

# Ancient New Testament Manuscripts

## Mark 16:9-20

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### 1. Review of textual criticism

Since the original writings of the New Testament have not survived the two thousand year span of time, the task of determining their text becomes necessary. All of these ancient handwritten copies have discrepancies between them. This process of evaluating the variant readings of existing 5,800+ New Testament manuscripts and coming to a decision about the original text is known as textual criticism.

The work of textual criticism surrounds the study of which manuscripts support which variant reading, known as the “external evidence.” The counterpart to this study is to consider which variant reading would have been more likely to give rise to the other reading(s), known as the “internal evidence.” The best and most widely used approach treats internal and external evidence as equally valuable, looking at the external evidence first before considering the internal evidence.

Today’s class will continue to look specifically at the most significant textual variants according to our English translations. We will look at another of the most well-known and extensive textual variants that exists in our modern English translations, Mark 16:9-20.

### 2. Overview of Mark 16:9-20

Mark 16:9-20 is the last twelve verses in most English Bibles. In textual discussions these verses are known as the “longer ending” of Mark and referred to by the abbreviation “LE.”

There is also a “short ending” (abbreviated SE, or also referred to as the Intermediate Ending) of Mark that is usually included as a footnote or extra italicized text in modern English translations, reading “But they reported briefly to Peter and those with him all that they had been told. And after this, Jesus himself sent out by means of them, from east and west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation” (ESV). No one claims the shorter ending is original, but it is included in many footnotes in modern English translations.

Most English Bible Translations will place Mark 16:9-20 into the text with a footnote regarding the questionable authenticity of the longer ending. The original New American Standard Bible bracketed the text and provided a footnote reading “some of the oldest mss. do not contain vv. 9-20.” The updated NASB (1995) retained the brackets but phrased it differently: “Later mss add vv. 9-20.”

However, the NKJV includes a footnote saying “Verses 9–20 are bracketed in NU-Text as not original. They are lacking in Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, although nearly all other manuscripts of Mark contain them.”

Both the English Standard Version and the New International Version inform the reader prior to the passage: “SOME OF THE EARLIEST MANUSCRIPTS DO NOT INCLUDE 16:9-20.” The ESV also places this variant text within double brackets.

In this class we will look closely at which manuscripts are being spoken of and how to evaluate Mark 16:9-20 in light of all the external and internal evidence.

### **3. The External Evidence**

#### **a. Papyri**

The only papyri of the book of Mark does not have chapter 16 and therefore does not factor into the external evidence.

#### **b. Uncials**

The two oldest New Testament manuscripts end the Gospel of Mark at 16:8. Both Codex Vaticanus (c. 325) and Sinaiticus (c. 330-360) do not include the longer ending of Mark.

Codex Washingtonianus (c. 400) includes the longer ending but uniquely adds the following text in between Mark 16:14 and 16:15: “And they excused themselves, saying, ‘This age of lawlessness and unbelief is under Satan, who does not permit God’s truth and power to conquer the evil [unclean] spirits. Therefore, reveal your justice now.’ This is what they said to Christ. And Christ replied to them, ‘The period of years of Satan’s power has been fulfilled, but other dreadful things will happen soon. And I was handed over to death for those who have sinned, so that they may return to the truth and sin no more, and so they may inherit the spiritual, incorruptible, and righteous glory in heaven.’ ” This addition to Codex Washingtonianus is known as the “Freer Logion,” named after the former owner of this manuscript.

Four uncials contain both the longer and shorter endings, putting the shorter ending between Mark 16:8 and the longer ending. Codex Regius (c. 700s), Codex Athous Lavrensis (c. 850), uncial 099 (c. 600s) and uncial 083 (formerly known as 0112 and dates c. 600s) all have the shorter ending after 16:8 but before the longer ending.

The rest of the uncials that complete enough to contain Mark 16 include the traditional ending of Mark 16:9-20: Codex Alexandrius (c. 400-440); Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (c. 450); Codex Bezae (c. 400); Purpureus Rossanensis (c. 550; lacks 6:14-20); Codex Cyprius (c. 800s); Codex Sangallensis (c. 800s); Codex Koridethi (c. 800s); Codex Petropolitanus (c. 800s; lacks 6:18-20); Codex Nanius (c. 800s); and Codex Monacensis (c. 900s).

#### **c. Minuscules**

Unlike uncials, minuscule manuscripts include upper and lower case letters. These New Testament minuscule texts appear beginning in the tenth century. Nearly all minuscules contain the longer ending of Mark.

The number of minuscules that end at Mark 16:8 are miniscule: 304, 579, 2386. Even these are debated regarding whether some text may be damaged and thus explain its omission.

