

**The Devil is in the Details:**

*A Socio-Cultural Reading of the Gerasene Demoniac Narrative in Mark*

by

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### Abstract

The exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac is one of the most striking narratives in the New Testament and depicts an intense power struggle between Jesus and a horde of demons. Although the exorcism is recounted in all of the Synoptic Gospels, the Markan narrative is especially intriguing because it includes three significant details. First, the demons attempt to use “name magic” on Jesus; second, they adjure him by God; and third, Jesus himself resorts to name magic before he casts out the demons. For ancient readers, the presence of these three details would have been interpreted as limitations of Jesus’ power. However, this essay argues that the Markan author intentionally includes these “embarrassing” details in order to heighten the action and drama of the narrative. By describing Jesus’ violent struggle and subsequent victory over a multitude of demons, the narrator emphasizes his authority as an exorcist.

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## Introduction

In Mark 5:1-20, Jesus exorcises a violent demoniac in the Gerasene region.<sup>1</sup>

Although casting out demons was a common aspect of Jesus' ministry, the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac is especially unusual because it includes three significant details. First, the demons attempt to use *name magic* by identifying Jesus as the "Son of the Most High God" (Mark 5:7). Second, they *invoke* the name of God in order to prevent Jesus from tormenting them (Mark 5:7). Finally, Jesus deviates from his usual exorcistic method and asks the demons for their name before casting them out (Mark 5:9).

Taken at face value, these details cast a shameful image of Jesus and would have led ancient readers to doubt his authority as an exorcist. Rather than cast out the demons quickly and effectively, he enters into a contest with them. Moreover, the demons seem to possess the upper hand as they are able to use powerful techniques to ward off their opponent. Their exclamation that Jesus is the "Son of the Most High God" is a form of *name magic*, which rests on the belief that to know someone's true identity, is to exercise complete control over them. The demons also attempt to bind Jesus with an *invocation*. In the first century, invocations were used to summon the aid of a more powerful being, and as a result, granted the individual access to tremendous power. For ancient readers, the demons' use of name magic and an invocation would

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<sup>1</sup> There is sufficient debate as to the credibility of this location. Some manuscripts read "Gadarenes", while others read "Gergesenes". Although Gerasa was a city of the Decapolis, which would correlate the information provided in Mark 5:20, it was nearly forty miles from the sea. It seems highly unlikely then, that the possessed pigs in 5:13 would be able to run such a distance (Donahue and Harington, 163). Nonetheless, this essay will assume the Markan position of Gerasa, as it has little bearing on the author's portrayal of Jesus in the exorcism narrative.

have highlighted their power and given them a significant advantage over their exorcist. Confronted with these aggressive attacks, Jesus himself resorts to name magic before casting out the demons. Although name magic was a common technique in antiquity, it was often associated with less powerful exorcists and would have called Jesus' authority into question.

At first glance, the inclusion of these narrative details seem to emphasize the limitations of Jesus' power. However, this essay argues that the Markan author intentionally uses these "embarrassing" details as a compelling literary device. By pitting Jesus against a horde of demons who fight back against expulsion, the gospel writer heightens the drama of the narrative and sets the stage for an impressive victory. In doing so, he portrays Jesus as a formidable exorcist – one who is unaffected by his opponents' maneuvers, and ultimately, triumphs over them.

### **The Core Passage: Mark 5:1-20**

Before delving into an analysis of the Gerasene exorcism, it is first necessary to read the text in both English and in its original language, Koine Greek. Provided below therefore, is the Markan account of the Gerasene demoniac. All Greek references come from the 28<sup>th</sup> edition of the Nestle Aland Novum Testamentum Graece (NANTG), while the English references are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Verses six through ten of the text have been highlighted as they will be examined in greater detail throughout the essay.

#### Mark 5:1-20 (NANTG)

<sup>1</sup>Καὶ ἦλθον εἰς τὸ πέραν τῆς θαλάσσης εἰς τὴν χώραν τῶν Γερασηνῶν. <sup>2</sup>καὶ

ἐξελθόντος αὐτοῦ ἐκ τοῦ πλοίου εὐθύς ὑπήντησεν αὐτῷ ἐκ τῶν μνημείων ἄνθρωπος ἐν  
 πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ, <sup>3</sup> ὃς τὴν κατοίκησιν εἶχεν ἐν τοῖς μνήμασιν, καὶ οὐδὲ ἀλύσει οὐκέτι  
 οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο αὐτὸν δῆσαι <sup>4</sup> διὰ τὸ αὐτὸν πολλάκις πέδαις καὶ ἀλύσεσιν δεδέσθαι καὶ  
 διεσπᾶσθαι ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ τὰς ἀλύσεις καὶ τὰς πέδας συντετριφθαι, καὶ οὐδεὶς ἴσχυεν αὐτὸν  
 δαμάσαι · <sup>5</sup> καὶ διὰ παντὸς νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας ἐν τοῖς μνήμασιν καὶ ἐν τοῖς ὄρεσιν ἦν  
 κράζων καὶ κατακόπτων ἑαυτὸν λίθοις. **6 Καὶ ἰδὼν τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἀπὸ μακρόθεν ἔδραμεν**  
**καὶ προσεκόνησεν αὐτῷ** <sup>7</sup> καὶ κράξας φωνῇ μεγάλῃ λέγει · **τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, Ἰησοῦ υἱὲ**  
**τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου; ὀρκίζω σε τὸν θεόν, μὴ με βασανίσῃς.** <sup>8</sup> ἔλεγεν γὰρ αὐτῷ ·  
**ἔξελθε τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἀκάθαρτον ἐκ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.** <sup>9</sup> καὶ ἐπηρώτα αὐτὸν · **τί ὄνομά σοι;**  
**καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ · λεγιῶν ὄνομά μοι, ὅτι πολλοὶ ἐσμεν.** <sup>10</sup> καὶ παρεκάλει αὐτὸν πολλὰ ἵνα  
**μὴ αὐτὰ ἀποστείλῃ ἔξω τῆς χώρας.** <sup>11</sup> Ἦν δὲ ἐκεῖ πρὸς τῷ ὄρει ἀγέλη χοίρων μεγάλη  
 βοσκομένη · <sup>12</sup> καὶ παρεκάλεσαν αὐτὸν λέγοντες · πέμψον ἡμᾶς εἰς τοὺς χοίρους, ἵνα εἰς  
 αὐτοὺς εἰσέλθωμεν. <sup>13</sup> καὶ ἐπέτρεψεν αὐτοῖς. καὶ ἐξελθόντα τὰ πνεύματα τὰ ἀκάθαρτα  
 εἰσῆλθον εἰς τοὺς χοίρους, καὶ ὤρμησεν ἡ ἀγέλη κατὰ τοῦ κρημοῦ εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν, ὡς  
 δισχιλιοί, καὶ ἐπνίγοντο ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ. <sup>14</sup> Καὶ οἱ βόσκοντες αὐτοὺς ἔφυγον καὶ  
 ἀπήγγειλαν εἰς τὴν πόλιν καὶ εἰς τοὺς ἀγρούς · καὶ ἦλθον ἰδεῖν τί ἐστὶν τὸ γεγονός <sup>15</sup> καὶ  
 ἔρχονται πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ θεωροῦσιν τὸν δαιμονιζόμενον καθήμενον ἱματισμένον  
 καὶ σωφρονοῦντα, τὸν ἐσχηκότα τὸν λεγιῶνα, καὶ ἐφοβήθησαν. <sup>16</sup> καὶ διηγήσαντο  
 αὐτοῖς οἱ ἰδόντες πῶς ἐγένετο τῷ δαιμονιζομένῳ καὶ περὶ τῶν χοίρων. <sup>17</sup> καὶ ἤρξαντο  
 παρακαλεῖν αὐτὸν ἀπελθεῖν ἀπὸ τῶν ὁρίων αὐτῶν. <sup>18</sup> Καὶ ἐμβαίνοντος αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸ  
 πλοῖον παρεκάλει αὐτὸν ὁ δαιμονισθεὶς ἵνα μετ' αὐτοῦ ᾗ. <sup>19</sup> καὶ οὐκ ἀφῆκεν αὐτὸν, ἀλλὰ  
 λέγει αὐτῷ · ὕπαγε εἰς τὸν οἶκόν σου πρὸς τοὺς σοὺς καὶ ἀπάγγειλον αὐτοῖς ὅσα ὁ κύριός

