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Literary Features of Mark’s Gospel

Mark’s Gospel not only conveys meaning through the use of language on its most basic level, but it also tells a story in narrative form and conveys meaning through the development of its characters and plot. As such, it has literary features, and these features must be noted and understood. After all, when pastors preach pericopes from, or teachers teach given stories or incidents from, a given Gospel, they are taking only a slice of a very large pie. Each textual unit is set within the larger framework of a complete story with characters and plot, the story of that Gospel. Therefore, as each unit is interpreted and then preached or taught, its meaning (and, therefore, its meaning for God’s people) emerges as it is considered within its larger context (the narrative of the entire Gospel), even as individual words derive their meanings only from their larger contexts. For this reason, the approach taken in this commentary is not only grammatical/linguistic, but it is also literary, seeking to read the Gospel of Mark as a realistic narrative and to interpret it from that point of view.

Characteristics of the Gospel of Mark as Narrative

When Mark’s Gospel is read as story or narrative, it is in some ways similar to, e.g., the Gospel of Matthew, but it can and must be seen to differ quite radically from Matthew’s Gospel as well. This is apparent especially when one looks at the characteristics of the main characters and of the plot or story line.

Characteristics of the Chief Characters

As in each of the four Gospels, a number of “characters” occur in the Gospel of Mark. As in Matthew, our Lord Jesus Christ, his disciples, and his enemies

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1 The first portions of this section (“Characteristics of the Gospel of Mark as Narrative,” “Outline,” and “The Story”) are adapted from James W. Voelz, “Preaching Mark,” Concordia Pulpit Resources 16/1 (November 27, 2005–February 26, 2006): 3–9. For a discussion of the appropriateness of understanding Mark as a literary work in its own right, see excursus 3, “Literary Assumptions regarding Mark’s Gospel,” below in the introduction.

2 In this it differs from most historical-critical approaches, or even from what is often put forward as the “traditional” approach of harmonizing the Gospels, both of which seek to reconstruct “what really happened” behind the narrative or story and to use that reconstruction as a sort of “Fifth Gospel” that provides the basis upon which proclamation takes place. The church has always valued each Gospel individually; it may be noted that the earliest larger NT manuscripts contain four, and only four, Gospels. The fourfold nature of the Gospel witness is, therefore, enshrined in our early copies of Gospel texts—and the church has thoroughly rejected any notion of another version of the story of Jesus, whether that be in an individual writing, such as the Gospel of Thomas, or a composite production, such as the Diatessaron of Tatian. Readers of this commentary are, therefore, encouraged to study and to preach or teach the Gospel of Mark as the Word of the Holy Spirit to the church through St. Mark, rather than as one among several Gospels that provide an entrée to the life of Jesus, which is seen as the “real” object of interpretation and application. The Spirit has given us four portrayals of the life of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and each one must be respected as the means of grace that it is.
are all key, but unlike Matthew, the so-called “minor characters” are also quite important. Mark is, in many ways, different from Matthew in his character portrayals. Indeed, he presents a picture unique among the Gospels, and it is important not simply to assimilate his sometimes disturbing depictions to the more familiar ones of the other writers.

**Jesus Christ**

In the Gospel of Mark, there are at least six specific ways in which Jesus is portrayed:

1. **A man of authority**: The teaching authority of Jesus in Mark is tremendous, a point confirmed by the reaction of the crowd at the conclusion of his teaching in Capernaum, in which he is also described as exuding authority as he taught, and not as the scribes (1:22). In Mark, though, this teaching is also linked to exorcism, and his command over unclean spirits is described in terms of teaching (1:27). His personal authority is such that Peter, Andrew (1:16–18), James, and John (1:19–20) all follow him from fishing, at his simple command. (Note how the scene in 1:16–20 is stark and lacking in causal explanation.)

2. **A man of power**: In Mark, more than in any other Synoptic, Jesus is extremely powerful. He has power over disease (1:34; 5:27–29), and that in such a way that as many as even touched the hem of his garment were healed (6:56; cf. 5:28). He has power over nature, with the stilling of the storm (4:39) and the multiplication of loaves and fish (for five thousand men in 6:33–44 and for four thousand in 8:1–10). Also, and perhaps especially, he has power over demonic spirits (1:24–26, 34; 5:1–20; 7:24–30). This leads to the next point:

3. **Someone to be feared**: Jesus is a man to be feared, especially in the first half of the Gospel. In his first miracle in Capernaum, he exorcises an unclean spirit, who cries out, “Have you come to destroy us?” (1:24). Later, the townspeople fear him after he frees the Gerasene/Gergesene man from his demonic possession (5:15, 17), and even the disciples “became greatly afraid” (4:41) after the stilling of the storm (not “amazed,” as in Matthew [8:27]), wondering who this authoritative one is, that even the wind and the sea obey him.

4. **Someone who is divine**: Jesus is clearly portrayed as divine in Mark, though in some ways less so than in Matthew. The unclean spirits/demons call him “the Holy One of God” (1:24) and “Son of God the Most High” (5:7), and they do a much better job of recognizing him than do human beings. The first human person to ascribe divinity to him is the centurion at the cross (15:39), and this attestation seems to form a bookend, as it were, with God the Father’s attestation of him as his Son at the Baptism (1:11), an attestation confirmed in the center of the story on the mount of transfiguration (9:7) after the first pas-

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3 The Greek construction is ὡς ἐξουσίαν ἔχων, in which ὡς plus a participle denotes the subjective impression either conveyed by an action or under which an action is taken (cf. Acts 27:30). See Smyth, § 2086.

4 Peter does not acclaim Jesus to be the Son of the living God at Caesarea Philippi in Mark’s account (8:29), whereas he does in Matthew (16:16).
sion prediction (8:31). Critical also is the first verse of the Gospel, specifically, whether or not the words “Son of God” are to be read at the end of 1:1. If they are—and one can well argue that they are to be included—then the “narrator” gives his attestation of Jesus’ divinity as a kind of overarching declaration before the story begins. The precise content of the term “Son of God” may be open to question, but Larry Hurtado’s massive study on the divinity of Christ in earliest Christianity, *Lord Jesus Christ*, demonstrates conclusively that it is not possible to see the phrase as meaning something as weak as “a divine man.”

5. **Someone who is fully human:** As in no other Gospel, Jesus is portrayed as thoroughly human in Mark. He becomes angry when the Jewish leaders do not accept his dealings with the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath (3:5; cf. Lk 6:10). He does not know who touched his garment after the woman does so (5:30–33). He is not able to do any miracle in Nazareth because of the people’s unbelief (6:5; cf. Mt 13:58). He moans and sighs (Mk 7:34; 8:12). And, perhaps most strikingly, it seems to take him two “tries” to heal a blind man (8:23–25) in a passage unique to Mark. The very human picture of Jesus in Mark must always be recognized and ought never to be underplayed or erased.

6. **Someone who is odd:** There is no doubt that, similar to the previous point, Mark portrays Jesus as quite a strange individual, someone who, at the very least, may be called idiosyncratic. He berates the man he has healed of leprosy and throws him out (1:43). Then, after he tells the healed man not to tell what had happened and the man does, he goes out into the desert to escape from the crowds that follow (1:45), even though he has professed that he has come to preach (1:38). When Jesus walks on the water to come to the disciples, Mark records that “he was actually desiring to pass by/outstrip/elude them” (6:48) as they looked on. Finally, after the entry into Jerusalem, Jesus curses the barren fig tree, even though, as Mark says, it was not the season for figs (11:12–14).

But there is one other way in which Jesus is seen as odd, a way that may be said to characterize the Second Gospel. Jesus is seen to be spirit-possessed (3:22), if not crazy (3:21). This may have been due to his propensity to interact and even converse with demonic spirits (see 1:24–25, 34; 3:11–12 [also 3:15]), but it may also reflect the circumstances surrounding his Baptism, in which, according to the best reading, the Spirit descends “into”/ἐἰς him (1:10) and then hurls him out into the desert (1:12). No wonder his relatives and family come to take him away (3:21, 31)!

