cameraman, he'd have taken a broad sweep, and then suddenly hit the zoom to focus right up close upon Jesus Himself. This is what is being done with words, and it reflects the Christ-centeredness of the whole narrative and preaching of the Gospel, of which the Gospels are transcripts.

Gergesenes- The "Girgashites" of Dt. 7:1, some of the original inhabitants of Canaan who had never been cast out of the land as intended by God. These men stopped anyone passing along the way or road. The point may be that those whom Israel should've 'cast out' to secure their inheritance of the Kingdom were finally cast out by Christ. This lays the basis for the language of 'casting out' the demons into the lake.

Two possessed- Mark and Luke focus upon just one of them, Legion. Luke says that Peter went to the Lord's tomb after the resurrection, yet several other disciples also went there ("some of our number"). Luke chose to focus upon only Peter; and here too, he chooses to focus upon only one of the two demoniacs.

Coming out- See on 8:34.

8:29 *Torment us*- The language of judgment at the last day, "the time" (Rev. 14:10; 20:10). See on :30 *a good way off* and on :31 *cast us out*. Legion believed he was demon possessed. But the Lord didn't correct him regarding this before healing him; indeed, one assumes the man probably had some faith for the miracle to be performed (Mt. 13:58). Lk. 8:29 says that Legion "was driven of the devil into the wilderness", in the same way as the Lord had been driven into the wilderness *by the spirit* (Mk. 1:12) and yet overcame the 'devil' in whatever form at this time. The man was surely intended to reflect on these more subtle things and see that whatever he had once believed in was immaterial and irrelevant compared to the Spirit power of the Lord. And yet the Lord 'went along' with his request for the demons he thought were within him to be cast into 'the deep', thoroughly rooted as it was in misunderstanding of demons and sinners being thrown into the abyss. This was in keeping with the kind of healing styles people were used to at the time – e.g. Josephus records how Eleazar cast demons out of people and placed a cup of

water nearby, which was then [supposedly] tipped over by the demons as they left the sick person [*Antiquities of the Jews* 8.46–48]. It seems to me that the Lord ‘went along with’ that kind of need for reassurance, and so He made the pigs stampede over the cliff to symbolize to the healed man how his disease had really left him.

8:30 *A great way off*- The term is used about those 'far off' from Christ, the unsaved (Lk. 15:20; Acts 2:39; 22:21; Eph. 2:13,17). The men saw themselves as far from Christ, with nothing in common between them and Him (:29). His response was to say that OK, let's get the condemnation over and done with- and you yourselves shall be saved. This is very much the kind of teaching which John's Gospel records as being specifically on the Lord's lips. See on :31.

8:31 *Cast us out*- The word is used about 'casting out' to condemnation at the last day (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Lk. 13:28; Jn. 6:37). These men were obsessed with the thought of condemnation at the last day, being 'tormented' at the last day (:28), being 'far off' from Christ and His salvation (see on :30), 'going away' into condemnation (s.w. Mt. 25:46), plunged into the sea of condemnation (see on :32). They correctly perceived that meeting Jesus in this life was in effect a meeting of Him in judgment, for even then, even now, He is the judge of all. The Lord was assuring them that their fear of condemnation was well and truly 'cast out'; His destruction of the pigs was an acted parable of final condemnation at the last day. John's Gospel doesn't record this incident but as so often, he records the essential teaching in spiritual terms. In John's terms, we need have no fear of future condemnation, for we have received it now, and have passed from judgment to life and salvation. These men had a fine understanding of the Lord Jesus. They realized that meeting Him was meeting their judge. And they ask that the pigs bear their condemnation. And the Lord agrees- which meant that once they had as it were received their condemnation, they had passed from death into life.

Suffer us- They recognized Jesus as not only Son of God but also their Lord, in total control of their final destiny.

To go away- The same word is used about the rejected at the final judgment 'going away' into condemnation (Mt. 25:46).

8:32 *Perished in the waters*- Death in the sea was seen as condemnation; the same figure is used of Babylon's final condemnation.

8:33 *Went their way*- See on :34 *besought*.

