

Did Mark Write Mark 16: 9-20? A Textual Criticism Case Study

by

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Introduction

The final goal of textual criticism is the recovery of the words of the original writers of Scripture out of the many manuscripts of the New Testament available to the scholar today. Since the Scriptures are the very foundation of Christian belief, there can surely be no more important a task than using the gifts of knowledge and of materials—in the form of thousands of manuscripts—to discover once again the very words our Lord inspired the authors of Scripture to write. There is scholarly agreement that, for the vast majority of the New Testament, one can have the assurance that these were the words the authors originally wrote. However, there are still some passages of Scripture in which the wording is by no means clear. Indeed, there are a couple of places where there is question whether an entire passage is original. John 7:53-8:11 is one of those passages; another is the passage under examination in this paper.

The purpose of this brief paper is to examine the textual evidence for the authorship of Mark 16:9-20 and come to a determination with regard to its authorship, at least in terms of the evangelist Mark. One cannot do in-depth textual study of this kind without a dependence upon the original languages. For this reason, the meat of this paper may not be readily accessible to those without facility in Greek and at least some understanding of text critical methodology. However, it is the hope of this author that the conclusions will be of interest and benefit to the entire body of Christ.

Context

The passage in question falls right at the end of Mark's Gospel. Without it, Mark's narrative ends thus:

¹ Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary *the mother* of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. ² Very early in the morning, on the first *day* of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. ³ And they said among themselves, "Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?" ⁴ But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away -- for it was very large. ⁵ And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶ But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. ⁷ "But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee;

there you will see Him, as He said to you.”⁸ 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. (NASB)

Even in English, it is not a very convincing ending. After the build-up to the first post-resurrection appearance of Christ and the exciting message He gave to the women, it seems a little abrupt to end the narrative without any further detail with regard to Christ’s appearance to His disciples, His commissioning of the disciples, His ascension, and so forth. Many modern textual scholars believe that it is an ending that demands a sequel. That is to say, endings were composed for this because early Christians also felt Mark’s Gospel to be in need of good closure. There are also those, on the other hand, who would defend the inclusion of verses 9-20 for the same reason—without them, the ending is missing something, and the traditionally preserved ending has as much, if not better, claim to authenticity than any other proposal.

For the textual critic, however, what “feels” and “seems” is not the correct place to start. The place to start is with solid evidence, and, for the textual critic, the evidence is the manuscript tradition, or the thousands of copies of New Testament writings (along with early versions in other languages as well as quotations from the early church Fathers). This evidence needs to be evaluated both in terms of external evidence and internal evidence. Only then can the critic start drawing conclusions.

The Textual Data

Modern editions of the Greek New Testament do a great service for the textual critic by upholding a tradition of printing a textual apparatus at the bottom of each page. This apparatus documents all of the most important variant readings for a particular word, phrase, or passage, and also lists which manuscripts support each one. From this apparatus, the textual critic can evaluate the quality of a particular reading and weigh it appropriately.

In the case of Mark 16:9-20, the evidence is abundant. In order to begin the evaluation process, it is necessary to describe the textual support for the passage and its variants. The first thing to note is that there are, in fact, two possible endings for Mark’s Gospel. The first reads:

πάντα δὲ τὰ παρηγγελμένα τοῖς περὶ τὸν Πέτρον συντόμως ἐξήγγειλαν. Μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀπὸ ἀνατολῆς καὶ ἄχρι δύσεως ἐξαπέστειλεν δι' αὐτῶν τὸ ἱερὸν καὶ ἄφθαρτον κήρυγμα τῆς αἰωνίου σωτηρίας. ἀμήν.

This is known as the “shorter” ending of Mark. Among the uncial supporters of this ending is Codex Regius (“L”), an eighth century manuscript described by Aland as having an “Egyptian” text,¹ Codex Athous Dionysiou (Ψ), an eighth or ninth century manuscript whose Marcan text is early, containing both Alexandrian and Western readings,² and Codex 083 from the sixth or seventh century, which is an important early witness though containing Byzantine influence. The Old Latin version “k” (Codex Bobiensis) from the fourth or fifth century is the only extant example of the shorter ending where it has been added directly to the end of Mark 16:8 as if it were supposed to be part of the ancient text.³ This version is also notable because, unlike many of the other manuscripts that carry this ending, it is not followed by the so-called “longer ending.”⁴ Other language versions that contain this passage are Syriac versions (at least those in the Sahidic and Bohairic dialects, as well as the marginal notes to the Harklean Syriac version indicating variant readings⁵), and several Ethiopic manuscripts.

