

THE COMMISSION JESUS NEVER GAVE (Mk 16:9-20)

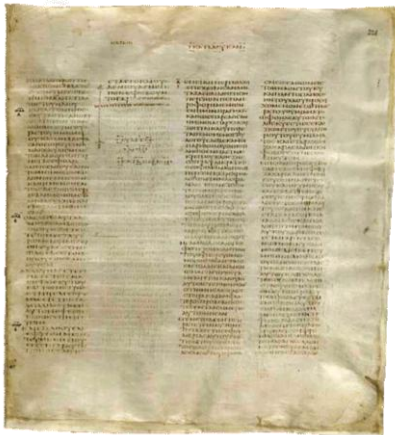
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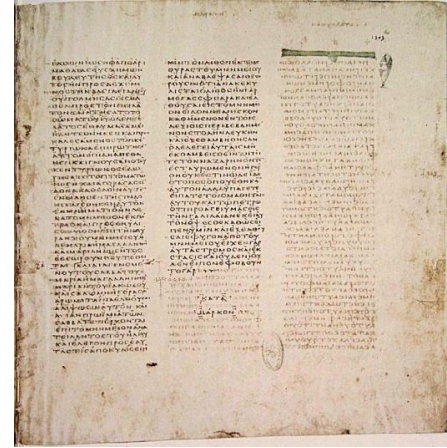
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Abstract — Textual scholars have long debated on whether or not Mark 16:9-20 is authentic or was a later addition to the text. By carefully weighing the known external and internal evidence, most textual scholars have confidently concluded that the “Longer Ending” of Mark’s Gospel was not original and that the Gospel originally ended at 16:8. This article investigates the textual reliability of the ending of the Gospel of Mark and examines the arguments against the “Longer” traditional ending.

General Research Topic(s) — The Gospel of Mark, Textual Criticism, Textual-Historical Studies.



Codex Sinaiticus (c. 4th cent.). Ending of the Gospel of Mark and beginning of the Gospel of Luke.¹



Codex Vaticanus (c. 4th cent.). Ending of the Gospel of Mark.²

I. INTRODUCTION

Aside from the *pericope adulterae* in John 7:53-8:11, the other large portion of Scripture that has come under close examination is the ending to the Gospel of Mark. Even though it has long been generally accepted as authentic Scripture throughout the history of the Church, the ending of Mark (Mk 16:9-20) has been re-examined by textual scholars in the past century after new manuscript discoveries and the development of better methods of textual investigation, and it has been predominantly concluded to be non-original to Mark’s Gospel. Mark 16:9-20 has been termed the

¹ Image used by permission from <http://www.codexsinaiticus.org>.

² Imaged used by permission from <http://nttextualcriticism.blogspot.com>

“Longer Ending” (LE) and it has been questioned by scholars not just on account of external (manuscript) evidence but also on account of internal inconsistency and dissimilarity within the Gospel. But, as will be discussed, the conclusion for excluding LE from the canon of Scripture is not a unanimous decision by scholars. There are some who believe it is original and should be left in the Bible. However, the scholars who argue that LE should be left where it is generally subscribe to certain presuppositions about Scripture and those presuppositions influence their perspective and criteria, and subsequently, their judgment on the LE’s authenticity.

The LE of Mark’s Gospel has many terms and characteristic sayings that make it unique. The commission that Jesus gives his disciples is unlike that found in any other Gospel. For example, certain signs are listed that are claimed to accompany the evangelization efforts of the disciples: casting out demons, speaking in new tongues, handling snakes, being unharmed if drinking poison, and healing the sick (vv. 17-18). These elements and several others will form a major part of the discussion on the internal evidence surrounding the authenticity of the pericope. Since much ink has been spilled over this issue in recent decades, I will not venture into a lengthy, detailed examination of the data (for I am not qualified for that task), but I will simply present the arguments and express their merits and then show why the majority of textual scholars have rightfully labeled the passage as being non-original. For those who wish to pursue more detailed studies on this textual issue, I will refer the reader to consult the sources provided in the bibliography.

From the beginnings of the English Bible, this passage has found commonplace among all the versions and has become extremely well-known because of its unique character. Some Christian groups find the greatest proof-text for their teaching and practices in the

LE of Mark’s Gospel. For example, the need to be water baptized in order to be saved in Baptist churches and the Restoration Movement (v. 16), or the speaking in new tongues for believers in Pentecostal and Charismatic churches (v. 17), or the sign of snake handling in Appalachian Pentecostal churches (v. 18). Thus, how could this be a commission that Jesus NEVER gave? However, many people argue with faulty logic along these lines: “If it is in my Bible then it must be genuine and part of God’s revelation to us and we have no right to take away or add to what God has said.” But I believe this is a false presumption that invests English Bibles with credit and authority they do not possess. Abiding by such logic only proves the ignorance and naivety of the reader for what the Bible really is and how we got our English text today. Only after consideration of the textual evidence and the results of many years of study by leading experts have scholars determined that Mark 16:9-20 is not the true ending to Mark’s Gospel. There are very good reasons for omitting 16:9-20 from Mark’s Gospel, and throughout the rest of this article, we will be occupied with examining and understanding the credibility of those reasons.