8:34 *Besought*- The very same word used about the demons / mentally ill men 'beseeching' Jesus in :31. As the mentally ill men besought Jesus to send away the demons, so the city dwellers besought Jesus to also 'go away'. As the keepers of the pigs "went their way" (:33), so the same word is used of the demons 'going away' into the pigs (:31,32). As the city dwellers 'came out' to meet Jesus, so the mentally ill men 'came out' of the tombs to meet Jesus (8:28) and the demons 'came out' of them (8:32). Perhaps the idea is that those unbelievers were spiritually in the same position as the despised mentally ill men whom they had excluded from their society. And the story ends with the mentally ill saved, and the townspeople asking Jesus to depart from them, which will be the exact position of the rejected at the last day (Mt. 25:41; Lk. 13:27). It is they who are condemned, by their own wish; the mentally ill men asked for the pigs to bear their condemnation, which they felt worthy of- and thus were saved. The parallel record in Mark 5 records three prayers to Jesus: "the devils besought him", and "Jesus gave them leave" (vv. 12,13); the Gadarenes "began to pray him to depart out of their coasts" (v. 17); and He obliged. And yet when the cured, earnestly zealous man "prayed him that he might be with him... Jesus suffered him not" (vv. 18,19). After the fascination, physically and intellectually, had worn off, very few of the crowds continued their interest. The Lord scarcely converted more than 100 people in the course of His ministry. We are familiar, from our own experience of sin and failure, with the pure grace of the Lord Jesus. We see that largeness and generosity of spirit within Him, that manifestation of the God of love, that willingness to concede to our weakness; and therefore we can tend to overlook the fact that the Lord Jesus set uncompromisingly high standards. I would even use the word "demanding" about His attitude.

Depart- Consider how the believers were assembled praying for Peter's release, and then when he turns up on the doorstep, they tell the servant girl that she's mad to think Peter was there. Or how the Lord Jesus did such wonderful miracles- and people asked him to go away. We too have this element within us. We would rather salvation and forgiveness were 'harder' to attain. The popularity of Catholic and Orthodox rituals is proof enough of this. It always touches me to read in the Gospels how the Lord Jesus cured wide eyed spastic children, crippled, wheezing young women, and sent them (and their loved ones) away with a joy and sparkle this world has never known. But the people asked Him to go away, and eventually did Him to death. A voice came from Heaven, validating Him as the Son of God; those who heard it involuntarily fell to the ground. But the people didn't really believe, and plotted to kill him (Jn. 12:37). They turned round and bayed for His blood, and nailed Him to death. He cured poor Legion; and the people told the Lord to go away.

Mark records further: "And as he was entering into the boat, he that had been possessed with demons pleaded with him that he might go with him. But Jesus did not permit him. Instead he

said to him: Go to your home, to your family, and tell them how great things the Lord has done for you and how he had mercy on you. And he went his way and began to publish in Decapolis the great things Jesus had done for him, and all men marvelled” (Mk. 5:18-20). This preaching in Decapolis rather than to his family could be read as disobedience. The Gospels are transcripts of the twelve disciples’ own preaching and obedience to the Lord’s commission for them to go into all the world and tell the news of what they had seen and heard of Him. Yet there is a theme in the Gospels, consciously included by the writers and speakers, of men being disobedient to the preaching commission which the Lord gave them. When some were told to say nothing, they went and told many others (Mk. 7:36). And as Acts makes clear, the disciples themselves were disobedient, initially, to the commission to go tell the Gentiles the good news of their salvation. Legion’s disobedience is especially instructive for us:

Mk. 5:19

Go to thy *house*

unto thy *friends*

tell them [Lk. 8:39 “*show* them”- by personal demonstration to individuals]

how great things

the *Lord* [*i.e. God*] hath done for thee

and how he had mercy on thee.

Mk. 5:20

He goes to the *ten cities* [Decapolis]

He goes to *strangers*

He “*publishes*”

how great things

Jesus had done for him

[ignored]

The record of the commission given him and his obedience to it are clearly intended to be compared. The man went to strange cities, indeed he organized a whole preaching tour of ten cities- rather than going home and telling his immediate friends / family. And how true this is of us. It’s so much easier to embark upon a campaign to strangers, to do ‘mission work’, to ‘publish’ the Gospel loudly, rather than *tell* and *show* it to our immediate personal contacts. And we notice too how he omits to tell others of the Lord’s merciful grace to him personally. Rather does he speak only of the material, the literality of the healing. And he tells others what Jesus had done for him, rather than take the Lord Jesus’ invitation to perceive the bigger picture in all this- that this was the hand of God. One wonders whether the disciples were commenting upon their own sense of inadequacy in their initial personal witness. The Lord told the cured demoniac to go back to his friends (Mk. 5:19) and family (Lk. 8:39) and witness to them. Clearly enough, the man didn’t have any friends- for he had a history of violence and lived alone, many having tried unsuccessfully to bind him due to the grievous harm he must have inflicted upon many. Yet the man went out and preached to the whole area (Mk. 5:20). Was this just rank disobedience to

what His Saviour Lord had just told him? Perhaps, due to unrestrained enthusiasm. But more likely is that the man now considered the whole world around him to be his family and friends, and therefore he witnessed to them. His care for others in desiring to witness to them flowed quite naturally from his experience of conversion at the Lord's hands.

