

The Ending of Mark's Gospel

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Feb 27, 1997

The most controversial textual problem in New Testament criticism concerns the ending of the Gospel of Mark. For centuries, readers of the English Bible have been accustomed to reading twenty verses in the last chapter. In 1881, however, the English Revised Version was published, followed by its transatlantic counterpart, the American Standard Version of 1901. Both of these translations used a white space to separate verses 9-20 of Mark 16 from the rest of the text. The ASV explained this separation with a footnote stating, "The two oldest Greek manuscripts, and some other authorities, omit from ver. 9 to the end. Some other authorities have a different ending to the Gospel." This change in our English text was largely the result of the work of Westcott and Hort, whose research had discovered that the Greek text upon which the King James Version was based was a relatively late (and thus inferior) text type. Westcott and Hort determined that the most accurate text was the Alexandrian (or Neutral) text, and the two oldest representatives of the Alexandrian text type (Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus) ended Mark's gospel at verse 16:8. Combined with certain internal considerations, this led many scholars to begin seriously doubting whether Mark 16:9-20 was indeed penned by Mark himself. As Jack Lewis observes, "The student would have to search diligently for a commentary written in this generation on either the Greek or English text of Mark, or for a survey of the Text of the New Testament, that does not seriously question the genuineness of these verses" (116). Except for the New King James Version, every major translation of the twentieth century has done something to set Mark 16:9-20 apart from the rest of the text.¹

¹For example, in the NIV, there is a space after verse 8, then a line, then another space before verses 9-20 are printed. A footnote says "The most reliable early MSS omit Mark 16:9-20." The note has been altered in recent printings of the NIV. According to Barker, the "value judgment" which labeled them "most reliable" was inappropriate. The note now reads, "The earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20" (Barker 64).

Older editions of the RSV place both the longer and shorter endings in footnotes in italic type.

The current standard Greek text (The United Bible Societies' 4th Revised Edition of the Greek New Testament) places Mark 16:9-20 in double brackets, indicating that these verses "are regarded as later editions to the text, but which are of evident antiquity and importance" (47*). The decision to place this passage in double brackets was given an "A" rating, which "indicates that the text is certain" (3*). In other words, the five members of the UBS revision committee had fully agreed that Mark 16:9-20 did not belong in the original text. Upon what evidence did they base this decision?

This paper will seek to determine, from the available evidence, the way in which Mark's Gospel originally ended. The textual, patristic, and internal linguistic evidence will all be considered. First, what evidence is found in the ancient Greek manuscripts?

THE MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCE

Among the ancient Greek manuscripts, there exist six different endings to Mark's Gospel. First, there are those MSS (manuscripts) which conclude the book at the end of verse 16:8 with the words *ephobounto gar* ("for they were afraid"). Then, there is the "traditional" ending, also known as the "longer" ending, or Mark 16:9-20. Sometimes, these twelve verses are accompanied by asterisks or obeli, or with a critical note. These markings were used by scribes

The long ending is introduced with, "Some texts and versions add as 16:9-20 the following passage." Before the shorter ending, it says, "Other ancient authorities add after verse 8 the following:"

Today's English Version has "AN OLD ENDING TO THE GOSPEL" before the longer ending, and "ANOTHER OLD ENDING" before the shorter one. Both endings are placed in brackets.

The New English Bible has a footnote accompanying verse 8, which reads: "At this point some of the most ancient witnesses bring the book to a close." The shorter ending is included in the text after verse 8 without a verse number. A footnote after this section explains, "Some witnesses add this paragraph, which in one of them is the conclusion of the book." The traditional ending is then given, followed by another footnote, saying, "Some witnesses give verses 9-20 either instead of, or in addition to, the paragraph *And they delivered. . . eternal salvation* (here printed before verse 9), and so bring the book to a close. Others insert further additional matter."

The New American Standard Bible places 9-20 in brackets and provides the following footnote: "Some of the oldest mss. do not contain vv. 9-20." Verse 20 is followed in the text by the shorter ending, which is printed in italics. The footnote for the shorter ending reads, "A few later mss. and versions contain this paragraph, usually after verse 8; a few have it at the end of the chapter."

Even the NKJV contains a footnote stating that the UBS Greek text has vv 9-20 in brackets, "as not in the original text."

to mark a section of text whose inclusion was questionable. Fourth, there is the “shorter” ending (also known as the "intermediate ending," if verse 8 is considered the "short ending," as Metzger does) of Mark, which reads as follows:

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 *Commentary* 103).

This ending can be found either by itself or followed by the longer ending. The sixth extant ending includes the traditional ending, but with an expansion after verse 14, which reads,

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. Therefore reveal thy righteousness now’ -- thus they spoke to Christ. And Christ replied to them, ‘The term of years for Satan’s power has been fulfilled, but other terrible things draw near. And for those who have sinned I was delivered over to death, that they may return to the truth and sin no more; that they may inherit the spiritual and incorruptible glory of righteousness which is in heaven’ (Metzger *Commentary* 104).