**Disciples**

Mark’s depiction of the disciples, especially the Twelve, is disturbing. There are, to be sure, some positives. These men do follow Jesus obediently, especially early on (1:18, 20), and they are given insight (4:11: “to you is [already] given

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5  We may also note that Jesus clearly has extraordinary powers of knowledge in Mark, though these may not always need to reflect divinity as such.

6  Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*, 287–90.
the mystery of the reign and rule of God”) and explanations (4:34). Indeed, they do follow him, up until they flee. But, in general, they are portrayed in extremely negative terms. They are greatly afraid and do not understand who he is after the stilling of the storm (4:41), even though Jesus has just given them the mystery of the kingdom of God (4:11, 34). They are terrified when they see him walking on the water (6:50). Most starkly, they are completely lacking in understanding of even what seems to be the most obvious truths later in Jesus’ ministry. They wonder, e.g., where one could get bread to feed four thousand (8:4) after five thousand have been miraculously fed (6:41–44). Even worse, they are totally ignorant of the point of Jesus’ warning concerning the leaven of the Pharisees, which follows immediately (8:15–16), so much so that Jesus excoriates them for their lack of understanding, implicitly comparing them to the so-called “outsiders” (τοῖς ἐξω), who do not know about the kingdom, as he says: “Although you have eyes, do you not see, and although you have ears, do you not hear?” (8:18; cf. 4:11b–12). In fact, he wonders aloud whether their hearts are now hardened (8:17b; cf. 6:52). Some time later, they do not understand his (second) passion prediction and are afraid to ask him about it (9:32; cf. Mt 17:23). Finally, all of them flee (Mk 14:50), and Peter, who follows furtively, denies him (14:66–72). Because of this portrayal, it is impossible to see the disciples in general, and the Twelve in particular, as models of discipleship in Mark.

Minor Characters

All the Gospels have so-called “minor characters,” those who are not major parts of the plot but are noticeable in the story. In Mark, however, they stand out, largely because they are portrayed positively and so provide a foil for the portrayal of the closest followers of the Lord. Especially noteworthy are Jairus (5:22–24, 35–43); the woman with the issue of blood (5:25–34); the Syro-Phoenician woman (7:24–30); the father of the demon-possessed boy (9:17–27); the widow who gave her “mite” (12:41–44); the woman who anointed Jesus with costly ointment (14:3–9); the centurion at the cross (15:39); and Joseph of Arimathea (15:42–46).

These minor characters evidence a proper understanding of, and attitude toward, the Lord. Consequently they are much better models of discipleship than are the more formal disciples of Jesus.

Enemies

As do all of the Synoptics, Mark portrays Jesus’ enemies negatively. Matthew is in many ways the most negative, especially toward the Jewish
leadership. Luke tends to be more positive, but open conflict is more prominent in Mark, and that from many sides. First, the leadership of the Jews arrays itself in a deadly way against Jesus early in the story: it seeks to “destroy” (ἀπόλλυμι) him (3:6). Second, the demonic spiritual forces are marshaled against him. They recognize him for who he is (1:24; 3:11–12) and are his first antagonists (1:23–24, 34, 39; 3:11). Third, his family also thinks negatively of him (3:21) and seeks to act to control his actions (3:21; 3:31–35). Finally, one might even suggest that Jesus’ disciples become his enemies, as they do not aid the carrying out of his mission (see “Disciples,” above in this subsection).

Characteristics of the Plot

As Mark presents the story of Jesus, a number of features of narrative plot emerge, most of which are unique to the Second Gospel. It is important not to read Mark through the lens of the other Gospels, which are often more comfortable to encounter.

1. There is no chronology early in the story. It is striking that the early chapters of Mark are generally devoid of time indicators. No overall time frame is presented, as one finds in Lk 2:2 or 3:1. Furthermore, stories are often simply strung together, usually with καί, “and,” with a verb of motion, e.g., 1:21: καὶ εἰσπορεύονται, “and they enter.” See also 1:16, 39, 40; 2:18, 23; 3:1. This seems to correspond to the observation of Papias that what Mark wrote was οὐ … τὰξει, “not … in order.”

2. There is a strong sense of urgency, especially early in the story. It is often noticed that Mark makes frequent use of the adverb εὐθύς, “immediately,” to describe Jesus’ actions, especially at the beginning of his Gospel. This gives the impression that Jesus is hurrying breathlessly from one place to another as he conducts his ministry. But other words and descriptions give this impression as well—e.g., Jesus’ statement in 1:38: ἄγωμεν ἀλλαχοῦ …, ἵνα καὶ εἰς τοῦτο γὰρ ἐξῆλθον, “Let us go elsewhere … in order that there too I may preach. For, for this I have come/gone out.” It may be noted that εὐθύς, “immediately,” retreats significantly in the middle of the Gospel but emerges in a striking way during Passion Week.

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8 Matthew records them asking specifically for a guard to seal Jesus’ tomb (Mt 27:62–66) and plotting with the guards to explain the empty tomb as the result of theft by the disciples (Mt 28:11–15).
11 See, e.g., 1:10, 12, 18, 20, 21, 23, 28, 29, 42. An exhaustive study of the use of this vocable in Mark is contained in the PhD dissertation of Daniel E. Paavola, “Straight Away: The Meaning and Literary Function of εὐθύς/εὐθέως in the Gospel of Mark.”
12 Paavola notes that this adverb is used only eight times in chapters 7–11 (“Straight Away,” 7), is missing from 11:4–14:42, fully twenty-three percent of the Gospel (pp. 8–9), but recurs in 14:43; 14:45; 14:72; and 15:1, during the betrayal, denial, and trial of Jesus (p. 9).
Mark 5:1–20

Jesus Encounters the Gergesene Demoniac

This pericope represents Jesus’ first move into Gentile country and his first dealing with non-Jews in Mark’s Gospel. It is a detailed and involved story similar to others in this Gospel. While Semitic characteristics in the Greek remain (especially lack of express subjects), Hellenic features, appropriate for a Gentile setting, also come into prominence. The beginning and the end of the story are especially important, though the central section rivets any receptor’s attention.