Mary's praise that "He hath done to me great things" is surely behind her Son's words in Lk. 8:39, where He bids Legion go home" and shew how great things God hath done unto thee". Her eternal influence on her Son is a huge encouragement to all mothers. For the language of the risen Lord in Revelation has discernible links with language she used to Him in His infancy.

Notes

(1)L.G. Sargent, *The Gospel Of The Son Of God*, p. 28.

Digression 5 Legion and the Gadarene Pigs

Mark 5:1-17 (Matthew 8:28-34; Luke 8:26-38) "They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him. And crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." For he was saying to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion, for we are many." And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him, saying, "Send us to the pigs; let us enter them." So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out, and entered the pigs, and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and were drowned in the sea. The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the legion, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs. And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region".

In considering this passage, let's bear in mind some conclusions reached elsewhere (*The Real Devil* and *Bible Basics* chapter 6):

- The Bible uses the language of the day, speaking of some things as they appeared in the eyes of their first audience-

- 'Casting out demons' is a way of saying that mental illness had been cured

- 'Demons' in the first century were understood to be demigods responsible for illness; they are paralleled with idols, and we are assured that demons / idols have no ultimate power or existence.

These principles enable us to understand the passage as an account of the healing of a mentally disturbed man- albeit written in the language of the day, from the perspective and worldview of those who first saw the miracle. The following comments hopefully assist in clarifying this interpretation:

1. Mk. 5:2 describes Legion as a man with an "unclean spirit". He cried out. But when we meet a similar situation in Acts 8:7 of unclean spirits crying out, the Eastern (Aramaic) text reads: "Many who were mentally afflicted cried out". This is because, according to George Lamsa, ""Unclean spirits" is an Aramaic term used to describe lunatics" (1). It should be noted that Lamsa was a native Aramaic speaker with a fine understanding of Aramaic terms. He grew up in a remote part of Kurdistan which had maintained the Aramaic language almost unchanged since the time of Jesus. It's significant that Lamsa's extensive writings indicate that he failed to see in the teachings of Jesus and Paul any support for the popular conception of the devil and demons- he insisted that the Semitic and Aramaic terms used by them have been misunderstood by Western readers and misused in order to lend support for their conceptions of a personal Devil and demons.

2. When Legion was cured of his 'demons', we read of him as now "clothed and in his right mind" (Mk. 5:15). His 'demon possession' therefore referred to a sick state of mind; and the 'casting out' of those demons to the healing of his mental state. People thought that Jesus was mad and said this must be because He had a demon- "He has a demon, and is mad" (Jn. 10:20; 7:19-20; 8:52). They therefore believed that demons caused madness.

3. A comparison of the records indicates that the voice of the individual man is paralleled with that of the 'demons'- the man was called Legion, because he believed and spoke as if he were inhabited by hundreds of 'demons':

"Torment *me* not" (Mk.5:7) = "Are you come to torment *us*?" (Mt. 8:29).

"*He* [singular] besought him" (Mk. 5:9) = "*the demons* besought him" (Mk. 5:12)

The man's own words explain his self-perception: "*My* name [singular] is Legion: for *we* are many (Mk. 5:9)". This is classic schizophrenic behaviour and language. Thus Lk. 8:30 explains that Legion spoke as he did because [he thought that] many demons had entered into him.