What manuscript support exists for each of these readings?

(1) The Gospel ends at verse eight in the two best available Greek manuscripts, Aleph and B. These are the two “oldest Greek manuscripts” referred to in the ASV footnote. Codex Sinaiticus, also called Aleph (Ⲁ) after the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, dates back to around A.D. 325. Discovered by Tischendorf in 1853, this manuscript contains the entire New Testament as well as parts of the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures), including some apocryphal material. Codex Vaticanus (B) also originated in the fourth century. Presently residing at the Vatican Library in Rome, this codex originally contained both testaments and the Apocrypha (except for the books of Maccabees), but sections of Genesis and Psalms are now missing, as well as the concluding pages of the tome (i.e., everything after Hebrews 14, including 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and Revelation) (Metzger *Text* 47).

These sections apparently fell off at some point during the book's history. These MSS are the two earliest representatives of the Alexandrian text type, which is considered to be closest to the original autographs of the NT.

Codex Vaticanus, while usually not leaving any space between the end of one book and the beginning of another, leaves more than an entire column blank between Mark 16:8 and the beginning of Luke. In the blank space, an ornament is drawn and the words *kata Markon* are inscribed. Those who defend the authenticity of the longer ending often appeal to this large gap to support their position, asking repeatedly, "What went in the gap?" Well, whatever the scribe had in mind, it wasn't the longer ending. Although the blank space is much larger than the space needed for the shorter ending, calculations show that it is also too small for the longer one (Lane 602, Zahn 469). Even Farmer, who defends the passage, concedes this fact (58).

What, then, can be inferred from the gap in B between Mark 16:8 and Luke 1:1? It seems that the scribe who created Vaticanus was aware of the existence of a conclusion to Mark's Gospel (possibly even having a copy of it available to him), yet he refrained from including this conclusion because he did not consider it authentic. Farmer suggests that this treatment of the text was used by the scribe because it "allows for some further treatment of a disputed matter," since a future owner could erase the subscription and replace it with whatever ending he desired (58).

Outside of B and \aleph , Mark 16:9-20 is also missing from MS 304, which dates to the twelfth century. As will be seen in the discussion of the patristic evidence, there were apparently many other Greek MSS in the fourth century of the church which ended at verse 8.

(2) The shorter ending is found by itself in Codex Bobbiensis (k), which is "the oldest witness textually to the Latin Bible" (Birdsall 153). Metzger calls it "the most important witness to the African Old Latin" (*Text* 73). The manuscript itself dates to the fourth century, but it is usually held that the text of this MSS goes back to about A.D. 250. Bobbiensis is especially important because it is not related to the Alexandrian text type of B \aleph .

(3) The following manuscripts contain the shorter ending followed by the longer ending: L (8th cent.), (8th-9th cent.), 099 (7th cent. Incomplete up to *suntomoos*), 0112 (omits *panta...meta de*), 579 (13th cent.), and 274. This dual ending is found in Lectionary 1602, as well as some ancient translations, such as “the margin of the Heracleian Syriac, several Sahidic and Bohairic manuscripts, and not a few Ethiopic manuscripts. . .” (*Metzger Commentary* 103).

(4) There is also the witness of Codex Washingtonianus (W), which is also known as the Freer Logion. This manuscript from the fifth century is the only existing manuscript which contains the expansion after verse 14, which is quoted above. Jerome (*Dial. adv. Pelag.* 2.15) referred to the existence of such an expansion circulating in the fourth century (*Metzger Commentary* 104).

(5) Some MSS include the longer ending (16:9-20), but mark this section with asterisks, obeli, or a critical footnote to indicate a question over their genuineness, much as the modern English translations do today. This is done in minuscule f1 (10th-14th cent.), as well as in 137, 138, 1110, 1210, 1215, 1216, 1217, 1221, 1241 (vid), and 1582.

(6) The traditional ending (16:9-20) is found in the vast majority of manuscripts, including A (Codex Alexandrinus from the fifth century, the best extant Byzantine MSS), C (Codex Ephraemi of the fifth cent.), D (Codex Bezae, a Western MSS of the fifth cent.), E (8th cent.), H (9th cent. Byzantine), K (9th cent. Byz.), M (9th cent. Byz.), S (Byzantine A.D. 949), U, W (Washingtonianus, with the expansion after v.14), X (9th or 10th cent. Byz.), Y, (6th cent.), 047, 055, 0211, f13, 28, 33, 274 (text), 565, 700, 892, 1009, 1010, 1071, 1079, 1195, 1230, 1242, 1253, 1344, 1365, 1546, 1646, 2148, 2174, and many others. Most of the Greek manuscripts that exist today are minuscules of the Byzantine text type. The Byzantine text type was the local text type of the city of Constantinople, which was the world’s center for Greek learning from the fourth century until the Turkish invasion of 1453. The study of Greek perished in the West due to Barbarian and Turkish invasions and the rise of Latin. Once the Byzantine became the standardized text, the other text types died out. This is important to consider in

weighing the quality of MSS, since the Byzantine is considered to be the latest of the four major text types, and thus the farthest from the original autographs.

