

# What's on your menu?

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**By Reginald Killingley**

BIG SANDY, Texas—At the time of Jesus there was a region not far from Nazareth, just south of the Sea of Galilee, known as the Decapolis—Greek for "Ten Cities."

These cities were Hellenistic, settled predominantly by Greek-speaking gentiles. Their religious and cultural practices were considered anathema and "unclean" to Jews. They did not for the most part follow the Jewish faith, which explains why their inhabitants engaged in activities such as herding pigs.

Jews did not raise pigs because those animals were viewed as unclean, or disallowed as food, based primarily on scriptures in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14.

In Matthew 8:28-34 we read an account of an exorcism that took place near one of the Ten Cities, a town known as Gadara. Two men from Gadara were possessed by demons who manifested their presence in the form of extreme violence.

When Jesus showed up to cast them out, the demons pleaded to be allowed to possess a herd of pigs instead. No sooner did Jesus permit them to do so than their violent nature made the whole herd rush into the nearby Sea of Galilee and drown.

When other inhabitants of Gadara heard about this amazing turn of events, they begged Jesus to go away. After all, He was wiping out their livelihood!

Have you ever wondered why Jesus would allow the deliberate destruction of private property leading to significant economic loss? After all, this was not a pack of feral hogs but a herd of domesticated swine (similar to the one described in Luke 15:15 in the parable of the prodigal son). These pigs provided an important source of both food and income to their owners.

Going back to the scriptures referenced above (Leviticus 11:7-8 and Deuteronomy 14:8), if God really meant it when He taught that pork was not suitable for people to eat, then we can easily understand how eliminating a herd of animals unfit for human consumption—or unclean, to use the biblical terminology—would actually be doing the pig herders and consumers a favor. It would be a blessing in disguise.

But it's not just the Bible that makes the case for avoiding pork, a prohibition going back thousands of years.

In early 2009, going back just a few weeks, *The New York Times* published a couple of op-ed articles just one month apart detailing some of the present dangers of pork consumption.

One article, "Our Pigs, Our Food, Our Health," by columnist Nicholas D. Kristof, described growing concern that pigs are incubating methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, or MRSA, sometimes referred to as a potentially deadly flesh-eating bacterium. Mr. Kristof suggested that "we as a nation have moved to a model of agriculture that produces cheap bacon but risks the health of all of us."

The problem is not confined to the United States. Mr. Kristof went on to mention a strain of MRSA that "has spread rapidly through the Netherlands—especially in swine-producing areas."

In another article, "Free-Range Trichinosis," by James E. McWilliams, a professor at Texas State University at San Marcos, the author discussed problems with both the horrors of intensive pig farming and the high rate of salmonella and other bacteria and parasites in free-range pork. Dr. McWilliams concluded that, if these problems cannot be solved, "there's only one ethical choice left for the conscientious consumer: a pork-free diet."

The Gadarenes were helped—at least temporarily—to adopt such a diet, to the benefit of their health and well-being. Now others, even from a nonreligious standpoint, appear to be considering a similar option. Their arguments certainly provide much additional food for thought. And, maybe, just maybe, God knew what He was talking about?

Now, what will be on *your* menu?