4. Note that the sick man is paralleled with the demons. "*He* begged him earnestly not to send *them* out of the country" (Mk. 5:10) parallels "he", the man, with "them", the demons. And the parallel record speaks as if it were the demons who did the begging: "*They* begged him not to order them to go into the abyss" (Lk. 8:31). This is significant in that the record doesn't suggest that demons were manipulating the man to speak and be mad; rather are they made parallel with the man himself. This indicates, on the level of linguistics at least, that the language of "demons" is being used as a synonym for the mentally ill man. There's another example of this, in Mark 3:11: "Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, 'You are the Son of God!'" Who fell down on their knees and who shouted? The mentally disturbed people. But they are called "unclean spirits". James 2:19 likewise: "The demons believe and tremble". This is surely an allusion to the trembling of those *people* whom Jesus cured, and 'belief' is appropriate to persons not [supposed] eternally damned agents of Satan. Clearly James is putting "demons" for 'mentally disturbed people who believed and were cured'. And thus we can better understand why in Mk. 5:8 Jesus addresses Himself not to these supposed spirits; but to the man himself: "Jesus said to *him*, Come out of the man, you unclean spirit". He doesn't say to the *unclean spirit* "Come out of the man". Jesus addresses Himself to "the man". The demons / unclean spirits never actually say anything in the records; it's always the man himself who speaks. Josephus records that when the first century Rabbis cast out demons [as they supposed], they first had to ask for the name of the demon. The Lord Jesus doesn't do this; He asks the man for *his* personal name. The difference is instructive- the Lord wasn't speaking to demons, He was speaking to the mentally sick man, and going along with the man's belief that he had demons within him. The 'demons' plead with Jesus not to torment them, and back this up by invoking God. 'They' believed in God and honoured Him to the point of believing He was the ultimate authenticator of oaths. 'They' hardly fit the classical idea that demons are anti-God and in conflict with Him. Clearly enough, when we read of demons and spirits in this passage we are not reading of the actual existence of 'demons' as they are classically understood, but simply of the mentally ill man himself.

5. Why did the pigs run over the cliff, and why did the Lord Jesus agree to the man's request for this?

Because mental illness features intermittent episodes, it's understandable that the Lord sought to comfort those cured that the change He had brought was permanent. Thus the Lord tells the 'spirit' assumed to be tormenting the mentally afflicted child: "I command you, come out of him, *and enter no more* into him" (Mk. 9:25). It's in the same vein that He drove the pigs into the lake as a sign that Legion's cure was permanent. I suggest that it was a kind of visual *aide memoire*, of the kind often used in the Bible to impress a point upon illiterate people. I suggest that's why in the ritual of the Day of Atonement, the scapegoat ran off into the wilderness bearing Israel's sins. As the bobbing animal was watched by thousands of eyes, thousands of minds would've reflected that their sins were being cast out. And the same principle was in the curing of the schizophrenic Legion- the pigs were made to run into the lake by the Lord Jesus, not because

they were actually possessed by demons in reality, but as an *aide memoire* to the cured Legion that his illness, all his perceived personalities, were now no more. Mental illness is typically intermittent. Legion had met Jesus, for he recognized Him afar off, and knew that He was God's Son (Mk. 5:6); indeed, one assumes the man probably had some faith for the miracle to be performed (Mt. 13:58). He comes to meet Jesus "from out of the city" (Lk. 8:27) and yet Mt. 8:28 speaks of him living in the tombs outside the city. He pleads with the Lord not to torment him (Mk. 5:7)- full of memories of how the local folk had tied him up and beaten him to try to exorcise the demons. Probably Legion's greatest fear was that he would relapse into madness again; that the cure which he believed Jesus could offer him might not be permanent. And so the Lord agreed to the man's request that the demons he perceived as within him should be permanently cast out; and the sight of the herd of pigs running over the cliff to permanent death below, with the awful sound this would've made, would have remained an abiding memory for the man. Note how the 'demon possessed' man in Mk. 1:23 sits in the synagogue and then suddenly screams out (Mk. 1:23)- showing he was likewise afflicted by intermittent fits. Steve Keating pointed out to me that the madness may have been an infection in the brain of the trichina parasite, commonly found infecting the muscles of pigs - and transmissible to humans in undercooked pork. The infected man would likely have been forced by poverty to eat this kind of food, and likely associated his "problem" with it because of the prohibition of pork under the Mosaic Law. The desire to see the disease return to the herds of swine probably stemmed from a need to know that his affliction had been cured in a rather permanent sort of way. And the Lord went along with this.

The idea of transference of disease from one to another was a common Semitic perception, and it's an idea used by God. And thus God went along with the peoples' idea of disease transference, and the result is recorded in terms of demons [which was how they understood illness] going from one person to another. Likewise the leprosy of Naaman clave to Gehazi (2 Kings 5:27). God threatened to make the diseases of the inhabitants of Canaan and Egypt to cleave to Israel if they were disobedient (Dt. 28:21,60). Here too, as with Legion, there is Divine accommodation to the ideas of disease transference which people had at the time.