σοι πεποίηκεν καὶ ἠλέησέν σε. <sup>20</sup> καὶ ἀπιῆλθεν καὶ ἤρξατο κηρύσσειν ἐν τῇ Δεκαπόλει ὅσα ἐποίησεν αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, καὶ πάντες ἐθαύμαζον.

Mark 5:1-20 (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup> They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. <sup>2</sup> And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. <sup>3</sup> He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; <sup>4</sup> for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. <sup>5</sup> Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. <sup>6</sup> **When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him;** <sup>7</sup> **and he shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me."** <sup>8</sup> For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" <sup>9</sup> Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many." <sup>10</sup> He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. <sup>11</sup> Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; <sup>12</sup> and the unclean spirits begged him, "Send us into the swine; let us enter them." <sup>13</sup> So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea. <sup>14</sup> The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. <sup>15</sup> They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had



the legion; and they were afraid. <sup>16</sup> Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. <sup>17</sup> Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood. <sup>18</sup> As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. <sup>19</sup> But Jesus refused, and said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you." <sup>20</sup> And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

### **Towards A Method: Historical Criticism and The Texture of Texts**

In order to examine the narrative of the Gerasene demoniac, this essay will utilize a historical-critical framework. The fundamental assumption of the historical-critical method is that every text is a product of its time. As such, they are often influenced by a number of social, cultural, and religious factors that are unique to their particular, historical context. Unlike other approaches, historical-criticism cannot be reduced to a single method. Rather, it functions as an umbrella term that encompasses a cluster of related approaches including: form criticism, source criticism, redaction criticism, and literary criticism to name a few (Law 23). While this essay is rooted in the broad framework of historical criticism, it will narrow its focus by utilizing Vernon K. Robbins' theory of socio-rhetorical interpretation. According to this theory, every text is like a well-woven tapestry which contains multiple layers of meaning (Robbins 2). By analyzing a text from a variety of different angles, scholars can then bring these layers into view (Robbins 3). Although Robbins identifies five different approaches with which to analyze a text, this essay will only refer to three: inner texture, intertexture,

and socio-cultural texture.<sup>2</sup>

### Inner Texture

Robbins' concept of *inner texture* analyzes the specific words of a text prior to its interpretation (Robbins 7). Those who examine the inner texture of a text, may choose to investigate certain features such as: the repetition of certain words, the order of events, or the presence of arguments within the text (Robbins 7). For instance, this essay will use inner texture to discuss the misplaced chronology of verses 7-9 of the narrative. In Mark 5:8, Jesus is said to have (already?) commanded the demon to leave its host. However, in verse 13, Jesus commands the demon to leave a second time. The placement of verse 8 before verse 13, has caused confusion amongst scholars and resulted in two, dominant positions. The first position holds that Jesus had commanded the demons to leave when he first arrived on shore. However, he was unsuccessful and forced to exorcise them a second time. The second position maintains that Jesus was merely revealing his *future* intention to exorcise the demons. From this standpoint, verse 13 is the first and only command of expulsion in the narrative. Regardless of which position is correct, it is clear that the inner texture of a text can have profound implications for its interpretation.

Another aspect of inner texture is *sensory-aesthetic texture*. Sensory-aesthetic texture highlights the the ways in which a text evokes certain senses such as thought,

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<sup>2</sup> Robbins also refers to *ideological* and *sacred* texture in his theory. *Ideological texture* focuses on both the writer and the reader's perspective, rather than gleaning information from within the text itself (Robbins 95). Thus, it is not particularly helpful in determining the motives or intended message of the Markan author. *Sacred texture* investigates the ways in which the text refers to God and its implications for contemporary, religious life (Robbins 120). While this theological approach is useful in other contexts, it goes beyond the scope of this essay.

emotion, sight, sound, and touch (Robbins 29). For example, verses 3-5 of the Gerasene narrative emphasize the bodily strength and violence of the demoniac. Although he has been chained hand and foot, the possessed man is able to “tear” apart his chains and “break” the irons on his feet. This colourful description alerts the reader to the exceptional, extra-human strength of the demoniac and sets the stage for his violent confrontation with Jesus. In verse 6 of the narrative, the demoniac who no one was able to restrain, prostrates himself at Jesus’ feet. By employing such vivid imagery early on in the narrative, the narrator effectively juxtaposes the physical strength of the demoniac with the spiritual authority of Jesus. It is clear that for the narrator, it is Jesus, and not the demoniac, who is the more dominant force.

#### *Intertexture*

In addition to inner texture, this essay will also use Robbins’ theory of *intertexture*. Intertexture can be defined as: “a text’s representation of, reference to, and use of phenomena in the ‘world’ outside the text being interpreted” (Robbins 40). Intertexture uses cultural, social, and historical phenomena as a means to enrich, challenge, or affirm the meaning of the text. One form of intertexture is *oral scribal texture*. It refers to the way in which a text references a literary work that is outside itself (Robbins 40). For example, scholars have often linked the demons’ exclamation in Mark 5:8 to a similar epithet found in 1 Kings 17. Here, a Gentile widow asks the prophet Elijah: “What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to cause the death of my son” (1 Kings 17:18)! The widow’s words are a blatant attempt to ward off the prophet before he can potentially harm her.

If the Markan author was familiar with this story, it is possible that he tried to evoke the same sentiment of repulsion in his narrative. Thus, when the demons shout: “What have you to do with me, Jesus...”, they attempt to repel their exorcist, much in the same way the widow attempts to repel the prophet Elijah.

### *Social and Cultural Texture*

In addition to inner texture and intertexture, this essay relies heavily upon Robbins’ theory of *social and cultural texture*. Social and cultural texture refers to common knowledge that is affirmed by all peoples of a particular region, regardless of their specific cultural communities (Robbins 62). It typically encompasses four categories including: social roles, social institutions, social codes, and social relationships (Robbins 62). By examining the socio-cultural texture, interpreters can determine the ways in which a particular text affirms, rejects, diverges from, or adheres to the socio-cultural boundaries of its time.

One of the most obvious examples of socio-cultural texture in the Gerasene narrative is found in verse 9 of the text, when the demon identifies itself as “Legion”. As commentators have pointed out, the word Legion comes from the Latin word *legio*, and refers to a Roman army which consists of anywhere between 1000-6000 soldiers (Cranfield 178). While contemporary readers may not pick up on this detail, the early Jewish and Hellenistic communities would have immediately understood its military connotations. Moreover, ancient readers would have also discerned the literary comparison between the powerful Roman army that occupied Judaea, and the demonic army, that occupied the unfortunate demoniac (Edwards 157). By utilizing socio-

cultural intertexture, scholars are able to glean shades of meaning that would have otherwise only been apparent to the original readers.

