

## **THE GENUINENESS OF MARK 16:9-20**

By

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With a Special Appendix by Dan R. Owen

One of the most fascinating aspects of Bible study is in regard to biblical origins. How we got the Bible has been an area of intense interest since the inspired writers wrote and the people of God collected their writings. Unfortunately, as all Bible students know, there are no originals in existence; there are only copies. Yet it has been proven decisively that the copies were done carefully and accurately, to the point that scholars believe that our Greek texts are 99.9% pure (that is, there is strong support that it reads exactly like the original). It is that 1/10<sup>th</sup> of one percent that still creates some interest and discussion. That small percentage has to do with what are known as “textual variants.” A textual variant is, simply defined, where the manuscript evidence has not clearly pointed to one particular reading. These textual variants are unsettling to some, and are used to challenge the credibility of the Bible by others. Yet such a small percentage of variants for a collection this large is amazing (with 27 New Testament books, containing 260 chapters, 7,959 verses, 181,253 words and 838,380 letters). Only .1% of this many words is questioned?

That would make the reconstructed text of the New Testament 99.9 percent free from real concern for the textual critic (Geisler and Nix 474).

This is a testimony to the providential protection of God of His holy word. Plus, it needs to be emphasized that *none* of these questioned texts have important and/or unique doctrinal points. They all include teachings that are found elsewhere in the New Testament. Yet the analysis of these textual anomalies is left to the discipline of “textual criticism.” George Ladd said:

This exercise of (textual) criticism is absolutely indispensable, for it is quite clear that although God inspired the authors of the Bible to produce a divinely superintended record, He has committed the reproduction and the preservation of the text to the vagaries of human history; and the establishment of a trustworthy text is the labor of a scientific scholarship (80).

Perhaps one of the most discussed texts is Mark 16:9-20. Many Bible students have noticed a footnote in verse nine that reads something like this: “Some of the oldest mss. omit from verse 9 through 20.” What does a statement like this mean? What led Bible translators to include such a footnote? Why have some Bibles omitted the section altogether, while most include it?

In this study we will identify the various endings for the Gospel of Mark, discuss the evidences both for and against these endings, and then provide some concluding remarks and observations.

## Six Different Endings for Mark 16

The manuscript (abbreviated as MS; manuscripts as MSS) evidence for the ending of the Gospel of Mark is varied, providing witness to six different endings (this information will come from Metzger 102-6; Thomas 407-8 and Elliott 255-59). Briefly, those endings are:

(1) *Ending the Gospel after verse eight. I'll call this the "abrupt ending."* The following MSS of Mark end at 16:8: Aleph (**a**); B (Vaticanus); 304; 2386 and 1420 (both of which have a page missing at this point in the text); the Sinaitic Syriac (syr<sup>s</sup> dating around the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century); around 90 Armenian MSS (many of which are 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century MSS); Clement of Alexandria and Origen make no reference to the long ending. Eusebius and Jerome both note that the long ending is absent from most of the Greek MSS they had available.

The two oldest (and considered most important) manuscripts are the Sinaiticus (Aleph - **a** – 4<sup>th</sup> century) and the Vaticanus (**B** – 4<sup>th</sup> century). The fact that these two vital MSS end at verse 8 has led the vast majority of scholars to reject any other ending.

(2) *The Short Ending* found in the Old Latin (k – 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century); L (8<sup>th</sup> century) 099 (7<sup>th</sup> century ) and 0112 (6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> century) reads, "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 to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation" (Metzger 103).

(3) *The long ending* (which is found in most English translations covering Mark 16:9-20) is included in the following MSS: A (5<sup>th</sup> century) C (5<sup>th</sup> century) D E H (all 6<sup>th</sup> century) K (9<sup>th</sup>

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century) W (4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century) X Δ Θ Π Σ Φ Ω 047 055 0211 f 28 33 274 (text) 565 700 892  
 1009 1010 1071 1079 1195 1230 1242 1253 1344 1365 1546 1646 2148 2174 (all 9<sup>th</sup> century or  
 after), lectionaries 60 69 70 185 547 833 (all of these are 11<sup>th</sup> century or after); along with  
 numerous late MSS. It is possible that Justin Martyr (*Apology* 1.45) is quoting from verse 20.  
 Irenaeus, Tertullian, Aphraates, Apostolic Constitutions, Didymus, Hippolytus, Marinus (as  
 quoted by Eusebius), Epiphanius all make reference to the long ending (Burgon 97-147; Bridges  
 237-42).

