

72

Mark 16:9-20 The various endings of Mark's Gospel

Discussion: Have you ever watched a film or read a book where you were disappointed by, or perhaps confused about the ending?

Introduction: There is agreement between Biblical scholars that verses 1-8 are authentic and undisputed. However, depending on the Bible version, three alternative endings are offered following verse 8:

1. the first (as supported by the earliest manuscripts) is to end Mark at verse 8.
2. the second is the traditional conclusion to the Gospel, which continues with verses 9-20. This is known as the *Longer Ending*.
3. the third is the *Shorter Ending*, which offers just a single verse after verse 8.

In this session, we examine how this came about, allowing you to form your own opinion on which of these alternative endings you prefer. While Christians have accepted the *Longer Ending* for hundreds of years, scholarship of the past fifty years has increasingly questioned the authenticity of any verses beyond verse 8.

This is because more ancient manuscripts have been discovered that predate others by a considerable period. Two of these critical documents are *Codex Sinaiticus* and *Codex Vaticanus*, which date from about 360-400 AD. Both of these finish Mark's Gospel in verse 8.³³

Sinaiticus and *Vaticanus* belong to the *Alexandrian* family or text type of manuscripts, which is the earliest. These include the entire New Testament. However, the less ancient *Byzantine* text type typically includes verses Mark 16:9-20. The *Byzantine* texts were used by Erasmus, which led to the *Textus Receptus* and then the Tyndale and King James translations into English. This is why the King James version includes the *Longer Ending*. There are over 1600 Greek manuscripts of the *Byzantine* text type, while only a handful of the much earlier *Alexandrian* exist today. The ongoing scholarly debate about the authenticity of verses 9-20 pitches the enormous number of *Byzantine* texts against the minimal number of Greek *Alexandrian* texts that are much closer in time to the original text written by Mark. It is a debate that argues quantity against quality. Figure 73 (on the next page) shows the region of the Roman Empire from which they emerged:

Bible Study of Mark's Gospel



Figure 73: Four families (“text types”) of manuscripts

These Greek manuscripts form part of the external evidence when seeking an answer to the question, “Are verses 9-20 authentic and written by Mark?” Other contributing evidence includes early translations of the New Testament, commentaries by the Church Fathers (e.g., Irenaeus, Eusebius, Jerome) that quote those scriptures, and early Lectionaries.

There are hundreds of early translations of the Greek New Testament into other languages (e.g., Syriac, Armenian, Georgian) where the original Greek text from which they were copied is now lost. These tend to follow a similar geographic mapping to the regional text types shown in the map.

It is clear from the commentaries written by the Church Fathers that some of them appear to be unaware of any verses after Mark 16:8, e.g., Clement of Alexandria (c.150-215 AD), Origen (c. 185-253), or Clement (c. AD 95).³⁴ However, Tatian (c. 170 AD) and Irenaeus (c. 180 AD) quote Mark 16:9-20. Consequently, these verses are shown to have existed since the earliest days. The debate regarding the authenticity of verses 9-20 started right at the beginning, in the 2nd Century.

In the 4th Century, Eusebius reported both versions of Mark 16, but during his time, most Bible texts available to him appear to have ended at Mark 16:8.

Bible Study of Mark's Gospel

Mark 16:8 (undisputed)
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.

Longer ending (Mark 9-20)	Shorter ending (conclusio brevior)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some Bible versions contain these additional verses, but placed in brackets and with a note, (e.g. [<i>Some of the earliest manuscripts do not include 16:9–20.</i>]) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The <i>Shorter Ending</i> follows Mark 16:8 in some manuscripts. Other manuscripts insert this verse then continue with the <i>Longer Ending</i>.

<p>9 When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. 10 She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. 11 When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.</p> <p>12 Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country. 13 These returned and reported it to the rest; but they did not believe them either.</p> <p>14 Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.</p> <p>15 He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. 16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. 17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.”</p> <p>19 After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. 20 Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.</p>	<p>But they reported briefly to Peter and those with him all that they had been told. And after this, Jesus himself (appeared to them and) sent out by means of them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.</p>
--	---

Context

- In the original Greek, verses 9-20 are stylistically quite different to Mark's writing. A list of bullet points rather than a narrative, these differences in style and vocabulary are why scholars suspect they were added later.³⁵
- But why would a scribe do this? The ending in verse 8 can seem unsatisfactory and incomplete compared to the other Gospels. The consensus is that Mark was the first Gospel and that the *Longer Ending* verses 9-20 were "borrowed" from those later Gospels, retro-fitted to provide a more satisfactory ending. Some scholars perceive these verses as so untrustworthy that their commentaries make only limited exposition of anything after Mark 16:8.^{36,37,38,39}