Text

5 1 καὶ ἦλθον εἰς τὸ πέραν τῆς θαλάσσης εἰς τὴν χώραν τῶν [Γέργεσσιν]. 2 καὶ ἐξελθόντος αὐτοῦ ἐκ τοῦ πλοίου εὐθὺς ὑπήνησεν αὐτῷ ἐκ τῶν μνημείων ἄνθρωπος ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθόριστο, 3 ὥς τὴν κατοικίαν εἶχεν ἐν τοῖς μνήμησις, καὶ οὐδὲ ἀλάσει οὐκέτι οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο αὐτὸν δῆσαι ὑπὸ τοῦ αὐτῶν πολλάκις πέδαις καὶ ἀλάσειν δεδέσθαι καὶ διεστάθαι ύπ’ αὐτοῦ τὰς ἀλάσεις καὶ τὰς πέδας συντετρίθηκαι, καὶ οὐδεὶς ἂν χειρὶ αὐτὸν δαμάσῃ. 4 καὶ διὰ παντὸς νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας ἐν τοῖς μνήμησις καὶ ἐν τοῖς ὀρεσίν ἢν κράζων και κατακόπτων ἑαυτὸν λίθοις. 5 καὶ ἱδὼν τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἀπὸ μακρόθεν ἔδραμεν καὶ προσεκύνησεν [αὐτόν]. 6 καὶ κράζας φωνῆς μεγάλης λέγει· τί ἐμοί καὶ σοι, Ἰησοῦ, ἐμεῖς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ; οὐκιώσε σὲ τὸν θεόν, μή με βασανίσῃς. 7 ἐλεγεν γὰρ αὐτῷ· ἐξελθεὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ ἀκάθαρτον ἐκ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. 8 καὶ ἔπηρον αὐτόν· τί ὄνομα σοι; καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ· ὁ γιατὶ ὄνομα μοι [ἔστιν], ὅτι πολλοὶ ἔσμεν. 9 καὶ παρεκάλεσεν αὐτὸν πολλά ἢν μὴ αὐτὸν ἀποστείλῃ ἐξοι ἡ χώρας. 10 ἵνα δέ εκεῖ πρὸς τὸ ὅριον ὑπὸ χοίρων μεγάλη βοσκομεθῇ. 11 καὶ παρεκάλεσαν αὐτὸν λέγοντες· πέμψων ἡμᾶς εἰς τοὺς χοῖρους, ἢν εἰς αὐτοὺς εἰσέλθωμεν. 12 καὶ ἐπέτρεψαν αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἐξελθόντα τὰ πνεύματα τὰ ἀκάθαρτα εἰσῆλθον εἰς τοὺς χοῖρους, καὶ ὠρμάσεν ἡ ἀγέλη κατὰ τὸν κήπον τοῦ τῆς θάλασσας. 13 ἔπεσεν ἐν τῇ ἀρχῇ τοῦ ποταμοῦ ἐπὶ τὸν τοὺς σύλλησεν, ἢν ὡς σιδηρία, καὶ ἐπνίγθη ἐν τῇ θαλάσσῃ. 14 καὶ οἱ βοσκοντες ἀνήλθαν παρεῖς τὴν χώραν εἰς τὴν πόλιν καὶ εἰς τοὺς ἄγρους· καὶ ἦλθον ἵδειν τί ἐστιν τὸ γεγονός, καὶ ἔρχονται πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ ἀπερωτοῦσιν τὸν ἀρχιμνήμονα καθεχόμενον καθαρισθέντα καὶ σωφρονοῦντα, τὸν ἐσχήκοτα τὸν λεγόνα, καὶ ἐφοβήθησαν. 15 καὶ διηγήσατο αὐτοῖς τὶς ἐγένετο τὸ ἀκάθαρτον καὶ ποῖς ἤλθεν ἐπὶ τοὺς κηρυχόντας καὶ περί τῶν χοίρων. 16 καὶ ἦρξαντο παρακαλεῖν αὐτὸν ἀπεθανεῖν ἀπὸ τῶν ὀρίων αὐτῶν. 17 καὶ ἐμβαίνοντος αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸ πλοῖον παρεκάλεσεν αὐτὸν ὁ δαιμονιζόμενος ἢν µετ’ αὐτοῦ ἢ. 18 καὶ οὐκ ἀφήκεν αὐτὸν, ἀλλὰ λέγει αὐτῷ· ὑπαγε, παρακλεῖν εἰς τὸν ὄρον σοι πρὸς τοὺς σοὺς καὶ ἀπάγγειλον αὐτοῖς ὅσα ὁ κύριός σοι πεποίηκεν καὶ ἤλεγχεν σε. 19 καὶ ἀπῆλθεν καὶ ἠρέτο κηρύσσειν ἐν τῇ Δεσποτόλει ὅσα ἐποίησεν αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, καὶ πάντες ἔθαυμαζον.

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1 See “Features for Literary Effect” in “Linguistic Essentials in This Pericope.”
Jesus Encounters the Gergesene Demoniac

**Translation**

5 And they went unto the far side of the lake/sea into the land of the Gergesenes. 2 And, after had he come out of the boat, immediately/εὐθύς a man in an unclean spirit confronted him out of the tombs, 3 who/he had his dwelling in/among the tombs/monuments, and no one was any longer able to bind him, even with chains, 4 on account of the fact that this was often the condition: he was bound with leg irons/fetters/shackles and chains, and the chains were torn asunder by him, and his leg irons/fetters/shackles were crushed, and no one was ever strong enough to subdue him. 5 And throughout each night and day, in/among the tombs/monuments and in/among the mountains, he was crying out and gashing himself with stones. 6 And upon seeing Jesus from afar, he ran and knelt before him. 7 And upon yelling in a loud voice, he says, “Why are you meddling in my affairs, Jesus, Son of God the Most High? I adjure you by God, do not torture me.” 8 He was saying to him, “Come out of the man, unclean spirit!” you know/γάρ. 9 And he proceeded to question him, “What is your name?” And he says to him, “Legion is my name, for we are many.” 10 And he began to plead with him a lot, that he not send them (with a commission) out of the area.

11 And there was there at the mountain a great herd of pigs, grazing. 12 And they pleaded with him, saying, “Send us into the swine, in order that we may enter into them.” 13 And he gave them permission. And after the unclean spirits had come out, they entered into the swine, and the herd rushed down from the cliff/overhanging bank into the lake/sea, about two thousand, and they proceeded to suffocate in the lake/sea.

14 And the men who were tending them fled and brought a report into the city and into the countryside. And they came to see what the thing was that had happened (and was still the case). 15 And they come to Jesus and observe the man who is/was being possessed by a demon sitting clothed and being of sound mind, the one who has/had had the legion, and they became afraid. 16 And the men who had seen described in detail to them how (on earth this) had happened to the man who was being possessed by a demon—and about the pigs. 17 And they began to plead with him to depart from their borders/boundaries. 18 And as he was stepping into his boat, the man who had been demon possessed began to plead with him to be with him. 19 And he did not permit him (to do so), but he says to him, “Go into your house, to your (people), and announce to them as many things as the Lord has (already) done and (the many ways in which) he has had mercy on you.” 20 And he departed and began to proclaim in the Decapolis as many things as Jesus had done for him, and all were really amazed.

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Linguistic Essentials in This Pericope

Grammar Basics

- 5:4: δεδέσθαι: perfect infinitive/verbal aspect
- 5:4: διεσπάσθαι: perfect infinitive/verbal aspect
- 5:4: τάς: possessive use of the article
- 5:4: συντετρῖθαι: perfect infinitive/verbal aspect
- 5:4: ἱσχύειν: imperfect indicative/verbal aspect
- 5:5: κράζων: participle use: periphrastic (with ἦν)
- 5:5: κατακόπτων: participle use: periphrastic (with ἦν)
- 5:9: ἐπιρώτα: imperfect indicative/verbal aspect
- 5:10: παρεκάλει: imperfect indicative/verbal aspect
- 5:11: βοσκομένη: participle use: attendant circumstance
- 5:13: ἐπηρώτα: passive voice/active intransitive meaning
- 5:15: καθήμενον: participle use: supplementary
- 5:15: ιματισμένον: participle use: supplementary
- 5:15: σωφρονοῦντα: participle use: supplementary
- 5:15: ἐφοβήθησαν: aorist indicative/verbal aspect; passive voice/active intransitive meaning
- 5:18: τό: possessive use of the article
- 5:18: παρεκάλει: imperfect indicative/verbal aspect
- 5:19: πεποίηκεν: perfect indicative/verbal aspect
- 5:19: ἠλέησεν: aorist indicative/verbal aspect
- 5:20: ἐποίησεν: aorist indicative/verbal aspect
- 5:20: ἐθαύμαζον: imperfect indicative/verbal aspect

Marcan Usage

- καί as the basic conjunction: 5:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13 (four times), 14 (twice), 15 (three times), 16, 17, 18, 19 (twice), 20 (three)
- “historical present” indicative: λέγει, 5:7, 9, 19; ἔρχονται, θεωροῦσιν, 5:15
- imperfect indicative in narrative: εἶχεν, ἐδύνατο, 5:3; ἵσχυεν, 5:4; ἐλεγεν, 5:8; ἐπηρώτα, 5:9; παρεκάλει, 5:10; ἦν, 5:11; ἐπηρώτα, 5:13; παρεκάλει, 5:18; ἐθαύμαζον, 5:20
- V-S syntax: 5:4, 13, 16, 18, 20
- O-V syntax: 5:3, 4, 7, 10
- asyndeton: 5:7 (three times), 8, 9, 12, 19
- ἵνα to introduce an object clause: 5:10, 18

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3 See the translation, above, as well as excursus 1, “Grammatical Review,” following “Linguistic Features of Mark’s Gospel” in the introduction. These items deserve particular attention and help to explain decisions taken in the translation.