(4) *The long ending expanded* was found in MS W (also known as the Freer Logion; 4<sup>th</sup>  
 or 5<sup>th</sup> century) expands the longer ending at verse 14, “And they excused themselves, saying,  
 ‘This age of lawlessness and unbelief is under Satan, who does not allow the truth and power of  
 God to prevail over the unclean things of the spirits [*or*, does not allow what lies under the  
 unclean spirits to understand the truth and power of God]. Therefore reveal your righteousness  
 now’—thus they spoke to Christ. And Christ replied to them, ‘The term of years of Satan’s  
 power has been fulfilled, but other terrible things draw near. And for those who have sinned I  
 was handed over to death, that they may return to the truth and sin no more, in order that they  
 may inherit the spiritual and incorruptible glory of righteousness that is in heaven’” (Metzger  
 104).

(5) *The longer ending with scribal notations* is included in the following MSS (marked  
 with asterisks, or obeli, or with a critical note added): f<sup>1</sup> 137 138 1110 1210 1215 1216 1217

1221 1241<sup>Vld</sup> 1582 (most of these are 9<sup>th</sup> century or after). The use of these scribal notations was their way of indicating that they did not view the text to be original.

Not a few manuscripts that contain the passage have scribal notes stating that older Greek copies lack it, and in other witnesses the passage is marked with asterisks or obeli, the conventional signs used by copyists to indicate a spurious addition to a document (Metzger 103).

(6) *The short ending plus the long ending.* The following MSS add the shorter ending (number 2 above) before the longer ending: L  $\Psi$  (both 8<sup>th</sup> century); 099 0112 (both 7<sup>th</sup> century) 579 274<sup>mg</sup>; lectionary 1602 (12<sup>th</sup> century); along with certain Syriac (syr<sup>hmg</sup>); Coptic (copt<sup>sahmsSbohms</sup>); and Ethiopic (eth<sup>TM</sup>) manuscripts. This is what is known as a ‘conflated reading,’ and was characteristic of the later Byzantine texts. Here the scribes had both options before them (in the MS they were copying), and decided to include both.

### **Evaluation of These Six Options**

Number 4 above can be dismissed as an expanded form of the longer ending. Metzger (104) notes,

It is obvious that the expanded form of the long ending has no claim to be original. Not only is the external evidence extremely limited, but the expansion contains several non-Markan

words and expressions (including ὁ αἰὼν οὗτος, ἁμαρτάνω, ἀπολογέω, ἀληθινός, ὑποστρέφω) as well as several that occur nowhere else in the New Testament (δεινός, ὄρος, προσλέγω). The whole expansion has about it an unmistakable apocryphal flavor. It probably is the work of a second or third century scribe who wished to soften the severe condemnation of the Eleven in 16:14.

Number 2 has so little MSS support that it is can be eliminated from serious consideration. H. B. Swete says:

As to the origin of this ending there can be little doubt. It has been written by some one whose copy of the Gospel ended at *ephobounto gar*, and who desired to soften the harshness of so abrupt a conclusion, and at the same time to remove the impression which it leaves of a failure on the part of Mary of Magdala and her friends to deliver the message with which they had been charged. Terrified as they were, he adds, they recovered themselves sufficiently to report to Peter the substance of the Angel's words. After this the Lord Himself appeared to the Apostles and gave them orders to carry the Gospel from East to West; and these orders, with his assistance, were loyally fulfilled" (ci).

Number 5 should be evaluated with number 3 above (*The long ending*). The thought of these later scribes, while noteworthy, does not in and of itself answer the question regarding the proper ending for the Gospel.

Number 6 seems to be an attempt to blend all variant readings into one, and as noted with some others, lacks sufficient MSS support.

This leaves only number 1 and number 3 as viable options. Let us now consider the strengths of each of these positions.

### **Evidences For the Gospel Ending at 16:8; The “Abrupt Ending”**

*First*, the MSS evidence for the abrupt ending is clearly the strongest. As noted above, it has the support of our two most important manuscripts: the Sinaiticus (**α**) and the Vaticanus (**B**). Both of these are 4<sup>th</sup> century manuscripts and are considered our very best and reliable ancient manuscripts.

*Second*, the other endings (both the short ending and the long ending) have been carefully analyzed by textual critics. Some feel they have shown that it was written by someone other than Mark. Metzger proposes two primary arguments here: (1) The vocabulary is unlike that of the rest of the Gospel.