Mark 16:9-11 Mary Magdalene and the Disciples' unbelief

Mary was the first witness to the resurrection of Jesus and the first to proclaim it to the Disciples. Seeing the risen Jesus and informing the Disciples originates in John 20:11-17, and the mention of seven demons is from Luke 8:2. The reaction of unbelief by the Disciples is taken from Luke 24:11.⁴⁰

Mark 16:12-13 The Walk to Emmaus

These verses seem to refer to the Emmaus Road, derived from Luke 24:13-35 but there remains some doubt in the Disciples' minds.

Mark 16:14 The Rebuke for their Unbelief

The appearance of Jesus to the Eleven and his rebuke of them for failing to believe is taken from Luke 24:36-49 and John 20:19-29.

Mark 16:15-16 The Evangelistic Commission

This verse recalls the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19 and Luke 24:47. Faith and baptism guarantee salvation, taken from Acts 2:38.⁴¹

Mark 16:17-18 Signs that Accompany Salvation

The spiritual gifts available to believers are introduced here, such as driving out demons (Matt. 10:1, Luke 10), speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 12:10) and healing (Matt 9:18, Acts 3:1-7). More questionable are the signs of handling snakes and drinking poison as these don't serve the community but appear to be about "spectacle" and are not in the NT.⁴²

Mark 16:19-20 The Ascension

These verses reflect Luke 24:50-51, Acts 1:9-11 and Psalm 110:1.

Bible Study of Mark's Gospel

- Many other difficulties exist when reconciling verses 9-20 with the rest of Mark, including the use of entirely different vocabulary. These verses were, however, widely accepted in the early church and are still treasured today in translations such as the King James.
- Interestingly, when examining the earliest manuscripts where Mark 16:9-20 are missing, Codex Vaticanus ends at verse 8 but the scribe leaves a gap as if he knew of additional verses that might need to be inserted.
- The gap is almost the correct size to include the *Longer Ending*. However, there is debate among scholars argue about whether that remaining space is, by a few lines, and underestimate by the scribe, requiring some lines to be squeezed a bit closer together.⁴³
- The scribe concludes the Gospel with “Kata Markon” (which means *According to Mark*) and is the only place such a gap is left at the end of an NT Book of the Bible in this manuscript.

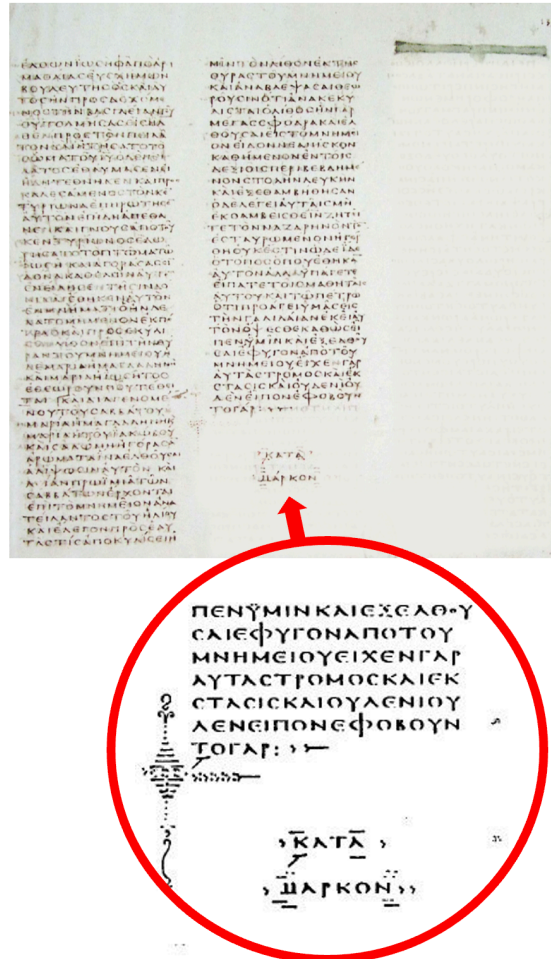


Figure 74: End of Mark in Codex Vaticanus⁴⁴

Discussion: In our concluding discussion on Mark's Gospel, what is your opinion about the way it ends? And which ending do you prefer?