Another example of socio-cultural texture is apparent when the restored demoniac goes into the Decapolis and proclaims what Jesus has done for him (Mark 5:20). To the contemporary reader, the term "Decapolis" holds little meaning. For the ancient reader however, the Decapolis was a well-known cluster of ten cities which lay east of the Jordan (Hooker 146). From this detail alone, the reader becomes aware of Jesus' profound effect on the demoniac. Although Jesus only commands the man to tell his family about his deliverance, the former demoniac testifies to a much larger audience. It is also interesting to note that the Decapolis was a predominantly Gentile region, and is only mentioned in the Markan pericope. Thus, "it is possible that Mark understood the man's commission as a precursor of the mission to the Gentiles" (Hooker 146). By investigating the socio-cultural aspects of the Decapolis, contemporary readers gain insight into the significance of the exorcism both for the demoniac and for the Gospel writer.

In addition to geographical details, social and cultural texture also addresses the norms, customs, boundaries, and taboos of a specific time period. For example, Robbins identifies honour-shame dynamics as a key component of social relations in the first century (Robbins 76). During this time, honour came with social acknowledgement as well as "boundaries of power, sexual status, and position on the social ladder" (Robbins 76). It functioned as a type of "social rating" which indicated how individuals could (or ought to) interact with "his or her equals, superiors, and subordinates, according to the

prescribed cultural cues of the society” (Robbins 76). Since honour and shame were integral parts of the social landscape, it is not surprising that the Markan author emphasizes these features throughout his narrative. Indeed, the very premise of this essay is that the gospel writer simultaneously threatens and affirms Jesus’ honour.

At first, the Markan author seems to portray Jesus in a shameful light. He includes details such as: a (potentially) failed exorcism attempt, the demons’ invocation of God, and Jesus’ use of name magic. Through the inclusion of these details, the narrator sets up a story in which Jesus’ reputation as an exorcist is at stake. Yet like any good storyteller, he only temporarily highlights the power of the demons in order to enforce Jesus’ superiority over them. By the end of the narrative, it is the demons who are desperate and put to shame. The success of Jesus’ exorcism, especially against such a challenging opponent, restores his honour as an exorcist and validates his overall message.

### **Establishing the Pattern: Jesus’ Exorcisms in the Gospel of Mark**

By describing the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac as a violent struggle for power, the narrator attempts to affirm Jesus’ power as an exorcist. To achieve his goal, the narrator heightens the drama of the story by including details that clearly distinguish it from Jesus’ other exorcisms. The inclusion of these details signal to the reader that this particular exorcism is different than the rest. Unlike his other exorcisms, in which Jesus casts out the demons with ease, the Gerasene encounter seems to imply that Jesus has finally met his match. Thus, in order to appreciate the uniqueness of the Gerasene exorcism, it is first necessary to contrast it to Jesus’ usual pattern of exorcism.

In doing so, this section will demonstrate the way in which the Markan author sets up his story so that Jesus is revealed as the superior power.

One of the most common features of Markan exorcisms is Jesus' refusal to let the demons identify him. A prominent example can be found in Mark 1:21-28 which describes the exorcism of the Synagogue demoniac. According to the text, Jesus is teaching in the synagogue when a man with an unclean spirit approaches him. The demon reacts defensively to Jesus' presence and exclaims: "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24)! Having been identified, Jesus rebukes (*ἐπιτιμάω*) the demon and commands it to: "Be silent, and come out of him" (Mark 1:25)! The demon immediately obeys and after convulsing its victim, leaves with a loud voice (Mark 1:26).

While the synagogue exorcism is one of the more descriptive pericopes, there are shorter references in which Jesus forbids the demons from speaking. In Mark 1:34, the author writes that Jesus healed the sick and cast out demons. Moreover, "he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him" (Mark 1:34). Similarly, in Mark 3:11, the author states that when the unclean spirits saw Jesus, they would fall down before him and shriek: "You are the Son of God"! In response, Jesus strictly orders the demons to "not make him known" (Mark 3:12).

Jesus' silencing of the demons has often been linked to William Wrede's theory of the "Messianic Secret". According to this theory, the author of Mark presents Jesus as someone who does not admit to his Messiahship until after the resurrection (Johnson 10). According to this view, the Markan author "believed that the true nature of Jesus

was not apprehended during his ministry” (Johnson 11). Wrede’s hypothesis is supported by information in the Markan Gospel. Jesus orders silence,

after notable miracles, after Peter’s confession, and at the descent from the Mount of Transfiguration. Jesus withdraws from the crowd on secret journeys and gives private instruction to his disciples (Taylor 122).

Most importantly, Jesus silences the demons who attempt to reveal his identity. The seriousness of his rebuke is made especially clear when one examines his words in Greek. For instance, in the exorcism of the synagogue demoniac, the words “be quiet”, are expressed in Greek as *φειώθητι*. Taken in the infinitive tense, the word *φειώω*, literally means to “tie shut” or “muzzle” (Taylor 81). It implies that Jesus has forcefully bound the mouth of the demon(s) in order to prevent them from speaking. In the ancient world, forcing a demon to speak was part of the standard exorcistic procedure (Johnson 50). By commanding the demons not to speak, the author of Mark emphasizes the authority behind Jesus’ word (Johnson 50).

In addition to his ability silence the demons, another feature of Markan exorcisms is Jesus’ ability to exorcise with a single command. Unlike other exorcists of the first century, Jesus is depicted as not relying on formulas, physical objects, or invocations to cast out demons. On the contrary, the narrator describes Jesus shocking his audience because he is able to exorcise “with a word”. For instance, in Mark 9:14-29, a father brings his demon-possessed son to Jesus after the disciples are unable to exorcise him (Mark 9:18). When the demon is brought in close proximity to Jesus, it reacts violently. It convulses the boy, causing him to fall to the ground, roll about, and



foam at the mouth (Mark 9:20). After testing the man's faith, Jesus rebukes (*ἐπιτιμάω*) the demon and addresses it directly by saying: "You spirit that keeps this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again" (Mark 9:25)! The spirit cries out with a loud voice, convulses the boy, throws him to the ground, and finally departs (Mark 9:26). Jesus' ability to cast out the demon with a simple command demonstrates his power as an exorcist. Moreover, the gospel writer doubly emphasizes Jesus' power by stating that Jesus both casts out the demon and commands it to never enter the boy again (Taylor 279).

A description of Jesus exorcising through a single command is also found in the exorcism of the synagogue demoniac. As previously mentioned, Jesus is said to have commanded the demon to "Be quiet and come out of him" (Mark 1:25)! As usual, Jesus does not rely on the use of a magical formula, invocation, or adjuration to exorcise, thus affirming the power of his word (Taylor 81). If the verbal command is not enough to convince the reader of Jesus' power, the Markan author also includes a description of the audience's reaction. Mark 1:27 states: "They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching – with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him" (Mark 1:27). By including the amazement of the audience into his narrative, the Markan author stresses Jesus' authority (Taylor 81).

