

# **A Gift From Heaven**

*Why Four Gospels: Mark*

*His Suffering*

*The Miracle of God's People*

## **Lesson 13**

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# Why Four Gospels: Mark

Mary, the mother of Mark, lived in Jerusalem. Peter went there when he was miraculously freed from his imprisonment. "When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying." (*Acts 12:12*) Obviously there was a close relationship between Mark and Peter. Peter calls Mark "my son" (*1 Pet. 5:13*), and during the second century Mark's gospel was also called "Peter's Memoirs". In Mark's gospel you can also notice Peter's haste. Peter was a man of hasty reactions and hasty exclamations.

God may have made use of this special relationship between Mark and Peter to convey the overpowering force of the Gospel. The energy in Mark's gospel is one of its dominant characteristics.

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## Mark, Paul and Peter

Just as Luke mentioned much of what he had heard from Paul in his gospel, Mark most likely made use of Peter's speeches in order to write his gospel. Mark did, however, accompany Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journeys as their assistant (*Acts 12:25*). Unfortunately, there were conflicts in the relationship between Paul and Mark. "And Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work." (*Acts 15:37,38*) Evidently, Mark had returned to Jerusalem against the wishes of Paul (*Acts 13:13*). This conflict between both apostles grew worse. "There arose a sharp contention, so that they separated from each other; Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus." (*Acts 15:39*)

There are people who love to point out the shortcomings and errors of people in the church using that as ammunition in their rejection of Christianity. But the Bible does not hide the faults of Christians. It does not beat around the bush. Christians, even those who live close to Christ, are not perfect people. It is precisely because of this that they need Christ as their Saviour. Christ teaches them to fight sin and to live in harmony with each other. That happened here too, because the difference of opinion between Mark and Paul was solved. The right relationship seems to have been restored later because Paul says, "Get Mark and bring him with you; for he is useful in serving me." (*2 Tim. 4:11*) During Paul's first imprisonment Mark was even with him and meant much to him (*Col. 4:10,11*). In spite of his many contacts with Paul, Mark was mostly influenced by Peter. An author from about A.D. 130 mentions that Mark wrote down Peter's sermons with great accuracy. Most likely Mark's gospel is a condensation of the first Christian instruction given in Jerusalem by means of sermons and other methods.

The wording used in Mark's gospel shows that he was a city dweller. In Jerusalem, Greek and Syrian were spoken. Therefore, Mark gives a Greek translation of typical Aramaic words. For instance, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." (*Mark 5:41*), and "Ephphatha" that is, "Be opened." (*Mark 7:34*)

## A Brief Book

The gospel of Mark is the shortest of the four gospels. It deals with a brief period of Jesus' life. Mark does not mention the birth of Jesus, but begins his gospel with the public appearances of Jesus who is the fulfillment of Old Testament, who comes to save a world that is lost (*Is. 40:3, Mal. 3:3*).

The herald, John the Baptist, had finished his task. Now the fulfillment of all God's promises in Christ starts and this is the good news Mark is going to tell. Mark ends his gospel in the same abrupt style as he started it. It is all equally surprising. In the last chapter Mark tells how the frightened women fled from the tomb of Jesus, and told no one about the empty tomb. The resurrection of Jesus is so surprising, so contrary to human expectation, that at first they could not assimilate it. When we compare Mark's gospel to the other gospels God gave us, it appears that after their initial fear, the women did speak. All of the evangelists note the shock that resulted from the resurrection of Jesus, but only Mark brings it across in such a dramatic style. To be sure, this resurrection has often been denied. There have always been people who shrugged their shoulders at it, like the Athenian philosophers: "Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; but others said, 'We will hear you again about this.'" (*Acts 17:32*)

Most likely Mark wrote his gospel to educate the young Christian churches. These churches had to know that the gospel of the resurrection was such a momentous event that it came as a shock even to the small circle of His followers. This small circle had not taken Jesus' words seriously when He had previously announced His resurrection, but now the joy of this event filled their lives. Mark wants this joy to permeate to these newly established churches as well (*Mark 8:31, 9:31-32, 10:34*).

The abrupt narrative of the fleeing, scared women near the end of Mark's gospel is often an embarrassment to Christians. It shows that they have no reason to feel superior to others who will not or cannot accept the resurrection of Jesus. If it had not been for the fact that Jesus took matters into His own hands, there would not have been a Christian church. (*Mark 16:9,11,13,14*)

You may have also noticed that in the translation, a footnote indicates that the verses 9-20 of chapter 16 are missing in important manuscripts. There are various opinions concerning the question of whether this ending has been added at a later date by someone other than Mark. But this passage does fit in with the other gospels. This is why the church accepted this final part of the gospel of Mark as "canonical", that is, as the authoritative Word of God.