The traditional ending receives large support from the ancient versions. It is found in Latin MSS from the 5th century onward, as well as in Jerome's Vulgate of the fifth century. The long ending is found in the Old Syriac in a fourth-century MS whose text is believed to go to the late second century. The Syriac Peshitta, or "Syriac Vulgate" (late 4th cent. Byz.) and Harclean Syriac version (6th cent.) have these verses, as does the Palestinian Syriac (Caesarean text) of the fifth century. These verses are found in the Sahidic Coptic of the early fourth century, but "the Sahidic apart from one manuscript bears notices to the effect that older manuscripts ended at xvi. 8" (Birdsall 154). The Boharic Coptic (Alexandrian, possibly as early as the fourth cent.), and the Fayumic Coptic have the longer ending. The Gothic translation (Byz.) of the middle fourth century has 16:9-20, as do many Arminian MSS, and the Georgian version (fourth cent.). Tatian's Diatesseron (a harmony of the four gospels prepared around A.D. 170) probably had these verses, since they are included in Arabic, Italian, and Old Dutch harmonies which Metzger says "show more or less dependence, either in form or in text, upon Tatian's pioneering work" (*Text* 91).

An important witness for exclusion is the Sinaitic Syriac manuscript from the fourth century. Based on a Western text, this is the oldest surviving example of the Old Syriac version. The MS itself was discovered by Agnes Smith Lewis in the monastery of St. Catharine on Mount Sinai in 1892. Equally important when considering the ancient versions is the witness of Old Latin MS k (Codex Bobbiensis), our oldest representative of the Old Latin version. The two oldest Georgian manuscripts (written A.D. 897 and A.D. 913) omit the twelve disputed verses (Metzger *Commentary* 102), as do about one hundred Armenian MSS. The Armenian is sometimes called the 'Queen of the versions,' and Metzger says it is one of the most accurate of all the early Bible translations (*Text* 82). As Farmer points out, "when the Armenian Manuscripts which can be dated before the thirteenth century are examined, those which omit

Mk. 16:9-20 predominate proportionately over those which include these verses, seven to one” (Farmer 39).

To clarify this information, the three oldest translations are the Old Latin, the Old Syriac, and the Coptic. In general, all three contain the longer ending of Mark, though our oldest Old Latin (Codex Bobbiensis) and oldest Old Syriac (Sinaitic) both omit these verses.

From the above manuscript evidence, it becomes apparent that the ending of Mark’s gospel was unstable. The authenticity of the shorter ending and the Freer Logion expansion, though, can be quickly dismissed. There is very little textual evidence for the Freer Logion expansion. It also contains several non-Markan words and expressions, as well as several words found nowhere else in the NT. Metzger says it has “an unmistakable apocryphal flavor,” and concludes that the expansion is probably “the work of a second or third century scribe who wished to soften the severe condemnation of the Eleven in 16:14” (*Commentary* 104). Similarly, the shorter ending has, according to Metzger, a high percentage of non-Markan words [10 out of 35 total], a rhetorical tone very different from Mark's simple style, and "the mouth-filling phrase at the close ('the sacred and imperishable message of eternal salvation'), which "betrays the hand of a later Greek theologian" (*Text* 228). This ending seems to have originated with someone who had a copy of Mark ending at verse 16:8, yet disliked the abruptness of it and wanted to give the Gospel a more fitting conclusion (cf. Swete cvii), for it seems absurd to suggest that someone, having verses 9-20 available, would have replaced them with what Metzger calls “a few lines of colorless and generalized summary” (*Commentary* 105). Thus, the existence of the shorter ending is usually counted as evidence that Mark ended at 16:8.

What about the longer ending? If it is not original to the book of Mark, where did it come from? It is interesting to notice that in one existing manuscript, the longer ending is preceded by an inscription which gives the name of its author. As Swete explains it:

In November 1891 Mr F. C. Conybeare found in the Patriarchal Library of Edschmiazin an Armenian MS. of the Gospels written A.D. 989, in which the last twelve verses of St

Mark are introduced by a rubric written in the first hand [i.e., in the same handwriting as the original scribe], *Of the presbyter Ariston*. Mr Conybeare with much probability suggests that the person intended is the Aristion who is mentioned by Papias as one of the disciples of the Lord (cxi).

Since this is the only existing text which mentions Ariston, or any other writer, and since it was written as late as the tenth century, it seems that the scribe was most likely just making an educated guess as to who the author of this material (which he obviously considered to be spurious) might be.