Minuscule Family 13 (13, 69, 124, 346, 543, 788, 826, 828 and 983) plus minuscules 22, 138 and 205 include the longer ending but with a note that some copies do not contain these verses.

Minuscules 274 (the shorter ending is placed in the margin) and 579 place the shorter ending between Mark 16:8 and the longer ending.

#### **d. Versions**

The early translations are less supportive of the longer ending than the Greek manuscripts are. The Sinaitic Syrian text does not include the ending though most other Syrian texts include the LE (some with the SE). Most older Armenian texts do not have the LE and some of those texts have the shorter ending also. The two oldest Georgian texts do not have the long ending. The Coptic versions are mixed with most including both the short and the long ending, one ending at Mark 16:8, and one only including only the longer ending.

Most old Latin translations include the longer ending and the Vulgate includes it as well. However Codex Bobienis (c. 400) one of the oldest Latin copies (containing the first half of Matthew and the second half of Mark) omits the longer ending but after Mark 16:8 includes the shorter ending. It is the only existing manuscript to only include the shorter ending.

#### **e. Church fathers**

The evidence of support for the longer ending from the church fathers must be prefaced with a mention that if a church father does not speak to Mark 16:9-20, this does not mean he did not know of it or even regarded it a part of Mark's Gospel. Therefore, we can only look at what they actually say about this passage rather than what they do not say about it.

Many church fathers reference or allude to Mark 16:9-20. Some of those fathers are very early in the history of the church. There is evidence that even as early as the second century of it being supported. Justin Martyr (c. 160) may have possibly alluded to it and Irenaeus (c. 180) cited it. More significantly, Tatian (c. 172) included most of the longer ending in his Diatesseron, which was a harmony of the Gospels.

The most significant voices against the validity of the longer ending come from Eusebius of Caesarea and Jerome in the late fourth century. Eusebius writes that almost all the copies of Mark end with "for they were afraid" and considered the Gospel ending at that point. This explains why Eusebius did not include Mark 16:9-20 in his Eusebian Canons.

Likewise, referring to the longer ending, Jerome noted, "almost all Greek codices are without this passage." That Jerome included Mark 16:9-20 in his Latin translation speaks to the strong tendency that existed to include questionable passages in the text even when serious doubt about its authenticity existed.

There is fairly strong evidence that Mark 16:9-20 was known and accepted as early as the second century and there is also fairly strong evidence that a large number of Greek manuscripts that no longer exist did not include the longer ending. The omission of the LE was not only in the Alexandrian text since Jerome resided in Rome (and was well travelled) while Eusebius was from Caesarea. The geographical variety of the evidence shows this omission of the long ending is not restricted to one strain of the transmission of the text.

#### **4. The Internal Evidence**

While the external evidence is less than conclusive, the internal evidence is more compelling. Internal evidence asks the question, “Which reading would bring about the other readings?” There is little persuasive reason why the longer ending would produce the shorter reading or the so-called “abrupt ending” at Mark 16:8.

Most of Mark 16:9-20 is found in other passages so there is little reason for a scribe to want to remove the entire passage if he only wanted to make a change to the text. It is far more likely for them to omit a few words than several sentences.

On the other hand, the addition of Mark 16:9-20 brings a conclusion to the book that Mark 16:8 leaves hanging. It is highly unusual to end a book with “for they were afraid,” which leads to a perceived need for an appropriate ending. Hence the development of not only the longer ending, but also of the shorter ending.

It is impossible to miss, even in English translations, how disconnected Mark 16:9 is from Mark 16:8. First, the connecting word “now” expects a continuity, which does not exist. Second, there is a difficult grammatical fit between “he had risen early” and verse 8 because there is only “they” (the women) in verse 8 – Jesus must awkwardly be inferred as the grammatical antecedent in 16:9.

Also, Mary Magdalene is strangely introduced in 16:9 even though she was the subject of the narrative in 16:1-8 and was introduced in 15:40, 47. The words about Mary being the one from whom He had cast out seven demons is an identifier that would be found at the beginning of the introduction of a character, not toward the end. Finally, the inclusion of the timing of the events in 16:9 is a redundant statement from what was already stated in 16:2. Verse 9 alone shows all the markings of text that was added to the Gospel.

Many have noticed the change in vocabulary and style beginning in Mark 16:9-20. Slightly more than one-third of the nouns and verbal construction are words that are unique to the longer ending and not found elsewhere in Mark. The content of 16:14 of Jesus’ rebuke for unbelief (cf. 16:11, 16) and hardness of heart is unlike Mark’s Gospel (though similar to Matthew and Luke) and the promise of the miracles is absent from any other post-resurrection account in the Gospels.

