



The Gospel of Mark

A Living Word Independent Bible Study



The Gospel of Mark
Part 42
Mark 15:33-41

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Mark 15:33-41 ***(NIV)***

INTRODUCTION

We have now reached the moments leading up to Jesus' death and resurrection.

Only four sessions remain:

The account of Jesus' death (this session)

The account of Jesus' burial (next session)

The account of Jesus' resurrection (session after next)

The "additions to Mark" that contain accounts of numerous resurrection appearances of Jesus.

The theme of prophetic fulfillment continues throughout these accounts.

We will also see, in this session, the first public acknowledgement by a human being of the preferred identification of who Jesus is:

He IS the Son of God!

The entire Gospel has been leading us, and inviting us, to draw this same conclusion.

Mark 15:33 (NIV)

***At the sixth hour
darkness came over the
whole land until the
ninth hour.***

“sixth hour”

Time was measured from sunrise – so this is about noon.

“darkness came over the whole land”

Thus, at the very time that the sun should have been at its brightest.

“until the ninth hour”

That is, until 3:00 PM.

No natural explanation is given.

The implication is that this is a miracle of supernatural origin.

This could be read as a sign of judgment – the dawning of the last days:

Exodus 10:22 – “So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days.”

Joel 2:10 – “Before them the earth shakes, the sky trembles, the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars no longer shine.”

Amos 8:9 – “In that day,’ declares the Sovereign LORD, ‘I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.’”

Some commentators, though, believe it is done as an act of grace.

In darkness, Jesus would have been better hidden from his tormentors.

Mark 15:34 (NIV)

***And at the ninth hour
Jesus cried out in a loud
voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama
sabachtani?” – which
means, “My God, my
God, why have you
forsaken me?”***

“Jesus cried out in a loud voice”

This is the first of two loud shouts from Jesus in Mark’s Gospel.

It has now been six hours on the cross for Jesus.

The cry, at this time, is loud and unexpected.

Crucifixion really was exhausting – ANY shout is amazing, perhaps even strange, to witnesses who might typically hear groaning but nothing loud.

Mark 15:34 (NIV)

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“Eloi, Eloi, ...”

Jesus here quotes Psalm 22:1

Psalm 22:1 – “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?”

Jesus DOES feel forsaken and abandoned by God.

This is a REAL, HUMAN emotion.

He has NOT lost faith, but feels abandoned.

Quoting the first verse of a psalm was a way, for ancient Jews, to bring to mind an entire psalm.

There are many linkages between Psalm 22 and the story of Jesus’ death in Mark’s Gospel:

The wagging of hands (22:7)

Mockery (22:7-8)

Piercing of hands and feet (22:16)

Dividing of garments (22:18a)

Casting lots for garments (22:18b)

Mark 15:34 (NIV)

***And at the ninth hour
Jesus cried out in a loud
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sabachtani?” – which
means, “My God, my
God, why have you
forsaken me?”***

“*Eloi, Eloi, ...*” (continued)

The WHOLE psalm seems to be in mind when Jesus quotes the first verse.

Psalm 22 begins in despair, then swings around, and becomes a psalm of hope and confidence in God in 22:22-31.

God DELAYS help, but does not abandon (22:1-5).

The psalmist prays to God, knowing God is there, while FEELING abandoned.

Jesus expected to die, and THEN be raised.

He knew he would be rescued, NOT from death, but from the GRAVE.

Jesus still trusts God to do so even here, with Psalm 22 in view.

Mark 15:35 (NIV)