Although its author is unknown, most scholars believe that Mk. 16:9-20 was written by someone, imitating Mark's style, who wanted to supply a more appropriate conclusion to the Gospel than "for they were afraid." Metzger, though, doesn't think it was written *ad hoc*. Instead, he conjectures that "the section was excerpted from another document, dating perhaps from the first half of the second century" (*Commentary* 105). Lane suggests that it was taken from a "catechetical summary of post-resurrection events" (604). All such suggestions are merely educated guesses.

THE PATRISTIC EVIDENCE

What evidence can we find among the early Christian writers? The evidence in support of the traditional ending's authenticity will be considered first, followed by the evidence against.

(1) The strongest testimony in support of the longer ending comes from Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, who died around 202. In a treatise defending the deity of Christ, he comments: "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:"..." (*Adv. Haer.* 3.10.5). Thus, he not only quotes Mark 16:19, but he also attributes it to Mark and points out where the passage can be found in the book.

(2) The earliest evidence seems to come from Justin Martyr, who died around 165. In his *Apology* 1.45, we find the sentence, "His apostles, going forth from Jerusalem, preached

everywhere;" (*hoi apostoloi autou exelthontes pantachou ekeeruxan*), which Clark (10) says is "notably verbatim with Mark 16:20," which reads, "And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word by the signs that followed" (ASV) (*ekeinoi de exelthontes ekeeruxan pantoachou. . .*). Justin does not mention the name of Mark in conjunction with this statement, and it is debatable whether Justin is relying upon Mark 16:20 for his wording, since the idea of apostles going from Jerusalem and preaching everywhere is clearly taught in passages such as Matt. 28:19, 20; Luke 24:47; and Acts 1:4, 8.

(3) Burgon, Farmer, and some others believe that Celsus (a third century contemporary of Origen) knew about the ending of Mark. As Helton points out, though, "Regarding Celsus there is nothing definite to indicate that he knew the passage; it is based on an inference. . ." (46). To see how Farmer arrives at this inference, cf. footnote 2 on page 31-32 of his *Last Twelve Verses*.

(4) "A third-century passage, sometimes attributed to Hippolytus, includes an interpretation of Mk. 16:18" (Farmer 32).

(5) Mark 16: 16, 17, and 18 are cited in a sermon by Aphraates, the earliest known Father of the Syrian church in A.D. 337, about the same time B and \aleph were being written (Farmer 33).

(6) "*Acta Pilati* (Gospel of Nicodemus) contains Mk. 16: 15-18" (Farmer 33).

(7) The traditional ending is frequently quoted by Ambrose, Archbishop of Milan, who died around 397 (Farmer 33).

(8) Also in the fourth century, the verses in dispute are referred to by Epiphanius of Constantia in *Panarion*, and they are quoted from in *The Apostolic Constitutions* (A.D. 380).

(9) Mark 16:9 is referred to by Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople (who died around 407) in his *Homilies on First Corinthians*.

(10) "Augustine (d. 430) discusses these verses as the work of Mark on numerous occasions" (Farmer 34).

There are other important ancient sources which show the existence of MSS both with and without the longer ending. For example, a catena on Mark usually attributed to Victor of

Antioch says that the traditional ending is nowhere to be found “in very many copies of the present Gospel,” while at the same time, “in very many we have discovered it to exist” (Farmer 24). So, at that time, it seems, one could easily find manuscripts of both types.

Eusebius (d. 339) is another important witness. Although he knew copies of Mark which included 16:9-20 (as seen in the Mai fragment, which Farmer discusses thoroughly in the first chapter of his book), he attested that it was lacking in “almost all” Greek MSS he had seen, and that the most “accurate” copies ended with *ephobounto gar (Queastiones ad Marinum I)*. In his book, Farmer tries to explain that by the term “accurate” (*akribes*), Eusebius means “improved” or “carefully edited,” not “closest to the autographs.” Birdsall attacks this idea and says that Farmer gives no adequate evidence for it. Furthermore, as Metzger points out, “The original form of the Eusebian sections (drawn up by Ammonius) makes no provision for numbering sections of the text after 16:8” (*Commentary* 103).

Similar to Eusebius, Jerome (who died around 419) states that “almost all of the Greek codices lack the longer ending” (*Jer. Ep.* 120, 3). Nevertheless, he did include these verses in his Latin Vulgate (although this was really a revision of the Old Latin, not the Greek) (cf. Helton 38).

It is also interesting to notice which church fathers did not refer to Mark’s longer ending even when it would have served their purposes to do so. Hort lists Clement, Origen, Athanasius, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril of Jerusalem, Cyril of Alexandria, Theodoret, Tertullian, Cyprian, Hillary, and others (37). The most striking example of this is Tertullian (of the early third century), who certainly could have used Mk. 16:15-16 in his *De Baptismo*, a treatise on baptism, but did not (Helton 39).