Metzger notes that these manuscripts carry this ending “with trifling variations.” One of these variations that ought to be pointed out however is one that appears in L, the Harklean Syriac marginal notes, Codex 099 (a seventh century Coptic manuscript), one

¹ Kurt and Barbara Aland, The Text of the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981, 1987, 1989, 1995), p. 113.

² Bruce M. Metzger, The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration, 3d ed., (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 60.

³ Elsewhere it follows verse 20.

⁴ Bruce Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, 3d ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1975), p. 124.

⁵ The Harklean version is a seventh century revision of the sixth century Philoxeniana, which is no longer extant. Thomas of Harkel undertook this revision in which he tried to reproduce as closely as possible the underlying Greek text, even down to word order. This enables the textual critic to observe the kind of Greek text that was in use at this time. The text appears to be of the Byzantine type, however the marginal notes giving variant readings appear to reflect a Western text-type (see Aland, pp. 198-199). This evidence may or may not be of note when determining the authenticity of the passage, but it is certainly of interest to the student of the early text of the New Testament.

important Sahidic manuscript, and one eighth century Greek-Coptic lectionary (*l* 1602).

These contain an indication that the following passage is in some (or not in some) copies.⁶ The importance of this is that scholars can know for certain that this passage was in question from at least as far back as the fourth or fifth century, and in a variety of locations (note, Latin, Syriac, and Coptic translations carry this phrase).

Of significance also are the manuscripts that *omit* this passage. Codices \aleph and B (Sinaiticus and Vaticanus) do not carry either ending of Mark. This ending is also not found in uncials A, C, D, W, Θ , which date from the fifth to the ninth centuries and are of various text types. It is also not in various miniscules, Latin, Syriac, and Coptic versions, and it is notably absent from the Byzantine text tradition.

Metzger notes that the style of this ending appears inconsistent with the rest of Mark's Gospel, and one is forced to agree.⁷ There are various words used in this passage that are unknown to the other fifteen and a half chapters of the Gospel.⁸ Metzger notes that this ending has a "rhetorical tone" that is inconsistent with the rest of the Gospel.⁹ It certainly comes across, at least to this writer, as an attempt to tie up the loose end left by the $\epsilon\phi\omicron\beta\omicron\upsilon\upsilon\tau\omicron$ $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$ of the first part of Mark 16:8. Evans notes the "devotional language" used in the passage, particularly the phrase $\tau\omicron$ $\iota\epsilon\rho\omicron\nu$ $\kappa\alpha\iota$ $\acute{\alpha}\phi\theta\alpha\rho\tau\omicron\nu$ $\kappa\acute{\eta}\rho\upsilon\gamma\mu\alpha$ $\tau\eta\varsigma$ $\alpha\iota\omega\nu\iota\omicron\upsilon$ $\sigma\omega\tau\eta\rho\iota\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$ ¹⁰ This is certainly not the Marcan style one is accustomed to, and does appear more fitting to something one would find in the Petrine epistles. Also the fact of the variant readings contained in such a small passage, and particularly the witnesses to its questionable origin noted earlier, all count against its authenticity. Of greatest

⁶ L and the Harklean Syriac read $\Theta\epsilon\rho\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$ $\pi\omicron\upsilon$ $\kappa\alpha\iota$ $\tau\alpha\upsilon\tau\alpha$; 099 and the Sahidic manuscript read $\epsilon\nu$ $\tau\iota\sigma\iota\nu$ $\alpha\nu\tau\iota\gamma\rho\alpha\phi\omega\nu$ $\tau\alpha\upsilon\tau\alpha$ $\phi\epsilon\rho\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$; *l* 1602 reads $\epsilon\nu$ $\alpha\lambda\lambda\omicron\iota\varsigma$ $\alpha\nu\tau\iota\gamma\rho\alpha\phi\omicron\iota\varsigma$ $\omicron\upsilon\kappa$ $\epsilon\gamma\rho\alpha\phi\eta$ $\tau\alpha\upsilon\tau\alpha$.

⁷ Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, p. 126.

⁸ For example, $\sigma\upsilon\nu\tau\omicron\mu\omega\varsigma$ $\delta\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$ $\acute{\alpha}\nu\alpha\tau\omicron\lambda\eta$, and $\acute{\alpha}\phi\theta\alpha\rho\tau\omicron\varsigma$.