6. The Lord focused the man's attention upon the man's beliefs about himself- by asking him "What is your name?", to which he replies "Legion! For we are many!". Thus the man was brought to realize on later reflection that the pig stampede was a miracle by the Lord, and a judgment against illegal keeping of unclean animals- rather than an action performed by the demons he thought inhabited him. The idea of transference of disease from one to another was a common Semitic perception, and it's an idea used by God. And thus God went along with the peoples' idea of disease transference, and the result is recorded in terms of demons [which was how they understood illness] going from one person to another. Likewise the leprosy of Naaman clave to Gehazi (2 Kings 5:27). God threatened to make the diseases of the inhabitants of Canaan and Egypt to cleave to Israel if they were disobedient (Dt. 28:21,60). Here too, God is accommodating the ideas of disease transference which people had at the time.

7. Legion believed he was demon possessed. But the Lord didn't correct him regarding this before healing him. Anyone dealing with mentally disturbed people soon learns that you can't correct all of their delusions at one go. You have to choose your battles, and walk and laugh with them to some extent. Lk. 8:29 says that Legion "was driven of the devil into the wilderness", in the same way as the Lord had been driven into the wilderness by the spirit (Mk. 1:12) and yet overcame the 'devil' in whatever form at this time. The man was surely intended to reflect on these more subtle things and see that whatever he had once believed in was immaterial and irrelevant compared to the Spirit power of the Lord. And yet the Lord 'went along' with his request for the demons he thought were within him to be cast into 'the deep', thoroughly rooted as it was in misunderstanding of demons and sinners being thrown into the abyss. This was in keeping with the kind of healing styles people were used to at the time- e.g. Josephus records how Eleazar cast demons out of people and placed a cup of water nearby, which was then [supposedly] tipped over by the demons as they left the sick person [*Antiquities Of The Jews* 8.46-48]. It seems to me that the Lord 'went along with' that kind of need for reassurance, and so He made the pigs stampede over the cliff to symbolize to the healed man how his disease had really left him.

8. The Legion incident "proves too much" if we are to insist on reading it on a strictly literal level. Do demons drown? Presumably, no. And yet the story as it stands requires us to believe that demons drown- if we are talking about literal 'demons' here. Clearly, Legion was mentally ill. We therefore have to face the hard question: Was that mental illness caused by demons, or, as I am suggesting, is the language of demon possession merely being used to describe mental illness? If indeed mental illness is caused by demons, the observations of T.S. Huxley are about right: "The belief in demons and demoniacal possession is a mere survival of a once universal superstition, its persistence pretty much in the inverse ratio of the general instruction, intelligence, and sound judgment of the population among whom it prevails. Demonology gave rise through the special influence of Christian ecclesiastics, to the most horrible persecutions and judicial murders of thousands upon thousands of innocent men, women, and children... If the story is true, the medieval theory of the invisible world may be and probably is, quite correct; and the witch finders, from Sprenger to Hopkins and Mather, are much-maligned men... For the question of the existence of demons and of possession by them, though it lies strictly within the province of science, is also of the deepest moral and religious significance. If physical and mental disorders are caused by demons, Gregory of Tours and his contemporaries rightly considered that relics and exorcists were more useful than doctors; the gravest questions arise as to the legal and moral responsibilities of persons inspired by demoniacal impulses; and our whole conception of the universe and of our relations to it becomes totally different from what it would be on the contrary hypothesis" (2).

Another case of 'proving too much' arises from reflection upon the fact that the 'demon possessed' Legion clearly recognized Jesus as the Son of God (Mk. 5:7); Mark seems to emphasize that demon possessed' people perceived Jesus as God's Son (Mk. 1:24,34; 3:11). Yet

Mark and the other Gospel writers likewise emphasize the slowness or refusal of many other groups in the Gospels to arrive at the same perception. And so we are forced to deal with the question: Since when do 'demons' bring people to accept Jesus as God's Son? Surely, according to the classical schema of understanding them, they and the Devil supposedly behind them are leading people to unbelief rather than to belief? But once we accept the language of 'demon possession' as referring to mental illness without requiring the actual physical existence of demons, then everything falls into place. For it's so often the case that the mentally ill have a very fine and accurate perception of spiritual things. And we see a clear pattern developed in the Gospels: the poor, the marginalized, women, slaves, the mentally ill ['demon possessed'], the disenfranchised, the lepers, the prostitutes, are the ones who perceive Jesus as God's Son and believe in Him.