So we see that the chief witness in behalf of the traditional ending is Irenaeus, who is the only ante-Nicene father to quote *explicitly* from these verses. Tatian’s *Diatesseron* would be the second most important, although it only exists today in translations. Against the longer ending one finds Eusebius and Jerome, who say the best and most MSS of their day ended at 16: 8. The

evidence from the church fathers, therefore, points in both directions.

THE INTERNAL EVIDENCE

Now that the external and manuscript evidence has been discussed, it is time to consider the data from the text itself. Does Mark 16:9-20 appear to fit in with the rest of the Gospel? Most scholars say no, and many would hold these verses to be spurious based on internal evidence alone.

The first difficulty encountered in this passage is the abrupt change of subject from verse 8 to verse 9. In verse 8, the subject is "they," referring to Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. In verse 9, though, the subject suddenly shifts to "he" without any antecedent. In fact, the subject of "he" (Jesus) is not named until verse 19. The second oddity encountered in this passage is the way in which Mary Magdalene is specified in verse 9 as the woman from whom Jesus "had cast out seven demons." She is introduced as though unfamiliar to the reader, even though she is a main character in the preceding verses (e.g., 15:40; 16:1-8).

Most scholars agree that "the form, language and style of these verses militate against Marcan authorship" (Lane 604). As Jack Lewis explains the situation, the long ending "contains 167 words in the Nestle Text of which 110 are different words and 75 are significant words. Fifteen of these are not in the rest of Mark, and eleven others are used in a different sense from that elsewhere used" (123). The most striking examples are the following:

(1) Verse 9 is the "only place in the NT that the verb *ephane* is used of a resurrection appearance" (Thomas 410).

(2) "*Ekeinos* ("that") is not characteristic of Marcan style, although it occurs three times in the longer ending (vv 10, 11, 20)" (Thomas 411).

(3) Another word which occurs three times in the last twelve verses is *poreuomai* ("go") (vv 10, 12, 15), which is only found once in Mark (9:30), and there it exists in a compound form (Thomas 411).

(4) Verse ten contains the expression *tois met autou gegomenois* ("those who had been

with him"), which "occurs nowhere else in the NT and is an unusual way of referring to the disciples" (Thomas 411).

(5) The verb *theaomai* ("see, look at") is found twice in the longer ending (vv 11, 14), but nowhere else in Mark (Elliott 259).

(6) Similarly, *apisteo* ("fail to believe") occurs in two places (vv 11, 16) in the traditional ending, but is lacking in Mark 1:1-16:8 (Elliott 259).

(7) Verse 12 contains *meta tauta* ("after these things"), which is used often in Luke and John but never in Mark (Thomas 411).

(8) Verse 12 also has a form of *phaneroo*, which occurs elsewhere in Mark, but not in reference to Jesus' resurrection appearances. It is also found in verse 14 in the same context (Elliott 259).

(9) In addition, verse 12 contains a form of *heteros* ("another"), of which there is "no firm example" in Mark (Elliott 259).

(10) *Morphe* ("form") (v 12) is found in the NT only in Phil. 2:6-7 (Thomas 411).

(11) *Husteron* ("afterwards") "does not occur in Mark. It is not part of his vocabulary as can clearly be demonstrated at Mark 12:6 which contains *eschaton* whereas the parallel in Matt. 21:37 reads *husteron*" (Elliott 259).

(12) Verse 15 includes "the only occurrence in the Gospels of *ktisis* used in the sense of the sum of what is created rather than the creative act" (such as in Mk 10:6 and 13:19) (Elliott 260).

(13) The reference to "new tongues" (*glossais. . . kainais*) is odd. Although Paul mentions "speaking in tongues," "new tongues" is only found here in 16:17 (Thomas 411).

(14) "*Opheis* (v 18) does not occur in Mark 1:1-16:8" (Thomas 411).

(15) *Thanasimos* ("deadly" v 18) is found nowhere else in the Greek Bible. Instead, the more poetic synonym *thanatephoros* (which is found five times in the Septuagint, as well as in James 3:8) is used (Elliott 261).

(16) *Blapto* ("injure" v 18) is found only in Luke 4:35 (Thomas 411).

(17) Although Mark uses *kalos* ("well"), the "classical phrase" *kalos exousin* (v 18) is found nowhere in the NT (Thomas 411, Elliott 261).

(18) The combination of *me oun* in verse 19 is not found in Mark (Elliott 261).

(19) Nowhere in Mark is Jesus given the title *Kurios* ("Lord"), although it is used this way twice in the longer ending (vv 19, 20) (Elliott 261).

(20) Along with this list of words, one might add that "the simple style in which clauses are joined with "and" (*kai*), a characteristic of Mark, is not here prevalent" (Lewis 123).