⁹ Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, p. 126.

¹⁰ Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, (Nashville, Tn: Thomas Nelson, 2001), p. 550. One might also note that the use of the term $\kappa\acute{\eta}\rho\upsilon\gamma\mu\alpha$ for the Gospel proclamation is not what one would normally find in Mark. More commonly, the Second Gospel will use the phrase $\kappa\eta\rho\upsilon\sigma\sigma\epsilon\iota\nu$ $\tau\omicron$ $\epsilon\upsilon\alpha\gamma\gamma\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\iota\omicron\nu$. The use of the term $\kappa\acute{\eta}\rho\upsilon\gamma\mu\alpha$ for the Gospel proclamation itself is nowhere to be found in Mark, and in the rest of the New Testament it is found most commonly in Paul's epistles (Romans 16:25; 1 Corinthians 1:21; 2:4; 15:14; 2 Timothy 4:17; Titus 1:3).

significance, and perhaps the deathblow to the shorter ending's claim to originality, is the fact that the Byzantine text tradition stands in agreement with various Alexandrian readings (including Sinaiticus and Vaticanus) in rejecting it.

The so-called "longer" ending of Mark, as the appellation suggests, contains much more substantial detail. The passage reads as follows:

⁹Ἀναστὰς δὲ πρῶτῃ σαββάτου ἐφάνη πρῶτον Μαρίᾳ τῇ Μαγδαληνῇ ἀφ' ἧς ἐκβεβλήκει ἑπτὰ δαιμόνια ¹⁰ἐκείνη πορευθεῖσα ἀπήγγειλεν τοῖς μετ' αὐτοῦ γενομένοις πενθοῦσιν καὶ κλαίουσιν· ¹¹καὶ κείνοι ἀκούσαντες ὅτι ζῆ καὶ ἐθεάθη ὑπ' αὐτῆς ἠπίστησαν ¹²Μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα δυσὶν ἐξ αὐτῶν περιπατοῦσιν ἐφανερῶθη ἐν ἑτέρᾳ μορφῇ πορευομένοις εἰς ἀγρόν· ¹³καὶ κείνοι ἀπελθόντες ἀπήγγειλαν τοῖς λοιποῖς· οὐδὲ ἐκείνοις ἐπίστευσαν ¹⁴Ὑστερον ἀνακειμένοις αὐτοῖς τοῖς ἑνδεκά ἐφανερῶθη καὶ ὠνείδισεν τὴν ἀπιστίαν αὐτῶν καὶ σκληροκαρδίαν ὅτι τοῖς θεασαμένοις αὐτὸν ἐγγεγερμένον οὐκ ἐπίστευσαν ¹⁵καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς Πορευθέντες εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἅπαντα κηρύξατε τὸ εὐαγγέλιον πάσῃ τῇ κτίσει ¹⁶ὃ πιστεύσας καὶ βαπτισθεὶς σωθήσεται ὁ δὲ ἀπιστήσας κατακριθήσεται ¹⁷σημεῖα δὲ τοῖς πιστεύσασιν ταῦτα παρακολουθήσει· ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου δαιμόνια ἐκβαλοῦσιν γλώσσαις λαλήσουσιν καιναῖς ¹⁸ὄφεις ἄροῦσιν καὶ θανάσιμόν τι πίωσιν οὐ μὴ αὐτοὺς βλάψῃ ἐπὶ ἄρρωστούς χεῖρας ἐπιθήσουσιν καὶ καλῶς ἔξουσιν ¹⁹Ὁ μὲν οὖν κύριος μετὰ τὸ λαλήσαι αὐτοῖς ἀνελήφθη εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ ἐκάθισεν ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ ²⁰ἐκείνοι δὲ ἐξελθόντες ἐκήρυξαν πανταχοῦ τοῦ κυρίου συνεργοῦντος καὶ τὸν λόγον βεβαιοῦντος διὰ τῶν ἐπακολουθούντων σημείων Ἀμήν.

It needs to be said from the start that this passage is in the majority of extant manuscripts. However, as the seasoned textual critic knows, quantity alone does not determine a reading. There are many factors that could contribute to making one reading more ubiquitous than another, and it may have nothing to do with theological preference. The textual critic must treat this passage as he would every other and examine the manuscript evidence both in terms of the age, type, and location of the manuscripts, and in terms of the context and consistency of this reading with the rest of Mark's Gospel.