4 See “Basic Characteristics of Mark’s Greek” in “Linguistic Features of Mark’s Gospel” in the introduction. Items are presented here in the order in which they appear in “Basic Characteristics.”
• redundant λέγω: 5:12
• “trailer” construction: ὡς δισχίλιοι, 5:13; τὸν ἐσχηκότα τὸν λεγιῶνα, 5:15
• lack of express subjects: 5:1, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 19, 20
• S-V syntax: 5:4 (three times), 9, 13, 14, 19, 20
• δέ: 5:11
• genitive absolute used “improperly”: ἐξελθόντος αὐτοῦ, 5:2; ἐμβαίνοντος αὐτοῦ, 5:18

Features for Literary Effect

• “historical present” indicatives to foreground a section beginning and discourse
• main verb tense pattern 1: 5:1–10
  ♦ aorist indicative—background description: ἦλθον, 5:1; ὑπήντησεν, 5:2
  ♦ first principal part (imperfect) indicative—setting of scene: ἐδύνατο, 5:3; ἐσχῆσε, 5:4; ἦν κράζων, 5:5
  ♦ aorist indicative—description of action: ἔδραμεν, προσεκύνησεν, 5:6
  ♦ first principal part (present/imperfect) indicative—introduction to discourse: λέγετε, ἔλεγεν, 5:8; ἐπηρώτα, λέγει, 5:9
  ♦ first principal part (imperfect) indicative—conclusion of scene: παρεκάλει, 5:10
• main verb tense pattern 1 (modified): 5:11–13
  ♦ aorist indicative—background description: lacking
  ♦ first principal part (imperfect) indicative—setting of scene: ἦν, 5:11
  ♦ aorist indicative—description of action: παρεκάλεσαν, 5:12; ἔπετρεψεν, εἰσῆλθον, ὥρμησεν, 5:13
  ♦ first principal part (present/imperfect) indicative—introduction to discourse: lacking
  ♦ first principal part (imperfect) indicative—conclusion of scene: ἐπνίγοντο, 5:13
• main verb tense pattern 1 (modified): 5:14–20
  ♦ aorist indicative—background description: ἐφοβήθησαν, ἠπήγαγεσαν, ἦλθον, 5:14
  ♦ first principal part (present) indicative—setting of scene: ἐρχονται, θεωροῦσιν, 5:15
  ♦ aorist indicative—description of action: ἐφοβήθησαν, 5:15; διηγήσαντο, 5:16; ἔρξαντο, 5:17; ἀφῆκεν, ἠλέησεν, ἀπῆλθεν, ἦρξατο, ἐποίησεν, 5:20

5 See “Elements of Linguistic Usage for Literary Effect” in “Linguistic Features of Mark’s Gospel” in the introduction. Items are presented here in the order in which they appear in “Elements of Linguistic Usage.” Details for the items in this section are generally given in the two sections immediately above, “Grammar Basics” and “Marcan Usage.”
7 παρεκάλει in 5:18 does not introduce direct discourse but indirect, thus describing action. It is used for aspectual reasons, conveying the beginning of an action (inception).
Mark 5:1–20

✧ first principal part (present) indicative—introduction to discourse: λέγει, 5:19
✧ first principal part (imperfect) indicative—conclusion of scene: ἐθαύμαζον, 5:20

- scene setting: mixed (Semitic/Hellenic)
  ✧ Semitic: καί dominant; lack of express subjects
  ✧ Hellenic: S-V word order; attention to verbal aspect; complex infinitive constructions

Textual Notes

5:1 εἰς τὴν χώραν τῶν [Γεργεσηνῶν]—The far (eastern) side of the Lake/Sea of Galilee is Gentile country, more specifically, the area of the “ten [Greek] cities,” the Decapolis (5:20). The reading of “Gerasenes” as the location by strong, unlikely manuscript allies B and D (as well as K* and the entire Latin tradition) and by English translations creates a severe problem, since Gerasa (Jerash) lies some thirty-seven miles southeast of the Lake/Sea of Galilee.9 The solution may be to read “Gergesenes,” attested by ms. B allies K* L Δ 565 579 and 33, as well as by the Sinaitic Syriac and the Bohairic translations.10 Gergesa, modern El Koursi, lay on the east bank of the lake on a plateau, and there is a steep cliff near this location.11 Eusebius attests this location, as does, perhaps, the presence of ecclesiastical ruins from the fifth century AD.12

5:2 ἐξελθόντος αὐτοῦ—Note that this genitive absolute is used “improperly.”13 The subject (αὐτοῦ, “he,” i.e., Jesus) is also reflected in the main clause (ὑπήντησεν αὐτῷ, “confronted him”).

εὐθύς—This adverb, “immediately,” reappears with the move of the narrative to a new location. See the first textual note on 1:10.

ἐκ τῶν μνημείων—Both μνημείον (5:2) and μνῆμα (5:3, 5) denote places where memory (cf. μιμνῄσκομαι, “remember”) is preserved and, therefore, both also can be used in the sense of “tomb.” The latter (μνῆμα) is possibly more common in Classical Greek literature for this meaning.14 Both are more than “graves”: in fact, people could enter both (see BDAG, μνῆμα and μνημείον).

ἀνθρώπος ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ—This phraseology is identical to that in 1:23, Jesus’ first overt miracle.15 While it may be correct to see the “unclean spirit” as

9 McKay, “Gerasenes,” ABD 2:991. Yarbro Collins (Mark, 266–67, note 51) cites a view that the name Gerasenes is selected because of its similarity to the Hebrew word וַגְּזַ, “drive out,” used for expelling people (e.g., Gen 3:24; 4:14; Ex 6:1; 23:28).
13 See section B 3 b in “Basic Characteristics of Mark’s Greek” in “Linguistic Features of Mark’s Gospel” in the introduction.
14 See, e.g., Herodotus, Histories, 7.167.
15 See the second textual note and the commentary on 1:23.
associated with the tombs and the dead,\textsuperscript{16} it is probably best to see it as related to the reign and rule of God—or lack thereof. See the commentary.

5:3  ἐν τοῖς μνήμασιν—The preposition ἐν may well be taken in its primary sense of “in” (for subterranean “tombs/monuments”; see the third textual note on 5:2), although “among” may be preferable in view of 5:5.

οὐδὲ ... οὐκέτι—The three negatives heap up; they do not cancel out. Note the vivid picture given by such a heaping.

ἁλύσει—The singular “chain” can be used collectively, “chains.”\textsuperscript{17}

5:4  διὰ τὸ αὐτὸν πολλάκις πέδας καὶ ἁλύσειν δεδέσθαι καὶ διεσπάσθαι υπ’ αὐτοῦ τὰς ἁλύσεις καὶ τὰς πέδας συντετρῖφθαι—The three perfect passive infinitives (δεδέσθαι, διεσπάσθαι, συντετρῖφθαι) governed by the neuter article τὸ are dependent upon διὰ, with αὐτὸν as the subject of the first infinitive (δεδέσθαι). Note the attempt of the translation to reflect tense/verbal aspect by prefacing the infinitives with “on account of the fact that this was often the condition.” All is placed into the past tense in the translation, because the entire διὰ τὸ clause is dependent upon the (negated) past time imperfect indicative verb ἐδύνατο (“was [not] able”) in 5:3. Note also Mark’s intricate syntax, with πέδας and ἁλύσειν modifying δεδέσθαι (“bound with leg irons and chains”), and then with each of the two succeeding arthrous nouns (τὰς ἁλύσεις ... τὰς πέδας) becoming the subject of one of the two infinitives (διεσπάσθαι ... συντετρῖφθαι) that surround those two nouns, producing a chiastic structure:

A  διεσπάσθαι, “torn asunder”
B  τὰς ἁλύσεις, “the chains”
B’ τὰς πέδας, “the leg irons”
B’ συντετρῖφθαι, “crushed”

The υπ’ αὐτοῦ (“by him”) modifies both of those two infinitives (διεσπάσθαι ... συντετρῖφθαι, “torn asunder ... crushed”).\textsuperscript{18} One could possibly say that the rending of the man’s bonds is depicted metaphorically by the placement of the two (infinitive) verb forms outside of the two nouns in the chiastic structure. The generally complex syntax may metaphorically depict his bondage. See parallels grammatically in 4:19 and 5:25–27.

ἰσχυειν—Similar to δύναμιν, (not) “be able,” in 5:3, ἱσχύω generally denotes “having sufficient strength” to do something. People were simply not “strong enough” to contain the man.

5:5  ἐν τοῖς μνήμασιν καὶ ἐν τοῖς ὀρέσιν—With “the tombs/monuments” and “the mountains” here, the translation “among” for the repeated preposition ἐν seems to fit better than “in” (see the first textual note on 5:3).

