

The Gospel of Mark – Epilogue

“A New Case for the Authenticity of Mark 16.9-20”¹

July 25, 2021



Reasons the authenticity of Mark 16.9-20 is disputed...

1. The most ancient manuscripts of Scripture omit that last 12 verses of Mark....

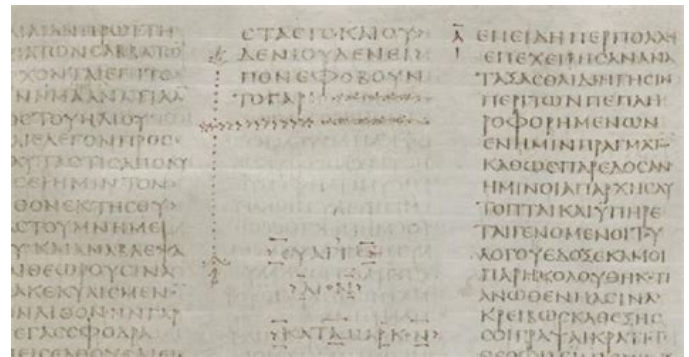
This **objection** to its inclusion was never voiced in the Western and Byzantine Church prior to the discovery of the codex *Sinaiticus* in the 19th century, along with its intimate connection to codex *Vaticanus*, long known to be in the Vatican archives. As noted in the objection, these are the oldest known manuscripts of a “complete Bible,” that is, a bound New and Old Testament (plus). These copies dated from 4th century Alexandria, Egypt. Though Eusebius († 339 or 340 AD – Respected scholar, bishop and theologian in Ceasarea) mentions some “manuscripts that omit” these verses, he casts no personal doubt as to the authenticity of the longer ending and answers questions addressed to him based on these verses being authentic and true in their relation to the other Gospel accounts of the resurrection (for details see Lunn p. 93).

Codex Vaticanus (15th C Vatican Archives)



Note the manuscript ends with Mark 16.8 but, reserves a blank space sufficient to accommodate the ‘missing’ verses. The faint text observed is bleed from words written on the other side of the page.

Codex Sinaiticus (19th C discovery)



Note the line drawn at the end of Mark 16.8 followed, again, by blank space. The horizontal line is twice as long as the lines marking the end of other Biblical books in the codex. This emphatic line draws attention to itself as if the omission is being done for some purpose, that is, in reaction to what might come next but is omitted. Lunn discusses the fact that Gnosticism was often confused with authentic Christianity in the 4th Century (especially in Africa) and omission of a fleshly resurrection could be a tacit nod to the Gnostic as much as a shying away from orthodox Christianity.

¹The information and references provided in this handout refer to:

Nicholas P. Lunn, *THE ORIGINAL ENDING OF MARK; A New Case for the Authenticity of Mark 16:9 - 20*. Pickwick Publications, Eugene Oregon, 2014.

These codices were probably produced from out of the same Scriptorium (copy house), a few years apart. The historical manuscript evidence for Biblical and ecclesial texts which omit verses 9-20 seem to originate from here, in Alexandria, Egypt and extend into “daughter” translations and early manuscripts copies, consisting of less than 4% of all extant ancient manuscripts. The ancient dating of these works (as the most ancient complete Bibles we have – but does that make them more authentic?) weigh heavily in many modern Biblical scholars’ deciding to exclude these last 12 verses from Mark (or to place a footnote on the text of your English translation.)

Discussion (From our Lutheran perspective, what would omitting these verses “cost us?”):

What important verse in the “longer ending” would we lose from our Catechism were we to excise it? Cf. Mark 16.16

Is this verse “out of sync” with respect to the importance of this doctrine in the Bible’s other Petrine materials? Cf. 1 Peter 2.9; 3.21.... How does this fit into an argument for the authenticity of this section?

Since we have no other complete Bibles besides these, which omit that last 12 verses of Mark, prior to the 4th century is there any evidence of these verses being used in the church prior to this time? As just one early example of such “usage” that Lunn mentions (cf. p. 65f) we have the writings of the Apostolic Father, Clement of Rome († 99 AD), who seems to be very familiar with Mark, quoting him indirectly in the language of his writings. Many scholars find an affinity between the longer ending and Clement’s account of Jesus’ proof of his resurrection....

Having therefore received their orders, and being fully assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and full of faith in the word of God, with full assurance of the Holy Spirit they went out proclaiming the good news that the kingdom of God was about to come...preaching in the country and in the towns. (1 Clem. 42.3-4)

Also, in his *Shepherd of Hermas*, Clement speaks of the apostles preaching to the “whole world” tightly linking it to Mark 16.15 (where the Gospel is to be preached to “all creation”).