## God's Kingdom Has the Future

The gospel of Mark is probably the oldest of the four gospels. It is also called the "basic gospel". Except for eighty verses, the subject matter can also be found in Matthew and Luke. It is remarkable how pointed and precisely Mark describes various events. You can check this yourself by comparing:

*Matt. 4:22*      *Luke 5:11*      *Mark 1:20*

*Matt. 8:4*      *Luke 5:14*      *Mark 1:43,44*

*Matt. 8:23*      *Luke 8:22*      *Mark 4:35,36*

It is not easy to pick out one central theme in Mark's gospel. Some say that this gospel depicts Jesus in His humanity and power. Others think that Mark's gospel deals principally with God's hidden Kingdom, which through Jesus, is clearing a way for itself in this world.

On the one hand, Mark is showing the power of Jesus: "And many who heard him were astonished, saying, 'Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to him? What mighty works are wrought by his hands!'" (*Mark 6:2*) On the other hand, it is remarkable how often Mark mentions Jesus' commandment not to tell others about His miracles. "And he charged them to tell no one about him." (*Mark 8:30*)

Jesus does not want the people to perceive Him as a miracle worker or a superman. He does not want to be the "superman" who is honoured as a hero. He simply wants to be recognized as the Son of God. He came to earth in humiliation. He came to establish the Kingdom of God. It grows in secret like a seed that falls into the ground. God's Kingdom is like a mustard seed which "when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs..." (*Mark 4:32*)

Only the Kingdom of God has a future - a tremendous future. The miracles performed by the King of this realm indicate that the age of this Kingdom has come and is moving towards total fulfillment. Are you ready for it?

# His Suffering

## *Article 4*

The birth of Jesus as a human being was His own choice. He knew before He came to earth that His life here would not be easy. The Son of God would have to suffer and die for us. Was all this suffering really necessary? Why did Jesus have to endure the ridicule of the Jewish people and die a cursed death on the cross?

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### **Voluntary Suffering**

Jesus came to earth to fulfill all God had promised about the Messiah in the Old Testament. Jesus knew that only in this way would salvation be possible for His people. He also knew that His life on earth would be one of suffering. Centuries ago Isaiah had already prophesied this (*Isa. 53*). Jesus knew that His Father's justice required that He lay down His life for others (*John 10:18*). We cannot imagine what a great burden His suffering must have been to Him.

"Even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (*Matt. 20:28*). The Son of God offered His life for others (*Isa. 53:4,5*). He was the ransom for many, for all who have gambled away their lives.

Jesus had to fulfill the mandate which mankind had received before the fall into sin. Mankind could not fulfill this mandate because of the fall into sin. Jesus also had to clear the account between God and man. On our earth cursed by sin, He had to live in complete obedience and love to God. He also had to carry God's just punishment for mankind's sins: the death penalty, eternal death (*Gen. 2:17*).

Voluntarily, and in full consciousness, Jesus suffered for our salvation. The Good Shepherd sacrificed Himself for His sheep. Yet, man did not appreciate it. Rather than listening to Him while He was on earth they plotted to kill Him. The long-awaited Messiah received a very cold reception on earth and this made His sufferings even more severe.

### **The Severity of His Suffering**

Sinless Jesus came into a sinful world. He had to carry God's wrath against the sins of all mankind. God gave Him the punishment that we, human beings, deserved. This meant His whole life on earth was filled with suffering, from His birth till His death (*Phil. 2:7,8*).

Let us look at some of the ways in which He suffered. When Jesus was eight days old He had to be circumcised (*Luke 2:21*). This operation may not seem to be too terrible, but it signified and acknowledged man's uncleanness, sin and guilt. As a child He was driven out of the promised land and became a fugitive, an alien in Egypt (*Matt. 2:13,14*). It was not the status a King should have. When He grew up, He was confronted with the unbelief and ignorance of Mary and Joseph (*Luke 2:41-52*). When He became an adult and appeared in public, He became the object of all sorts of attacks. First, He had to resist the strong temptations of Satan, after going hungry for forty days (*Matt. 4:1-11*). Later, Israel's leaders, the very men who should have supported Jesus, called Him a servant of the devil. This accusation only added to His suffering (*Matt. 12:22-32*). He was the Saviour filled with wisdom and power, but the people did not believe in Him (*Matt. 13:53-58*). He also had to rebuke His own followers and call them an unbelieving and perverse generation (*Matt. 17:17*). Even Peter, one of His leading disciples, tempted Him the way Satan had once tempted Him (*Matt. 16:21-23*).