A third feature of Markan exorcisms is the immediate expulsion of the demons. In the exorcisms of both the synagogue demoniac and the epileptic boy, the demons respond to Jesus' command without fighting back. The order of the text in Mark also

stresses the immediacy of Jesus' command. For instance, in Mark 1:25, the narrator states that Jesus commands the demon to be quiet and leave its host. In verse 26, the demon immediately obeys and is successfully expelled. Similarly, in the exorcism of the epileptic boy, verse 25 of the text relates Jesus' command to the deaf and mute spirit to come out of the boy. By verse 26, the spirit shrieks and leaves the boy. The placement of the demons' obedience in relation to the command, emphasizes Jesus' ability to successfully exorcise. It is also important to notice the lack of retaliation on the part of the demons. While the demons attempt to shout the identity of Jesus when they encounter him (Mark 1:24, 1:34) they do not put up a fight when he commands them to leave. The demons do not use adjurations, invocations, or any other means to ward off their exorcist. They also exit their host without any indication of *where* they have exited to. The physical manifestations of the demons are also fairly common. In both the synagogue exorcism and the exorcism of the epileptic boy, the demons are described as convulsing their victims, throwing them to the ground, causing them to foam at the mouth, and leaving with a loud voice.

The exorcism of the Syrophenician's daughter is found in Mark 7:24-30. It describes the plea of a Gentile woman who finds Jesus and begs him to heal her possessed daughter. Jesus responds harshly, stating that it is not right for the children's bread to be given to the dogs. Unfazed by his words, the woman insists that even dogs eat the crumbs that have fallen from the table. Impressed with her answer, Jesus performs a long-distance exorcism and states: "For this reason you may go; the demon has left your daughter". The Markan author concludes the narrative by stating that

when the woman returns home, she finds her daughter sitting in bed and the demon gone (Mark 7:30). In the exorcism of the Syrophoenician's daughter, Jesus does not address the demon directly. Yet for the gospel writer, Jesus' ability to exorcise even from a great distance, stresses his power and heightens his authority (Taylor 235).

Thus far, this paper has identified three common features of Markan exorcisms. First, Jesus silences the demons who reveal his true identity. Second, Jesus expels the demons with a simple command. Third, the demons respond to Jesus' command without much resistance. Taken together, the Markan author portrays Jesus as a powerful exorcist, one who is markedly different than his contemporaries. The exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac however, presents many exceptions to the standard, Markan pattern. First, the demons identify Jesus as the Son of the Most High God. Yet surprisingly, Jesus does not rebuke or silence them. Second, the demons adjure Jesus to spare them by invoking the name of God. Unlike the exorcisms of the synagogue demoniac or the epileptic boy, the demons resist Jesus' initial command to "come out of this man" (Mark 5:8)! In other words, even after Jesus explicitly orders the demons to leave, the demons continue to possess their victim. More shockingly, they refuse to leave their host until *after* they have begged for mercy.

Finally, Jesus' use of name magic is the most surprising detail. Throughout the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is portrayed as being powerful enough to cast out demons with a mere word. He does not rely on mechanical formulas, incantations, or physical objects to exorcise. Yet in the case of the Gerasene exorcism, Jesus' initial command seems to fail (Mark 5:8). He then resorts to using name magic before casting out the demons. As a

result, the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac seems to highlight Jesus' limitations as an exorcist, rather than his power. Although it is impossible to give a definitive answer as to *why* Jesus breaks from his usual pattern, it is possible to claim that for the Markan author, these changes do not detract from Jesus' power. Rather than viewing the Gerasene exorcism as proof of Jesus' limitations, the narrator sets up the story in such a way so that even Jesus' ostensible failures are transformed into acts of power. The following sections will examine these so-called failures in greater detail. Moreover, it will attempt to show the ways in which the author uses them to highlight Jesus' superiority over the demons.

### **A Failed Attempt at Name Magic: Jesus as "Son of the Most High God"**

In Mark 5:7, the narrator describes the shocking encounter between Jesus and the demoniac. Upon seeing his exorcist, the demoniac exclaims: "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God" (Mark 5:7a)? The epithet "Son of the Most High God", was used by pagans to refer to the God of Israel and often appears in the Septuagint within a Gentile context (Guelich 279). Some commentators, such as J.C. Du Buisson, assert that the demons make this proclamation because they recognize Jesus as the Messiah (Buisson 46). The early Christian community also held this view and interpreted the demons' words as a Messianic confession (Twelftree 62). Yet in the Old Testament, many people were given similar titles without any claim to Messiahship. For instance, Aaron is referred to as the Holy one of God (Psalm 106:16) and Samson says that he was a 'Holy one of God' from his birth (Judges 16:17). The use of these titles did not mean that either of these individuals were the Messiah. Rather, it simply designated

them as having a special relationship with God (Twelftree 62). It is unclear then, whether the demons were truly aware of Jesus' divine origin or if they simply recognized him as chosen by God. The demons' later attempt to adjure Jesus by the name of God (v.7), also casts doubt on the belief that they were aware of his identity. A more sinister explanation of the demons' outcry was that it was not a Messianic confession, but an aggressive attempt to repel their exorcist through the use of *name magic* (Remus 25).

In the ancient world, names were considered to be significant for a number of reasons. They supposedly revealed the true nature of an individual and were often believed to carry great power. The importance of a name is also well attested in the Jewish tradition:

In the world of the Hebrew Scriptures, a personal name was often thought to indicate something essential about the bearer's identity, origin, birth circumstances, or the divine purpose that the bearer was intended to fulfill (Knowles 27).

Thus, in the book of Genesis, Abram becomes Abraham (Genesis 17:5); Sarai becomes Sarah (Genesis 17:15); and Jacob becomes Israel (Genesis 35:10). In each of these cases, the change in the individual's name symbolized a fundamental change in their identity and in their relationship with God.

Jewish tradition associated name magic with one of its most powerful exorcists, King Solomon. Known for his great wisdom, King Solomon was believed to have special knowledge regarding how to control and expel demons. The *Testament of*

*Solomon* for instance, is a grimoire, a textbook of magic, which claims to be written by the king just shortly before his death (Sparks 733). Although scholars agree that the *Testament* was probably redacted by later Christian writers, it provides deeper insight into early, Jewish conceptions of demonology (Sparks 734). More importantly, it demonstrates the unique way in which King Solomon utilized name magic to control the demons he encountered. According to the grimoire, the archangel Michael visits Solomon and gives him a powerful signet ring (Testament of Solomon 1:6-7). With the ring in his possession, the king is able to summon all manner of demons, both male and female. Unfortunately, while the ring ensures that the demons are present, it does not ensure their obedience.

To ensure that the demons comply with his demands, Solomon forces the demons to reveal their name before giving them their orders. The power of the king's name magic is especially clear when he receives the following response from a demon: "If I tell you his name, I place not only myself in chains, but also the legion of demons under me" (Testament of Solomon 11:5). In one particularly difficult case, the king encounters the demon Asmodeus, who initially refuses to divulge his name. In response to his impudence, Solomon orders that Asmodeus be bound more carefully and then flogged (Testament of Solomon 5:6). Not surprisingly, the demon agrees to obey the king and reveals both his name and function. He states: "I am called renowned Asmodeus. I increase men's evil-doing throughout the world. I plot against the newly-wed: I mar the beauty of maidens and estrange their hearts" (Testament of Solomon 5:7).

By using his ring to bind and coerce them, King Solomon effectively derives key information about the demons. However, it is only *after* he learns their names that he is able to influence their behaviour and put them to work in the Temple of God (Testament of Solomon 5:12).

The use of name magic as an effective tool against demons is also mentioned in several Hellenistic texts. The *Greek Magical Papyri*, for instance, were a series of texts that provided instructions on how to control the gods, evil, illness, and demonic spirits (Twelftree 39). Although many of the papyri date later than the first century and very few of them are from Palestine, their content has remained relatively stable both in terms of time and geography (Twelftree 40). As such, scholars have frequently used the papyri “to illustrate notions held in first-century AD Palestine” (Twelftree 40). Several of these texts include instructions on how to use name magic against demons. Two such papyri include the inscriptions: “I know your name which was received in heaven” (PGM 8:6-7) as well as, “I know you Hermes, who you are and whence you came and which is your city” (PGM 8:13). In both cases, the user is advised to recite their knowledge of the demon’s name and identity. Possessing this knowledge was believed to grant the individual complete control over the spirit, thus making name magic an especially potent tool for exorcists.