The vocabulary and style of verses 9–20 are non-Markan (e. g. ἀπιστέω, βλέπω, βεβαιόω, ἐπακολουθέω, θεάομαι, μετὰ ταῦτα, πορεύομαι, συνεργέω, ὕστερον are found nowhere else in Mark; and θανάσιμον and τοῖς μετ’ αὐτοῦ γενομένοις, as designations of the disciples, occur only here in the New Testament) (104).

(2) The transition from verse 8 to verse 9 is so awkward that it is not possible that the same person wrote both.

The connection between ver. 8 and verses 9–20 is so awkward that it is difficult to believe that the evangelist intended the section to be a continuation of the Gospel. Thus, the

subject of ver. 8 is the women, whereas Jesus is the presumed subject in ver. 9; in ver. 9 Mary Magdalene is identified even though she has been mentioned only a few lines before (15:47 and 16:1); the other women of verses 1–8 are now forgotten; the use of ἀναστὰς δέ and the position of πρῶτον are appropriate at the beginning of a comprehensive narrative, but they are ill-suited in a continuation of verses 1–8 (104).

An even more detailed breakdown of the problems found in Mark 16:9-20 are given by J.R. Dummelow:

Internal evidence points definitely to the conclusion that the last twelve verses are not by St. Mark. For, (1) the true conclusion certainly contained a Galilean appearance (Mark 16:7, cp. 14:28), and this does not. (2) The style is that of a bare catalogue of facts, and quite unlike St. Mark's usual wealth of graphic detail. (3) The section contains numerous words and expressions never used by St. Mark. (4) Mark 16:9 makes an abrupt fresh start, and is not continuous with the preceding narrative. (5) Mary Magdalene is spoken of (16:9) as if she had not been mentioned before, although she has just been alluded to twice (15:47, 16:1). (6) The section seems to represent not a primary tradition, such as Peter's, but quite a secondary one, and in particular to be dependent upon the conclusion of St. Matthew, and upon Luke 24:23f.

*Third*, additional valuable MSS witnesses have the abrupt ending. The Sinaitic Syriac (2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century) and the best Armenian MSS (4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries) omits it (see also the testimony of Eusebius and Jerome in the next point). Ethiopian MSS (6<sup>th</sup> century) equally ends



at verse 8. While the number of MSS that have the abrupt ending are far fewer than the long ending, they are considered as having more weight.

*Fourth*, Eusebius (c. A.D. 325) and Jerome (c. A.D. 340) “attest that the passage was absent from almost all Greek copies of Mark known to them” (Metzger 103). Equally Clement of Alexandria (c. A.D. 150-200) and Origen (c. A.D. 185-254) are unaware of the longer ending.

*Fifth*, those who argue for the priority of Mark (that is, that Mark was the first gospel written and Matthew and Luke “copied” material from it) state that the longer ending has no parallel in either Matthew or Luke (cf. Brown 89-110).

*Sixth*, according to some scholars, the peculiar ending is totally out of character with both the Gospel and the teachings of Jesus.

The bizarre promise of immunity from snakes and poisonous drinks is completely out of character with the person of Christ as revealed in the *Gospel of Mark*, the other Gospels and in the whole of the New Testament. Nowhere did Jesus exempt himself or his followers from the natural laws which govern this life, nor did he ever intimate that such exemptions would be given those who believe in him (Bratcher and Nida 520–21).

### **Evidences for the Long Ending**

It should be obvious that there would not be such a strong debate if there were no legitimate arguments in support of the long ending. Yet it is clear that relatively few scholars have championed the long ending. Two of the most noteworthy proponents are William Farmer,

*The Last Twelve Verses of Mark* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974) and John Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Associated Publishers & Authors, 1871).

Arguments in favor of the long ending are as follows:

*First*, despite the absence of the text in the Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, it does have good MSS support. It has witness in each of the major four MS “families.” First some of the **Alexandrian** texts have it. C (5<sup>th</sup> Century) and minuscule 892 (9<sup>th</sup> Century) contain it, along with some Coptic texts that date in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries. Second, the **Byzantine** witnesses include A (5<sup>th</sup> Century) E (6<sup>th</sup> Century) H (6<sup>th</sup> Century) K (9<sup>th</sup> Century) S II (9<sup>th</sup> Century). The **Caesarean** witnesses include W (4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> Century) f<sup>13</sup> 28 565 700 arm (4<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> Centuries). The **Western** witnesses include D (5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> Century) and Tatian's *Diatessaron* (which dates around A.D. 170). “Such weight is quite impressive and should—by mere bulk, variety and date—be cause for further consideration” (Thomas 409).