Similar phrases and specific words that seem rooted in the longer ending of Mark are also found in the writings of Justin Martyr († 165 AD; cf. Lunn p. 76). Tatian († 180 AD; cf. Lunn p. 77) writes: “And on the first day on which he rose, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons....(and) Go now into all the world and preach my Gospel in all the creation...For whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved; but whoever does not believe shall be rejected. And the signs which will attend those that believe in me are these: they will cast out demons in my name, and they will speak with new tongues, and they will take up serpents; and if they drink deadly poison, it will not injure them; and they will lay their hands on the diseased, and they will be healed.’ This pretty directly quotes Mark’s longer ending prior to 180 AD.

Lunn gives many other examples of church literature quoting or alluding to this material prior to the fourth century. This is evidence that the early church was familiar with this material and quoted and used these verses authoritatively from the earliest days of the New Testament Church. One other especially important witness is St. Jerome (b. 342-347 AD) who famously translated the Bible into the Latin Vulgate. One of Jerome’s writings seems to repeat Eusebius’ acknowledgement of texts with a truncated ending of Mark, but his Vulgate includes the longer ending. So Jerome is a witness for, not against, the authority and authenticity of this as the original ending of Mark.

2. V. 9 is a dramatic and fitting ending for Mark’s Gospel as is read in Church traditionally on Easter Sunday.

As mentioned before (cf. Handout for October 25, 2020) fear is contrasted by Jesus in Mark with faith (cf. Mark 4.40). He diagnoses fear as the absence of faith. So to end the Gospel with the women disobeying Christ (saying nothing when He commanded them to tell the disciples) and their being in fear (not yet believing as they should) seems to be a defeat for Jesus’ purpose instead of Easter victory. The promises of a resurrection He had made in the Gospel (cf. 8.31; 9.31; 10.34; 14.28) would remain unfulfilled, except, perhaps, in a Gnostic (which is to say, anti-material, or anti-corporeal) sense. And indeed, without a nativity account in Mark, the incarnation could be taught as temporary or unnecessary. All the other Gospels specifically recount Christ’s resurrection and commission for the Apostles to proclaim the Gospel. Without this, this Gospel may support a Gnostic “secret” instead of the universal proclamation that saves proclaimed in the last 12 verses.

3. The materials in the last 12 verses seem disjoint with the rest of the Gospel.

This criticism asserts many differences in this section from the rest of the Gospel. For instance, it is asserted that many more unique words (not found elsewhere in this Gospel) are used in this section, reflecting a different author. Lunn goes into much detailed analysis of language and grammar to show that these 12 verses are not radically different than other sections of Mark of a similar length. This data is too tedious to include in this presentation. Buy the book!

We mentioned in last week's lesson how the pattern of events in the last 12 verses is foreshadowed in the events following the raising of Jairus' daughter in Mark 5 and 6 (see last week's handout). Some of you will recall a few years ago when Prof. Jack Cascione also showed that inclusion of this ending completed certain Hebrew meter patterns in the book and that exclusion disrupted these patterns. Although some of the unique subject matter in this section (such as the handling of snakes and the drinking of poison) seems to be jarring and out of left field, last week's treatment of those topics gives a plausible tie between these references and related OT events. Thus a sensible Biblical context exists between these promises to those carrying out God's mission with Jesus' ascent to the right hand of God with God's promises to Moses and Elisha for their mission of proclamation and deliverance.

4. This section seems cobbled together from materials in other books of the New Testament. Or how do or should the Gospels relate one to another? Do valid witnesses collude with each other or are they independent? What must the Gospels have in common? Why should they often read so closely with each other? So disparately?

The chart on following page gives a harmony of the Gospel resurrection accounts and how they might fit together. New Testament scholars have loved to debate which Gospel was written first, Matthew or Mark. They compare parallel accounts of the same events as well as other features of the texts. They assume one author saw the other author's work, borrowed it, and then saw fit to expand it or to summarize and shorten it. If we assumed that were the case, we might expect the Gospels would easily harmonize since the subsequent authors would not intentionally contradict the others without hurting their cause and claim of authenticity. But above we already reported how Eusebius had to respond to questions about apparent contradictions between Gospel accounts of the resurrection. He is asked by a certain man named Marinus why Matthew seems to indicate the resurrection occurred later in the day after the Sabbath and Mark early. Here Eusebius mentions that some (even most) texts omit this section of Mark, so, as Eusebius says, one might make the issue disappear by removing the ending. But then he speaks more concretely about respecting both texts and seeking to reconcile them, that is, to resolve the apparent contradiction. If you are trying to work through how the resurrection texts fit together Lunn's chart on the next page may be of help for you. Reconciling the Gospel accounts of the resurrection is not a simple matter. I believe even Luther said they are confusing and hard to harmonize. But that is a greater issue than the ending of Mark and no modification of Mark's ending simplifies or makes resolves the apparent difficulties. We see here, perhaps, merely the confusion that occurs among people involved in the collision of two worlds; the world passing away in death giving way to formation of what will constitute a New Heaven and a New Earth.

