

Main Idea: With Jesus there is hope for the helpless. Perhaps no story illustrates this any more clearly than the one in Mark 5:1-20. There are five scenes in the passage.

- I. Jesus and a man without hope (1-5)
  - A. He was demon-possessed (2).
  - B. He lived like a dead man (3-4).
  - C. He was self-destructing (5).
- II. Jesus and Legion (6-10)
  - A. Evil spirits fear Jesus (6-8).
    1. They know the truth about Him.
    2. They know their days are numbered.
  - B. Evil spirits must submit to Jesus (9-10).
    1. He knows the truth about them.
    2. He decides their fate.
- III. Jesus and a herd of pigs (11-13)
  - A. Their presence says something about the people (11).
  - B. Their death says something about the demons (12-13).
    1. Satan promises life, but delivers death.
    2. Satan intends to kill.
- IV. Jesus and the townspeople (14-17)
  - A. They saw the evidence (14-16).
  - B. They asked Jesus to leave (17).
- V. Jesus and a man full of hope (18-20)
  - A. He wants to be with Jesus (18).
  - B. He obeys Jesus (19).
  - C. He tells others about Jesus (20).

Implications: The Lord has done so much for us, too!

1. Let’s thank Him right now.
2. Let’s tell others this week.

Later in this service we will have the privilege to come to the Lord’s table together. We will worship our Savior together by remembering what He has done for us. Communion is all about *remembering*. Do you remember what it was like to be lost, to be helpless and hopeless? This morning’s text will help us remember. As we’ll see in today’s passage in Mark, the Lord Jesus truly is the One who brings hope to the helpless.

*Scripture Reading: Mark 5:1-20*

Helpless and hopeless. Those two words describe people that are living all around us. They are helpless and hopeless.

It’s tough to live without hope. The reality is, if you don’t have hope, you don’t really live, but merely *exist*. And we are living in a society full of people who are doing just that, not living, but merely *existing*. Oh, they may be smiling on the outside, but behind a smiling façade is the haunting realization that something’s missing.

I’m so thankful to be able to proclaim with certainty today that hope is available. You can have hope today. Your family can have hope. You won’t find it by looking within yourself. If you want hope you must look to a person, Jesus Christ.

You say, “You don’t know how bad it is for me. My life is crumbling.”

That may be true, but so is this. There is hope.

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<sup>\*\*</sup>Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> For a previous look at this passage, see the Mark series in 2004.

Maybe you're thinking of someone else, a family member or a friend or neighbor, "She's too far gone. Her situation is *hopeless*."

Again, I have good news. With Jesus there is hope for the helpless and hopeless.

Perhaps no story in God's Word demonstrates this any more powerfully than the one before us in Mark 5:1-20. We meet a demon-possessed man. We don't even know his name. The Bible doesn't tell us. What the Bible does make perfectly clear is that this man was helpless and hopeless. And then Jesus entered his life! And what Jesus did for this demoniac He can do for anyone. There are five scenes in the story.

### I. Jesus and a man without hope (1-5)

Verse 1 [I'll be reading from the NIV]—"They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes." *They* is referring to Jesus and the disciples who had been ministering in Galilee. Jesus had been using parables to teach the crowds about His kingdom. When evening came, He said to His disciples, "Let us go over to the other side (4:35)." What Jesus didn't tell His men were the reasons for going.

For starters, He had a pop quiz for His students that came on the boat ride in the form of a violent storm. "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" He asked them (4:40). The purpose of the trip was to teach them about their need to trust Him.

But the primary reason for the trip, however, focused on one desperate, hopeless man. Jesus had a divine appointment to keep with that man and, not surprisingly, the man was waiting when the boat docked.

Verse 2—"When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him." Don't miss the sovereign timing in this story. Just a few hours earlier Jesus stopped His teaching ministry and said, "Let's go to the other side." The boat runs into a furious squall, but the Master prevails. As soon as He and the twelve reach their destination a man approaches them. Not just any man, either, but a man who truly is without hope.