*Second*, it has strong support from early church writers. Burgon spent considerable time identifying the fact that there are relatively few truly ancient MSS (only five, by his count), whereas the witness of the “church fathers” brings us considerably closer to the time the Gospel of Mark was written. Papias (c. A.D. 125) seems to have Mark 16:18 in view when he refers to a Christian who “after drinking noxious poison, through the Lord’s grace experienced no evil consequence” (*Fragments of Papias* 3.6). However, Burgon has his critics, who question his use of this quote from Papias:

It is incredible that Burgon cites such a vague patristic reference as proof for the early existence of the “traditional” text. Papias (in Eusebius) quotes no words at all from the Majority Text of Mark 16:18. Even the word for “deadly thing” is different (*pharmakon* in Eusebius, as opposed to *thanasimon* in the Byzantine text). There is nothing whatever in the account of Papias to prove that he had Mark 16 in mind at all. It is just as likely that Papias recalls the account of Paul’s miraculous deliverance from a deadly snake bite in Acts 28:3–6 or that he alludes to no NT passage at all. Patristic evidence such as this is not evidence but merely speculation (Heuer 526).

Yet Papias is certainly not the only witness from the church fathers. Justin Martyr (c. 100-165) includes five words that occur, in a different sequence, in verse 20 (**τοῦ λόγου** τοῦ ἰσχυροῦ ὄν ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλήμ οἱ ἀπόστολοι αὐτοῦ ἐξεληθόντες **πανταχοῦ ἐκήρυξαν**) (*Apology* 1.45). Despite attempts to minimize this, the similarities (even in verb and noun forms) are quite striking. Tatian had the long ending to Mark in his harmony of the four Gospels, the *Diatessaron* (c. A.D. 170). Irenaeus (c. 130-202) clearly quotes verse 19: “Also, towards the conclusion of his Gospel, Mark says: ‘So then, after the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God...’” (*Against Heresies* 3.10.5). Regarding this quote, Burgon has the following observation:

Who sees not that this single piece of evidence is in itself sufficient to outweigh the testimony of any codex extant? It is in fact a mere trifling with words to distinguish between ‘Manuscript’ and ‘Patristic’ testimony in a cast like this: for (as I have already explained) the passage quoted from S. Mark’s Gospel by Irenaeus is to all intents and

purposes a *fragment from a dated manuscript*; and *that* MS., demonstrably older by at least one hundred and fifty years than the oldest copy of the Gospels which have come down to our times (102).

Additional evidence from the church fathers is found with Hippolytus (c. 170-235) an elder in Portus, near Rome. He quotes verses 17 and 18 (Burgon 102-3). Burgon also spends considerable time dealing with the actual statements of Eusebius and Jerome, arguing that they are not being properly represented today (119-35). He spends considerable time demonstrating that the statements Jerome made regarding the long ending (that is, that the long ending “is absent from almost all the Greek codices” and that it is “scarcely in any copies of the Gospel”) is nothing more than quotes from Eusebius, and is, in fact a misrepresentation of Eusebius. As far as Jerome is concerned, Burgon has this to say:

If he had been indeed persuaded of their absence from “*almost all the Greek codices*,” does any one imagine that he would have suffered them to stand in the Vulgate? If he had met with them in “*scarcely any copies of the Gospel*,” – do men really suppose that he would yet have retained them?...It is an additional proof that Jerome accepted the conclusion of S. Mark’s Gospel that he actually quotes it, and on more than one occasion: but to prove this, is to prove more than is here required...I pass on, claiming to have shewn that the name of Jerome as an adverse witness must never again appear in this discussion (134-5).

No doubt Burgon would be disappointed to find that the name of Jerome is still used as an “adverse witness” to the long ending (as found in Metzger and others). Nevertheless, the

examples of church fathers using or quoting the long ending deserve consideration in this discussion. Swete disagrees. He says:

“...those who maintain the genuineness of the last twelve verses have to account for the early circulation of the alternative ending, and for the ominous silence of the Ante-Nicene fathers between Irenaeus and Eusebius in reference to a passage which was of so much importance both on historical and theological grounds” (cxiii).