\textsuperscript{16} Marcus, \textit{Mark 1–8}, 342.

\textsuperscript{17} See Polybius, \textit{Histories}, 21.5.3.

\textsuperscript{18} For parallel syntax, see Lk 1:2. There the prepositional phrase ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς is related both to αὐτόπται and to ὑπηρέται (technically, it modifies γενόμενοι).
The desperate plight of the man in the throes of bondage to the spiritual world apart from the reign and rule of God is seen in these periphrastic participial constructions, “he was crying out and gashing.”

Note the Greek dative of means, “with stones.” A Hebraic structure with the preposition ἐν is not used here, as it is not generally used in Mark’s Gospel. See also the first textual note on 5:7.

The verb προσκυνέω, “kneel before,” with the accusative (αὐτόν, “him”) is characteristic of Classical Greek and is supported by mss. B, L, Δ, and C (the dative form characterizes later Greek). This classical construction may well be appropriate in this Gentile context.

Note the move to the present indicative now, “says,” as the tension of the scene heightens. All verbs of speaking in the entire pericope are first principal part forms (present/imperfect indicatives), which is typical of main verb tense pattern 1.

For this construction, see the first textual note on 1:24.

These vocative case forms, “Jesus, Son,” are “better Greek,” as might be appropriate in a Gentile setting. Compare the possible use of the nominative to express direct address in the Jewish setting of 1:24 (see the fourth textual note on 1:24).

The phrase ὁ ὑψίστος, “the highest,” was the name for Zeus, a Gentile appellation for the highest god in the pantheon. In fact, an inscription from AD 22/23 attests a temple and cult for Zeus Olympus at Gerasa. The exact phrase used here is also used in Acts 16:17 by the Gentile girl employed for divination at Philippi, who called Paul and his associates δοῦλοι τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου, “slaves of God the Most High.” The phrase also reflects Jewish usage; see ὑψίστος in LXX Gen 14:18; Deut 32:8 (both translating יְהוָה); and also in Lk 1:32.

With ὁρκίζω, “adjure, put (someone) under oath by invoking (God or another authority),” the double accusative construction (i.e., both σε, “you,” and τὸν θεόν, “God,” are objects of the verb) is traditional, though a dative or a prepositional phrase could also be used (instead of the second accusative) to express the basis for the solemn urging.

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19 See section A 3 e iii in “Basic Characteristics of Mark’s Greek” in “Linguistic Features of Mark’s Gospel” in the introduction.
20 See, e.g., Herodotus, Histories, 2.121.
22 See Pindar, Nemean Odes, 1.60; Aeschylus, Eumenides, 1.28.
23 See Yarbro Collins, Mark, 268.
24 See Acts 19:13: ὁρκίζω σε τὸν θεόν — With ὁρκίζω, “adjure, put (someone) under oath by invoking (God or another authority),” the double accusative construction (i.e., both σε, “you,” and τὸν θεόν, “God,” are objects of the verb) is traditional, though a dative or a prepositional phrase could also be used (instead of the second accusative) to express the basis for the solemn urging.
25 See LXX Dan 6:13 (ET 6:12): ὁρκίζομεν σε τοῖς Μήδων καὶ Περσῶν δόγμασιν, “we adjure you by the regulations of the Medes and the Persians.”
26 See LXX 2 Chr 36:13: ὁρκίζειν αὐτὸν κατὰ τοῦ θεοῦ, “he (had) made him to swear by God.”
μὴ … βασανίσῃς—This is a normal construction of a negative command with the aorist stem, namely, μή plus an aorist subjunctive (not an imperative).  

5:8 γάρ—This is a good example of the use of γάρ for a Marcan aside (“you know”). See the fourth textual note on 1:16.  

tο πνεύμα τὸ ἁκάθαρτον—Though these forms appear to be nominative, they are probably vocative case for direct address, “O unclean spirit!” (cf. the fourth textual note on 5:7). The neuter singular vocative is identical to the nominative/accusative in form.  

5:9 τι ὄνομα σοι—This construction with the dative (σοι, “to you,” equivalent here to “your”) is standard Greek for speaking about a person’s “name” (ὄνομα). See a parallel construction in Homer: οὔτις [= οὐδείς] ἐμοὶ … ὄνομα, “‘no one’ is my name” (literally, “‘no one’ is to me a name”). This is an excellent example of a possessive dative. See also the next textual note.  

λεγιὼν ὄνομα μοί [ἐστιν], ὅτι πολλοὶ ἐσμεν—Note the construction of the first three words: a nominative, λεγιών, “Legion”; the noun ὄνομα, “name”; and a dative of possession, μοί, “my.” The construction is identical to that in the preceding textual note. The inclusion of ἐστιν, read by ms. B and f manuscripts, is controversial but is the lectio difficilior vis-à-vis the preceding similar “name” construction without ἐστιν. The plurals in the final clause (ὅτι πολλοὶ ἐσμεν, “for we are many”) indicate that the singular “unclean spirit” is actually capable of multiplicity, as confirmed by the two thousand pigs being possessed later in the story (5:13). Note that the word “legion” (legio in Latin) can denote troops from non-Roman nations or any large body of men, but normally it denotes a body of fifty-four hundred Roman soldiers, including a hundred and twenty cavalry.  

5:10 παρεκάλει—An imperfect indicative active of an -έω contract verb (παρακαλέω), this form continues Mark’s close attention to verbal aspect detail, “he began to plead with.” This form also concludes main verb tense pattern 1 for 5:1–10.  

πολλά—This neuter plural adjective often functions adverbially, “a lot.” See the third textual note on 1:45.  


27 See FGG, chapter 28, section F 4.  
28 See also section A 2 c in “Basic Characteristics of Mark’s Greek” in “Linguistic Features of Mark’s Gospel” in the introduction.  
30 Homer, Odyssey, 9.366.  
31 See Yarbro Collins, Mark, 269.  
32 Yarbro Collins, Mark, 269.
the spirits are those associated with the dead of the local tombs, though more commonly it is seen as a desire to hold on to territory that they inhabit.

5:11 ἦν ... ὀγέλη ... βοσκομένη—This is another example of ἦν, “was,” doing double duty (see the second textual note on 4:38). ἦν serves as a verb on its own with ὀγέλη (“there was ... a herd”) and as part of a periphrastic construction with βοσκομένη (the herd “was ... grazing”).

πρὸς τὸ ὅρει—The preposition πρὸς plus the dative (as in Classical Greek; seven examples appear in the NT) usually means “at” in the sense of “facing,” often assuming a prior motion toward the position. See, e.g., Jn 18:16, 20:12.

5:12 παρεκάλεσαν—Instead of repeating the singular παρεκάλει, “he began to plead with” (see the first textual note on 5:10), Mark switches to the plural for the main verb to prepare for the request of the spirits to “send” (πέμψον) “us” (ἡμᾶς, plural) into the swine.

ἵνα εἰς αὐτοὺς εἰσέλθωμεν—This clause with ἵνα and a subjunctive expresses purpose (“in order that ...”) after a main verb of motion (πέμψον, “send”). Cf. 5:10, which has ἵνα and a subjunctive (ἵνα ... ἀποστείλῃ) after a main verb of exhorting (παρεκάλει). Note the repetition of the preposition εἰς as the prefix of the compound verb (εἰσ–έλθωμεν), literally, “into them we may enter into” (common in Hellenistic Greek), which here may emphasize the spirits’ desire to reside in physical bodies (the swine). The preposition is again repeated in 5:13 (εἰσ-ἡλθον εἰς).

5:13 ἐξελθόντα—While this aorist participle (“had come out”) could be a masculine singular accusative form (as in Mt 26:71), here it is neuter plural nominative, modifying the following neuter plural nominative πνεύματα, “spirits.”

κατὰ τοῦ κρημνοῦ—The preposition κατὰ with the genitive often means “down from.” The image is of rushing down from a sheer/overhanging rock area (κρημνός) into the lake.

ὁς δισχίλιοι—The adverb ὁς makes the number (δισ-, “two” -χίλιοι, “thousands”) approximate.