Since the manuscripts that contain these verses are the majority, it will be useful to begin by looking at the manuscripts that do not contain these verses.¹¹ According to

¹¹ Some, especially those who set up either the King James Version of the Bible, or the Majority/Traditional/Byzantine text as the standard, would prefer to say that these manuscripts "omit" these verses. However, this assumes that these verses were not added to the manuscripts that, for whatever reasons, happen to be in the majority at present. The case on either side has yet to be proved.

the textual apparatus of the Nestle-Aland 27th edition, the witnesses that do not have Mark 16:9-20 are: **ⲛ**, B, 304, k, sy^s, sa^{ms}, arm^{mss}, Eus, Eus^{mss}, Hier^{mss}.

ⲛ is Codex Sinaiticus, the fourth century codex discovered by Constantin von Tischendorf in St. Catherine's Monastery at the foot of Mt. Sinai in the mid-1800's. While the quality of the text contained within the manuscript is a matter of dispute,¹² the importance of the manuscript itself is almost universally agreed upon. It is one of the oldest complete Bibles extant, save for a few folios of the Old Testament. It also includes some early Christian writings that were, at one time, in certain places, listed as "canonical" (e.g., The Shepherd of Hermas, and The Epistle of Barnabas). **ⲛ** is a good example of the Alexandrian text type.

B is Codex Vaticanus is another complete fourth century Bible apart from some missing pages. Its textual quality is considered superior to **ⲛ**, and together these two codices formed the basis of Westcott and Hort's Greek New Testament. Again, one cannot deny that this manuscript is an important witness at least to the Alexandrian text in the fourth century, if not to the text of the New Testament as a whole.

304 is a twelfth century miniscule. The significance of this witness to the ending of Mark's Gospel is simply in the fact that there were still manuscripts that closed Mark 16 at verse 8 at a time when the long ending was so dominant. As Aland points out, this is an example of the tenacity of New Testament readings: when a variant appears in the text, it keeps showing up throughout the text tradition.¹³

Codex Bobiensesis, or "k," is the Old Latin manuscript previously mentioned as being unusual in that it contains only the "shorter" ending. This manuscript is another fourth or fifth century witness in favor of closing Mark at 16:8.

sy^s, is an example of an Old Syriac manuscript, written around the fourth century and discovered at the foot of Mount Sinai (hence it is referred to as the Sinaitic Syriac). There are a number of passages missing from the New Testament in this manuscript.

¹² Aland, *Text of the New Testament*, p. 107, notes that Tischendorf highly overrated the quality of the readings in **ⲛ**. He notes that there are numerous "singular readings (and careless errors)" and is "distinctly inferior to B."

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

sa^{ms} is, in this case, a fifth century parchment codex containing both Mark and Luke in the Sahidic Coptic dialect.¹⁴

arm^{mss} refers to a number of Armenian texts that do not contain the “longer” ending of Mark. Metzger notes that in a study of 220 Armenian manuscripts, Ernest Colwell identified only 88 that include Mark 16:9-20, and yet 99 end the Gospel at verse 8, while the rest indicate some doubt as to the authenticity of the passage.¹⁵ These manuscripts date from the ninth century through to the twelfth century.

Eus and Eus^{mss} both refer to Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 340), whose sections do not make provision for section numbers after Mark 16:8, and also indicates knowledge of other manuscripts that lack these verses.

Hier^{mss} is Jerome (d. 420), the same that was responsible for the Latin Vulgate. This notation indicates that Jerome was aware of manuscripts that did not contain these verses.

Among the many witnesses in favor of the longer ending of Mark are A, C, D, W, Θ, f¹³, 33, 2427, ℱ, lat, sy^{c, p, h}, bo, Ir^{lat}, Eus^{mss}, and Hier^{mss}. These figures represent three fifth century uncial codices (A, C, D) of mixed quality, two ninth century codices, one “Caesarean” (Θ), and one Byzantine (W). Also, there is the important miniscule manuscript 33, “the Queen of the miniscules,” and an important fourteenth century miniscule (2427), significant if only because it tends not to follow the Byzantine readings. The Byzantine text family contains this ending, as do various Latin, Syriac, and Coptic manuscripts. There is a Latin translation of Irenaeus’ work Adversus Haereses that supposedly quotes Mark 16:19, lending support to the existence of this passage at the end of the second century. Also, the previously mentioned passages from Eusebius and Jerome may be cited as evidence of their knowledge of these verses in at least some manuscripts.

