

Connected

The story of this healed man is a powerful example of Jesus' statement in John 10:16.

"And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd."

Jesus traveled to a distant land to find this lost sheep, and though the man longed to join Jesus' band of disciples, Jesus had a special mission for him to do.

In the early Christian church, whenever a believer would accept Christ, he or she would become part of the *ekklesia*—the assembly of believers, or what we call the "church." That commitment would be sealed, in a sense, through their baptism (Acts 2:38,41,47; 8:36; 10:47-48). Baptism symbolized death to the old life and rising to new life in Christ (Romans 6:3-4). The word "baptize" means "to immerse," and Biblically this is how baptism was always performed. Believers would receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, sometimes prior to and sometime after their baptism.

With so many Christian denominations today, many believers would rather not connect themselves with any particular group of Christians. But the Bible is clear that connection with believers is nearly as important as connection with Christ! How could we ever know which group are Christ's true followers?

Revelation 12:17 predicts that the "dragon" would be fighting against a group of people who are still left at the end of time, the offspring of the pure woman (God's church). These people *"keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ."* And Revelation 7:9 describes last-day "Israel" as representing *"every nation."*

What Christian movement is a world-wide movement that teaches the truth about Jesus Christ and also keeps all of God's commandments, including the fourth commandment: to keep holy the seventh day Sabbath? Among all the voices claiming to represent Christ today, only one movement consistently teaches the full message of Christ's return, His law, and His grace: the *Seventh-day Adventists*.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church began as a movement of Christian believers in the 19th century. Today, there are more than 85 thousand congregations and over 20 million members around the world. Seventh-day Adventists teach salvation by grace through faith in Jesus, and also emphasize the teaching of His soon return. Adventists believe that it's important for Christians to live holy lives and to keep God's commandments, including the Sabbath commandment—not in order to be saved, but as evidence of Christ's transforming grace.

The blessing promised to Abraham belongs to all who are in Christ (Galatians 3:7, 29). Throughout history, that blessing has been revealed through connection with God's covenant people (Genesis 12:3; Deuteronomy 7:6). Today, people from every nation can share in that same blessing by uniting with God's last-day church—those who keep His commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus (Revelation 12:17; Revelation 14:12).

ANCIENT WORLDS *of the* BIBLE

Study Guide 14

by Pastor Daniel McFeeters

The Blessing of Abraham

From the Tombs to the Nations

(Read Mark 5:1-20)

He came from the tombs—wild-eyed, filthy, and broken. Chains dangled from his wrists, shattered like the life he once knew. Possessed by forces too dark to name, he wandered among the dead, cut off from family, community, and hope. No one could control him. No one could reach him. No one even tried anymore. But Jesus did.

Crossing the Sea of Galilee into Gentile territory, Jesus stepped onto the shores of the Decapolis—not to teach the crowds, but to rescue one man. One soul. One outcast. In a moment of divine confrontation, the legion of demons was cast out, and the man was made whole. Clothed. Calm. Sitting at Jesus' feet.

He begged to stay. Who wouldn't? But Jesus had greater plans. *"Go home to your friends,"* He said, *"and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you."* So the man went—not just to his village, but across the cities of the Decapolis. And when Jesus later returned to the region, the people flocked to his side. The testimony of that one life had touched their hearts.

Today, the ruins of Decapolis still stand—silent stones that once echoed with the message of a man transformed. What if God is still calling people from the tombs—transforming their lives, connecting them to His body of people and sending them into cities and homes that desperately need hope?

What happens when a soul moves from isolation to connection, from bondage to purpose? How might your story—your healing, your testimony, and your connection with His people—be part of the blessing promised to Abraham: that *all nations* will be blessed through His seed?

Transformed

This man's conversion began with his *connection* to Jesus. Even with his body controlled by demons, he came to Jesus, and once he was free, he sat at Jesus' feet (Mark 5:15), along with his other disciples. When Jesus crossed the stormy sea to find him, it was a divine rescue mission for one soul. That same invitation is extended to us. To be with Jesus is the beginning of healing (John 15:4–5).

His deliverance wasn't just spiritual—it reshaped his lifestyle. His entire body became a testimony to God's power. In the same way, when we are healed by Jesus, He reclaims our hearts and our habits. Scripture says that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). We are no longer ruled by destructive appetites or enslaved to harmful habits. Our physical bodies become sacred space—set apart for God's presence. This means pursuing purity, cultivating mental clarity, and adopting healthful practices that honor the One who redeemed us (1 Corinthians 10:31).

This story of the pigs is important. These animals were unclean according to the Old Testament laws (Leviticus 11). When God delivered Israel from Egypt, He gave laws to separate them from their harmful habits. When Jesus cleansed this man, he allowed the demons to destroy the pigs. Why? Clearly this is evidence of spiritual battle, yet it could also be evidence that God chose not to protect something that would be harmful to those who consumed it.

Although we are not saved by keeping rules, the New Testament affirms that God's health principles, like His moral law, are still important for Christians. At the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), when the early church debated what should apply to Gentile converts, they affirmed that believers should abstain from sexual immorality, from blood, from things strangled, and from foods offered to idols (Acts 15:20, 28–29). The moral law, including sexual purity (see also 1 Thessalonians 4:3–5), was never set aside. And health principles—long tied to reverence for life and avoidance of defilement—were not abolished either.

Today, we know that eating meats like pork, ham and bacon can increase a person's risk of heart disease and cancer, and that they are at higher risk of carrying parasites that could cause trichinosis. Shellfish like shrimp, crab, and lobster are also a health risk. They are filter feeders, concentrating heavy metals and pollutants in their bodies. The same is true of birds of prey, reptiles, and most insects—not surprising that the Bible would list these as unclean in Leviticus 11.

The Bible also speaks strongly against drinking “strong drink.” While it could be debated as to why “wine” is sometimes considered good, we must remember that the best “wine” in Bible times was actually unfermented fresh grape juice. The counsel of Scripture is clear—those who are given to strong drink are not following in the way of Christ. (Proverbs 20:1, 23:29–35, Isaiah 5:11, Isaiah 65:8, Proverbs 3:10, John 2:10, Habakkuk 2:15, 1 Corinthians 6:9–10, Galatians 5:19–21, 1 Peter 5:8, Galatians 5:23) The same principles would clearly apply to using tobacco or recreational drugs today. Just as this man was transformed by Jesus, so our lives should reflect the transformation that comes through our connection with Christ.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

SCRIPTURE:

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” — 2 Corinthians 5:17

“Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; ... they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship...” — Acts 2:41–42

“And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” — Revelation 12:17

REFLECTION: If we are saved by grace, why is it important to experience the “new creation,” to receive baptism and to continue in “the apostles' doctrine and fellowship”?

EXPERIENCE: What has your experience been in connection with organized communities of faith? Are you connected with a church, or have you been in the past? How does that church's teaching and practice align with the Bible?

QUESTION: Since God will give us new bodies in heaven, do you think God still cares about how we treat our bodies today? Why or why not?

QUESTION: Is it possible to follow Jesus without being part of a church family? Why or why not?

QUESTION: What part of the story of the demon-possessed man wasn't covered in this lesson? (Hint: this will be in tomorrow's study!)

RESPONSE: Would you like to be baptized? Would you like to be part of a church that keeps the commandments of God and has the testimony of Jesus?

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