9. A fairly detailed case can be made that the man Legion was to be understood as representative of Judah in captivity, suffering for their sins, who despite initially opposing Christ (Legion ran up to Jesus just as he had 'run upon' people in aggressive fits earlier), could still repent as Legion did, be healed of their sins and be His witnesses to the world. This fits in with the whole theme which the Lord had- that the restoration of Israel's fortunes would not be by violent opposition to the Legions of Rome but by repentance and spiritual witness to the world. The point is, Israel were bound in fetters and beaten by the Gentiles because of their sins, which they were culpable of, for which they had responsibility and from which they could repent; rather than because they had been taken over by powerful demons against their will. Here then are reasons for understanding Legion as representative of Judah under Gentile oppression; I am grateful to John Allfree and Andrew Perry for bringing some of them to my attention:

- Israel were "A people... which remain among the tombs, and lodge in the monuments" (Is. 65:3-4).

- Legion was always "in the mountains"- the "high places" where Israel sinned (Is. 65:7; Hos. 4:13).

- The man's name, Legion, suggests he was under the ownership of Rome. The miracle occurred in Gentile territory, suggesting Judah in the Gentile dominated world.

- 'What is your name?' is the same question asked of Jacob

- Legion's comment that 'we are many' is identical to the words of Ez. 33:24 about Israel: "Son of man, they that inhabit those wastes of the land of Israel speak, saying, Abraham was one, and he inherited the land: but *we are many*; the land is given us for inheritance. Wherefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Ye eat with the blood, and lift up your eyes toward your idols, and shed blood: and shall ye possess the land?"

- Legion had often been bound with fetters and chains (Mk 5:3,4)- just as God's people had so often been taken into captivity in "fetters and chains" (2 Chron. 33:11; 36:6, 2 Kings 24:7).

- When the sick man asks that the unclean spirits not be sent "out of the country" (Mk. 5:10), I take this as his resisting the healing. But he later repents and asks for them to be sent into the herd of pigs. This recalls a prophecy about the restoration of Judah in Zech. 13:2: "And it shall

come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered: and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land”.

- The herd of pigs being "destroyed" in the water recalls the Egyptians being “destroyed” in the Red Sea when Israel were delivered from Gentile power before. The Gadarene Gentiles "were afraid", just as the Gentile world was at the time of the Exodus (Ex 15:14). The curing of Legion is termed “great things” (Mk 5:19); and Israel's exodus from Gentile power and the destruction of the Egyptians is likewise called “great things” (Ps. 106:21).

A Psychological Approach

I have outlined above how Legion could be seen as representative of Israel in their weakness. Mark records how Jesus asked the man his name- as if He wished the man to reflect upon who he thought he was. He replied: "Legion". And of course the word "legion" referred to a division of Roman soldiers, usually five or six thousand. The man felt possessed by Roman legions. Through the incident with the pigs, Jesus helped him understand that He alone had the power to rid the man, and all Israel, of the Roman legions. The observation has been made that the incidents of 'driving out demons' nearly all occur in "militarized zones", areas where the Roman army was highly visible and resented (3). The man wished the "demons" he imagined to be possessing him to be identified with the pigs. And Jesus empowered that desire. The ‘band’ of pigs is described using the same original word as used for a group of military cadets. And the pig was the mascot of Rome’s Tenth Fretensis Legion which was stationed nearby; indeed, "pigs" were used as symbols for Romans in non-Roman literature of the time (4). William Harwood comes to the same conclusion: "Jerusalem had been occupied by the Roman Tenth Legion [X Fretensis], whose emblem was a pig. Mark's reference to about two thousand pigs, the size of the occupying Legion, combined with his blatant designation of the evil beings as Legion, left no doubt in Jewish minds that the pigs in the fable represented the army of occupation. Mark's fable in effect promised that the messiah, when he returned, would drive the Romans into the sea as he had earlier driven their four-legged surrogates" (5). The claim has been made by Joachim Jeremias that the Aramaic word for "soldiers" was in fact translated "Legion" (6). Jesus elsewhere taught that through faith in Him, "this mountain" could be cast into the sea (Mt. 21:21; Mk. 11:23). Seeing that mountains are symbolic in Scripture of empires, it could be that He was referring to how the empire contemporary with Him as He spoke those words, the Roman empire, could be cast into the sea through faith in Him. The acted parable of the Legion of pigs running into the sea was surely teaching the same thing. In passing, I note the apparent discrepancy between the fact that a Roman Legion contained five or six thousand people and yet there were two thousand pigs drowned. I found the comment on an internet forum, by an unbeliever, that "the governor of Judaea only had 2000 legionaries at his disposal". I have searched Josephus and other sources for confirmation of this, but can't find any. If it were to be found, it would be marvellous confirmation of the thesis I'm presenting here- that the pigs were to be understood as representative of the Roman Legions, who in their turn were responsible for

the man's mental illness (7). In any case, there is evidence to believe that there were Roman troops stationed in Gadara, and the pigs were likely being kept in order to provide food for them (8). "Pigs for the pigs" would've been the common quip about that herd of swine.