Both the Jewish and Hellenistic traditions affirmed the power and significance of names. For each of these communities, name magic functioned on the principle that to know someone’s name, was to know something about their true nature. Once a being’s name was discerned, it could then be used to control or influence their behaviour.

Names were especially important for exorcists and miracle workers, as they were believed to have secret identities which were revealed to them by a divine patron (Ascough 25). If an evil spirit gained knowledge of this name, it would almost certainly grant them control over the exorcist. Conversely, if the exorcist was powerful enough, they too could force a demon to reveal its name, thus giving them complete control over the spirit (Remus 24).

When one considers the power of a name in the ancient world, it seems unlikely that the Gerasene demons were simply making a Messianic confession. Instead, their exclamation suggests an aggressive attempt to use name magic on their exorcist. Thus, by proclaiming Jesus' true identity, the demons "might be seen as warding off his power, countering it with the power inherent in knowing his name" (Remus 25). The inclusion of this detail in the narrative would have been both shocking and embarrassing for several reasons. First, it demonstrates that the demons have knowledge of Jesus' true identity, thus giving them a clear advantage. Moreover, Jesus does not even try to silence them. As previously stated, Jesus' typical pattern has been to rebuke and silence the demons who attempt to reveal his identity. The immediate question therefore, becomes: is Jesus simply unwilling or *unable* to defend himself?

Taken at face value, verse 7 of the narrative suggests that Jesus is the weaker force. Not only has he fallen prey to the demons' magic, but he seems unable (or unwilling) to do anything about it. A closer examination of the text however, reveals the way in which the Markan author uses this detail to highlight rather than diminish, Jesus' authority. In verse 6 of the text, the author states that the demons see Jesus from a



distance and run towards him. When they are in close proximity, they immediately fall at his feet. The Greek word used in this verse is *προσκυνέω* and “denotes prostrating oneself before a person to whom reverence or worship is due, even kissing his feet or the hem of his garment” (Edwards 156). By including such a blatant act of submission in verse 6, the Markan author seems to lessen the impact of the demons’ name magic in verse 7. In including this detail in the narrative, Jesus’ authority is established right at the outset (Pesch 357).

If describing the demons’ prostration were not enough, the narrator also includes the phrase, “*τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί*”. In English, this phrase can be translated in one of two ways, either as: “What have you to do with me...” or “Why do you interfere with me” (Lane 183)? As previously mentioned, the epithet is reminiscent of 1 Kings and was used to hold someone off at a distance (Pesch 357). The demons’ exclamations are “entirely defensive; sensing the identity of a dangerous opponent, the unclean raises its voice to defend itself against him” (Lane 182-183). By including this detail alongside the demons’ identification of Jesus, the author ensures that Jesus is still depicted as being in control. Finally, the *absence* of Jesus’ reaction also seems to highlight his authority. After the demons attempt to use name magic, there is no indication that it has worked. There is no description of Jesus being bound or rebuking the demons for their actions. In fact, the lack of a reaction from Jesus only seems to emphasize just how unaffected and unfazed he is. By verse 9, it is completely apparent that the name magic has failed. Ultimately, it is the demons, and not the “Son of the Most High God” who succumbs to name magic (Pesch 357).

### **An Ironic Invocation: The Demons Adjure Jesus by God**

After identifying Jesus' true identity, the demons follow up their name magic with an adjuration: "I adjure you by God, do not torment me" (Mark 5:7)! In the ancient world, exorcists used adjurations in order to "frighten and coax and entice the demons from their victims" (Wright 97). By invoking the name of a more powerful being or deity, the individual could vicariously gain power over someone else. In other words, to adjure someone was to bind or curse them, and subsequently control their behaviour (Twelftree 61).

Adjurations and invocations were a common feature of Jewish religious life. They often took the form of solemn oaths and can be found in various places in the Old Testament. For example, in 1Kings 22:16 (LXX 3 Kings 22:16), King Ahab adjures the prophet Micaiah to tell the truth regarding a prophecy he received from God. Jesus himself is subject to an adjuration when the religious leaders command him to reveal his identity: "And the high priest said to him, 'I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God'" (Matthew 26:63). Although this verse is from the New Testament, the high priest's adjuration is a reference to Leviticus 5:1 which commands that a witness must testify to the truth when they are publicly adjured.

There are also extra-biblical documents which affirm the power of adjurations. Documents found in Qumran contain lists of apotropaic hymns, prayers, and incantations. They often include a "direct address to demons asking for their identity, formulae of adjurations, invocations in the name of God (including frequent use of the

Tetragrammaton)<sup>3</sup> and threats against the demons” (Morrow 193). One fragment includes only the beginning of an adjuration which states: “I adjure you, O spirit” (Eshel 398). In another scroll from 4Q511, the exorcist invokes the name of YHWH to force the demon’s compliance. If it does not obey, the exorcist remarks that the deity, “will strike you with a [grea]t b[low] to destroy you...And his fury [he will send] against you a powerful angel [to carry out] his [entire comm]and, [without showing] you mercy” (Eshel 399). By invoking the name of a deity more powerful than themselves, the exorcist increases the likelihood of the spirit’s obedience.

In his seminal work, *Antiquities of the Jews*, the prominent Jewish historian, Josephus, recounts the story of an exorcist named Eleazar. His narrative provides insight into how ancient exorcists would have used adjurations to prevent repeat possession. Josephus writes:

I have seen a certain man of my own country, whose name was Eleazar, releasing people that were demoniacal, in the presence of Vespasian and his sons and his captains and the whole multitude of his soldiers. The manner of the cure was this: He put a ring that had a root of one of those sorts mentioned by Solomon to the nostrils of the demoniac, after which he drew out the demon through his nostrils; and when the man fell down, immediately he adjured him to return into him no more, still making mention of Solomon, and reciting the incantations which he composed (*Ant.* 8.2.5).

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<sup>3</sup> The Tetragrammaton is a transliteration of the Hebrew name for God and was often stylized as YHWH (Knowles 33). The name of God was believed to be so holy and powerful that it was never uttered out loud. Its presence in the Qumran scrolls as well as the Greek Magical Papyri affirm the belief that it was a great source of power.

Interestingly, Eleazar does not use an adjuration to directly exorcise. He does not use it to threaten the demon (as modelled in the Qumranic scrolls) or even bind it with a solemn oath. Rather, Eleazar uses the adjuration as a deterrent in order to prevent the demon from returning (Twelftree 35). His actions provide another example of the many ways adjurations were used in the ancient world.

Hellenistic texts such as the Greek Magical Papyri also refer to invocations and adjurations as powerful exorcism tools. Interestingly, some of these papyri even invoke the names of Hebrew and Christian deities rather than pagan ones. Two such papyri, include the phrases, “I adjure you by the God of the Hebrews” (PGM 4:3019) and “Hail spirit of spirit of Jacob; Jesus the Christ, holy spirit...drive out the devil from this person until this unclean demon of Satan shall flee before you...” (PGM 4:1227-48). A more detailed recipe is given in one papyrus which instructs the user to take an unripe olive, along with other plants, and recite certain magical words over them, including the Greek version of the Tetragrammaton (*יהוה*). The user then makes a phylactery out of tin, hangs it on the possessed individual, and adjures the demon in the following way: “I conjure thee in the name of the God of the Hebrews, Jesus, Jahaia etc (Kohler and Blau 305-6). In each of these examples, the user combines their adjuration with an invocation of a more powerful being. By appealing to “Jesus the Christ” or the “God of the Hebrews”, the individual acknowledges that they are unable to perform the exorcism through their own ability, but are dependent upon a higher authority.