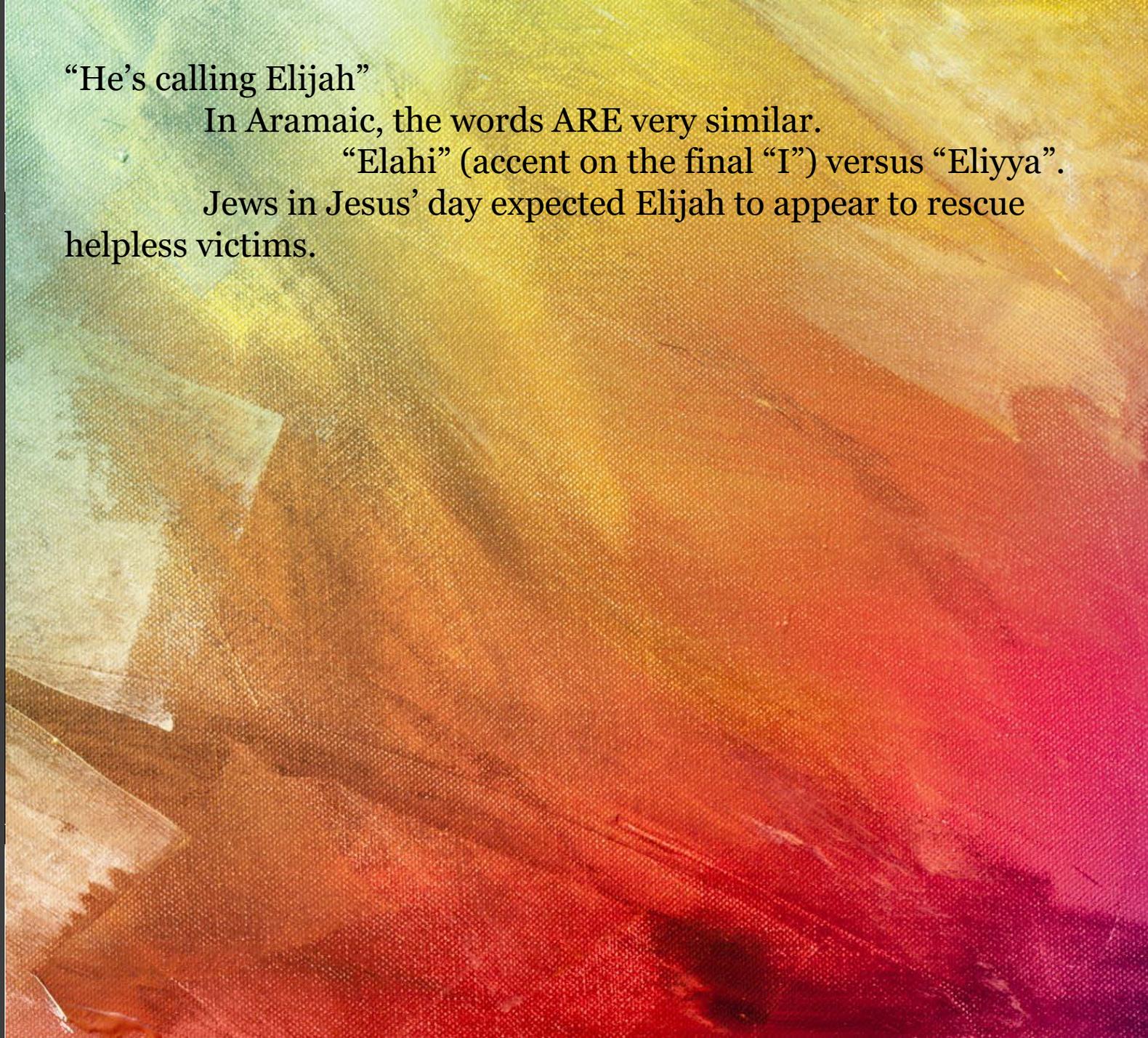
When some of those standing near heard this, they said, “Listen, he’s calling Elijah.”

“He’s calling Elijah”

In Aramaic, the words ARE very similar.

“Elahi” (accent on the final “I”) versus “Eliyya”.

Jews in Jesus’ day expected Elijah to appear to rescue helpless victims.



Mark 15:36 (NIV)

One man ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down,” he said.

“sponge ... offered it to Jesus to drink”

This is perhaps intended to revive him long enough to allow Elijah to appear to rescue him.

It might have been either a soldier or a Jewish bystander ... but a Jewish bystander would likely have been stopped from doing so.

“Let’s see if Elijah comes”

Probably, this is ongoing mockery.

Its verbiage and tone is similar to what we saw in 15:32:

Mark 15:32 – “Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.”

In other words, “He can’t come down himself – let’s see if ELIJAH comes to help!”

Mark 15:37 (NIV)

***With a loud cry, Jesus
breathed his last.***

“With a loud cry”

Jesus’ actual death coincides with another loud cry.

The act of shouting IS the death – Jesus does NOT shout out, and a moment later die.

This is an important distinction, because Jesus’ very death itself is a display of power!

The releasing of his spirit is awesome in power.

His death-shout did NOT match how other crucifixion victims died.

This last, powerful, shout signals Jesus’ willful surrender of his life into God’s hands.

John 10:17-18 – “The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

Again – Jesus is not a helpless victim, but chose to walk into his death.

Mark 15:38 (NIV)

The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

“curtain of the temple was torn in two”

This is another tangible display of the power implicit in Jesus’ death, in addition to the death-shout.

The two together counter all the previous mockery.

The tearing of the curtain actually conveys several different meanings:

1) The curtain is the INNER curtain, separating the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple.

The tearing then signifies the breaking down of this wall of separation, allowing direct access to God the Father, who inhabits the Holy of Holies.

Romans 5:1-2 – “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.”

Hebrews 6:19-20 – “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf.”

Hebrews 10:19-22 – “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.”

Mark 15:38 (NIV)

The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

“curtain of the temple was torn in two” (continued)

2) Jesus had already predicted the destruction of the temple, in chapter 13.

Jesus’ death at the hands of the temple leadership seals the fate of the temple.

Having made the decision to kill Jesus, the destruction of the temple is now assured.

This inevitable destruction is symbolized by the curtain’s being torn in two – with the completion symbolized by the phrase “from top to bottom.”