Apparently the references from Papias, Justin Martyr, Tatian, Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Jerome are not enough for Swete, although Farmer (57) and Burgon (97-147) and others consider them more than sufficient. But there are other significant names that also bear witness to the long ending: Tertullian (c. 160-220); Aphraates (c. 367); Apostolic Constitutions (c. 380) and Didymus (c. 398) just to cite a few. Scrivener sums it up best:

It is cited, possibly by Papias, unquestionably by Irenaeus (both in Greek and Latin), by Tertullian, and by Justin Martyr as early as the second century; by Hippolytus (see Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text*, p. 252), by Vincentius at the seventh Council of Carthage, by the *Acta Pilati*, the *Apostolic Constitutions*, and apparently by Celsus in the third; by Aphraates (in a Syriac Homily dated A.D. 337), the *Syriac Table of Canons*, Eusebius, Macarius Magnes, Didymus, the *Syriac Acts of the Apostles*, Leontius, Ps.-Ephraem. Jerome, Cyril of Jerusalem, Epiphanius, Ambrose, Augustine, Chrysostom, in the fourth; by Leo, Nestorius, Cyril of Alexandria, Victor of Antioch, Patricius, Marius Mercator, in the fifth; by Hesychius, Gregentius, Prosper, John, abp. of Thessalonica, and Modestus, in the fifth and sixth. Add to this, what has been so forcibly stated by

Burgon (*ubi supra*, p. 205), that in the Calendar of Greek Church lessons, which existed certainly in the fourth century, very probably much earlier, the disputed verses were honoured by being read as a special matins service for Ascension Day (see p. 81), and as the Gospel for St. Mary Magdalene's Day, July 22 (p. 89); as well as by forming the third of the eleven εὐαγγέλια ἀναστασιμα εὐθινα, the preceding part of the chapter forming the second (p. 85): so little were they suspected as of even doubtful authenticity (337).

For those interested in reading the actual statements made by the church fathers, consult Appendix A, written by Dan R. Owen. It is abundantly clear that the long ending has a formidable host of ancient witnesses, many of which pre-date the Vaticanus and Sinaiticus. Thomas (409, fn 10) concludes by saying: “This much is clear: The longer ending is quite old, dating at least to the middle of the second century.”

*Third*, it should be noted that one of the primary witnesses to the abrupt ending, the Vaticanus, ended the Gospel of Mark with a most conspicuous blank space. It has been frequently observed that scribes never left blank spaces. Therefore, there had to be considerable doubt that the Gospel had ended with verse 8. What could be the possible reason for the scribe leaving this large area blank? Here are some suggested explanations: (a) He was leaving room for the eventual owner of the MS to “make any modification deemed necessary” (Thomas 409); (b) He intended to return later to finish the Gospel, but for unknown reasons never did so; (c) He personally felt the ending insufficient and was intending to consult other manuscript witnesses.

Cod. B, however, betrays consciousness on the scribe's part that something is left out, inasmuch as after εφοβουντο γαρ ver. 8, a whole column is left perfectly blank (*the only*

*blank one in the whole volume*), as well as the rest of the column containing ver. 8, which is usual in Cod. B at the end of every other book of Scripture. No such peculiarity attaches to Cod. 8 (Scrivener 337).

While Scrivener says that “no such peculiarity attaches to” codex a (Sinaiticus), this is not entirely true. Even the Sinaiticus ends with a space exactly large enough to include the long ending (Snapp 1-15).

*Fourth*, it is highly unlikely that Mark would have ended his Gospel with the Greek word γάρ, “for.” While various scholars have found sentences that end with γάρ, and even a few books (although this is disputed) have ended with γάρ, this type of construction is very unusual. In an extensive study N. Clayton Croy made the following observation:

The relevant question is no longer, can *gar* end a sentence? but rather what *kinds* of sentences end with *gar*? Obviously, such sentences must be short, usually two or three words long. Less obvious is the fact that such sentences occur most often in certain kinds of literature. Short sentences ending in *gar* reflect an informal oral or conversational style. They often have the parenthetical quality of an aside. The text almost always continues. Sentences ending in *gar* are much less common in narrative (48).

Croy’s far-reaching research led him to make the following analysis: “The limited use of ‘final *gar*’ sentences in narrative prose and their extreme scarcity at the end of narrative works ... argues *against* the likelihood that Mark concluded his entire Gospel with such a clause” (48). Others, (i.e. Iverson 94) do not believe the final *gar* proves a case either way.

*Fifth*, it is highly unlikely that Mark would have ended his Gospel with such a depressing, negative note. The text in verse 8 reads: “So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid” (NKJV). How is this a “good news” ending?

*Sixth*, the rules of textual criticism argue in favor of a longer, more difficult reading. Farmer argues that the unusual reference to picking up serpents and drinking deadly poisons is such that no scribe would have ventured to include such (57). It had to be genuine and original with the Gospel. Thomas says “This is an argument that has not been answered sufficiently” (410).