The rhetorician, Lucian of Samosata (c.120-180 CE) describes how a Syrian exorcist uses an adjuration to threaten and subsequently cast out a malevolent spirit.

His narrative demonstrates how adjurations were used to control a demon's behaviour and more importantly, the limitations of their power. He writes:

...everyone knows about the Syrian from Palestine, the adept in it, how many he takes in hand who fall down in the light of the moon and roll their eyes and fill their mouths with foam; nevertheless, he restores them to health and sends them away normal in mind...When he stands beside them as they lie there and asks: 'Whence came you into his body?' the patient himself is silent, but the spirit answers...telling how and whence he entered into the man; whereupon, by adjuring the spirit and if it does not obey, threatening him, he drives him out (Twelftree 46).

The Syrian exorcist's adjuration is consistent with the techniques found in the Qumranic scrolls and Greek Magical Papyri. Although it is not explicitly mentioned in the text, it is likely that the adjuration appealed to the name of a higher power, as this was usually the standard practice. The text also implies that the adjuration is used to control the demon's behaviour, as the spirit has the option to either obey or disobey. If they obey, the exorcism is successful; if they do not, the exorcist must resort to alternative methods such as the use of threats. Yet the very fact that the spirit may resist an adjuration suggests that this technique is not always successful. Ironically, in the Gerasene exorcism, it is the demons (and not the exorcist) who discover the limits of this otherwise powerful technique.

Thus far, this essay has established that adjurations were used to bind, control, or influence other beings. They were often used in conjunction with the invocation of a

more powerful deity, usually as a way to scare the spirit into compliance. In Mark 5:7b, the demons attempt to use an adjuration against their exorcist. However, the inclusion of this adjuration is a feature that is only present in the Markan narrative. The Gospel of Matthew removes the dialogue entirely (Matthew 8:29) whereas in the Gospel of Luke, the author dilutes the force of the demons' words (Luke 8:28). Instead of using the Greek word *ὀρκίζω*, which connotes a forceful binding or curse, the Lukan author uses *δέομαι*, which is interpreted as a beg or plea. In doing so, he portrays the demons as clearly adopting a posture of submission and subservience; they immediately recognize Jesus' authority and beg to be spared. The Markan account however, includes a much more embarrassing description of events. By including the demons' adjuration, the Markan author temporarily casts doubt on Jesus' authority as an exorcist. Rather than being immediately submissive to Jesus' presence, the demons take a far more aggressive stance. In layman's terms, their words could be paraphrased as: "In the name of God, go away" (Ascough 55)!

Unlike the demons in the Lukan pericope, the demons in Mark actively challenge Jesus' ability to exorcise them. Their adjuration functions as a threat and is an intentional attempt to bind Jesus as he enters into their space and threatens to get rid of them. Ancient readers would have also found the demons' words highly ironic, as adjurations were typically used by exorcists and not by the spirits themselves (Donnahue and Harrington 165). Thus, they may have interpreted the demons' statement as an attempt to perform a reverse exorcism on Jesus. By using an adjuration against their exorcist, the demons are portrayed as being unusually powerful; not only

are they aware of Jesus' identity (v.7a), but they are audacious enough to try and bind him with a powerful exorcism technique.

If the adjuration were not strange enough, the demons attempt to bolster its power by invoking the name of God (*τὸν θεόν*). There is an obvious sense of irony in the demons' words, as they attempt to bind the very person that they have just identified as the "Son of the Most High God". However, their invocation also highlights their strength and resilience, as they employ the most potent name available to them (Gundry 250). Jewish readers would have immediately grasped the significance of this plea as,

the name of God was (and to this day still is) deemed to be so unutterably holy that pious scribes omitted the necessary vowel markings...as a reminder not to pronounce the word as it was written (Knowles 33).

That being said, one could argue that even the Jewish people did not have access to the true name of God. In Exodus 3:13, Moses asks God to reveal his name. Yet the answer he receives is not necessarily a full admission of the divine name, nor does it mean that Moses has gained any advantage or power. Rather,

the name that God pronounces gives nothing away until God chooses to define it further. It is its own guarantee: 'I am'. Each of God's answers to Moses makes clear that the nature, the identity, and the 'name' of God are self-authenticating, not subject to limitation or control by those who call upon it, despite Moses' fervent wish to do just that (Knowles 34).

In other words, even if God did reveal his true name to Moses and by extension, to the Jewish people, it is still “beyond human manipulation or control” (Knowles 34).

Knowing this, it is unclear whether the demons use the *actual* name of God in their invocation or if they are simply using a well-known formula. Their adjuration is also similar to the one used by the high priests in Matthew 26:63. Here, the priests adjure Jesus by God, but would have almost certainly refrained from speaking the divine name as it was considered too holy. Their ability to invoke God’s name without actually using its proper form, suggests that there were specific formulas which could be used by the general populace. It seems likely then, that the demons in Mark were merely resorting to a common exorcistic formula rather than using the true name of God. Their struggle to bind Jesus in this manner is also consistent with their previous attempts to ward him off using other exorcistic techniques such as name magic.

For the ancient reader, the demons’ ability to confidently use several exorcism techniques against a reputed exorcist would have been highly impressive. However, it may have also raised several troubling questions about Jesus’ identity and the source of his power. In Mark 3:20-21, the teachers of the law accuse Jesus of casting out demons by Beelzebub, the prince of demons. Undeterred by their accusations, Jesus explains that it would be ludicrous for Satan to oppose his own kingdom. In other words, if Jesus himself was possessed by an evil spirit, it would be irrational to drive out other spirits who were part of the same team. However, the Gerasene demons cast doubt on the validity of Jesus’ theory as they are from an opposing kingdom, and yet have the ability to invoke the name of God. By including such a scandalous detail, the Markan author



sets up a tense situation in which Jesus' identity is brought into question. If he succumbs to the invocation, Jesus, by his own admission, would prove that his authority is not from God.

Invocations in the ancient world were only effective in so far as they appealed to a being with *greater* authority. By invoking the name of God, the demons hoped to repel Jesus by appealing to a being with the greatest possible power. While the question of whether the demons invoke the true name of God is open to debate, for the gospel writer, this detail is unimportant. If the demons are simply resorting to a common exorcistic formula as they have been doing through their use of name magic and an adjuration, then Jesus has successfully resisted three consecutive attempts at repulsion. If, however, the demons do use the real name of God, then Jesus is still portrayed as the more powerful figure as he actively resists the name an extremely powerful deity. Why does Jesus remain completely unaffected? William Lane provides one theory: [the demon] "invokes God's protection, but the adjuration is without force, for Jesus is the Son of God" (Lane 184). Although it is unclear whether the demons grasp the full extent of Jesus' identity, for the Markan author, it is irrelevant. The very fact that Jesus can resist an adjuration by God (either as a formula or as the true name itself) points to the possibility that he himself may be divine (Lane 184).