During His whole life, His suffering produced great stress, but particularly towards the end. The anguish of approaching death and of being forsaken by God oppressed Him at Gethsemane to such a degree that He, shedding His tears, prayed to God while His sweat "became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground" (*Luke 22:44; Heb. 5:7*).

Jesus was without sin, and yet Pilate condemned Him. Even though he proclaimed Jesus' innocence no less than three times, he finally yielded to the Jews' demands (*John 19:1-16*). God used him to pronounce the verdict over Jesus.

## **Victory Through His Suffering**

On Golgotha's cross, Jesus was deserted by God. When God abandons someone He does not want anything to do with that individual. It is commonly called "eternal death". Christ took this eternal death upon Himself. He had to undergo this while He was fully conscious. To Him that was worse than death. When this complete rejection by God happened to Him, He cried out, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (*Matt. 27:46*) As a living human being, He experienced the complete darkness caused by God's absence for a total of three hours while being fully aware of this both physically and spiritually. While hanging alive on the cross, He endured eternal death. His divine nature supported His human nature until the end when He could say "It is finished."

In this way He suffered and experienced the death that should have been ours (*Gen. 2:1; Gal. 3:13*). Everything we deserved, He endured: sin, sicknesses, hunger, and suffering. God made Him endure all of this. That is why Jesus came to earth. It was a long road of suffering, but He walked it for our sake.

## **Our Substitute**

The suffering we experience cannot be compared with the suffering of Jesus. In the history of the Church many martyrs have been tortured. It is said that the apostle Peter was crucified upside down. But even suffering as terrible as this is not like the suffering Jesus had to endure. Christ was without sin. His suffering contained the wrath of God, not because of any personal sin, but because of the sins of mankind.

Jesus bore the anger of God, He endured this punishment till the bitter end, in complete love to God. The severity of His suffering was not in the fact that people hurt Him. The severity was that He experienced God's wrath against mankind's sins. As our substitute He was made "to be sin" (*2 Cor. 5:21*), so that we would be acquitted by God. That was the hardest part of His suffering.

No human being can withstand eternal death, let alone conquer it. But the Son of God came to earth and delivered us from eternal death.

# The Miracle of God's People

## *Genesis 39-45*

While on his death bed, Jacob blessed his sons and through them their descendants. Jacob could see that God was fulfilling His promise of descendants as numerous as the stars. His family was over seventy members large and growing rapidly. He also trusted that God would give this young nation its promised land. Therefore, Jacob insisted on being buried there.

Joseph also trusted God because he had the same wish at his death. Thus the Book of Genesis ends with an example of firm faith in the promises given to Abraham (*Gen. 50:24-26*). It is an appropriate ending to a book filled with the struggle of faith. The patriarchs died in faith because God had joined Himself to them with a solemn oath. His promises are absolutely sure. What He promises will come to pass through faith, including His promise of a Saviour.

With an eye to the arrival of this Messiah the Lord guided and directed His nation, Israel.

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## **God Directs Events**

The nation which God chose for Himself had a very special role in God's plan of salvation. They would be the nation that was to bring a very special child, the Messiah, into the world. Let us see how God works with this nation.

Jacob was one of the patriarchs of this special nation. Jacob was the child his parents had been anticipating for twenty years. However, Jacob, the child of their prayers soon turned into Jacob, the deceiver, who robbed his brother of his birthright and deceived his father (*Gen. 25:21, 27, 29-34*). Yet, God makes use of this Jacob. God's ways are unsearchable!

Jacob's four wives gave Jacob twelve sons and one daughter. This family lived in the midst of the Canaanites. God told them that they had to keep themselves separate from that nation, but they did not do this. Jacob's daughter Dinah was seduced by a Canaanite boy (*Gen. 34*). As punishment, her brothers murdered all the males of this boy's family. After this bloody deed Jacob took his whole family to Bethel to be purified, but the cleansing was not deep enough. Jacob's son Judah, who would be the direct forefather of Jesus, soon involved himself with a prostitute (*Gen. 38*).

Things were obviously not right with Jacob's family. They had to leave this godless country before it swallowed them up, so God moved them from this tempting environment. God oversaw a chain of events that lead to Joseph's arrival in Egypt. Joseph, Jacob's favourite son, was sold as a slave by his brothers. They lied to his father that a wild beast had devoured him. The eleven brothers were cruel to Joseph because they hated him. In a dream, God had revealed to Joseph, one of the youngest sons of Jacob, that he would become the most important member of the whole family (*Gen. 37:5-11*).