See the sovereign, gracious love of the Lord in this, my friend. Jesus sees the hurting sinner. He cares. He comes. And He's still doing it. You are not here by accident this morning. He sees you. He is intersecting your life today.

Mark informs us of three things about this particular man.

**A. He was demon-possessed (2).** According to verse 2, he had an "unclean spirit." As we'll see shortly, it was actually plural, unclean *spirits*, for the man was infested with dozens, even thousands of demons. Mark refers to him as "the demon-possessed man" in verse 16.

There's some discrepancy over the location. Mark says the event occurred in the region of Gerasa. Other manuscripts say it was Gergesa or Gadara. Part of the problem is reconciling the geography to the meeting. The town of Gerasa was about thirty miles southeast of the lake. Gadara was only six miles away, but with a deep gorge in between. But Mark doesn't say the meeting took place in either of these towns. He says that Jesus went to the region, not the city of Gerasa, likely to a place right on the shore known as Kursi, with steep cliffs as we'll see momentarily.

It's significant to note that this was a largely Gentile area as evidenced by the name "Decapolis" in verse 20. These are Greek cities located within Syria.

Jesus initiated this meeting. That's amazing. This man is unclean, in so many ways. He's living in tombs, with Gentiles, perhaps himself a Gentile, filled with demons. Yet

Jesus designed a trip to reach this vile man. He entered Gentile territory with this specific location in mind.

And amazingly, this hopeless demoniac reciprocated. Verse 6 indicates the man saw Jesus coming *from a distance* and started running towards Him.

By the way, since it was already evening when Jesus departed on the boat trip, we can assume it is now dark when He meets this demon-controlled man. Darkness seems to make things creepier. That being the case this must have been an eerie encounter.

Here comes a man who lives in a tomb. It's night. Matthew's account says he was naked.<sup>2</sup> A perilous place, a perilous hour, a dangerous man. If the storm got the disciples unnerved, can you imagine how they felt right about now?

**B. He lived like a dead man (3-4).** "This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him."

It makes me wonder why people tried to bind him. Perhaps for his own safety. My hunch is they considered him a menace to society, a threat to public safety.

What a pathetic situation! Based on Jesus' words in verse 19, we know the man had family ['friends' in the KJV], but now his closest friends are the gravestones. He's living like a dead man.

**C. He was self-destructing (5).** "Night and day among the tombs and in the hills, he would cry out and cut himself with stones." How tragic! Here is a man created in the image of God, created to love God and others, created to work and contribute to the good of society. But he's under demonic control. There's not one constructive thing coming out of his life, just the opposite. He's a threat to others and himself.

The text says he "cut himself." Self-mutilation isn't a new problem, friends. Far too many young people today abuse their bodies, yet sadly, there's nothing new about this behavior. God is the Creator, but Satan is the destroyer.

J. D. Jones comments, "This naked, brutalized madman may aptly stand as an illustration of the ruin sin makes. It degrades, defiles a man. It pollutes the soul. It turns what was designed for a temple of God into a haunt of devils."<sup>3</sup>

That's scene 1. Jesus and a man without hope. The spotlight moves in scene 2.

## II. Jesus and Legion (6-10)

So where did the demons come from? The generally accepted view is that these spirit beings were once angels who joined with Lucifer in his attempted coup. There are many questions the Bible doesn't answer for us about the demonic world, and it's best not to speculate. From a careful look at this text we learn two things about evil spirits.

**A. Evil spirits fear Jesus (6-8).** Verse 6—"When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him." The KJV says, "He ran and worshiped Him," but the verb simply means, "to bow down, to prostrate oneself." Here it's obviously not an act of adoration, but of sheer, fearful submission.

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<sup>2</sup> Mark gives more detail than either Matthew or Luke. Matthew says there were *two* demon-possessed men involved. Luke mentions only one but reveals that the man was naked and originally lived in the city.