B.B. Warfield noted the existence of the shorter ending testifies against the genuineness of the longer ending when he wrote, “For no one doubts that this shorter conclusion is a spurious invention of the scribes, but it would not have been invented, save to fill the blank.” If the longer ending were originally in the Gospel, then there would be no shorter ending.

#### **5. Reasons to reject Mark 16:9-20 as original**

The stated reason that English Bible translations give is a bit misleading. To say that “some of the earliest manuscripts do not include Mark 16:9-20” is technically true but readers will not understand that there are only two of the earlier Greek manuscripts that do not include Mark 16:9-20. Readers may not understand “manuscripts” to extend to various early translations.

However, the fact that the longer ending of Mark is absent in the two earliest existing texts of Mark, combined with the fact that it is missing from several different translations, added to

the testimony from church fathers regarding many more manuscripts they knew of which omitted the LE, speaks to a serious degree of doubt regarding whether Mark 16:9 was actually in the original Gospel account.

The most compelling reason to consider Mark 16:9-20 as a later addition to the Gospel of Mark involves the text itself. It reads as an additional text, not as flowing from the narrative leading up to it. On the basis of style, grammar, and vocabulary it does not appear to fit.

Also, it would be far more likely for scribes to fix an abrupt ending that does not appear to complete the book. This explains why a shorter ending also arose. The oddity of manuscripts including both the shorter ending and the longer ending when they are contradictory testifies to the tendency of scribes to include extra material with the mindset of “when in doubt, don’t leave it out.”

## **6. Arguments made to defend Mark 16:9-20**

There are many who are adamantly opposed to considering Mark 16:9-20 to be a later addition. The arguments that they advance include:

### a) The overwhelming manuscript evidence

This is really the best argument by far to support the inclusion of Mark 16:9-20 in the Gospel account. It is not easy to discount such a large amount of external evidence.

Those that defend the longer ending typically treat all texts that have verses 9-20 as the same, ignoring the problem of the shorter ending and the markings of the questionable nature of the text in other manuscripts. There is also little attention paid to the many translations that omit the text.

While there was serious question about the genuineness of this text in the early centuries of the church and in the recent 140 years, for most of the church age this passage was accepted. The biggest emotional hurdle is to believe that for many centuries that people were mistaken about a part of what they thought was the biblical text.

It should not surprise us that the history of the church includes the involvement of well-meaning but confused men who sought to add to the Word of God. This is how the Roman Catholic Church arose, with a long line of men who thought the Scripture was insufficient and more was needed.

Like the church, the Greek manuscripts were not exempt from the errors of man. It is the sovereignty of God that He works through the failures of man to accomplish His will and deliver His truth.

### b) The Gap Theory

Codex Vaticanus contains blank space after the ending at Mark 16:9 that some have supposed was to leave room to put the longer ending into the manuscript later. Some advance the argument through intrigue where the scribe was told to omit the longer ending and sought to advocate for the longer ending by leaving a blank space.

Needless to say, a blank space is nothing more than a blank space. There are three other places in Codex Vaticanus where blank spaces exist after books with the reasons uncertain. Also, the way that Codex Vaticanus communicated the existence of a variant was with a marking (called an “umlaut”), of which none exists at the end of Mark.

At best, if the blank space were left for Mark 16:9-20, this only speaks to the knowledge of the scribe concerning the existence of the longer ending, certainly not for advocating its inclusion when the text actually omits it.

c) The books do not end with the Greek word GAR argument

This is an attempt to claim that Mark 16:8 cannot be the end of Mark’s Gospel because of the last word he used. The Greek word “GAR” (translated “for”) can end a sentence and if it can end a sentence then it can end a book. Nevertheless, in 1972 a Greek text was found ending in GAR and now there are three existing ancient Greek works that do so.

d) The removal of questionable theology theory

Some have suggested the reason some manuscripts have removed the longer ending was because of the embarrassing or difficult teaching regarding casting out demons, handling snakes, and drinking poison in verses 17-18.

But why would the entire longer ending be removed when only a couple of verses could be difficult? And when we find the church fathers referring to the LE, they almost always speak to the second half of it. Therefore, the idea that there was teaching that was suppressed has no evidence to support it.

## **7. The origin of the longer ending**

So how did we get the longer ending of Mark? As has been shown, there is a perceived lack of completion to the Gospel account by people who do not appreciate Mark’s style. So an ending was constructed that was essentially lifted from other Gospel accounts.