*Seventh*, examinations of the long ending, through textual criticism, has led some to believe that the ending is consistent with the overall language and syntax of the Gospel. It was stated earlier (as proof against the long ending) that textual critics have dismissed the long section based upon their evaluation of the section. However, Thomas notes that

Various scholars have appealed to the internal evidence as proof of the non-Markan origin of 16:9-20, yet relatively few have done an exhaustive study. On the other hand, a handful of scholars have argued, on the basis of internal evidence, that part or all of 16:9-20 is Markan (410).

A few of these scholars are the aforementioned William Farmer (83-4) and Eta Linnemann ("Der wiedergefundene Markusschluss," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 66 (1969):255-287). While it is beyond the scope of this study to consider all of their points, their arguments are powerful in offering internal support for the long ending.



With regard to the argument against these twelve verses arising from their alleged difference in style from the rest of the Gospel, I must say that the same process might be applied — and has been applied — to prove that St. Paul was not the writer of the Pastoral Epistles (to say nothing of that to the Hebrews), St. John of the Apocalypse, Isaiah and Zechariah of portions of those prophecies that bear their names. Every one used to literary composition may detect, if he will, such minute variations as have been made so much of in this case, either in his own writings, or in those of the authors he is most familiar with (Scrivener 337).

One of the most thorough examinations of the last twelve verses with the entire Gospel of Mark was done by Bruce Terry. His conclusion was:

Textual critics usually object to Mark's authorship of these verses on the basis of supposed differences of style between them and the rest of the Gospel of Mark. However, an in depth study of the stylistic features in question reveals that almost all of them can be found elsewhere in Mark. For convenience of discussion, these features may be categorized under four headings: juncture, vocabulary, phraseology, and miscellaneous.

As Terry demonstrated, the supposed objections to the Gospel being authored by Mark are invalid (therefore his conclusion agrees with those of Farmer, Linnemann and Scrivener).

### **Five Possibilities**

It is clear that there are strong arguments offered both for the ‘abrupt ending’ as well as for the ‘long ending.’ Based upon the available evidence here are the most logical possibilities:

**1) Mark intended his Gospel to end at 16:8.**

This is certainly the most popular view. Some have even attempted to show that this ‘abrupt ending’ was intended by Mark, producing shock value or demonstrating literary genius (cf. Iverson, Hester, Rist, etc.).

**2) Mark intended to complete his Gospel but never did.**

This view, suggested by Metzger (105, fn. 7) and others, accounts for the awkwardness of the ending, but also accounts for the fact that significant manuscripts ended the Gospel at 16:8. It has even been postulated that Mark was martyred or died suddenly of sickness, thus keeping him from completing his Gospel (Brooks 274-5).

**3) The long ending was authored by Mark himself.**

This is a conclusion that some scholars agree with, but most do not. Yet, if this is in fact the correct view, then there is no question that the text should be included in all copies of the Bible and be considered as fully inspired.

Yet this view still poses some questions. *First*, if Mark wrote it, what happened to it? Of course, the answer to this can only be conjecture. Some have suggested that it was the last leaf of his manuscript, and (as has happened frequently) that last leaf was lost. Then, future scribes perpetuated the problem by copying only what they had in front of them and what they had did not include the last twelve verses (Metzger 105, fn. 7). This would explain the Sinaiticus and

Vaticanus not having the long ending, and would explain the comments by Eusebius. This would also explain the vast number of scribes and commentators who did not believe the Gospel would have ended with the depressing phrase “for they were afraid.” They believed that there certainly had to be more.

*Second*, if Mark wrote it, why is it different than the rest of his Gospel? As noted above, there are many who would challenge the accuracy of this statement. They argue that the style of writing is, in fact, Markan. Yet those who do believe the writing to be different suggest that Mark may have written the last twelve verses at a later date than the rest of the Gospel, perhaps even years later. This would allow both for the differences and similarities, and might account for those verses to be missing from certain manuscripts (if copies were made before Mark had a chance to finish his Gospel).

#### **4) The long ending was written by a close colleague of Mark**

This view is divided into two possibilities. *First*, that Mark approved of this colleague finishing his Gospel, and even provided the material to him that he wanted included. *Second*, that this colleague took it upon himself to finish the Gospel, either knowing that Mark wanted more written or that he himself was inspired to complete it. Some have even suggested that the Apostle Paul wrote the last twelve verses, because they are written in typical Pauline style (cf. H. H. Evans; Bruns 358). Conybeare (241–53) suggested that Mark 16:9–20 was composed by the second-century apologist Aristion.