<sup>3</sup> J. D. Jones, p. 131.

It's interesting that though he was too strong for men to bind, even with chains, he falls to his knees in the presence of Jesus. Philippians 2:10 says it well, "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth."

Why did the man react as he did? Remember, the man is under the control of the evil spirits, and based on what came from his lips next, we know that evil spirits fear Jesus.

Verses 7-8—"He shouted at the top of his voice, 'What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!' For Jesus had said to him, 'Come out of this man, you evil spirit!'"

Here is why evil spirits fear Jesus, for two reasons.

1. *They know the truth about Him.* This man, under demonic control, uses the Lord's personal name. He calls him "Jesus."<sup>4</sup> He also uses the title, "Son of the Most High God," indicating he recognized His deity. But it's not the man. It's the demons speaking through the man they control. And most certainly, they know who Jesus is.

2. *They know their days are numbered.* What a request! "Swear to God that you won't torture me!" Did you realize that demons believe in God? Absolutely. They apparently once served in His presence, prior to their rebellion. Now they know their fate, that they're living on borrowed time, and that eternal torment is coming.

Please note that the demons do not know what Jesus plans to do. That indicates that demonic beings can know God's plan only if God reveals it. There is no evidence in Scripture to suggest that demons can read the mind of a believer, for instance.

And so, they fear Jesus. But not only that...

**B. Evil spirits must submit to Jesus (9-10).** Do they want to submit? No, but they must. They are rebel creatures standing before their Maker and Judge.

Verse 9—"Then Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?'" Why did the Lord ask that question? It wasn't for His sake, for He knows everything. He asks it for the sake of the man, the demons, the disciples, and us. He wants us to know who He's dealing with.

"'My name is Legion,' he replied, 'for we are many.'" Legion. A Roman legion contained 6,000 soldiers. Note the plural. "*We* are many."

The Bible seems to differentiate various degrees of demon control. Usually, the gospel record states that a person has one unclean spirit or demon. Mary Magdalene's condition was worse, for she had seven demons (16:9). But this man, by contrast, is affected by a *legion*. In other words, there is a whole army of evil indwelling him.

But even an army of demons is no match for the Lord. Verse 10 says, "And he begged Jesus again and again [note the repetition] not to send them out of the area." Why would a proud, powerful legion of demons resort to begging? Why would they cower in submission before Jesus? Here are the reasons, two of them.

1. *He [Jesus] knows the truth about them.* They can't hide behind the face of the poor man they infest. Jesus fixes His gaze on them, and knows the truth about them.

2. *He [again, that's Jesus] decides their fate.* "Please don't send us out of the area," was their plea. Why are they afraid? Yes. Could it be that demons are territorial? Perhaps. Does Satan delegate particular assignments of destruction to his wicked junior associates, assignments that include jurisdiction over particular places in the world? For instance, in Daniel 10:13 the angel Michael told Daniel, "The prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days," apparently referring to a demon that exercised influence over the Persian empire in the interests of Satan. Could it be that these demons

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<sup>4</sup> There was common thinking that by using the person's name you could control the person.

are fearful to return to their boss knowing they have yet to complete their assignment of destruction?

Maybe. But the real reason for their fear is standing right in front of them. They know what He's going to do to them. They just don't know when. The parallel account of Luke 8:31 reads, "And they begged him repeatedly not to order them *to go into the Abyss*." They know that's where they are heading. Their sentence is settled. All they can do is plead, "Not yet, Jesus, not yet."

Did you realize that demons can show emotion, even a sense of remorse and sorrow? They can and do, but it's a sham. They don't love the Lord, and certainly don't want to please Him. They just want Him to leave them alone.

People can be like that, too. They can cry and call out to the Lord, but what's needed is repentance, not tears.

This brings us to scene three. We've seen Jesus and the man without hope, and Jesus and Legion. Next...