The narrator emphasizes Jesus' authority as an exorcist, not only by his resistance to the adjuration/invocation, but also through the demons' plea for mercy. Taken at face value, the demons only seem to fear punishment or banishment from their home (Guelich 279). However, in verse 7b, the demons beg Jesus to not torture (*βασανίζω*)

them. The Greek word that is used here is also found in Revelation 20:10, which speaks of the final judgment and torment of the devil. The demons' plea therefore, may have eschatological connections. D.E. Nineham supports this position and argues that: "The demon realizes that with the coming of Jesus the eschatological event has begun, and begs Jesus to spare him the corresponding punishment" (Nineham 153). This stance is also supported by the Matthean pericope, in which the demons exclaim: "Have you come here to torment us before the time" (Matthew 8:29)? Their proclamation alludes to an appointed period of judgment, and their attempt to avoid torment until it comes to pass (Donahue and Harington, 165). Thus, although the demons attempt to adjure Jesus by the name of God, the Markan author makes it clear that it is an act of submission (Edwards 156). "By adjuring Jesus not to torment him the demon seems to imply once again his recognition of Jesus' power; Jesus has the power to torment him" (Pesch 357-358).

### **Act of Strength or Moment of Weakness? Jesus Resorts to Name Magic**

As this essay has already established, the use of name magic was a common exorcism technique in the ancient world. By asking a demon for its name, "the exorcist is in a position to find out on what terms the spirit will depart, and to bargain with him" (Derrett 288). While an exorcist using name magic was not unusual, Jesus' reliance on it would have been surprising. In every one of his other exorcisms, Jesus casts out the demons with a word and they immediately obey him. It is precisely because he does *not* rely on common exorcism methods, that Jesus is believed to possess greater authority. It was probably shocking for ancient readers to find such an embarrassing

detail in the Markan narrative, as it would put Jesus on the same level as other, weaker exorcists.

In the first century, exorcists were considered especially powerful if they could cast out demons through “their own personal force which was thought to be respected and feared by the demons” (Twelftree 50). There are several accounts of Jewish exorcists who employ their “personal force” to successfully drive out demons. In the pseudepigraphal book of Jubilees, Noah pleads with God to take action against the demons who lead his sons astray. He asks for protection from the evil spirits by praying:

...And as for these spirits which are now alive, imprison them and hold them securely in the place of punishment, and let them not bring destruction on the sons of thy servant, my God; for these are malignant, and created in order to destroy” (Jubilees 10:5-6).

Noah’s intercession is successful and as a result, God commands his angels to imprison nine-tenths of the demons (Jubilees 10:7-9). God also commands his angels to teach Noah certain remedies which will ward off the remainder of the spirits. However, these remedies are given for the benefit of Noah’s sons who would “not live upright lives, nor even try to do what is right” (Jubilees 10:10). While Noah is able to subjugate nine tenths of the evil spirits with a simple prayer, his sons must rely on herbs and other physical remedies. Noah’s use of prayer, as opposed to his sons’ reliance on tangible objects, renders him the more powerful exorcist (Twelftree 31).

The prominent rabbi Hanina ben Dosa, is another example of an exorcist who drove away demons solely through the use of prayer and his own personal force (Twelftree 50). He lived in Galilee during the first century and was a pupil of the famous Rabbi, Johanan ben Zakkai (Twelftree 50). Hanina ben Dosa was known for his wisdom, piety, and miracle working. His prayers were so powerful that they were believed to heal the sick and even produce rainfall. On one occasion, his prayer is even used as an apotropaic device against an evil spirit. According to the narrative, Hanina ben Dosa is walking outside when he suddenly encounters Agrath, the Queen of Demons. Agrath threatens the miracle worker and tells him: "Had they not made an announcement concerning you in heaven, 'Take heed of Hanina and his learning', I would have put you in danger" (Twelftree 50). Unfazed by the demon's intimidation, Hanina ben Dosa binds Agrath solely by using his good reputation. He states: "If I am of account in heaven, I order you never to pass through settled regions" (Twelftree 50). The command is immediately effective and forces Agrath to plead for leniency. Hanina ben Dosa agrees to Agrath's request and allows her to roam freely on Wednesdays and the Sabbath (Twelftree 50). Unlike other exorcists of the time who relied on formulas, incantations, or tangible remedies, Hanina ben Dosa is able to restrict the Queen of Demons solely through a verbal command, thus depicting him as an especially powerful exorcist.

The Greek orator Apollonius of Tyana (c.15-100 CE) was a contemporary of Jesus and also renowned for his exorcistic abilities. The philosopher Flavius Philostratus, documents some of Apollonius' most famous exorcisms in his biography, *The Life of*

*Apollonius of Tyana* (Remus 27). In one particular account, Apollonius is teaching a large crowd when he is suddenly interrupted by a youth who displays erratic behaviour. The young boy was, “without knowing it, possessed by a devil; for he would laugh at things that no one else laughed at, and then he would fall to weeping for no reason at all, and he would talk and sing to himself” (*Life* 4:20). Apollonius quickly discerns the malevolent source of the boy’s actions and proceeds to exorcise the demon. He addresses the spirit directly and “with anger, as a master might a shifty, rascally, and shameless slave and so on, and he ordered him to quit the young man and show by a visible sign that he had done so” (*Life* 4:20). As proof of its departure, the spirit knocks over a statue in the king’s portico. Apollonius’ ability to successfully exorcise the demon with a simple command leaves the crowd in awe, and sets him apart as a powerful exorcist (Twelftree 48).

As the lives of Noah, Hanina ben Dosa, and Apollonius of Tyana demonstrate, an exorcist’s methods directly affected the perception of their authority. Exorcists who used formulae, physical objects, or other tangible remedies were believed to be legitimate, but less powerful than those who used simple, verbal commands. For the most part, the Markan author depicts Jesus as an exorcist who casts out demons with a mere word, without the use of any external formula. The sole exception to this trend is found in the Gerasene narrative. For the first time in any of the Gospels, Jesus asks the demon: “What is your name” (Mark 5:9a)? His question is an obvious use of name magic and for the ancient reader, would have suggested a limitation of his power.

Considering that Jesus was supposed to be more powerful than the average exorcist, it is difficult to understand why the narrator would include a detail that would threaten his authority as an exorcist. R.T. France suggests that Jesus' identification of Legion was never meant as an exorcism formula (France 229). He argues that because Jesus does not use name magic anywhere else in the Gospel (or in any of the Synoptics for that matter), it is unlikely that he would need it to exorcise the Gerasene demons (France 229). Instead, he maintains that the purpose of Jesus' question is not to gain power over the demons, but to "provide a graphic indication of the multiple possession involved in this case, which in turn will explain the following incident with the pigs..." (France 229). France's assessment that Jesus' name magic is solely a literary device seems only partially accurate. The use of name magic does set up the narrative so as to reveal the strength of the demonic host. However, when one considers the prevalence of name magic in the first century, it seems unlikely that ancient readers would have simply glazed over Jesus' words without interpreting them as an apotropaic formula.

In the second half of verse 9, the demon responds to Jesus' name magic by stating: "My name is Legion; for we are many" (Mark 5:9b). As stated earlier in this essay, the word "Legion" is a Romanization of the Latin word, *legio*. It refers to a military unit consisting of anywhere between 1000-6000 soldiers (Donahue and Harington 166). For instance, Syrian incantation bowls were used to ward off "legions of demons" and in Matthew 26:53, Jesus states that he is able to receive over twelve legions of angels to protect him (Derrett 288). The use of the name "Legion" suggests

that the demoniac was possessed by a great number of spirits, who were perhaps controlled by one main host (Derrett 288).