ἐπνίγοντο—The imperfect indicative form of this verb, “they proceeded to suffocate,” adds to the vividness of the depiction, with one pig after another plunging to its suffocating death. This form also concludes main verb tense pattern 1 for 5:11–13.

5:14 This verse as a whole is another example of a “Janus construction” in Mark’s Gospel, which looks both ways in the narrative. It concludes 5:11–13, and it begins the next section, 5:14–20.
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ἀπήγγειλαν εἰς...—The verb ἀπαγγέλλω means, in the first place, “bring tidings” and is often used of messengers. It recurs in 5:19.

ἡλθον—The subject of this main verb (“they came”) is unexpressed (a Semitic feature) but must be the townspeople, given the context. In an oral presentation, this would not be nearly so unclear.

τι ἐστιν τὸ γεγονός—This is an indirect discourse construction after a verb of perception (ἰδεῖν, “to see”). These four words comprise the actual question people were asking one another, namely, “what is the thing that has happened (and is now the case)?” See the translation for an effort to express this indirectly.

5:15 ἔρχονται ... θεωροῦσιν ... ἐφοβήθησαν—Again, in Semitic fashion all three of these verbs have unexpressed subjects (see also the third textual note on 5:14). Following main verb tense pattern 1, initial first principal part forms (ἔρχονται ... θεωροῦσιν) bring the next scene to the hearers’/readers’ attention, with succeeding verbs expressing actions in the aorist (e.g., ἐφοβήθησαν, 5:15) and verbs introducing discourse in the present (λέγει, 5:19) or imperfect (παρεκάλει, 5:18), with the concluding verb an imperfect indicative (ἐθαύμαζον, 5:20). This is a good indication that Mark wants his receptors to view these final verses (5:14–20) as a somewhat separate and important piece of the narrative. Note that θεωρέω is used here, not βλέπω; the people do not simply “take a look” or “glance”; they “observe” (cf. ἐθεώρουν in 15:47).

τὸν δαιμονιζόμενον—For the first time in this passage, the man in the possession of the unclean spirit is described as “the man who is/was being possessed by a demon” (see also the fourth textual note on 5:15). Mark will employ δαιμονίζομαι twice more for the same man (5:16, 18). The only other appearance of this verb in Mark is in 1:32.

καθήμενον ἱματισμένον καὶ σωφρονοῦντα—These three participles are supplementary, part of the object observed: “sitting clothed and being of sound mind.”

τὸν ἐσχηκότα τὸν λεγιῶνα—The participle ἐσχηκότα in this “trailer” construction employs the perfect (active) stem, conveying a condition entered into, namely, he got the unclean spirit and then “had the legion” (just as one “catches” a cold and then “has” a cold).

Note that, grammatically, both τὸν δαιμονιζόμενον (see the second textual note on 5:15), “the man who is/was being possessed by a demon,” and τὸν ἐσχηκότα, “the one who has/had had,” convey the thought that the man is still under possession! The translation tries to reflect this. This indicates that in the mind of the townspeople (see the third textual note on 5:14), as they went out “to see” (see the fourth textual note on 5:14), he has not yet been exorcized.

38 See Xenophon, Anabasis, 2.4.4; 6.4.25, for parallels with ἀπαγγέλλω εἰς.
39 See FGG, chapter 26, section C 4.
41 See Goodwin, § 1582.
Mark 5:16 διηγήσαντο—The verb διηγέομαι generally denotes setting out a detailed description of something, as would be appropriate here. Note how this expands the story from 5:14, where the men simply “brought a report.”

πῶς ἐγέρενο τὸν Χίριον—Again, see also the fourth textual note on 5:14, an indirect discourse construction reflects a direct question, here “how did (this) happen … ?”

καὶ περὶ τῶν χοίρων—This is a mixed construction dependent upon διηγήσαντο, “described in detail,” rather than upon ἐγέρενο, “happened,” and so it is set off from the preceding part of the sentence by a dash: “—and about the pigs.”

Mark 5:18 ἐμβαίνοντος αὐτοῦ—This is another genitive absolute that is used “improperly” (see also the first textual note on 5:2). The subject (αὐτοῦ, “he,” i.e., Jesus) is also reflected in the main clause (παρεκάλει αὐτόν, “he began to plead with him”).

ἵνα μετʼ αὐτοῦ ἠλεήσε—This is another object clause after a verb of asking (here παρεκάλει, “he began to plead with”). For another such ἵνα clause, see the third textual note on 5:10 (cf. the second textual note on 5:12). This verbiage is reminiscent of 3:14: ἵνα ὦσιν μετʼ αὐτοῦ, “that they might be with him,” said with reference to the Twelve.

Mark 5:19 ὁφίηκε—Again, as in 1:34 (also, e.g., 5:37; 7:12; 10:14), ὁφίημι does not mean “forgive” but “allow.”

ὑπαγε—This present imperative active form from ὑπάγω is intransitive (“go”). The verb ὑπάγω standardly employs the present stem for imperatives. It is not necessarily emphatic.

πρὸς τοὺς σοὺς σοῦς—The emphatic plural possessive adjective σούς, “your (people),” seems to be in contrast to Jesus and his people.

ἀπαγγεῖλον—Here ἀπαγγέλλω means “announce, report” (cf. the second textual note on 5:14), also a common meaning for this liquid stem verb. The form is an aorist imperative active second person singular.

ὅσα ὁ κύριος σοι ἠλεήσε—In this set of clauses, the neuter plural relative pronoun ὁσα, “as many things as/the many ways in which,” does double duty, being the direct object of πεποίηκεν (a perfect indicative active), “he has (already) done,” and an accusative of respect for ἠλεήσε, “he has had mercy.” See the translation for an attempt to express this construction.

Mark 5:20 Δεκαπόλει—The “ten cities” of the “Decapolis,” including Gerash (Jerash), Hippos, Gadara, Pella, and Philadelphia (modern-day Amman, Jordan), were founded generally between the time of Alexander the Great in the late fourth century BC and the time of the Roman conquest of Palestine in the mid first century BC. With one

42 See Aristophanes, Birds, 198, as well as Lk 9:10; Acts 12:17.
43 The verb διηγήσαντο takes two different kinds of phrases, which are therefore “mixed”; first, the indirect discourse construction with πῶς (see the second textual note on 5:16), and second, joined to it by καὶ, is this prepositional phrase with the preposition περί.
44 See section B 3 b in “Basic Characteristics of Mark’s Greek” in “Linguistic Features of Mark’s Gospel” in the introduction.
46 See Demosthenes, Orations, 21.72.
exception (Scythopolis), they were located in the area east and southeast of the Lake/Sea of Galilee, and so were not in Israel in NT times. They were modeled upon the Greek polis (“city”) and proved to be places of interaction between Greek and Semitic cultures.47

ὅσα ἐποίησεν αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς—Note the correspondence linguistically between this sentence, “as many things as Jesus had done for him” (rendered as pluperfect to reflect indirect discourse in a secondary sequence),48 and Jesus’ command in 5:19 (ὅσα ὁ κύριός σοι πεποίηκεν). Note also that ὁ κύριος, “the Lord,” in 5:19 corresponds to ὁ Ἰησοῦς, “Jesus,” in 5:20.

ἐθαύμαζον—At what were they “amazed”? It seems that they “were really amazed” at the content of the proclamation of the man, not simply at the miracle itself. Again, amazement in Mark’s Gospel accompanies divine activity (see 1:27; 10:32; cf. the commentary on 4:41). This form also concludes main verb tense pattern 1 for 5:14–20.

Commentary

5:1 The east side of the Lake/Sea of Galilee represents the first foray of Jesus beyond Israel. At this point in his ministry there is not full commitment to Gentile ministry (see 5:19), but it is proleptic, representing a foretaste of something fuller. It is in this area that Jesus will later feed the four thousand (8:1–10; cf. 7:31).