### III. Jesus and a herd of pigs (11-13)

Verse 11—"A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside." Pigs, in Israel? Yes, indeed. What are we to make of these pigs?

**A. Their presence says something about the people (11).** What are pigs, which are unclean animals according to Mosaic law, doing here?

One commentator observes, "Even today in Israel, it is not unknown for a 'kibbutz' to rear pigs, in spite of all the outcry from the orthodox; although in deference to scruples, they will be called *haberim*, 'comrades,' instead of *hazirim*, 'pigs.'"<sup>5</sup>

I had to chuckle when I read that sentence, for one scene I'll never forget from the four months I lived in Israel was a cookout we had. Uzi was the chef. We ate what he called "white steak." It was the best pork chop I'd ever tasted, right on the southern shore of the Sea of Galilee!

Uzi didn't care about pleasing the Lord with kosher laws. He was basically an agnostic. These pig owners in Gerasene didn't care either. Either they were Jews who disobeyed God's law for financial gain, or they were Gentiles who could care less about God's law. In either case, the presence of the pigs says something about the condition of the people living there. Furthermore...

**B. Their death says something about the demons (12-13).** Verse 12—"The demons begged Jesus, 'Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them.'" Once again we see that demons can do nothing without permission from Jesus.

Verse 13—"He gave them permission, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned."

Matthew records Jesus' answer with one word. "Go!" He said *go* and the demons went directly to the pigs and caused the entire herd to stampede to their death. What a scene! It's also a vivid portrayal of the true character of Satan.

*1. Satan promises life, but delivers death.* Jesus said in John 10:10, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy." That's Satan. He promises the good life. But he delivers death. Every time. I'll put it even more bluntly.

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<sup>5</sup> Cole, p. 158.

2. *Satan intends to kill.* He could care less about anything but himself. He hates God and he uses the creatures of God for his self-seeking ambitions. And so, he *ruins* the lives of God's image-bearers, he *destroys* them, to get at God. He even destroys other creatures, in this case, pigs that perished in the water.

Beloved, please don't dabble with the devil. He's a killer. He'll promise you the world but cut your throat. That's one of the reasons Jesus allowed this destruction of the swine. Some animal activists have criticized Jesus for authorizing what resulted in the death of 2,000 pigs. "Why did He do that?" they demand.

For starters, He didn't *do* it. He *allowed* it. The demons did the killing. But the reason He allowed it, perhaps, was to give proof of several things, for all to see:

⇒One, proof that the miracle of deliverance had indeed taken place, the once demon-possessed man was now free.

⇒Two, proof of just how powerful the Lord is, for the spirits that Jesus exorcised from the man were powerful enough to destroy 2,000 pigs. And finally...

⇒Three, proof of the truth about the evil one. To Satan, a pig is as good as a man.<sup>6</sup>

Friends, getting comfortable with Satan is like petting a rattlesnake. Sure, he might not bite you this time, but what a foolish risk. I'll be more specific. Why listen to music that promotes the demonic? Why play video games that glorify evil? Why watch movies that sensationalize the forces of Satan? He's a killer, and if he could, he would kill you and those you love.

What happened to the demons after they killed the pigs? We're not told. Apparently, since they destroyed their newfound dwelling place, they returned to the pit.

You say, "I thought you said the demons were territorial and didn't want to leave their area." First of all, I *suggested* that as a possibility. And secondly, I suggested they didn't want to leave the area *without fulfilling their destructive assignment*. In other words, their assignment is to kill, nothing less will do. They wanted to destroy the man, but failed. So they settled for the pigs. Now they can report to their wicked general.

This brings us to scene four. Scene 1, Jesus and a man without hope. Scene 2, Jesus and Legion. Scene 3, Jesus and the pigs. Scene 4...

#### IV. Jesus and the townspeople (14-17)

We're told that the local inhabitants responded in two ways.