I suggest that the man's mental illness was related to the possession of his country by the Roman Legions. Perhaps he found huge power within himself to smash the chains with which he was restrained because he imagined them as symbolizing the Roman grip upon his soul and his country. In this case, his self-mutilation, gashing himself with stones (Mk. 5:5), would've been from a desire to kill the Legions within him, the 'demons' of Rome whom he perceived as having possessed him. He saw himself as representative of his people; Walter Wink sees the man's gashing himself with stones as a result of how he had "internalized [Judah's] captivity and the utter futility of resistance" (9). So often the mentally ill internalize their abusers; they act and speak as if their abusers are actually them, within them. This is why the abused so often end up abusing others; it's why Israel treat some Palestinians in a way strangely similar to how they were treated at the hands of the Nazis; and it's why Jesus urges us to pray for those who persecute us, to the end we might place a psychological distance between them and us, be ourselves, and not become like them. Jesus recognized this long before modern psychiatry did; hence he asks the sick man his name, "Legion". The man's reply really says it all- as if to say 'I am my abusers. I have internalized them'. Hence one commentator writes of how Legion "carries his persecutors inside him in the classic mode of the victim who internalizes his tormentors" (10).

Frantz Fanon was a psychiatrist who analysed the psychological damage done to those living under repressive regimes. Taking case studies from the French colonization of Martinique and Algeria, Fanon demonstrated that many darker skinned local people came to see themselves as second rate and dirty, and that when these darker skinned natives interacted with the white colonizers, they often experienced a tension between who they really were, and who they had to act as in secular life with the white masters. One of his books says it all in its title: *Black Skin, White Masks*. Having listed the various types of mental illness and multiple personality disorders which he attributed to French colonialism, Fanon concluded that there was brought about "this disintegrating of personality, this splitting and dissolution... in the organism of the colonized world" (11). Similar observations have been made, in a white-on-white context, about the psychological damage done by the Soviet occupation to the ethnic Baltic population, perhaps explaining why the tiny countries of Latvia and Lithuania have some of the highest suicide and mental illness rates in the world. The point is, however exaggerated these studies may be in some areas, there is indeed huge psychological damage caused by occupying, colonial powers; and this was the case in first century Palestine, and I submit that Legion with his multiple personalities was an example of mental illness caused by such a scenario. Paul Hollenbach likewise interprets the case of Legion, commenting in that context that "mental illness can be seen as a socially acceptable form of oblique protest against, or escape from, oppressions... his very madness permitted him to do what he could not do as sane, namely express his total hostility to the

Romans; he did this by identifying the Roman legions with demons. His possession was thus at once both the result of oppression and an expression of his resistance to it" (12). Richard Horsley takes the idea further: "The demon possession of the manically violent man among the Gerasenes can be understood as a combination of the effect of Roman imperial violence, a displaced protest against it" (13). By asking the sick man for his name, the Lord Jesus was surely seeking to help the man clarify the fact that his real issue was with Rome, and the man actually need not fear supposed 'demons'. This refocusing upon the real problem is a common feature of how the Bible deals with the whole subject of Satan and demons, as we've often seen in the course of this book. Horsley is right on target in his conclusion: "The casting out and naming of "Legion" is a demystification of demons and demon possession. It is now evident to Jesus' followers and to the hearers of Mark's story that the struggle is really against the rulers, the Romans" (14). Newheart writes in very similar terms: "Jesus... demystified the demons, showing that the real culprit was Rome" (15).