II. EXTERNAL EVIDENCE

First, the principle task of textual criticism is to review which manuscripts provide what readings. In other words, the objective is to find out if there are any discrepancies among the manuscripts as to the words that compose the text of Scripture? If there are, which reading probably represents the original text? Thus, we are concerned with what variants exist for the ending of Mark’s Gospel and determining which one is likely the original?

There are 5 major variant readings found in the ancient manuscripts for the last verses of the Gospel of Mark.³

1. *End at 16:8*: “And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”
2. *Shorter Ending*: “And all that had been commanded them they told briefly to those with Peter. And afterward Jesus himself sent out through them, from the east as far as the west, the holy and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation. Amen.”⁴
3. *Longer Ending (LE)*: Traditional reading of Mark 16:9-20.
4. *Longer Ending with Addition Material after 16:14*: “And they excused themselves, saying, ‘This age of lawlessness and unbelief is under Satan, who does not allow the truth and power of God to prevail over the unclean things of the spirits. Therefore reveal your righteousness now’ –thus they spoke to Christ. And Christ replied to them, ‘The term of years of Satan’s power has been fulfilled, but other horrible things draw near. And for those who have sinned I was handed over to death, that they may return to the truth and sin no more, that

they may inherit the spiritual and imperishable glory of righteousness that is in heaven.”⁵

5. *Both the Shorter and Longer Endings: #2 & #3 above combined.*

So, the dilemma that textual scholars face is determining which of the five readings listed above is original to Mark’s Gospel. However, another option exists, though. Perhaps the original ending to Mark’s Gospel has been lost and that none of the readings found in the manuscripts contain the original ending?⁶ But, as this is an argument from silence, we will only concern ourselves with the available data as reflecting viable options for considering the ending of Mark. Of the variant possibilities, only readings #1 and #3 are disputed by scholars. None of the other possible endings are argued as potentially being original. But most textual scholars are confident that the manuscript evidence points toward the first reading, which stops at 16:8, as the original ending to the Gospel of Mark.

When the entirety of biblical manuscripts is compiled the data provides a false impression since 95% of all manuscripts include the LE (#3) and it is represented in all four major text-types: Western, Caesarean, Byzantine, and the secondary Alexandrian.⁷ One might surmise, “Isn’t that a good enough cause to

³ For a detailed analysis of these categories see Michael W. Holmes, “To Be Continued . . . The Many Endings of the Gospel of Mark,” *BRev* 17 (2001): 12-23, 48-50. For an overview of the textual witnesses concerning each category, see Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 322-27.

⁴ Of the few late Greek manuscripts and other versions, all proceed to include the LE as well except one text, Codex Bobiensis (it^k, 5th cent.).

⁵ This added reading found in Codex Washingtonianus (W, 4th cent.) is known as the “Freer Logion” after Charles Freer who discovered it, and it is unquestionably of later origin.

⁶ Bruce Metzger believes this is the most likely solution to the textual problem encountered at the end of Mark’s Gospel is that the last leaf of the Gospel was lost early in its transmission before it was able to be transcribed, multiplied, and distributed. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1975), 126 n. 7.

⁷ Daniel B. Wallace, “Mark 16:8 as the Conclusion to the Second Gospel,” in *Perspectives on the Ending of Mark: 4 Views* (ed. David A. Black; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008), 10.

claim it is original if so many manuscripts contain it?" Unfortunately, that sort of logic comes from one's bibliology that the majority text preserves the original reading. In other words, to simply adhere to the reading of the majority of manuscripts is based on the presumption (belief) that God has preserved the original reading in the majority of biblical manuscripts. Fortunately, textual scholars do not abide by such a notion but rather deduce the most credible reading by taking into account external and internal evidence on multiple levels and weighing the significance of each piece of data according to standardized methods and established criteria developed in their field.⁸

What is uncontested by scholars is that Mark's Gospel circulated early on with varying endings. The earliest and best Greek manuscripts that contain the ending of Mark omit verses 9-20. These witnesses are: Codex Sinaiticus (Ⲛ, 4th cent.) and Codex Vaticanus (B, 4th cent.).⁹ Both of these manuscripts are of the Alexandrian family,¹⁰ but it has been proven that the several thousand differences noted between them suggest they do not reflect the same archetype text.¹¹ Therefore, scholars attribute each of these great uncials as representing two independent, early witnesses. Moreover, Codex Vaticanus' resemblance to P⁷⁵ is taken by scholars as a good indication that it represents a highly-preserved, early (second-century) form of the

⁸ For a great introduction and overview of the methodology and practices of textual criticism see Philip W. Comfort, *Encountering the Manuscripts: An Introduction to New Testament Paleography and Textual Criticism* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 289-320.