5:2 ἐν πνεύματι ἁκάθαρτῳ, “in an unclean spirit”: As indicated in the textual note, Jesus dealing with a man “in” an unclean spirit puts this pericope into parallel with 1:23–27, Jesus’ first exorcism and miraculous act. As in 1:23, “in” (ἐν) here must mean “within the sphere of,” “within the influence of,” parallel to the “in” (ἐν) of “in Christ” (ἐν Χριστῷ, e.g., Rom 8:1; 2 Cor 5:17). Also, “unclean” denotes “unwashed,” just as those who have not been responsive to the preaching and activity of John the Baptist remain unwashed/unclean, i.e., not ready for and under the (proleptic coming of the) reign and rule of God.49

This tells us two things. First, once again, the spiritual realm is both key and foundational (see the commentary on 1:23; 2:10; 3:27; and also on 5:3–5). The initial problem confronted with both Jews (1:4–5, 23–27) and Gentiles (5:1–20) is that of being under the wrong spiritual lordship. Second, it tells us that each people group has the same difficulty, standing before God in the same condition. This is, of course, a basic theme of St. Paul (see Romans 1–3), and it will find further discussion and illustration in Mark 7. But the likeness of the problem in 1:23–27 with that in 5:1–20 and the similarity of the verbal

47 See the description of Pliny the Elder in Natural History, 5.16, from the late 70s AD.
48 See the last textual note on 5:14.
49 See the second textual note and the commentary on 1:23. As will be seen in 5:11–13, the “unclean” spirits have an affinity for “unclean” animals, namely, swine, declared “unclean” in Lev 11:7; Deut 14:8, because they do not conform to the usual pattern of creation. Thus, the “unclean spirits,” like these animals, are “out of order,” since they deviate from God’s created order.
interaction between Jesus and the possessed man in both accounts are surely deliberate on Mark’s part.

5:3–5  The detailed description in these verses helps to paint a picture of the extent to which the spiritual realm that arrays itself against Jesus/God enslaves a person and keeps him from living a full life as God’s creature. The man has community with the dead and not with his brothers and sisters among the living.  

The reference to people not being strong enough to subdue the possessed man should recall Jesus’ discussion of binding “the strong man” (ὁ ἰσχυρός), Satan, in 3:27. In Mark 5, Jesus is strong enough to bind the strong man by unbinding him who has been in bondage to that very strong man referred to in Mark 3! See also 1:7, with John’s description of Jesus as “the one stronger” (ὁ ἰσχυρότερος).

5:6  προσεκύνησεν αὐτόν, “he … knelt before him”: This action represents an acknowledgment of who the real “strong man” actually is, namely, Jesus.

5:7  τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ υψίστου, “of God the Most High”: The use of phraseology common to Gentile speakers helps to set the scene of this story in a Gentile context.

ὁρκίζω σε τὸν θεόν, μὴ με βασανίσῃς, “I adjure you by God, do not torture me” (5:7): This is an ironic statement, to say the least. Usually adjuration, or solemn commanding in the name of God, is done by the exorcist, addressing the unwanted spirit. For the unclean spirit, not under the reign and rule of God, to try to “pull this off” with God himself is laughable, even as is his plea not to be tortured—the very thing he is doing to the man within his power. Indeed, the level of detail in this story and developments such as the one under discussion support the notion that this pericope was developed for “literary” as well as theological purposes, to entertain as well as to instruct.

Note that the reference to torturing shows congruence with Matthew’s version of the story, wherein the two demons ask whether Jesus has come “to torture” (βασανίσαι) them “before the appointed time” (πρὸ καιροῦ, Mt 8:29), i.e., proleptically—before the final judgment (cf. Rev 20:10).

5:9  τί ὄνομά σου; “what is your name?”: The attempt to determine the spirit’s name is typical of the conduct of exorcisms. It allows the exorcist to gain more control over the spirit to be expelled.

50 It is not likely that Is 65:1–7 refers to Gentiles (though Is 65:1 may), but if it does, parallels to Mk 5:2–5 and this whole pericope are uncanny; see Is 65:4, which speaks of people “who dwell in/among the tombs” (מי־יובא מי־יובא, יַבִּיא) and “who eat the flesh of the pig” (מי־יובא מי־יובא יַבִּיא).

51 See the fourth and fifth textual notes on 5:7.


53 Martin Dibelius (From Tradition to Gospel, 71, 76–77), an early Formgeschichte/form criticism proponent, classified this pericope (as well as the stilling of the storm immediately preceding) as a “tale,” a longer story attending to detail that has delight simply in its telling.

54 Yarbro Collins, Mark, 268, including note 70.
λεγιών, “Legion” (5:9): It is tempting to see a (not so veiled) reference to Roman soldiers with this appellation, including a characterization of them as bad spirits (in Matthew’s account the spirits are called “demons,” Mt 8:31; cf. Mt 8:28, 33) and worthy of association with pigs, men who should be drowned (5:12–13). But there is no anti-Roman cast to Mark’s Gospel; indeed, the only human to recognize and witness publicly to Jesus’ divinity is a Roman soldier (15:39).55 Whether hearers/readers in various contexts might understand “Legion” (λεγιών) as a negative Roman portrayal is another matter. Indeed, for those who do not have eyes to see and ears to hear, who do not know who Jesus is, what he is like, and what he is about, such an appellation might seem to darken their understanding, even as do the parables (see 4:9–12). The actual “legion” nature of the “unclean spirit” (singular in Greek) testifies to the fact that control of human beings by dark forces of the spiritual realm may well be much worse—and have much worse characteristics—than we would ever suppose.

5:11 The presence of “pigs” confirms the Gentile nature of the area, since they are declared “unclean” in Lev 11:7; Deut 14:8.

5:12 The spirits may well wish to occupy physical bodies, whether human or animal (see the second textual note on 5:12).

5:13 The movement of the swine presents proof that the exorcism did actually take place. Such evidence is present in other exorcism stories, most notably a famous incident attributed to Apollonius of Tyana, the first-century AD wonderworker from around Tarsus in Asia Minor, whose life and actions bear some similarity to that of Jesus (see the discussion of Apollonius in the commentary on 1:34). In this case, Apollonius diagnoses that a young man has a demon that causes him to laugh and weep for no reason and to mock the wonderworker, and Apollonius gazes at him. Philostratus records:

Then the demon cried out in fear and anger, as if he were being burned and tortured, and promised under oaths that he would let the young man go, and never again attack a human being. When Apollonius now spoke to him like a master to a wily, devious and impudent slave, ordering him to leave the young man in a visible fashion, the demon cried out: “I will knock over that statue over there,” referring to a statue near the royal hall, where the entire scene took place. And this statue did indeed begin to move, and fell over. The noise that this produced, and the applause that followed the general astonishment, were indescribable.56

There is, however, an important difference between the incident in Mark 5 and the Apollonius exorcism in this regard. Apollonius seems to need a physical sign so that others will know that an exorcism has taken place; in Jesus’

55 The statement in 15:39 that Jesus is the Son of God could be ironic (see the commentary on 15:39), though even if it were so, there is no specifically anti-Roman accent to the passage.
56 Philostratus, Life of Apollonius, 4.20, quoted in Klauck, The Religious Context of Early Christianity, 172. Klauck then summarizes what happens next: the young man rubs his eyes, as if awakening from sleep, abandons his former lifestyle of wantonness, takes off his fine clothing, and adopts the cloak of a philosopher.
miracle, the visible sign that the demonic has left the man is a by-product of the exorcism, and one that is not necessary for others to notice that the expulsion of the spirit has taken place (see 5:15). (This may well follow from an earlier difference, namely, that the man’s possession by a spirit was not noticeable to others, only to Apollonius; in the case of the Gergesene man, his possession by an unclean spirit was only too apparent to all [5:2–5].)

From a narrative point of view, Jesus outwits the spirits, who wish to remain in the area (5:10). He knows that possession will cause such upset in the pigs (cf. 5:3–5) that moving to new bodies will backfire on the spirits: their hosts will die, and they will lose their new bodies completely. In all probability the spirits will no longer (be able to) inhabit human beings. Also, if the water/sea is to be seen as an alien place—a place opposed to God (see the commentary on 4:37 and especially the commentary on 6:48, Jesus walking on the water)—then the drowning of the pigs with the spirits inside of them may be seen as the spirits being returned to the place they should be, i.e., with all that resists God (cf. Is 27:1; Job 38:8–11; Pss 74:13–14; 89:10–11 [ET 89:9–10]), and in John’s vision, the sea is a place that at the very last day will be excluded from the new creation (Rev 21:1).