Internally, there are some difficulties with the longer ending. Stylistically, for example, Mark’s Gospel uses the verb ἀκολουθεῖν, but never the compound

¹⁴ Bruce M. Metzger, The Early Versions of the New Testament, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 113.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 163-164.

παρακολουθεῖν. Nowhere else does he use the verbal form of ἀπιστία or ἄπιστος, ἀπιστέω. Outside of Mark 16:18, the verb βλέπω is found only in Luke (4:35) and in the LXX. It is of note that whenever the verb πορεύομαι is used in Mark, from 1:1-16:8 it is always as a compound verb (e.g., ἐκπορεύομαι, εἰσπορεύομαι, etc.) Every time the verb is used in 16:9-20, it is in its simple form (16:10, 12, and 15). The phrase μετὰ ταῦτα, used three times in Luke, and numerous times in John, is never used in Mark outside of Mark 16:12.¹⁶ The word μετὰ is certainly used in Mark, and even in a temporal sense (i.e., “after”), but never with ταῦτα. Outside of Mark 16, it is always used to designate a very specific time frame or event (e.g., μετὰ δὲ τὸ παραδοθῆναι τὸν Ἰωάννον (1:14); μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας (8:31); μετὰ ἡμέρας ἕξ (9:2)).

Metzger notes that there is a continuity problem between verses 8 and 9. He points out that verse 8 finishes talking about the frightened women, and yet verse 9 begins Ἀναστὰς δὲ..., the subject of this phrase being, of course, Jesus.¹⁷ Metzger also notes that only Mary Magdalene is now mentioned whereas prior to verse 9 there were others with her. Mary is also mentioned by name, and qualified (παρ’ ἧς ἐκβεβλήκει ἐπὶ δαιμόνια), even though she is in 15:47 and 16:1. Schaff also notes that the promise of 16:7 that they will see Jesus in Galilee is left unfulfilled.¹⁸ Indeed, Jesus addresses His disciples with no mention given of their location. One would expect, in light of 16:7, that there would be some indication that they are now in Galilee.

Evaluation

It is probably safe to say that the shorter ending of Mark is not original. The overwhelming preponderance of evidence, both internal and external, speaks against it, as do the variety of manuscripts that either question it or simply fail to transmit it. Upon this point there appears to be little disagreement.

¹⁶ It also appears in the shorter ending of Mark, but that can hardly be admitted as a favorable witness given that its authenticity is also doubted. Indeed, the fact that this phrase is only found in Mark in these two passages of spurious origin only further questions their authenticity.

¹⁷ Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, p. 125.

¹⁸ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, (Garland, Tx: Galaxie Software, 1999).

With regard to the longer ending, however, there is a great deal of disagreement over how the evidence cited above is best interpreted. Generally speaking, it appears that one's overall text critical position with regard to the manuscripts tends to dictate one's approach to Mark 16:9-20. Those who favor the Byzantine manuscript family defend the authenticity of the longer ending of Mark, whereas those who favor the Eclectic approach to textual criticism doubt the Marcan authorship of these verses. However, this is not simply a question of manuscript preference. Those favor the Byzantine manuscripts tend to place higher importance on external evidence, while those who favor the Eclectic approach tend to prefer internal evidence. From what has been said so far with regard to the evidence, one can perhaps see why each position feels vindicated by their particular methodology. To be fair, therefore, the following evaluation must look closely at *both* internal *and* external evidence, and weigh the case on the merits of both.

From the standpoint of external evidence the majority of manuscripts contain these verses. It was noted earlier that there are manuscripts of a variety of text types, spanning the fourth to the twelfth century that contain them, including the entire Byzantine tradition. The manuscripts that do not contain them are few, but many point out that these manuscripts are of great significance. Perhaps most significant are \aleph and B, Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, the oldest "complete," extant biblical codices.