Here are the verses in Mark 16:9-20, along with the corresponding biblical texts that these verses were derived from:

- Mark 16:9 is from Luke 8:2
- Mark 16:10 is from John 20:18
- Mark 16:11 is from Matthew 28:17
- Mark 16:12-14 is from Luke 24:13-42 and the story of the road to Emmaus
- Mark 16:15 is from Matthew 28:19
- Mark 16:16 is from John 20:23
- Mark 16:17-18 is from Matthew 10:8, Luke 10:19, Acts 2; 28:3-6
- Mark 16:19-20 is basically a summary of the book of Acts

What we have with Mark 16:9-20 is that a well-meaning later writer made a conclusion out of a patchwork of existing Bible texts, likely as early as the second century. It is doubtful that they thought they were adding words to the Bible, but were just using what the Bible already said.

## 8. Why the Gospel of Mark ends at 16:8

There is no question that Mark 16:8 would make for an abrupt ending to the Gospel account. However, there is ample evidence from Mark's style of writing that this is exactly what he did.

First, the nature of the book is abrupt. It moves from event to event without transitions. It begins abruptly, without introduction and episodes end without summaries.

Also, for Mark to end his story with a concluding statement of the emotional response of people is not unprecedented in the book. Mark 16:8 is very similar to the end of the section in Mark 9:32 and includes the same imperfect verb for "afraid."

Indeed, there are many times in Mark's Gospel where concluding statements are made regarding people's emotional state, including fear or shock. A list of these descriptions of the emotional state of people to conclude sections of Mark includes:

- "And they were amazed at His teaching" (1:22)
- "And they were all amazed and were glorifying God" (2:12)
- "And they became very much afraid" (4:41)
- "And everyone marveled" (5:20)
- "They were completely astounded" (5:42)
- "They were greatly astonished" (6:51)
- "And they were afraid" (9:32)
- "All the multitude was astonished" (11:18)
- "They were amazed at Him" (12:17)
- "And he began to weep" (14:72)
- "Pilate was amazed" (15:5)

These concluding statements of the emotional state of the various characters in a variety of sections of the Gospel of Mark occurs so often that it should be an expected conclusion of the book if we read the book in context, rather than how we think it ought to end.

## 9. What happened?

Several theories exist about how we ended up with the evidence that we have.

a) Mark failed to complete his Gospel and someone else finished and distributed it complete.

There are many difficulties with this theory including (1) why Mark would not complete his Gospel; (2) the idea of two authors for the Gospel account; (3) the complete lack of testimony to any co-author; and (4) the slippery slope of people adding to Scripture.

b) Mark 16:9-20 was originally in the text and was fraudulently omitted from Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus.

This presumes that the two oldest codices are corrupt because they are different. It also does not account for the other external evidence or the internal evidence. It comes from the belief that Mark 16:9-20 is original rather than any complete analysis of the data.

c) The original ending of Mark was lost and someone else attempted to complete the Gospel.

The Scripture testifies to its perseverance (Matthew 5:17; 24:35; John 10:35; 1 Peter 1:23-25). While we may have some difficulty discerning the original text, we nevertheless have the original text delivered to us. The idea that Mark's Gospel was in part lost is incompatible with this doctrine.

Nevertheless, most scholars believe that the original text was written on a scroll rather than a codex. Scrolls were the normal form of writing material in the first century. If Mark was written on a scroll, the ending of the scroll would be the most protected since the scroll would open to the beginning of the writing.

This idea also misses the similarity of Mark's style in 16:8 with a concluding comment about the emotional state of the characters of the narrative.

d) Mark concluded his Gospel with Mark 16:8 and Mark 16:9-20 was later added to it.

This scenario is the most likely because it explains all the evidence. If the text was added within the first one hundred years of the writing of Mark, then Irenaeus and Tatian could have been familiar with it and it could have made its way into Gospel manuscripts. Also, a later addition would account for manuscripts of various languages that omit the longer ending.

Furthermore, it makes the most sense out of the apparent disconnectedness of the longer ending. If the longer ending was written by another hand to add a conclusion then this explains the difficulties found in Mark 16:9-20.

Finally, this explanation is the only one that explains the existence of the shorter ending. If the longer ending was in place, there would be no need for shorter ending to arise. The evidence to the authenticity of the shorter ending is so thin that its unique value is to help us to understand the later addition of the longer ending.

## **10. Conclusion**

Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53-8:11 demonstrate the challenge that exists with the evidence surrounding the biblical text. History isn't clean. People make mistakes and do bad things. Life is very often not what we expect and we find that the more we learn, the more we realize that we have more to learn.

We can choose to hold on to our presupposition that what has been published for us by others is exactly what the original text was or we can do our own research and arrive at our own conclusion. Part of the essence of Protestantism is that each believer in Christ has access to God without a professional telling him or her what to believe. The Lord wants us to love Him with our mind, heart and soul and we ought to pursue the truth of the Lord wherever it may lead us.

## **11. Application**

“Allow for the possibility that God works in different ways than you expect.”