

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY IN MARK'S GOSPEL – PART SEVENTEEN – A FINAL WORD

According to which translation you are using there are several different ways the chapter may end depending on which manuscripts are used by the translators. Many modern translations leave out verses 9-20 because some of the oldest manuscripts do not contain them. Oldest does not necessarily mean best however. Because the custom of the early scribes was to copy the best document available when the old one became damaged and then to destroy the previous document, it can reasonably be argued that the old manuscripts may have survived because they were not considered fit to copy.

My assumption in including these controversial verses in this study is that God not only inspired the Bible but protected it. He also gives us a collective conviction in our hearts that this is His word. Christians generally have shared such a conviction about verses 9-20.

When we compare the four accounts of the resurrection day in the four gospels it seems at first a little confusing. Just who went first to the tomb and with whom? The key to putting these accounts together is to compare what each writer says about when the visit happened. Matthew says 'as it began to dawn'.(Matt.28:1) Mark refers to 'when the sun had risen'.(Mk.16:2) Luke speaks of 'at early dawn',(Lk.24:1) and John of 'while it was still dark'.(Jn.20:1) There were therefore 4 separate visits in the order of John, Matthew, Luke and Mark. The women were running back and forth to one another and the disciples. In Mark's account, 3 women came together equipped to prepare the body of Jesus for burial according to their customs, by covering it in ointment and spices which would mummify it. Mary Magdalene had previously been involved in Satanic activity which resulted in her being demon possessed, from which the Lord had delivered her. She has often been assumed to be the prostitute who anointed Jesus' feet in Luke 7 simply because she is named at the beginning of Luke 8 but there is no evidence for this. She had certainly dramatically changed sides from Satan to Jesus and so knew how wonderfully the Lord had transformed her life. The second Mary can be assumed to be the mother of Jesus whose sons included James and Joseph (or Joses).(Matt.13:55) This Mary had definitely been there during the crucifixion.(Jn.19:26) Salome had been watching with the other two when Jesus died and was removed by Joseph to his own tomb.(16:1,2)

Grief stricken but determined they came to the tomb wondering how they would get past the guards and into the sealed cave. To their great relief the guards had fled and the stone had been rolled away. As they entered expecting to see a dead body they were confronted by an angel who gave them extraordinary news, Jesus was alive and the tomb was empty. They were given two instructions. Firstly they were to inform the disciples, and Peter in particular, despite his failure when Jesus was arrested. Secondly they were to meet up with Jesus in Galilee. For the moment their reaction was of terror not of faith. They loved Him dearly but had not taken in His promises about resurrection.(Mk.8:31) All they could do was to go home and lock themselves away.(16:3-8)

According to John's account,(Jn.20:1,2) Mary Magdalene has made an earlier visit alone, saw the stone removed, assumed that the body of Jesus had been removed and told Peter. Some time later that same morning, after the visit with the other two women, she was back yet again and this time she met the risen Lord. Now she had the confidence to announce the good news, only to be met with unbelief from the others, too crushed with grief to take it in. To be convinced of the resurrection of Jesus we need to meet Him.(16:9-11)

Mark now records briefly the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus who had finally discovered the identity of the mysterious stranger who taught them the real meaning of every Old Testament book as being about Him. They too had believed Him once they met Him, as we can meet the same Jesus in the scriptures. But they also were not believed at first when they told of their experience.(16:12,13)

Again it was the personal appearance of Jesus which convinced the other eleven apostles. Jesus rebuked them for closing their hearts to the testimony of others. Faith begins with a soft heart which is the work of the Holy Spirit with the 'plough' of His word, preparing us for the 'seed' of truth. Their future mission would be to go world-wide with the good news which could bring people to faith in Him. Jesus was not promising to make a physical appearance to every member of the human race to convince them. His word preached would be the means of revealing Him. Those who heard would have two choices only, faith leading to salvation, or unbelief resulting in judgement and condemnation.(16:14-16)

The Lord went on to detail some miracles which would accompany this mission to the world. Sometimes His followers would cast out demons as Jesus had done.(Acts 16:18) On the day of Pentecost,(Acts 2:4-11) and sometimes in Corinth, believers would speak in languages not their own for the benefit of their hearers who did not otherwise understand. Paul would be bitten by a poisonous snake but be unharmed.(Acts 28:3-5) There is no Biblical record of believers being unharmed by drinking poison but we can assume this occurred at some time. Miracles of healing would be given on occasion.(Acts 3:1-10) Such things happened when God chose and not to satisfy human demands.(I Cor.12:11) Presumably they still do. There is no indication however that miracles of this kind were to be the normal means of convincing people of the truth of the gospel. It would be the combination of the persuasive power of the gospel message whether heard or read and the impressive message of the love of Jesus,(Jn.13:34,35) through the lives of His disciples.(16:17,18)

Forty amazing days later, Jesus ascended to heaven, to be restored to that relationship to the Father, which He had given up to come to live among us and die for us.(Acts 1:9-11; Phil.2:6-11) His first disciples went out to do as they had been told and preach the gospel, often at the cost of their lives. We are to do the same. God did miracles when He chose. He still does, but His first miracle is to change us.(16:19,20)

My suggestions for titles for the last two chapters are as follows: 15:1-5 - accusations accepted; 6-15 - murder manipulated; 16-21 - torture tolerated; 22-32 - forecasts fulfilled; 33-41 - crucifixion completed; 42-47 - burial begun; 16:1-8 - risen but unrecognised; 9-11 -witnessed but unconvinced; 12-13 - taught but unimpressed; 14-18 - commissioned but unequipped; 19-20 - ascended, preached, demonstrated and believed!

Take a few minutes now to reflect on the book of Mark as a whole. What has God shown you about Himself and His plan for your life? How will your study of this book change you?

**A FINAL ASSIGNMENT** Choose any passage in Mark's gospel of at least 20 verses and plan a Bible study for your own people based on that section. Don't look at the questions I have given you as you do it. Trust God to give you a way of teaching others. If your first language is not English then write the study first in your own language but provide me with a translation. I will enjoy seeing something of the insight God has given you!