In 1871, Dean John William Burgon published a book titled, The Last Twelve Verses of Mark, in which he sought to defend these verses against Westcott and Hort and their two prize manuscripts, \aleph and B. At the time he wrote, Burgon could make claims such as, "With the exception of the two uncial MSS which have just been named [\aleph and B], there is *not one* Codex in existence, uncial or cursive... which leaves out the last twelve verses of S. Mark,"¹⁹ as well as the various accusations of corruption he levels against these two manuscripts on the basis of their divergence from the "Traditional Text."²⁰ While \aleph and B are by no means considered as highly today as Westcott and Hort considered them in the late nineteenth century, subsequent manuscript and papyri

¹⁹ Dean John W. Burgon, The Last Twelve Verses of Mark, (Oxford, UK: James Parker and Co., 1871; reprint, Collingswood, Nj: The Dean Burgon Society, 2002), p. 71. The emphasis is in the original.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 70-113.

discoveries have vindicated many of their readings, at least showing that they are not anomalous within the manuscript tradition.

The manner in which Codex Vaticanus concludes Mark's Gospel has been a particular point of interest to those in favor of the longer ending. There is a gap at the end of the column in which Mark's Gospel concludes, and the *kephale* for Mark's Gospel appears a little way down. While such a gap may not be significant for a scribe who wishes to begin the next book at the top of the next column, in this instance the scribe left an entire additional column blank. Burgon (and others) reckon this space to be sufficient for verses 9-20, but for some reason the scribe chose not to fill this space with those verses.²¹ It is Burgon's belief that the copier's exemplar contained the verses, but the scribe was instructed to leave them out.²²

In response to this, Philip Schaff quotes a private note from Dr. Abbot who makes the following observation regarding Codex Vaticanus:

In the Alexandrian MS a column and a third are left blank at the end of Mark, half a page at the end of John, and a whole page at the end of the Pauline Epistles... In the Old Testament, note especially in this MS Leviticus, Isaiah, and the Ep. of Jeremiah, at the end of each of which half a page or more is left blank; contrast Jeremiah, Baruch, Lamentations... These examples show that the matter in question depends largely on the whim of the copyist; and that we can not infer with confidence that the scribe of B knew of any other ending of the Gospel.²³

So, the omission of these verses in Codex Vaticanus either demonstrates the freedom that the copyist had to arrange his work how he pleased, or it demonstrates that the copyist had Mark 16:9-20 in front of him but, for whatever reason, did not reproduce them but rather left a vacancy for them.

Of the manuscripts that contain Mark 16:9-20, most of them are either Byzantine, or display what some might call "Byzantine influence." For some, this indicates that these are all of one source, and therefore do not constitute multiple witnesses, but

²¹ Ibid., pp. 86-87.

²² Ibid., p. 87.

²³ Schaff, History of the Christian Church.

essentially only one witness. If it is granted that some of the more “mixed” manuscripts come from different locales, this would demonstrate that the reading was known outside of the Byzantine region of influence. It remains that the earliest manuscripts do not contain them, and there is evidence of this “negative” witness in Latin, Syriac, Armenian, and Coptic manuscripts, indicating that this ending was also widely known.

The Patristic evidence is made much of by advocates of Mark 16:9-20. Many more early church Fathers are cited in favor of these verses than against, and doubt is raised over the ones who seem to testify against them. Burgon cites the passage in Eusebius in which the alleged rejection of Mark 16:9-20 occurs. The context of the passage is Eusebius’ response to a question from Marinus about an apparent discrepancy between Matthew 28:1 and Mark 16:9. Eusebius’ response begins:

This difficulty admits of a twofold solution. He who is for getting rid of the entire passage will say that it is not met with in all the copies of Mark’s Gospel: the accurate copies at all events, making the end of Mark’s narrative come after the words of the young man who appeared to the women and said, “Fear not ye! Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth,” &c.: to which the Evangelist adds, --“And when they heard it, they fled, and said nothing to any man, for they were afraid.” For at those words, in almost all copies of the Gospel according to Mark, comes to an end. What follows, (which is met with seldom, [and only] in some copies, certainly not in all), might be dispensed with; especially if it should prove to contradict the record of the other Evangelists. This, then, is what a person will say who is for evading and entirely getting rid of a gratuitous problem.

But another, on no account daring to reject anything whatever which is, under whatever circumstances, met with in the text of the Gospels, will say that here are two readings, (as is so often the case elsewhere) and that *both* are to be received—inasmuch as by the faithful and pious, *this* reading is not held to be genuine rather than *that*; nor *that* rather than *this*.

