

Pigs in the Water

Commentary for July 1, 2020 — When the Pigs Died, Did the Unclean Spirits Die?

This month's article is "Spirits Can Die." I briefly introduce the article in the "[July 2020 Newsletter](#)," but I also discuss some underutilized features of the ASK Website. In this Commentary I focus on the unclean spirits of the Gergesenes (or Gadarenes) demoniac. The accounts are in Matthew 8:28–34; Mark 5:1–20; and Luke 8:26–39.¹ Jesus and His apostles took a fishing boat to the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. They arrived safely after Jesus calmed a violent storm.

In Matthew, when Jesus and His apostles landed their boat, two naked men possessed by unclean spirits approached Jesus. One man each is featured in Mark and Luke. They lived in an area of tombs and were violently uncontrollable (Mark 5:2–5; Luke 8:29). Jesus ordered the unclean spirits to leave the men. The spirits begged Jesus: **"What have I to do with you, Jesus, you Son of God most high? I beseech you, torment me not"** (Luke 8:28).

Swine are unclean animals to YHWH and could not be given as an offering to Him, nor could swine be eaten by the Israelites (Leviticus 11:7–8). Luke tells us about one of the two men:

"And Jesus asked him, saying, 'What is your name?' And he [they] said, 'Legion': because many devils were entered into him. And they besought him that he would NOT command them to go out into the deep [into the Sea of Galilee]."

And there was a herd of many swine feeding on the mountain: and they besought him that he would suffer [allow] them to enter into them. And he suffered [allowed] them. Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked."

• **Luke 8:30–33**

- In Mark 5:10, some unclean spirits spoke through one man, **"he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country."**
- In Luke 8:32, it seems different unclean spirits spoke, perhaps through the other man, **"they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep [the abyss²]."**

Jesus fulfilled neither of these request. The spirits had no right to request anything from Jesus, their Creator. They asked Him to let them escape punishment. Jesus ignored them.

Are the "country" and the "abyss" the same thing? Remember there was a legion (around 5,400) of unclean spirits, so various spirits may have made different requests. The "country" or territory of the Gergesenes may have been a preferred pagan environment for them rather

¹ Differences of the three narratives can be understood by the accounts of the two men in Matthew. Perhaps one man's story is told in Mark and the other man's story is told in Luke.

² The "abyss" (Greek, *abussos*) is a place of confinement for spirits in Romans 10:7 and Revelation 9:1–2, 11, 11:7–8, and 20:1–2. The spirits wanted to stay and abuse the two men.

than Galilee west of the lake. The “abyss” was a prison for spirits where they would suffer and have no access to “host” bodies.

The account in Mark 5:13 says the swine herd numbered 2,000. Jesus cast the 5,000+ unclean spirits out of the men and into the swine as the spirits asked.³ All the swine died. If Jesus cast the demons out of the men and into the air, they might have returned or found other victims. Jesus tells us in Matthew chapter 12 how unclean spirits operate:

“When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walks through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he said, ‘I will return into my house from whence I came out’; and when he is come, he finds it empty, swept, and garnished.

Then he goes, and takes with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.”

• **Matthew 12:43–45**⁴

Even with this information, we cannot be certain what happened to the unclean spirits when the swine died. The spirits did not want to be dispossessed from the men, did not want to be cast out of the land (the territory they were in, Mark 5:10), nor walk **“through dry places”** (Matthew 12:43). Their request to go into the swine was even worse (Luke 8:32), resulting in the unexpected suicide dive of the pigs into the lake. Did Jesus lock the spirits into the swine?

If so, then the spirits died when the swine died. There is no reason to think they were imprisoned like the spirits in 1 Peter 3:19. The texts do not say the unclean spirits escaped while the pigs were drowning. Why assume the spirits escaped? I believe Jesus did lock the unclean spirits into the unclean swine. (Read my article “Spirits Can Die.”) Put it all together and I believe death occurred to the supposed “undying” spirits. Consider:

- They were “dispossessed” from their human hosts.
- The spirits could not return to repossess the freed men.
- They were sent into swine, who like the spirits were unclean.
- The swine could not tolerate the unclean spirits.
- The 2,000 swine died and so did all the unclean spirits.

All spirits knew Jesus was the Son of God. Their death was a warning to evil spirits in Judea.

Were the men cleansed of the spirits Israelites or Gentiles? They were likely Gentiles. We know that after Jesus freed them, one of them told everyone in that Gentile area what Jesus had done to free him (Mark 5:18–20). My guess is that the spiritual condition of the area east of the Sea of Galilee improved (and pig breeders rebuilt their herd).

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³ Jesus cast out seven spirits from Mary Magdalene in Luke 8:2. The word “Legion” is Latin and not a Hebrew or Greek word. The unclean spirits were bragging about their numbers. An ideal number for a Roman legion from the period is 5,400 men, but such standards were rarely maintained.

⁴ Earlier in Matthew 12:22–32 Jesus cast out a devil and relates it to extreme evil in Jerusalem.