**A. They saw the evidence (14-16).** "Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well."

Talk about evidence! Exhibit A—two thousand dead pigs lying at the bottom of a cliff. Exhibit B—a once-naked-crazy-man now clothed and sitting in peace. And exhibit C—they then saw the One responsible for all this. And when they saw that Man, they were *afraid*.

People often fear what they don't understand, and sometimes what they *do* understand. They give in to their fears and do what the townspeople did.

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<sup>6</sup> Wiersbe, p. 126.

**B. They asked Jesus to leave (17).** “Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.” Amazing. The Son of God came to visit them and they begged Him to leave.

Why? He *changed things*. For starters, He got rid of their pigs. What will He do next? Sadly, the restoration of a helpless demoniac meant nothing to them compared to the loss of their property.<sup>7</sup>

The fact is, if these people were Jews they were engaged in a forbidden business venture. Even if they weren't Jews, they were guilty of greed. Like Esau, they preferred their mess of pottage to the birthright.

J. D. Jones is right: “Many a business man has bowed Jesus out of his establishment, because His presence interferes with his trade; many a merchant has bowed Him out of his office because He interferes with his profits; many a young fellow has bowed Him out of his life because He interferes with his pleasures. They have told Him to go.”<sup>8</sup>

Basically, the Gerasenes loved their swine more than their souls.

You say, “I think you're being too hard on the Gerasenes. They weren't calculating sinners, just confused.” That's what many today would say, “I don't hate Jesus. I'm just not ready yet to receive Him into my life.”

Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman told of a distinguished minister, Dr. Howard, from Australia who preached very strongly on the subject of sin. After the service, one of the church officers came to counsel with him in the study. "Dr. Howard," he said, "we don't want you to talk as openly as you do about man's guilt and corruption, because if our boys and girls hear you discussing that subject they will more easily become sinners. Call it a mistake if you will, but do not speak so plainly about sin." "The minister took down a small bottle and showing it to the visitor said, "You see that label? It says strychnine -- and underneath in bold, red letters the word 'Poison!' Do you know, man, what you are asking me to do? You are suggesting that I change the label. Suppose I do, and paste over it the words, 'Essence of Peppermint'; don't you see what might happen? Someone would use it, not knowing the danger involved, and would certainly die. So it is, too, with the matter of sin. The milder you make your label, the more dangerous you make your poison!"<sup>9</sup>

The Gerasenes committed a grave sin that day. But they're not alone. John 1:11 records, “He [Jesus] came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.” The fact is, we'll never love Jesus as we ought either if we love something else more.

“The saddest thing in the whole story,” Cole writes, “is that Jesus granted their request, and left them. There are times when the worst possible thing for us is that the Lord should grant our prayer.”<sup>10</sup>

Jesus doesn't force His presence on those who don't want Him. Then or now.

Our story began in scene 1 with the spotlight on Jesus and a man without hope. Then we saw the demons, the pigs, and the townspeople. Now the climax, scene 5.

## V. Jesus and a man full of hope (18-20)

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<sup>7</sup> These people—like many today—had one basic concern. The *economy*. They were afraid if Jesus stayed any longer they might lose more “stuff,” and thus more money.

<sup>8</sup> J. D. Jones, p. 139.

<sup>9</sup> [Unknown](#).

<sup>10</sup> Cole, p. 159.

You say, “What does a person full of hope look like?” Here it is. It’s a person who exhibits three traits, all by the grace of God.

**A. He wants to be with Jesus (18).** “As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him.” How ironic! The people begged Jesus to leave them. This man begs Jesus for the opportunity to stay with Him.

I struggle with something. I don’t know what to make of people who claim to be Christians and yet say, they don’t like to read the Word, and don’t like to go to church. What would you think of a person who said, “I love Buckeye football. I’m a huge OSU fan,” but he never goes to a game, he never even watches a game on television, and he never checks the Sports page for the game summary. And when asked why he calls himself a Buckeye fan, he responds, “Oh, I went to a game back in 1974 and I still have the ticket stub.” Is he truly a Buckeye fan? Does claiming to be something make it so?