Well then, allowing this piece to be really genuine, our business is to interpret the sense of the passage...²⁴

²⁴ Burgon, p. 45. The Greek text behind this, as provided by Burgon on pp. 265 ff. is: Τούτου διττὴ ἂν εἴη ἡ λύσις· ὁ μὲν γὰρ τὴν τοῦτο φάσκουσιν περικοπτὴν ἀθετῶν, εἰποὶ ἂν μὴ ἐν ἅπασιν αὐτὴν φέρεσθαι τοῖς ἀντιγράφοις τοῦ κατὰ Μάρκον εὐαγγελίου· τὰ γοῦν ἀκριβῆ τῶν ἀντιγράφων τὸ τέλος περιγράφει τῆς κατὰ τὸν Μάρκον ἱστορίας ἐν τοῖς λόγοις τοῦ ὀφθέντος νεανίσκου ταῖς γυναιξὶ καὶ εἰρηκότες αὐταῖς μὴ φοβείσθε, Ἰησοῦν ζητεῖτε τὸν Ναζαρηνόν· καὶ τοῖς ἐξῆς, οἷς ἐπιλέγει· καὶ Ἀκούσασαι ἔφυγον, καὶ οὐδενὶ οὐδέν εἶπον, ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ· ἐν τούτῳ γὰρ σχεδὸν ἐν ἅπασιν τοῖς ἀντιγράφοις τοῦ κατὰ Μάρκον εὐαγγελίου περιγράφεται τὸ τέλος· τὰ δὲ ἐξῆς σπανίως ἐν τισιν ἄλλ’ οὐκ ἐν πᾶσι φερόμενα περιττὰ ἂν εἴη, καὶ μάλιστα εἴπερ ἔχοιεν ἀντιλογίαν τῆ τῶν λοιπῶν εὐαγγελιστῶν μαρτυρίᾳ· ταῦτα μὲν οὖν εἰποὶ ἂν τις παραιτούμενος καὶ πάντα ἀναιρῶν περιττὸν ἐρώτημα.

It is necessary to quote the passage this fully in order for the reader to grasp the argument made on behalf of Mark 16:9-20. A plain reading of the passage makes it clear that Eusebius' intention is not to pronounce sentence on the passage in question. Rather, Eusebius is answering Marius' question by setting forth two opinions (some reject the Mark passage and essentially evade the issue, others accept the Mark passage and deal with the problem head-on), and then proceeds to respond to the objection as if the passage in question were true (τοῦ μέρους συγχωρουμένου εἶναι ἀληθοῦς). In light of this, the best that can be said for Eusebius' evidence is that he admits that the passage is of dubious authenticity, yet he appears reluctant to dismiss it, even when to do so might be apologetically expedient.

Burton further points out that Jerome's testimony is essentially a Latin translation of Eusebius' argument. On this basis, he believes that the testimony of Jerome and Eusebius is in fact one testimony, not two.²⁵ Burton's case appears fairly solid on this point.

Some of the internal stylistic problems have already been noted. Stylistic criticism must, of course, be handled carefully. It is easy to assume that the variation of word usage by an author is indicative of a change of author, yet it could as easily be indicative of the same author adopting a different style or varying his vocabulary. Burton argues that, in the case of Mark's use of the verb ἀπιστέω, Luke uses this verb only twice in his Gospel, and both times in the final chapter. He asks why no suspicion is cast upon the last chapter of Luke, but the last chapter of Mark gets so much scrutiny. Of course, one of the flaws in Burton's reasoning at this point is the fact that the authenticity of the last chapter of Luke is not in question.

There are few passages in the New Testament that have come down the manuscript tradition with as much uncertainty as Mark 16:9-20. Even among the manuscripts that contain this passage, there are numerous variants throughout: some

²⁵ Ἄλλος δὲ τις οὐδ' ὅτιοῦν τολμῶν ἀθετεῖν τῶν ὀπωσοῦν ἐν τῇ τῶν εὐαγγελίων γραφῇ φερομένων, διπλὴν εἶναί φησι τὴν ἀναγνώσιν, ὡς καὶ ἐν ἑτέροις πολλοῖς, ἑκατέραν τε παραδεκτέαν ὑπάρχειν, τῷ μὴ μᾶλλον ταύτην ἐκείνης, ἢ ἐκείνην ταύτης, παρὰ τοῖς πιστοῖς καὶ εὐλαβέσιν ἐγκρίνεσθαι. Καὶ δὴ τοῦδε τοῦ μέρους συγχωρουμένου εἶναι ἀληθοῦς, προσήκει τὸν νοῦν διερμηνεύειν τοῦ ἀναγνώσματος...