Jesus said "Scripture will never be broken" (John 10.35) and "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my Word will never pass away" (Mark 13.31)." To suggest that for nineteen centuries God had allowed His Word to be broken and false Words placed into Jesus' mouth is shocking. To suggest that our ancient Fathers could have been fooled with respect to the canon of Scripture, as we have accepted their judgement and reasoning in this respect, as God's providence and grace to us, but that our "enlightened" nineteenth century scholars, based on a discarded and rediscovered manuscript, can correct the error in our canon seems dubious to me. For scholars (many of whom are unbelievers) to set themselves as judges over the sacred text God has preserved for His children in the Church these many years merely indicates their hubris over God's Word, which they despise (make little of; in the words of their father; "Hath God (Christ) really said?").

God gave His Word to us all, not only to those with advanced academic degrees. We thank God for pious believing scholars. John William Burgon (AD 1813-1888) first picked up the gauntlet thrown down by the first critics in the nineteenth century. Modern scholars like Lunn and the sainted Theodore Letis fended off scholarly attacks with their own brilliant scholarship and faithful adherence to God's Word. God Himself preserves His Word in their writings, cherished in His childrens' faith (but attacked / despised by those who are not). We should steel our hearts against any teachings or teachers that detract from the integrity or the authority of God's Word. For God will not hold him guiltless who despises God's Word, who makes God's Word less than it is, that is, God Himself (cf. Deut. 12.32; Rev. 22:18-19) !

To God alone be Glory!

The Original Ending of Mark

	Luke	Mark	Others
Visit of women to the tomb	<p>24:1-8</p> <p>τῇ δὲ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK ἀρώματα SPICES τὸν λίθον ἀποκεκλισμένον THE STONE ROLLED AWAY εἰσελθοῦσαι HAVING GONE IN ζητεῖτε YOU SEEK.... οὐκ ἔστιν ὧδε ...HE IS NOT HERE ἠγέρθη ...HE IS RISEN ἐν τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ INTO GALILEE καὶ ὑποστρέψασαι AND RETURNING ἀπὸ τοῦ μνημείου FROM THE TOMB</p>	<p>16:1-8</p> <p>τῇ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων ἀρώματα ἀποκεκλύσται ὁ λίθος εἰσελθοῦσαι ζητεῖτε οὐκ ἔστιν ὧδε ἠγέρθη εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν καὶ ἐξελθοῦσαι ἀπὸ τοῦ μνημείου</p>	<p>Matthew 28:1-8</p> <p>εἰς μίαν σαββάτων ἀπεκύλισεν τὸν λίθον ζητεῖτε οὐκ ἔστιν ὧδε ἠγέρθη εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν καὶ ἀπελθοῦσαι ἀπὸ τοῦ μνημείου</p>
Report of women	<p>24:9-11</p> <p>ἀπήγγειλαν AND THEY TOLD.. ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ Μαρία MARY MAGDALINE ἐφάνησαν SEEM AS IDLE TALK TO THEM ἠπίστων THEY DID NOT BELIEVE</p>		<p>John 20:2</p>
Peter's visit to tomb	<p>24:12</p> <p>ἀναστὰς (PETER) AROSE ἔδραμεν HE RAN καὶ παρακύψας AND STOOPING DOWN βλέπει τὰ ὀθόνια SAW THE LINEN CLOTH ἀπῆλθεν πρὸς ἑαυτὸν RETURNED TO THEM</p>		<p>John 20:3-9</p> <p>ἔτρεχον, προέδραμεν BOTH RAN: ONE FASTER καὶ παρακύψας βλέπει ... τὰ ὀθόνια ἀπῆλθον ... πρὸς αὐτοὺς</p>
Appearance to Mary		<p>16:9-11</p> <p>ἀναστὰς HAVING RISEN ἐφάνη HE APPEARED Μαρίᾳ τῇ Μαγδαληνῇ TO MARY MAGDALENE ἀπήγγειλεν REPORTED/TOLD ἠπίστησαν THEY DID NOT BELIEVE</p>	<p>John 20:10-18</p> <p>Μαριὰμ ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ</p>
Appearance to two disciples	<p>24:13-35</p> <p>δύο ἐξ αὐτῶν πορευόμενοι εἰς</p>	<p>16:12-13</p> <p>δυσὶν ἐξ αὐτῶν TWO OF THEM πορευομένοις εἰς JOURNEYED OUT (DEPARTED)</p>	<p>Cleopas?</p>