It is tempting to relate the pigs to uncleanness in a ritual sense and to say that Jesus destroys notions of uncleanness through the drowning of the pigs. It is unlikely that this is a correct understanding, however, since abolishing uncleanness in this sense generally involves “transgressing” the laws of cleanliness to show that they are no longer in force. See especially Mk 7:1–23 (and 7:24–30), along with 1:41 and 2:16–17, as well as Acts 10:11–16; 11:5–10. More likely is the conclusion that the involvement of the pigs (versus sheep or cattle) makes the Gentile connection clear.

5:14 The aorist indicative verbs (“fled … brought a report … came”) of this verse provide a backgrounding introduction to the third scene (5:14–20) in this pericope. Note that pig-herders have not been mentioned previously in the story.

5:15 As with the pig-herders in 5:14, a new item is introduced here, late in the story: the man must have lived in the grave area naked, because now he is said to be “clothed.” He is also “of sound mind.” Yarbro Collins alerts us to an interesting parallel from Plutarch’s Life of Marcellus concerning one Nicias, who, pretending to be possessed and crazed in order to avoid arrest, tore off his outer clothing/cloak (ιμάτιον), rent his tunic (χιτωνίσκον), and ran half naked to the exit of the theater. The inhabitants of the area would have seen the demoniac as normal after Jesus had dealt with him.

The move to the description of the man as “possessed by a demon” (5:15, 16, 18), instead of the previous expressions involving (an) “unclean spirit(s)”

57 See also by analogy Mk 2:23–24.
58 Yarbro Collins, Mark, 272, citing Plutarch, Life of Marcellus, 20.5.
(5:2, 8, 13), may reflect a change of focus for the story. The first thirteen verses of Mark 5 focus upon the coming of the eschatological reign and rule of God and the issue of which/whose reign the man is under—thus the problem was his being “unclean/unwashed.” That is not the precise focus of 5:14–20. Here the focus is on crazy versus sane and abnormal versus normal, as well as the irony of the people’s reaction to the man’s movement from his former condition to his state now. They “became afraid” (5:15)!

Such fear could be a positive thing (cf. awe), but in view of these people’s reaction in 5:17 (they ask Jesus to leave), their fear is negative, namely, actual fear. At this point the story is taking a dark and negative turn, though it must be remembered that the presence of fear relative to Jesus in Mark’s Gospel generally indicates the occurrence of divine activity (see the commentary on 4:41).

5:17 When the people ask Jesus to depart from their area, this exorcism story separates itself from all other such accounts in the Greco-Roman world, which end positively, i.e., with acclaim. (See the final statement in the account of the exorcism by Apollonius of Tyana presented in the commentary on 5:13.) Once again, a strange picture of Jesus is being drawn, one which presents ambiguous evidence at the very best; even hearers/readers of Mark’s Gospel are forced to ask why some people would act this way. Possibly the inhabitants of the area see Jesus as being in league with demons, as he was accused of being in 3:20–30, and therefore terrifying. In any case, resistance to him and to his ministry grows there in Gentile country as it has in Israel previously (2:6–8, 16, 24; 3:1–6, 20–35).

5:18 The further development of the story includes the departure of Jesus, and the request of the healed man shows that 5:1–20 is no mere “exorcism story.” It is not chiefly about Jesus’ power. It concerns the coming of the eschatological reign and rule of God in the person of Jesus and people’s reaction to him and it. In this verse, Jesus departs—in response to the inhabitants’ request or by his own design?—and certainly not to adulation. The healed man does, however, plead that Jesus would consent for him “to be with him” (μετ’ αὐτοῦ ἄει).

5:19 Why did Jesus refuse the man’s request “to be with him”? The verbal similarity of the man’s request to the words of 3:14 describing why Jesus established the Twelve as apostles provides the clue: he chose the Twelve “in order that they might be with him” (ἵνα δοθῇ μετ᾿ αὐτοῦ). Those who are “to be with” Jesus are the Twelve (corresponding to the number of Jacob’s sons and Israel’s tribes), who are also to provide the foundation for those who (will) receive God’s eschatological promises to his people Israel. At this point, no Gentile can fulfill these roles. Salvation proceeds outward from the Jews in Mark’s Gospel (see also 7:27)—even as it does in Matthew’s Gospel (see the

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60 Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 346.
61 See the commentary on 3:14–15.
genealogy in Matthew 1) and in John’s (see Jn 4:22)—and at this point in the development of the story, we are much closer to the bud than to the full flower, as it were.\textsuperscript{63}

Given this analysis, Jesus’ directions to the man are understandable: “go” to your house and announce the Lord’s deeds and mercy (5:19). The man is to stay with the Gentiles and not keep Jesus’ activities a secret; rather, he is to report them openly. The first action (staying among his fellow Gentiles) is appropriate at this stage in the coming of the reign and rule of God; the second (preaching publicly) is a stark contrast to Jesus’ ministry in Israel, where he told the beneficiaries of his gracious reign and rule not to tell others.\textsuperscript{64} There is need to spread the message among the heathen—although as Yarbro Collins points out, the man does not merely announce to his own household/people but begins to proclaim in the whole Decapolis\textsuperscript{65} (see the first textual note on 5:20), even as the leper was told to show himself to the priest (1:44) but went out and began to engage in proclamation (1:45). Here there is no need to hide Jesus’ identity, because there is no official opposition to him in the Decapolis, neither is there any chance of an overwhelming press of the crowds (see 1:45).

Note the emphasis on the Lord having “mercy” (5:19; see also 10:47–48). Throughout Mark’s Gospel “those who are in bad shape” (οἱ κακῶς ἔχοντες), namely, (those who confess that they are) “sinners” (ἀμαρτωλοί), receive Jesus’ attention, not “those who are (who consider themselves to be) strong” (οἱ ἰσχύοντες), namely, (those who imagine themselves to be) “righteous” (δικαίοι, 2:17). Note also the perfect indicative verb form (πεποίηκεν) denoting what “the Lord has (already) done” (5:19). What the Lord has done stays done, so to speak. The benefits are not temporary; they endure, even among the Gentiles.

5:20 As indicated in the second textual note on 5:20, “Jesus” in this verse corresponds to “the Lord” in 5:19. In Mark’s Gospel Jesus is the Lord, the Lord of the Sabbath (2:28), the Lord of nature (1:34, 42; 3:5, 10; 4:39–41), and the Lord of the spiritual world (1:12–13, 25–26, 34; 3:11, 27; 5:6–13). Note also “were really amazed” (ἐθαύμαζον, 5:20), an element similar to “being afraid” in Mark’s Gospel,\textsuperscript{66} namely, when people are amazed, divine saving activity is taking place (see, e.g., 1:27; 10:32; 15:5; see also the first textual note on 1:27).

We may observe, finally, that the proximity of this pericope to the stilling of the storm at the end of Mark 4 (4:35–41) bears a strange resemblance to books 9 and 10 of Homer’s Odyssey, in which the monstrous Cyclops Polyphemus

\textsuperscript{62} Luke’s Gospel is different. See the genealogy in Lk 3:23–38 and the ordering of phrases in Lk 2:32.

\textsuperscript{63} Joel Marcus (Mark 1–8, 353) helpfully notes that 5:18–19 reveals that in Mark’s Gospel it is not necessarily a sign of grace for God/Jesus to accede to a request, nor necessarily a sign of judgment for him to deny a petition.

\textsuperscript{64} For the “messianic secret” motif, see the commentary on 1:25. See also 1:34, 35, 44.

\textsuperscript{65} Yarbro Collins, Mark, 273.

\textsuperscript{66} In Mark’s Gospel “being afraid” relative to Jesus is a sign of divine activity, especially divine saving activity. See 4:41; 5:15, 33; 6:50; 10:32; and 16:8 (also 11:18).
encounters Odysseus and his men, after which the incident of Aeolus and the bag of winds unfolds. However, while Odysseus blinds Polyphemus, Jesus heals the “monstrous” demoniac, and while Odysseus is subject to the winds, Jesus is their master. In each case, Jesus emulates—surpasses—the central figure of the great Homeric epic.