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 53, 56.

manuscripts start ἀναστὰς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς,²⁶ one replaces the generic τοῖς μετ' αὐτοῦ with the more specific τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ,²⁷ some manuscripts read παρακολουθήσει ταῦτα at verse 17 instead of ταῦτα παρακολουθήσει,²⁸ and a final ἀμήν is found at the close of the passage in numerous manuscripts (including the Byzantine tradition), while it is not found in a number of others.²⁹ Some manuscripts place the shorter ending after verse 20, and one manuscript includes additional material after verse 14.³⁰ Finally, as Metzger notes, “Not a few manuscripts which 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.”³¹

Conclusion

In light of all the evidence cited above, it is the view of this writer that Mark 16:9-20 is not of Marcan origin. Mark’s Gospel must have ended at 16:8 from the earliest time, either because that is the way Mark intended to close his work, or he was interrupted in his work and never returned to it, or perhaps the final leaf was lost from the earliest time. Nevertheless, it is clear that the Gospel was known to end at verse 8 from the earliest time.

The shorter ending is quite clearly of a later period, and an examination of both internal and external evidence gives reasonable assurance that the same is true of the longer ending. Indeed, the very fact of the existence of both endings suggests that the

²⁶ F, *f*³, vul, et al.

²⁷ Θ, Codex Coridenthianus, a ninth century manuscript written by a scribe “evidently unfamiliar with Greek” (Aland, p. 118).

²⁸ A, C (second copyist’s hand), 099, 33, 1424, 2427, I2211, and a few others. Manuscripts C (original hand), L, Ψ, 579, 892 and a few others read ἀκολουθήσει ταῦτα.

²⁹ C (original hand), D (a later addition), L, W, Θ, Ψ, *f*¹³, 2427, *ff*, c, o, vg^{ww}, bo all contain the “amen,” while A, C (second hand), *f*¹, 33, I844, I2211 and a few others, it, vg^{cl, st}, sy, and sa do not.

³⁰ W, Codex Freerianus from the fifth century.

³¹ Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, p. 123.

earliest scribes felt that Mark 16 ends on a cliffhanger, and they sought to resolve it.³²

Given the awkward way in which verses 8 and 9 go together, it is possible that Mark 16:9-20 was lifted out of a non-canonical Gospel account that is no longer extant. The passage certainly contains allusions to both Matthew's Gospel as well as portions of Acts, so it is not inconceivable that it is a part of a later work based on the New Testament writings.

For the Christian, textual criticism is not a mere intellectual exercise; it has practical impact. The object of this work is to present to the church as closely as possible the very text of the original autographs. Since the church confesses to hold to the Old and New Testaments in the original languages as inspired in the autographs, it would surely be inconsistent to then admit to the canon of Scripture passages that are admittedly from a post-New Testament period and not from the hand of a biblical author. This author would like to suggest that, at least when it comes to translating the Scriptures into English, tradition be allowed to take a back-seat to *Sola Scriptura*, the Word of God alone, and such passages be removed from the main body of the text of Scripture. If Mark did not compose Mark 16:9-20, and this same passage was not originally part of Mark's Gospel, then it should not stand at the end of the canonical text of Mark, even with parentheses and footnotes. Many people disregard such qualifications and consider the text that appears in the body to be a part of the biblical text. Such passages are better fitted to an appendix of traditional, but non-canonical, passages. Such a practice can only better serve the body of Christ and fulfill the commission of the textual critic to present the Word of God as it was originally composed.

³² Metzger points out that it is very rare for any work of Greek literature to finish a sentence with the word γάρ. He also points out that the term ἐφοβοῦντο can be translated "they were afraid of." These facts lend credence to the idea that either Mark failed to complete his work, or the final leaf of the Gospel is missing. Either way, Metzger does not believe that he intended to finish his work this way (*Text of the New Testament*, p. 228). From a stylistic viewpoint, Metzger's argument seems fairly sound. How one would deal theologically with the idea that God has preserved within the New Testament canon an incomplete Gospel account is a thought that should be wrestled with if that is what the evidence suggests. It is sheer intellectual dishonesty (and even perhaps faithlessness) to put one's theological presuppositions before the evidence, and to try to protect God from what His own hand may have providentially brought about.