Mark 15:38 (NIV)

The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

“curtain of the temple was torn in two” (continued)

3) The tearing is a way to represent God’s grief at the death of His Son.

The cultural code among Jews of Jesus’ day required:

The rending of one’s garments at the moment of death.

The depth of the tear represented the depth of grief.

The garment was ripped at the neck, and torn downward.

This suggests that the temple represents God Himself, with its curtain representing God’s garment.

Its tearing, completely in two, from top to bottom, represents the Father’s immense grief over the death of His Son.

Mark 15:39 (NIV)

And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”

“centurion ... heard his cry and saw how he died”

Jesus’ death did not correspond to the kind of deaths by crucifixion that this centurion had witnessed before.

Standing in front of Jesus, he witnesses face-on this powerful shout – enough to convince him of Jesus’ uniqueness.

“Surely this man was the Son of God!”

Now, a pagan, Gentile Roman soldier is the first human being to proclaim the fullest, truest answer to the question, “Who is Jesus?”.

He is none other than the Son of God!

Note at Mark 1:10-11, when the HEAVENS were torn open at Jesus’ baptism, GOD had declared:

Mark 1:10-11 – “As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven; ‘You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased.’”

Now, with the tearing of the CURTAIN, for the first time, a human declares himself in agreement with God’s declaration.

Mark 15:39 (NIV)

And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”

“centurion ... heard his cry and saw how he died” (continued)

By law, this soldier could ONLY proclaim this to be true of the Roman emperor.

Thus, the centurion’s claim signals a change of allegiance from Caesar “son of god” to Jesus Son of God.

The impact of this upon Mark’s original readers – Roman Christians – cannot be understated. It would have been HUGE.

For us, it is evidence that God’s truth can break through even to those who seem most unlikely to confess it!

Mark 15:40 (NIV)

Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome.

“women were watching from a distance”

This paragraph serves as preparation for the discovery of the empty tomb.

Several women have observed all of this.

They are witnesses to Jesus’ crucifixion and death, as they will be of his resurrection.

“Mary Magdalene”

The descriptor means “from the town of Magdala”.

She figures prominently in the Gospel tradition, particularly at the crucifixion and the resurrection.

See Matthew 27-28, Mark 15-16, Luke 24, and John 19-20.

It is only in Luke 8:2 that she is described as having “seven demons gone out of her”:

Luke 8:2 – “and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out”

(Mark 16:9 also contains this description, but we will see in our final lesson that this is likely borrowed directly from Luke).

This scene in Luke is her ONLY appearance outside of Jesus’ death and resurrection, in any Gospel.

Mark 15:40 (NIV)

Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome.

“Mary the mother of James the younger and Joses”

This is probably the same person as “Mary wife of Clopas in John’s description of the women witnesses at the cross:

John 19:25 – “Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene”.

“Salome”

Following the parallel in Matthew’s Gospel, this might be the unnamed “mother of the sons of Zebedee”:

Matthew 27:55-56 – “Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee’s sons.”

Looking again at the description in John 19:25 (above), then, this could ALSO possibly be Jesus’ mother’s sister ...

Which would make Jesus the cousin of his disciples James and John!

We simply cannot be completely sure of the relationships or correlations among the women named by the various Gospels as watching the cross from a distance.

Mark 15:41 (NIV)

***In Galilee these women
had followed him and
cared for his needs.
Many other women who
had come up with him to
Jerusalem were also
there.***

“followed him and cared for his needs”

This lets us know in no uncertain terms that there WERE women among Jesus’ followers.

The phrase “followed him”, in Mark’s Gospel, has always implied discipleship.

Luke names other female disciples:

Luke 8:1b-3 – “The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod’s household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.”

“Many other women”

This gives room for other interpretations of the identities of the various women named in verse 40 and the other Gospels.

Matthew and John may have named others of these women, rather than their being a direct correlation between them.

These women stand in stark contrast to the male disciples who have all fled.

Thus, in some ways, better modeling discipleship than they do!

Mark 15:33-41 ***(NIV)***

SUMMARY

Mark has portrayed Jesus' death itself as a powerful, momentous event with widespread implications:

The power of Jesus' death has caused, for the first time, a human being to acknowledge that the Gospel has indeed been about "Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1).

This being not a Jew, but a Gentile Roman centurion, foreshadows the reception of the gospel among the Gentiles.

The tearing of the temple curtain is dense with symbolic meaning, as access to the God the Father is opened, the destruction of the temple in judgment has begun, and as God the Father has demonstrated his utter grief at the death of His Son.

And the women who have followed Jesus throughout have been shown to be exemplary, loyal disciples.

Note well that Jesus has predicted his suffering and death with uncanny accuracy.

But Jesus had ALSO predicted that he would be raised up!

It is one thing to predict suffering and death, and have it be fulfilled.

It is something else again to predict one's resurrection, and have IT fulfilled! But this is clearly where the story is headed!



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