Another psychological approach to the self-mutilation [which is a classic symptom of mental illness] would be to understand it as him trying to stone himself, convinced he was unworthy and deserving of condemnation. No surprise, in this case, that the presence of Jesus lifted that sense of condemnation from him, and the miracle of the pigs was therefore performed to assure him that his sin really had been removed and condemned by drowning in the sea [a figure of condemnation in Mt. 18:6 and Rev. 18:21. 33]. The French social scientist René Girard commented at length upon the curing of the demoniac. He took the gashing of himself with stones as being representative of the man's desire to stone himself, and he observes the phenomena of "autolapidation" (self-stoning) as being common within the mentally disturbed. But he observes further that the pigs running over the cliff has "ritual and penal connotations" in that both stoning and being thrown over a cliff were common methods of execution in primitive societies (16). We recall how the townspeople tried to execute Jesus by throwing Him off a cliff (Lk. 4:29). And yet Jesus turned the man's fears on their head; for the pigs, representing the crowd who wished to stone the man and throw him off the cliff, are the ones who are thrown over the cliff by Jesus. The crowd therefore suffer the execution which they wished to inflict upon the victim. Thus "the miracle of Gerasa reverses the universal schema of violence fundamental to all societies" (17). Now we understand why Jesus declined Legion's request to follow Him on His mission, but insisted he instead return to his own society and live at peace with them. For Jesus had taught the man that the crowd he feared were no more, the lynch mob he obsessively feared had themselves been lynched over the cliff. The man begged that the demons *not* be cast into the sea (Lk. 8:31) in the sense that he himself feared being cast over the cliff into the sea by the mob. But that fear was taken away by Jesus; for it was the demons, the lynch mob which he feared, the Roman Legions, which he saw represented by the pigs, hurtling to their own destruction over the cliff.

On a perhaps simpler level, we can quite easily identify with Legion, in that the "demons" he imagined infesting him are easily understandable as our varying sins and weaknesses. And our

identification with him progresses to being likewise left cleansed, in our right mind, and able and willing to witness for the Christ who cleansed us. Thus C.S. Lewis describes his own conversion to Christ: "For the first time I examined myself with a seriously practical purpose. And there I found what appalled me; a zoo of lusts, a bedlam of ambitions, a nursery of fears, a harem of fondled hatreds. My name was Legion" (18).

Notes

- (1) George Lamsa, *New Testament Commentary* (Philadelphia: A.J. Holman, 1945) pp. 57,58.
- (2) T. S. Huxley, *Science and Christian Tradition* (New York: Appleton, 1899) p. 225. Available on Google Books.
- (3) Shane Claiborne and Chris Haw, *Jesus for President* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008) p. 115.
- (4) Warren Carter, *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001) p. 71; Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000) pp. 212,213.
- (5) William Harwood, *Mythology's Last Gods: Yahweh and Jesus* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1990) p. 48.
- (6) The same point is made in Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Earliest Palestinian Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1978) pp. 101,102.
- (7) There is a strange flip of the tail in all this. Josephus records how the Romans massacred many Jewish rebels in Gadara, the very place of the Legion miracle, in AD69: "Vespasian sent Placidus with 500 horse and 3000 foot to pursue those who had fled from Gadara... Placidus, relying on his cavalry and emboldened by his previous success, pursued the Gadarenes, killing all whom he overtook, as far as the Jordan. Having driven the whole multitude up to the river, where they were blocked by the stream, which being swollen by the rain was unfordable, he drew up his troops in line opposite them. Necessity goaded them to battle, flight being impossible... Fifteen thousand perished by the enemy's hands, while the number of those who were driven to fling themselves into the Jordan was incalculable; about two thousand two hundred were captured..." (*Wars of the Jews*, Book 4, Chapter 7). This is all very similar to the picture of the [Roman] legions being driven into the water, as Jesus had implied would happen. Perhaps we are to understand that what was made potentially possible for the Jews by the work of Jesus was in fact turned around against them- they suffered the very punishment and judgment which was potentially prepared for Rome, because they refused their Messiah. This is possibly why the destruction of Rome / Babylon predicted in the Apocalypse is described in terms of Jerusalem's destruction in the Old Testament. The judgment intended for Babylon / Rome actually came upon Jerusalem and the Jews.
- (8) Michael Willett Newheart, *"My name is Legion": The Story and Soul of the Gerasene Demoniac* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004) p. 14.

- (9) Walter Wink, *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) Vol. 2 p. 46.
- (10) Robert G. Hammerton-Kelley, *The Gospel and the Sacred: Poetics of Violence in Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1994) p. 93.
- (11) Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963) p. 57. See too his *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967).
- (12) Paul Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 99 (1981) p. 575.
- (13) Richard Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001) p. 145.
- (14) *Ibid* p. 147.
- (15) Newheart, *op cit* p. 84.
- (16) René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986) p. 176. Pages 165-183 contain his exposition of the healing of Legion. The same points are made in Jean Starobinski, "The Gerasene Demoniac", in Roland Barthes *et al*, eds., *Structural Analysis and Biblical Exegesis* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1974) pp. 57-84.
- (17) *Ibid* p. 179.
- (18) C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of my Early Life* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1955) p. 213.