These are the twenty most striking examples of linguistic peculiarities in the last twelve verses of Mark. There are also, however, some special similarities these verses hold with the rest of Mark. For example:

(1) Verse 9 employs *proi*, "a favorite Markan linking word" (Thomas 410).

(2) *Para* plus the genitive (v 9) is found in several places in Mark (3:31; 5:20; 8:11; 12:2; 14:43), but nowhere else in the NT. Stylistically, therefore, verse 16:9 seems very Markan (Farmer 85).

(3) From verse 11, "Farmer suggests that Marks' use of *kakeinoi* ("and they") is a syntactical peculiarity since *kakeinon* is also found in Mark 12:4-5 and provides a syntactical parallel" (Thomas 411, cf. Farmer 88).

(4) Verse 15 employs *to euangelion* ("the gospel"), which is also in the very first verse of Mark. Matthew and John never use this expression; Luke uses it only in Acts 15:7. Farmer asserts that this "constitutes a strong linguistic tie between Mk. 1:1-16 and 16:9-20" (94).

As Thomas summarizes this evidence:

Due to a large number of words that appear in 16:9-20 but nowhere else in Mark, in some cases the whole of the NT, the strange syntactical constructions, and the abrupt transition between vv 8 and 9, it seems that this section does not belong to the canonical Mark.

Even though it is possible to argue that Mark 16:9-20 may have been an ancient

collection of resurrection appearances reworked by Mark [as Farmer suggests], it is more probable to assume that those Markan peculiarities that occur in 16:9-20 are due to the compiler's attempt to imitate Markan style (418).

CONCLUSION

So, based on the external evidence, did Mark's gospel originally end at verse 16:8 or 16:20? To decide, the seven basic rules of textual criticism will be applied to this passage. The seven rules are as follows:

(1) The first rule of textual criticism is that MSS need to be weighed rather than counted. Thus, the great codices Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, which Lightfoot calls "our very best manuscripts," having "unparalleled reliability" (38), along with the oldest Old Latin (k) and the Sinaitic Syriac (Ss), when weighed, are found to be more impressive than thousands of Byzantine minuscules.

(2) The older reading is to be preferred over the younger. In this case, it is very difficult to determine the older reading. Although the two oldest Greek MSS omit 9-20, there are translations which predate these manuscripts and include the disputed verses. Texts ending at verse 8 can be traced back to the early 4th century through \aleph , B, Codex Bobbiensis, and the testimony of Eusebius. The tradition must go back farther, though, since \aleph , B, Ss, and k had to be copies of earlier MSS. We also do not know how old Eusebius' "accurate" copies were. The longer ending can be seen in the latter second century in Irenaeus' quotation and Tatian's harmony of the Gospels. Based on this evidence, William Lane concludes that "The evidence is sufficient to assert that the longer ending was in circulation by the middle of the second century, while its composition should be assigned to the first half of the second century" (605), if not earlier. If Mk. 16:9-20 is an addition, it is a very early addition indeed.

(3) The shorter reading is to be preferred over the longer. In this case, the Gospel ending at 16: 8 is obviously the shorter reading.

(4) The more difficult reading is preferred over the easier. This rule is applied to textual criticism because it was the habit of scribes to "smooth out" the texts they were working with,

harmonizing them with other passages, and making them easier to read. Because of this tendency, textual critics typically consider the more awkward reading to be the original. Farmer suggests that the longer ending of Mark is the more difficult one since it deals with such odd practices as snake handling and drinking poison. He theorizes that scribes who were troubled by the implications of these verses omitted the passage. If this were the case, though, why would the scribes remove the whole twelve verses, and not just a couple of lines from the text? That would be much simpler and much more orthodox. Few accept Farmer's hypothesis, and the abrupt ending at verse 8 is usually considered the most difficult reading, for it ends with an awkward preposition (*gar*) and leaves the reader hanging at a crucial moment. There is no closure. The disciples are afraid, the good news has not been spread, and there is no record of the appearances of Jesus which he had predicted earlier. This difficulty is what led someone to compose these two endings and tie up the loose ends of Mark's gospel.

(5) The fifth question to ask is, "Which reading has the widest distribution?" B and \aleph show that the longer ending was missing from the text of Alexandria (North Africa). Its absence from the Sinaitic Syriac implies it was lacking in the early text of Antioch (Bruce 179). MS k (African Latin Bobbiensis) likewise shows the longer ending's absence from the Western text. As previously stated, the vast majority of our present MSS are of the Byzantine text type, which was the local text of Constantinople. Though they are great in number, they do not represent a wide distribution.

(6) Which has the combination of Alexandrian and Western? The long ending is found in the majority of Alexandrian and Western texts, yet, as rule 1 affirms, it is not enough merely to count up the MSS as if one was holding an election. These MSS must be weighed. The weightiest Alexandrian witnesses, Vaticanus and Sinaiticus end at verse 8. The Sinaitic Syriac (the oldest witness of the Syriac version) from the fourth century, which seems to be based on a Western Greek text, omits 16:9-20, as does Codex Bobbiensis, which also appears to be Western (cf. Bruce 180).