The sheer strength of the demonic army is highlighted when one examines the pronouns in the text. In the beginning of the narrative (v.1-8), the author refers to the unclean spirit in the singular and uses pronouns such as “I” (v. 7), “he” (v.7), and “him” (v.8). By verse 9 however, the author switches to using plural pronouns such as “us” (v. 12) and “them” (v.13). The author’s decision to switch pronouns alerts the reader to a shocking plot twist; Jesus is no longer up against just *one* demon, but a whole army of them. Given this information, it is no wonder that “no one has been able to bind or tame the demoniac—he has the strength of over six thousand unclean spirits” (Gundry 251). Seen from this angle, it is evident that the Markan author has heightened the drama of the narrative and wishes to “impress on his audience how many unclean spirits Jesus is about to exorcise” (Gundry 251).

Although the demons answer Jesus’ question and identify themselves as Legion, it is difficult to recognize their motives. One interpretation suggests that Jesus was actually addressing the demoniac, rather than the demons themselves (Lane 185). Thus, the name “Legion” represents the pitiful state of the demoniac who, “could not sever himself even in thought from the beings who controlled him: he seemed to himself to be a whole host of them: the sense of his own individuality was lost” (Du Buisson 46-47). This explanation is not entirely improbable as verse 15 describes the man as being in his right mind once he is delivered. However, when one considers the demons’ numerous attempts to use exorcism formulas, including their attempt at name magic, it seems

unlikely that Jesus would turn his attention to the possessed man rather than the opponent who is actively trying to harm him. Furthermore, verse 7 makes it abundantly clear that it is the demon, and not the demoniac, who addresses Jesus. It would be odd therefore, if Jesus responded to the possessed man rather than the demons who are presently speaking to him.

A second interpretation suggests that the demons do not actually give up their name, but are actively trying to evade Jesus' question. Rather than give up the source of their power, the demons offer Jesus their title rather than their true name (Lane 185). The title may have functioned as a threat and a blatant attempt to ward off their exorcist (Derrett 288). By revealing that they are many, the demons seem to boast about their numbers and strength, perhaps as a way to warn Jesus that he may not be able to cast them out (Derrett 288). The demons' statement that "we are many", supports the idea that "Legion" is at least a partial threat. Up till now, the demons have consistently tried to repel Jesus through any means possible, whether through name magic, an adjuration, or an invocation of God. Therefore, it is conceivable that they would use their numbers as a last-ditch effort to prevent expulsion. Yet to say that the demons do not reveal *anything* about their name would be unconvincing, as they follow up their statement by pleading not to be sent out of the country. Regardless of whether or not they have revealed their true name, the demons' groveling insinuates that they have indeed offered up crucial information.

While it is impossible to know for sure, this essay favours both the "threat" and "truth" interpretations. The phrase "we are many" is not part of the demons' name, and



serves no other purpose other than to perhaps showcase their strength and ward off the exorcist. However, by verse 10, the demons beg Jesus to not be sent out of the area. Indeed, “the adverbial πολλά, ‘much urgently’, exalts the figure of Jesus by portraying the demoniac as reduced from bold adjuration to groveling supplication (Gundry 251). The demons’ desperate supplication insinuates that the name magic of verse 9 is effective. Jesus has successfully forced the demons to reveal their name (albeit, with a threat) and is now ready to expel them.

At first glance, Jesus’ use of name magic is both puzzling and embarrassing. Since ancient exorcists were deemed powerful if they did not resort to mechanical formulas, Jesus’ use of a common exorcistic technique would have been interpreted as a sign of weakness. However, the Markan author attempts to reconcile this uncomfortable detail by simultaneously describing the demons’ subservience to Jesus. Up until this point, Jesus has successfully resisted the demons’ name magic, adjuration, and an invocation of God. Now, he is able to turn the tables on his opponents by demanding that they reveal their name. Indeed, “the demons have to submit to him, even to the extent of giving him the information which will lead to their expulsion” (Hooker 143). By begging Jesus not to send them out of the area, the demons resign themselves to their defeat and turn their attention to negotiating the terms of their expulsion (Gundry 251). Even though the author includes Jesus’ use of name magic, “he immediately lets it be followed by the plea for lenience, which naturally is placed on the lips of the inferior power, i.e. the demon” (Pesch 363). Jesus’ use of name magic can also be overlooked when one considers the sheer number of demons he has to exorcise, “and therefore why

this is turning out to be a case more difficult than those that Jesus has dealt with before” (Gundry 251). By having the demons identify themselves as “Legion”, the Markan narrator emphasizes the difficulty of this particular exorcism, and by extension, Jesus’ authority over a multitude of unclean spirits.

### Final Remarks

The exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac is one of the most shocking narratives in the New Testament, as it describes a violent struggle between Jesus and an entire horde of demons. The Markan version of events is especially scandalous as it includes details that both Luke and Matthew redacted out of the story.<sup>4</sup> At first glance, the demons’ use of name magic and their invocation of God seem to cast him Jesus a negative light. Not only do the demons refuse to leave their host, they use every trick they can to ward off their exorcist. However, without these details, the reader would remain unaware of the demons’ true strength. Had Jesus expelled just one demon who did not fight back and who immediately obeyed his command, the exorcism would not have been as impressive. This is not to say the Markan author has embellished the story simply for

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<sup>4</sup> There are numerous differences in the Matthean and Lukan pericopes. For instance, the Matthean account states that there were two demoniacs instead of one (8:28), whereas Luke simply states that the man had demons (8:27). In Matthew, the exorcism occurs in the country of the Gadarenes (8:28) whereas Luke retains Gerasa (8:26). All three synoptics affirm that the demons cry out when they see Jesus (Matthew 8:29, Luke 8:28). However, only Luke and Mark state that the demons actually fall before their exorcist (Luke 8:28, Mark 5:6). Mark heightens the demons’ submission even further by stating that they “bow down” before Jesus (5:6). The demons in Matthew address Jesus as “Son of God” (8:29). In Luke, just as in Mark, the demons call Jesus the “Son of the Most High God” (8:28). Luke changes the demons’ adjuration to a plea (8:28), and in doing so, removes the need for an invocation of God. Matthew, however, removes both the adjuration and the invocation of God entirely (Matthew 8:29). In both Mark and Luke, Jesus asks the demons for their name, and the demons respond with ‘Legion’ (Luke 8:30, Mark 5:9). Matthew removes Jesus’ use of name magic and by extension, the demons’ identity. Luke and Matthew both tie the Gerasene exorcism with the eschaton. In Matthew, the demons ask Jesus if he will torture them “before the time” (8:29), whereas in Luke, the demons beg not to be cast into the abyss—the place of eternal judgement (8:31). Despite their differences, all three authors note the transference of the demons into a herd of swine, who subsequently rush down a steep bank and perish in the water (Mark 5:13, Luke 8:33, Matthew 8:32).

the sake of making it more exciting. In fact, this essay has shown that in most cases, Markan exorcisms occur relatively quickly and without much fuss. In the Gerasene exorcism however, the narrator seems to challenge the validity of Jesus's authority, only to reaffirm it by the end of the narrative. By providing such gruesome, violent, and even embarrassing details, the Markan author heightens the drama of the story and demonstrates that Jesus has triumphed over a particularly formidable enemy. After all, "the greater the difficulty, the larger the success" (Gundry 250). Ultimately, the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac only strengthens the broader message of the Gospel of Mark. Jesus' miracles, including his exorcisms, are not merely entertaining stories; they are tangible demonstrations that for Mark, "the reign of Satan is being dismantled and that the reign of God is at hand" (Latourelle 284).

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