

# Matthew 8:28-34

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-8/matthew-828-34/>

*Jesus and His disciples arrive on the other side of the sea on the eastern shore in the Greco-Roman province called the Decapolis. Two violent, demon-possessed men come out to meet them and shout at Jesus, calling Him the “Son of God.” Jesus casts these demons into a herd of swine. The swine run off a cliff into the sea and to their deaths. When this is reported to the inhabitants of the city of Gaderenes, the entire city comes out to see Jesus and beg him to go away.*

The parallel accounts of this event are found in Mark 5:1-19 and Luke 8:26-39.

*When He came to the other side of the Sea of Galilee after the storm, Jesus and His disciples arrived into the country of the Gadarenes. The term, Gadarenes, is believed to refer to the citizens of the town, Gadara (much like the term, Nazarenes, refers to citizens of the town of Nazareth). Gadara was a city of the Greek Decapolis. The name Decapolis literally means “ten” (deca); city (polis). The Decapolis was a region populated by ten Greek cities established in the aftermath of Alexander the Great’s conquests, three and a half centuries earlier. They were now a Roman province. In the eyes of their Jewish neighbors, these Greco-Roman Gentiles loudly flaunted their paganism. Both Matthew’s and Mark’s use of the phrase *the other side* (Mark 5:1) makes reference to the Decapolis on the eastern shore.*

The city of Gadara itself was located about ten miles from the shoreline, a little to the south and further east of Galilee along a major trade route. Since Hippos was a Decapolis city on a hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee, Jesus and His disciples must have ventured into an area of the shoreline controlled by Gadara. Matthew infers this when he calls the space they entered *the country of the Gadarenes*. Jesus and His disciples arrived in the area under the influence of Gadara and *the country* where *the Gadarenes* held sway.

Mark and Luke use the term, Gergesenes instead of *Gadarenes* in their gospel narratives (Mark 5:1-17; Luke 8:26-37). A Gergesene was a citizen of the city of Gergesa which was situated north of Gadara halfway up the eastern shore of Galilee. It is likely that *the country* Jesus *came into* was between Gergesa and Gadara and in the relative proximity of both towns. It was under the cultural influence of both, but was in the political territory of Gadara. Gergesa is believed to have bordered the Decapolis but not to have been officially a part of this geopolitical territory.

*When they got to the other side, Jesus and His disciples were met by two men who were demon-possessed. Unlike the demon-possessed people who were brought to Jesus the night before in Capernaum, these two demon-possessed men were coming to Jesus themselves out of the tombs. Apparently, these men lived in these tombs among the dead, violently harassing anyone who came near. Matthew writes, they were so extremely violent that no one could pass by that way.*

But as they came out to harm Jesus and His disciples, the evil spirits within these *two men* recognize who *they* are encountering. *They*, meaning both the *two men* and the demons possessing them, cried out saying (to Jesus) *What business do we have with each other Son of*

*God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?* The demons understand that Jesus is *God* in human form. They recognize Him as being *the Son of God* who is of the Divine Trinity.

Because of their rebellion against God when they fell with Lucifer, the demons rightly see Jesus as their enemy. They are on opposite sides of the cosmic spiritual conflict, of which the kingdoms of earth serve as a battle ground. Because they diametrically oppose one another, the demons cry out, *What business do we have with each other?* They speculate their own answer. It is very revealing. *Have You come here to torment us before the time?* The demons understand that they are going to lose this conflict. They know that they will be severely punished and *tormented* at the appointed *time*. They know that their *torment* will be done by the authority of *the Son of God*. But they also know that this *time* is not yet, which is why they assume and ask if Jesus has come *here to torment* them now *before the time*.

The Gospel writer Mark shares about one of these *demon-possessed men*. He reports a few additional lines of conversation between Jesus and *the demons* possessing this man, “What is your name?” Jesus asks the evil spirits. And the man said to Him, “My name is Legion; for we are many” (Mark 5:9). Legion is a Roman military designation. A legion was composed of crack soldiers of the army and usually numbered in the thousands. The most famous Roman legion was the Tenth Legion who helped Julius Caesar subdue Gaul (modern day France) over 75 years earlier. This same legion would later be stationed in the nearby town of Hippos which lay between Gadara and Gergesa during the Zealot rebellion. Its iconic banner displayed a boar’s head.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke report *now there was a herd of many swine feeding at a distance from them*. *Swine* were unclean animals and forbidden to be eaten by Jews according to the Mosaic law (Leviticus 11:7, Deuteronomy 14:8). This particular *herd of swine* was likely being used as a food supply for the Gentiles living in the Decapolis. Matthew says that *the demons began to entreat Him* (Jesus). The word he uses for *entreat* is “parakaleo” (G3870) which literally means to “call alongside.” It has a wide range of meanings including, “encourage,” “plead,” “exhort,” or “comfort.” In describing the Holy Spirit to His disciples in John 14 and 15 Jesus describes Him as “The Paraklete,” i.e. the One who Encourages, Exhorts, Comforts, etc. In this instance, “parakaleo” means “pleads” or “begs.” What *the demons* begged of *Him* was to not be *cast into torment*, but to be *cast into* the nearby *herd of swine*. They said to *Him*, *if You are going to cast us out, send us into the herd of swine*. And Jesus granted their entreaty and *said to them*, “Go!”

The *two men* were liberated from the spiritual oppression of being possessed by these *demons*. *And the demons came out of the two men and went into the swine*. Once *the demons* entered the *swine*, Matthew tells us, *the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and perished in the waters*. *The herdsmen* who were raising the *swine* ran away. They *went into the city and reported everything*. These *herdsmen* likely did not wish to be held responsible for what happened to the destroyed livestock. They also *reported what happened to the demoniacs*. They told the townspeople that *the* now former *demoniacs* had been freed from these evil spirits at Jesus’s command. The *two men* had regained possession of themselves.

When the people of *the city* (it is not clear which city—Gadara, Hippos, or Gergesa) learned of these things, Matthew tells us that *the whole city came out to meet Jesus*. This would be an

appropriate response to take if a local reported these unusual events. *But when they saw Him, they were not happy.*

*They did not rejoice in what Jesus had done. They were upset about their lost property, or fearful of what Jesus would do next. They were not glad that He freed their countrymen from demons. They implored Him to leave their region. They would rather have their herd of pigs, even if it meant that their fellow countrymen would remain suffering in spiritual bondage.*

### **Biblical Text**

**8:28-34** When He came to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, two men who were demon-possessed met Him as they were coming out of the tombs. They were so extremely violent that no one could pass by that way. And they cried out, saying, “What business do we have with each other, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?” Now there was a herd of many swine feeding at a distance from them. The demons began to entreat Him, saying, “If You are going to cast us out, send us into the herd of swine.” And He said to them, “Go!” And they came out and went into the swine, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and perished in the waters. The herdsmen ran away, and went to the city and reported everything, including what had happened to the demoniacs. And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw Him, they implored Him to leave their region.