(7) The most important of these seven questions is the following: Which reading best explains the origin of the others? It is in this arena that the long ending of Mark is given the fatal blow, for, of the six endings listed above, the one in which the gospel terminates at 16:8 is the only one which can adequately explain the existence of the others. The abrupt ending is awkward and seems inappropriate as a conclusion to the story of the good news of Jesus Christ. People would naturally wish for something extra, a more satisfying ending. Thus, very early on, two endings were written. The shorter ending was probably written earlier than the longer (cf. Lane 602, citing K. Aland). In all texts where the two endings appear together (except 274), the shorter one is included first. Through Codex Bobbiensis, it can be traced back to the second century. The longer ending apparently came from a different location, and "was in circulation by the middle of the second century, while its composition should be assigned to the first half of the second century," (Lane 605) if not even earlier. The longer ending, being well-organized and beautifully written, naturally supplanted the inferior shorter ending and the awkward original ending (i.e., termination at 16:8). On the other hand, if the Gospel of Mark originally included 16:9-20, how could one possibly explain the existence of the abrupt ending and the shorter ending? Who would remove these verses, and why? What scribe would be tempted to omit such a beautiful, well-written, and orthodox section of scripture? Who in their right minds would ever replace the profound and colorful verses 9-20 with the terse and colorless shorter ending? There simply is no adequate explanation other than that these endings were added to fill a hole, a hole that was successfully filled by the text now known as Mark 16:9-20.

To summarize the conclusions reached from the rules of textual criticism: (1) Both readings have quite a bit of weight behind them. The weight behind the traditional ending has great bulk (multitudes of MSS), yet the two most important Greek MSS, as well as the oldest Coptic and oldest Latin end at 16:8. (2) It is not possible to determine which reading is the oldest. (3) The shortest reading ends at verse 8. (4) The abrupt ending at verse 8 is the most difficult reading. (5) Both endings seem to have wide distribution, at least in the early centuries

of the church. (6) Both readings have a combination of Alexandrian and Western text-types. (7) The abrupt ending at verse 8 is the reading which best explains the origin of the others, and this is the most important consideration regarding textual criticism.

The evidence from the church fathers is inconclusive. When carefully weighed and analyzed, the ancient manuscripts seem to tilt the scales against the authenticity of Mark 16:9-20. Likewise, the internal evidence suggests that it is an addition. The conclusion, then, is that "the earliest ascertainable form of the Gospel of Mark ended with 16:8" (Metzger *Commentary* 105). The question now is: Did Mark conclude his Gospel at this verse to begin with, or was there an ending which was lost? There seem to be four possibilities:

(1) The Gospel originally ended at 16:8 because Mark was unable to finish it (perhaps because of his own death).

(2) Mark intended to end his Gospel at 16:8.

(3) Mark wrote beyond 16:8, but the original ending was accidentally lost.

(4) Mark wrote beyond 16:8, but the original ending was intentionally suppressed.

Of the above four possibilities, the last one is least satisfactory, for there is no evidence of any organization in the first 100 years of the church's existence which would have been powerful enough to censor the inspired writings. The first explanation, although possible, seems somewhat far-fetched.

Many conjecture that Mark continued after 16:8, yet the original ending has been lost. Some have objected to this conclusion by claiming that the Holy Spirit would not allow a portion of the holy scriptures to be lost in such a way. But it is not our place to say what the Holy Spirit and God's providence would or would not do. We know of three letters written by Paul which no longer exist (cf. Col. 4:16; 1 Cor. 5:9; 2 Cor 2:4; 7:8). What is the probability of Mark's ending being lost? Such an accident would be highly unlikely if Mark were written on a scroll (since the end would be in the center -- the most well-protected part), yet entirely possible if it were found in a codex (multiple pages bound together, like a modern book). The last page of a very early

copy of Mark, if not the original itself could have fallen out and been lost, as McCown suggests in his 1941 HTR article. The problem with this theory, though, is that the codex may not have come into wide usage until the mid-second century. By that time, three endings of Mark were already in circulation.

That leaves us with the theory that the author ended at verse 16:8 on purpose. This theory has its own set of problems. As mentioned earlier, Mark 16:8 ends with a note of fear, and the last word is an awkward preposition (*gar*). In an effort to "fix" this problem, F. W. Danker suggests that the text originally had *megan* ("greatly") after *gar*. The text would thus read, "for they were greatly afraid," and that dangling *gar* would no longer be a problem. Similarly, C. F. D. Moule proposes that the *gar*-clause should be read as a parenthesis, and that the sentence continued after it, possibly with the words *kai euthus legousin tois mathetais peri panta touton* ("and immediately they spoke to the disciples concerning all these things"). As ingenious as they are, both of these suggestions are purely conjectural, with no manuscript evidence to support them.