How can you tell if a person is really a Christian? It’s not by what he *claims*. Just look at what he does. And here’s the first thing a true Christian does. *He wants to be with Jesus*. You don’t have to plead with him to spend time with the Master, in church, and in the Word. He wants to be near Him, and it’s because he has a new nature that’s wants to.

**B. He obeys Jesus (19).** Verse 19—“Jesus did not let him.” That’s interesting. He wanted to leave with Jesus, but Jesus said *no*, and gave him an assignment instead.<sup>11</sup>

Verse 19 again—“But said, ‘Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.’”

So the Christian life involves fellowship with the Lord, yes. But it involves more than that. We’re saved to serve. As Jones puts it, “The Christian life is not simply something to *enjoy*; it is also something to *do*.”<sup>12</sup>

And where does obedience begin? Right where we are. It begins at home.

So, it’s not complicated. A person who has hope wants to be with the One who gives the hope, Jesus. That’s the first trait. And someone who obeys Jesus—that’s the second. One more...

**C. He tells others about Jesus (20).** “So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.”

Go and tell, Jesus said. And that’s what the man did.

He actually became one of the earliest missionaries to Gentiles. The Decapolis was a league of ten (originally free) Greek cities. The Roman Emperor Pompey liberated them from Jewish rule about 63 BC. Barclay says the cities were “stubbornly Greek,” adding, “They were beautiful cities; they had their Greek gods and their Greek temples and their Greek amphitheatres; they were devoted to the Greek way of life.”<sup>13</sup>

Do you see the Lord’s mercy here? He’s giving the idolatrous Gerasenes another chance. They wanted Him to leave, which He did. But He left behind a preacher, a hope-giver. Oh, how tender are the mercies of God!

And what exactly did the man share with people? The very thing Jesus told him to share. Jesus said in verse 19, “Go and tell them how much the Lord has done for you.”

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<sup>11</sup> There’s a contrast here with the cleansed leper in 1:44. Jesus told the healed leper, “Don’t tell this to anyone.” Why the difference? In the case of the demoniac Jesus is in Gentile territory where there’s little danger of wrong messianic ideas spreading.

<sup>12</sup> J. D. Jones, p. 141.

<sup>13</sup> Barclay, p. 125.

And Mark says in verse 20, “So the man went...and began to tell how much Jesus had done for him.”

If you were dying of some terrible disease and a doctor healed you, you’d do the same, wouldn’t you? You’d sing the praises of that doctor, wouldn’t you? You’d tell everybody about him or her, especially those suffering from the disease that nearly took your life.

So answer this, brothers and sisters, two questions. One, has Jesus done anything for us? Indeed, He has! And two, who have we told about it recently? Calvin is right as he says this with the demoniac in mind, “Though we are not tortured by the devil, yet he holds us as his slaves, till the Son of God delivers us from his tyranny. Naked, torn, and disfigured, we wander about, till he restores us to soundness of mind.”<sup>14</sup>

Implications: The Lord has done so much for us, too!

And since He has, two responses are in order.

1. *Let’s thank Him right now.* Has Jesus set you free? Then give Him thanks. And if you want to be free, call on Him by faith, and He will!

2. *Let’s tell others this week.* The Lord used one man to fill ten cities with the knowledge of His mercy. Imagine what He can do with a whole congregation!

**Closing Song:** #201 “*Great Greater Than Our Sin*” (verses 1, 2, 3)

**Communion**

We who were without hope now have hope! And why? We come to the table now to remember why. It’s all because of what He did for us.

He told us to take the bread, saying, “This is for you.” Indeed, it was. He gave His body for us and let Roman soldiers nail Him to a cross, where He died in our place, paying the penalty for our sins. So let us remember.

And then He told us to take the cup, which He said is the new covenant in His blood. He shed His blood to make a ransom payment for us. So let us remember.

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<sup>14</sup> In Wessel, p. 658.