#### **5) The long ending was composed by some unknown, uninspired writer**

This view explains both how some early Christian writers knew of the text, but also how it did not make it into the canon of Scripture reflected in the Sinaiticus and Vaticanus. Hort arrives at the conclusion that the passage in question “manifestly cannot claim any apostolic authority; but it is doubtless founded on some tradition of the apostolic age” (51; cf. Craig Evans 550-1). If this view is correct, it should call for the elimination of the text altogether. It has no rightful place in the canon of Scripture.

### **Conclusion**

It is apparent that this is a complex issue. It is equally apparent why some have considered this textual variant to be the most difficult. There is strong evidence offered for the ‘abrupt ending’ as well as for the ‘long ending.’

In regard to the five possibilities, I reject #5 outright. The study of the Canon of Scripture proves that the early Christians were extremely careful in collecting and identifying the writings that came from the pen of inspired men (2 Ti. 3:16). They knew the difference, for there were many books composed during the first century that were never considered inspired. For them to have allowed some uninspired man to interject his ending to one of the Gospels is wholly inconsistent with the formation of the NT canon (not to mention the impact it has on the providence of God in preserving His word).

In regard to #2, it suggests (like #5) that some unknown hand took it upon himself to complete what Mark did not or could not. I reject this as a viable possibility as well. It seems

that the volumes of church history would have somewhere noted an untimely death of Mark, along with testimony that he had more to say in his Gospel. There is just no evidence to warrant such a conclusion.

In regard to #1, I find the arguments primarily based on two manuscripts (Sinaiticus and Vaticanus) and the witness of Eusebius to be insufficient by themselves. On this point I agree with Scrivener:

All opposition to the authenticity of the paragraph resolves itself into the allegations of Eusebius and the testimony of  $\aleph B$ . Let us accord to these the weight which is their due: but against their verdict we can appeal to a vast body of ecclesiastical evidence reaching back to the earlier part of the second century; to nearly all the versions; and to all extant manuscripts excepting two, of which one is doubtful. So powerfully is it vouched for, that many of those who are reluctant to recognize St. Mark as its author, are content to regard it notwithstanding as an integral portion of the inspired record originally delivered to the Church (Scrivener 344).

In addition, even Metzger (103) and Dummelow (733) acknowledged that the acceptance of the ‘abrupt ending’ and rejecting the long ending had to be based on more than manuscript evidence alone. Therefore scholars have spent considerable time analyzing the text to determine if it was consistent with the writing style and vocabulary of Mark. Those who have ventured to argue that the section is not of Mark have been totally unconvincing. As noted above, there has been

serious work done analyzing the text and clearly demonstrating that the text is consistent with the rest of the Gospel (cf. Terry, Farmer, Linneman and Scrivener – just to name a few).

Regarding #4 above, I am willing to accept this as a viable possibility. Why? Because of the strong evidence that the text was a part of the Gospel from at least the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century. This view also allows the text to stand and take its rightful place in Scripture. Regarding this point notice the words of Metzger:

There seems to be good reason, therefore, to conclude that, though external and internal evidence is conclusive against the authenticity of the last twelve verses as coming from the same pen as the rest of the Gospel, the passage ought to be accepted as part of the canonical text of Mark (*Canon 270*).

This leaves us with #3. This is the position that seems to be the strongest of all. The textual objections have been answered, and the manuscript objections have been answered. This leaves us with no logical reason to reject the ‘long ending’ as having come from the pen of the inspired writer Mark. The text deserves its place as authoritative Scripture.

## **Appendix A**

### Patristic Citations of the Longer Ending of Mark's Gospel

By Dan R. Owen

Patristic citations of the longer ending of Mark make it clear that the text was known and cited very early in the Christian community. Irenaeus of Lyons seems to allude to Mark 16:17, regarding the risen Lord giving power to believers to cast out demons (*Against Heresies*, I. xx. 3). Later, in the same work, he specifically mentions Mark's gospel and says, "Also, towards the conclusion of his Gospel, Mark says: 'So then, after the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God'" (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III.X. 5).

The second century Syrian writer, Tatian, includes the longer ending of Mark along with the other gospels in the final section of his *Diatessaron*. This is the way he weaves the text together in section LV.