Is the problem with the *gar* ending really all that insurmountable? Can a book end with *gar*? Yes, says P. W. Van Der Horst, who tries to lay this question to rest in his classic 1972 JTS article. He begins by claiming that "It has gradually become common knowledge that it is possible for a sentence or a paragraph to end with *gar*". Genesis 18:15 and 45:3 in the LXX are examples of this. He next points out that "if a sentence can end with *gar*, a book can end with such a sentence" (122). Van Der Horst then draws attention to three examples from Bauer's Lexicon which closely parallel the ending of Mark, focusing especially on the third treatise of Plotinus, which ends with a *gar* (123). He thus concludes that "the argument that a book cannot end with the word *gar* is absolutely invalid" (124). This may be something of an overstatement, but many scholars seem to have been swayed to his side. As Thomas states, "a growing number of scholars asserts that Mark 16:8 is the point at which the author originally intended to end his gospel" (415).

Even granting that a book can end with *gar*, it is still perplexing that the two predicted appearances of the risen Christ (14:28; 16:7) are not recorded. Instead, the Gospel ends on a note of fear, and the women remain silent, in discordance with Matt. 28:8 and Luke 24:9. This problem has been dealt with in several ways. For example, Robert Meye suggests that the fear seen in 16:8 is "a characteristic Markan reaction to God's power," and that "abruptness is characteristic of Mark's writing; therefore the abrupt ending should be expected" (Thomas 416). Theodore Weeden sees the book of Mark as a severe rebuke of the disciples, but to suggest this is to suggest that Mark intended to portray the disciples as unreliable (Thomas 417). F. F. Bruce agrees with N. B. Stonehouse in that the "fear" of the disciples in 16:8 "was not blind terror but reverential awe. . . rejoice with trembling. . . This is a perfectly common sense of *phobeomai*" (Bruce 171). Norman Peterson's idea about Mark 16:8 is interesting. He proposes an "ironic reading" of the final verse, which forces the reader to review the what has been read before. "The ironic equivocation of the meaning of 16:8 redirects the reader's attention back to the immediately preceding words of the young man -- he has risen; he is going before the eleven to Galilee; there they will see him, as he told them" (163). Robert Tannehill argues that the gospel ends at verse 8 on a high note, since the reader has come to expect that everything Jesus foretells comes to pass. Thus, one naturally concludes at verse 8 that Jesus will indeed see his disciples in Galilee (Thomas 418). These last two explanations are the most useful since they deal only with what the text actually says, and they show that the Gospel ends on a positive note.

As this paper has demonstrated, of the existing endings of Mark, the one which ends at 16:8 is the earliest. Perhaps it was that way from the start, or the original ending may have been lost. The evidence being as complex and confusing as it is, the conclusion of this paper is tentative. It is quite an overstatement to claim, as Vincent Taylor does, that "Both the external and the internal evidence are decisive" (610). They are completely decisive in neither direction. It is also quite inaccurate to claim, as one writer does, that "The best and most conservative scholars through the ages have accepted the authenticity of Mark 16:9-20. Infidels, despisers of

Mark 16: 14	=	Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-23
Mark 16: 15, 16, 19, 20	=	Luke 24:36-51, Matt. 28:19,20
Mark 16: 17-18	=	Matt. 28:20; John 19:12 (verified in Acts) ²

Having presented this information, McGarvey concluded that, concerning the traditional ending, "the question of its genuineness might be waived without detracting from its authority or credibility," for this passage "is not less valuable or authoritative because some other person than Mark may have been the author of it" (McGarvey 378).

This conclusion is similar to that of F. F. Bruce, who affirmed that, although these verses were an addition to the original Gospel, "no Christian need have any hesitation in reading them as Holy Scripture" (181). "When we discuss the authenticity of these verses," he explains, "we are not necessarily calling in question either their antiquity or their truth or their divine inspiration" (Bruce 177), since the anonymous author who penned them may very well have been inspired himself. The words of Mark 16:9-20 are true no matter who wrote them. Neither removing nor retaining them would change any teaching of the Bible. These verses have been accepted and used by the church for centuries, and the nature of the evidence is confusing. These facts lead to the conclusion that Mark:16:9-20 should not be removed completely from our English text. The use of footnotes to explain the textual variation is certainly appropriate and justified, but total excision would be hasty and unnecessary.

²The prediction of these miraculous signs is "verified" as follows: casting out demons (Acts 16:16ff), speaking in new tongues (Acts 2; 1 Cor. 14), picking up serpents (Acts 28:3ff), and healing the sick through the laying on of hands (Acts 5:11ff; 9:12; 28:8) (Lewis 124). Only the drinking of poison is not specifically mentioned in the NT.

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