All the brothers knew that dreams were one of the ways through which God revealed Himself, but they did not want to accept the fact that Joseph would be more important than they. They took offense to God's Word and God's way of working. They did not want

to submit to God's will and admit that Joseph would become their superior. That is why they wanted to kill him. But God intervened. Instead, they sold him as a slave to merchants that happened to pass by on their way to Egypt.

There he started off as the slave of an important Egyptian. Over the years Joseph gained status in Potiphar's household (*Gen. 38*). Joseph lost all this when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him. When she realized he would have nothing to do with her she charged Joseph with trying to rape her. Consequently, Joseph ended up in prison. However, there too, he soon gained the prison warden's trust. One day he met two of Pharaoh's imprisoned servants. God gave Joseph the wisdom and the insight to interpret their dreams.

Later, when Pharaoh has a dream which no one can interpret, the servant, who was once again in Pharaoh's court, remembered Joseph and Joseph was summoned to interpret the dream. In this way God used Joseph to make His will known to the king of a foreign country. Truly, this was an amazing series of events. Nobody but God could have directed them. And the plot becomes even more incredulous. Joseph, the slave became a top minister in the powerful nation of Egypt. In the process he saved his father's humble little nation which otherwise would have perished through seven years of famine.

After many years of separation Joseph met his father Jacob again (*Gen. 46*). It was a touching reunion, but the real significance of the story goes much deeper. Joseph explains the deeper meaning of the story. "As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (*Gen. 50:20*).

## God Provides for His People

Jacob's family stayed in Egypt some 400 years and became a great nation. In spite of many adverse conditions which would make one expect the opposite, the number of people grew so rapidly that it started to disturb the Pharaoh. Israel's population threatened to outnumber the Egyptian nation. To prevent this from happening, the Egyptian midwives were ordered to kill all new Israelite boys. But the midwives respected the Lord of Israel and refused to obey Pharaoh's commands (*Ex. 1:17*). Next, the new Pharaoh decreed that all newborn boys had to be drowned in the Nile (*Ex. 1:22*). In this sadistic manner the new Pharaoh forced the Israelites into submission. But even this decree did not subdue the nation. God continued to take care of His people, and it multiplied in spite of all the severe oppression (*Ex. 1, 2*).

As the oppression against the people increased, a very important boy was born. Moses would one day be the man who would lead the mighty nation of Israel out of the hands of the oppressive Egyptians. Moses would guide God's people out of Egypt where Satan was trying to destroy them. The history of Israel in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, is full of Satan's attacks on God's nation. In all kinds of ways, and by means of many different people, Satan tried to oppose the people of God. Meanwhile, God maintained His plan. God never lost track of His goal and that is why He gave Israel Moses as their leader.

## God Saves His People

God selected Moses to save His people. However, Moses, just like the patriarchs that had gone before him, was a human being who had to be disciplined (*Ex. 2:11-15*). Sometimes he was too hasty; sometimes he was too hesitant. Regardless of man's shortcomings God saw to it that His Son came into the world (*Ex. 2:23 - 4:17*). He had to do it all by Himself, for if it would have been up to people, Christ would never have come. The Lord's people depended on Him continuously for their existence. It is a good thing God is so faithful and merciful.

He showed His mercy by calling Abraham to a far and strange land and brought him there safely. He brought about the birth of Isaac at a moment when it humanly speaking seemed impossible. He gave a son to childless Isaac. And now the faithful God has miraculously created a nation in the midst of hostile Egypt. When the people of Israel were threatened with extinction, God saved again. Indeed, God saves. That is the line we find throughout the first five books of the Bible. It is the line to Christ, because God is going to bring His Son to the earth regardless of all and any opposition.

# Questions 13

## Why Four Gospels: Mark

1. Who, according to Mark, were Jesus' first disciples? (*Mark 1:16-20*)
2. What was the disciples' reaction when Jesus told them about His suffering, death, and resurrection (*Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:32,34*)
3. Can you state briefly what the task was of John the Baptist? (compare *Mark 1:1-8* with *Matt. 3:1-14, Luke 3:1-20, John 1:19-34*)

## His Suffering

1. Why is the Son of God also called "the Lamb" in the Bible? (*John 1:29, 1 Cor. 5:7, Rev. 5:12*) Do you see the connection with the Passover Lamb?
2. Jesus assures the believers that they share in His redemption. Through which sign does He do this? (*1 Cor. 11:23-26*)

## The Miracle of God's People

1. Which servants of Pharaoh did Joseph meet in prison? What was the meaning of their dreams (*Gen. 40*)?
2. When God called Moses to be the saviour and leader of His people, he had quite a few objections. What were his objections? How did God remove them (*Ex. 3:11-4:17*)?
3. What were the plagues that hit Egypt before Pharaoh allowed the Israelites to leave (*Ex. 7-12*)?