"Then said Jesus unto them, I have been given all authority in heaven 5 and earth; and as my Father hath sent me, so I also send you. Go now into 6 all the world, and preach my gospel in all the creation; and teach all the peoples, and 7 baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; and teach them to keep all whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you all the days, unto 8 the end of the world. For whosoever believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but 9 whosoever believeth not shall be rejected. And the signs which shall attend those that believe in me are these: that they shall cast out devils in my name; and they shall speak with new tongues; and they shall take up serpents, and if they drink deadly poison, it shall not injure them; and they shall lay their hands on the diseased, and they shall be healed. But

ye, abide in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be clothed with power from on high,” (underlined portions from Mark 16).

The North African father, Tertullian, in his *Treatise On the Soul*, alludes to Mark 16:9 and the fact that Mary Magdalene had been possessed of seven demons (*Treatise On the Soul*, 25). He may also be alluding to Mark 16:19 in his treatise *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, 51, where he says, “since Jesus is still sitting there at the right hand of the Father.” On the other hand, he may just be alluding to Psalm 110:1 as it was applied by Christians to Jesus (e.g. Hebrews 1:3,13; 8:1 etc). In his *Answer to the Jews* V. 7, he may be alluding to Mark 16:15 when he says, “undoubtedly because ‘unto every land’ the preaching of the apostles had to ‘go out.’”

During *The Seventh Council of Chalcedon*, presided over by Cyprian of Carthage (3<sup>rd</sup> Century), Vincentius of Thibarais reportedly said: “We know that heretics are worse than Gentiles. If, therefore, being converted, they should wish to come to the Lord, we have assuredly the rule of truth which the Lord by His divine precept commanded to His apostles, saying, "Go ye, lay on hands in my name, expel demons." And in another place: "Go ye and teach the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. The underlined portion seems to allude to Mark 16:16-17.

The apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus* XIV. 1., probably from the third century, cites the Great Commission from the longer ending. According to that document, “he said unto his disciples: Go into all the world and preach unto every creature (the whole creation): he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned. [And these



signs shall follow upon them that believe: in my name they shall cast out devils, they shall speak with new tongues, they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them: they shall lay hands upon the sick and they shall recover. And while Jesus yet spake unto his disciples we saw him taken up into heaven.” The apocryphal *Acts of Pilate*, XIV cites the same passage.

The fourth century writer Aphraates, in his *On Faith* 72, says “And when our Lord gave the mystery of baptism unto His disciples, He spake unto them thus: "Whosoever believeth and is baptized shall live; but whosoever believeth not shall be condemned."

The fourth century Ambrose of Milan refers several times to the longer ending of Mark. In *On the Holy Spirit* II. 145, he says, “And as Wisdom sent the apostles, saying, Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel...” then a few paragraphs later in the same work, (II. 151) he continues, “Christ chose and ordained to be apostles, and sent them into the world, saying: Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole creation. He that shall believe and be baptized shall be saved, but he that believes not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe. In My Name shall they cast out devils, they shall speak with new tongues, they shall take up serpents, and if they shall drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them, they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” Again, Ambrose, in his work *On the Christian Faith*, I. 14. 86, says “Herein is the quickening word that we read as our help, for we have heard the passage read where the Lord says: Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to all creation. He who says ‘all creation’ excepts nothing.” In addition, Ambrose, in *On Repentance*, I. 8.35 explains, “And in fine, He gave all gifts to His disciples, of whom He said: In My Name they shall cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if

they shall drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall do well.”

In his sermons on First Corinthians, the Fourth Century preacher John Chrysostom seems to refer to the statement about Mary Magdalene in Mark 16:9 when he says, “For He appeared, says he, to Cephas, He appeared to above five hundred brethren, He appeared to me also. Yet surely the Gospel says the contrary, that He was seen of Mary first,” (Chrysostom, *Homilies on First Corinthians*, 38.5).

The fourth century Biblical scholar Jerome, in a *Letter to Hedibia*, claimed that Mark 16:9-20, “is carried in few gospels, almost all the books of Greece not having this passage at the end” (Question 3). Yet, he seems to be referring to Mark 16:14 in *Against the Pelagians*, II. 15 when he says, “Even the Apostles showed unbelief and hardness of heart.”

All of this patristic evidence shows clearly that the longer ending of Mark was widely used and widely accepted as authoritative from the second through the fourth century. Much of this evidence predates the manuscripts Sinaiticus and Vaticanus. Because canonicity was not so easily attained without strong tradition supporting apostolic or prophetic authorship, this evidence strongly supports the idea that we should seriously consider Mark 16:9-20 as the original ending of Mark’s gospel.



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