⁹ P⁸⁸ is another fourth-century Greek papyrus manuscript that has high correlation with Ⲛ and B. Detrimentally, the Gospel of Mark is incomplete and several leaves are missing including the one with chapter 16.

¹⁰ See T. C. Skeat, "The Codex Sinaiticus, the Codex Vaticanus and Constantine," *JTS* 50 (1999): 600-01.

¹¹ Wallace, "Mark 16:8 as the Conclusion to the Second Gospel," 15.

NT.¹² Codex Sinaiticus has also been deemed to preserve an early reading of the NT text.¹³ However, regarding the rest of the Greek manuscript evidence, it appears that the LE was rapidly incorporated and became the dominant textual form by the 4th century.¹⁴ Of the manuscripts that include the LE, numerous texts include scribal notes, asterisks, or obeli at 16:9 to indicate that it was a spurious addition to the text.¹⁵

Adding to the difficulty of the task, Mark's Gospel is the least preserved of all the Gospels. Only one pre-fourth-century papyrus exists (P⁴⁵) with six leaves of Mark and it does not contain chapter 16.¹⁶ Aside from Greek manuscript witnesses, Mark 16:9-20 does not appear in the Old Latin Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae (it^k, 5th cent.), the Old Syriac Sinaitic manuscript (sy^s, 3rd/4th cent.),¹⁷ the majority of Armenian manuscripts, or the

¹² C. L. Porter, "An Evaluation of the Textual Variation between Pap75 and Codex Vaticanus in the Text of John," in *Studies in the History and Text of the New Testament in Honor of Kenneth Willis Clark* (ed. Boyd L. Daniels and M. Jack Suggs) *Studies and Documents*; Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1967), 71-80, cited in Wallace, "Mark 16:8 as the Conclusion to the Second Gospel," 17. See also Peter M. Head, "The Early Text of Mark," in *The Early Text of the New Testament* (ed. Charles E. Hill and Michael J. Kruger; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 119.

¹³ Peter M. Head, "The Gospel of Mark in Codex Sinaiticus: Textual and Reception-Historical Considerations," *TC* 13 (2008): 1-38.

¹⁴ Two twelfth century Greek manuscripts also omit 16:9-20 (304 and 2386) but the latter has been discredited because it is missing the leaf following the end of Mark. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 122 n. 1.

¹⁵ Ibid, 123. E.g. minuscules 1, 20, 22, 137, 1216, and 1582. Philip W. Comfort, *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary* (Carol Stream: Tyndale, 2008), 159.

¹⁶ Head, "The Early Text of Mark," 108.

¹⁷ The Sinaitic Syriac text is the oldest Syriac witness to the Gospels (3rd/4th cent.). It preserves a form of the text from the late 2nd or early 3rd century. Old Syriac versions like the Sinaitic represent Western type texts. However, other Syriac versions after the Sinaitic are known to include the LE, such as the Curetonian (sy^c, 3rd cent.), Peshitta (sy^p, 4th/5th cent.),

two oldest Georgian manuscripts (Adysh Gospels, AD 897, & Opiza Codex, AD 913).¹⁸ But while this list is slim compared to the list of manuscripts that include the LE, the texts on this list are significant and demonstrate further substantiation for the credibility of the early reading from the primal Greek codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus.

What is also intriguing is that several major uncial texts contain reading #2, “And all that had been commanded them they told briefly to those with Peter. And afterward Jesus himself sent out through them, from the east as far as the west, the holy and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation. Amen” following verse 8 before proceeding to include the LE afterward.¹⁹ Apparently, some scribes thought that more needed to be said before the LE (vv. 9-20). This added variant further supports the notion that the LE was likely not original. Otherwise, what need would a scribe have had to add such a large preface to the LE unless it was not viewed as original by the scribe to begin with?

For further external evidence, we next turn to the testimony early church fathers. Among the patristic writers, the LE is not cited by Clement of Alexandria (c. AD 150–215),²⁰ Origen (c. AD 184–254), Cyprian (c. AD 200–258), or Cyril of Jerusalem (c. AD 313–386). But,

and Harklensis (sy^h, 7th cent.) texts. Metzger and Ehrman, *Text of the NT*, 96-7.

¹⁸ Ibid, 322. However, the third oldest Georgian manuscript (T’bet, AD 995) includes the LE.

¹⁹ Uncials Codex Regius (L, 8th cent.), Codex Athous Laurae (Ψ, 8th/9th cent.), 099, and 0112, as well as the Old Latin Codex Bobiensis (it^k, 4th/5th cent.), the margin of Harklean Syriac (sy^h, 7th cent.), several Sahidic and Bohairic manuscripts, and more than a few Ethiopian manuscripts all contain the added reading before the LE, except it^k which excludes the LE. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 123-24.

²⁰ Clement of Alexandria cited Matthew ~700 times and Luke and John ~400 times but only cited Mark one time. The relatively few citations of Mark by patristic writers like Clement make determining the best reading more complicated. Head, “The Early Text of Mark,” 112.

the fact that they do not cite the LE does not prove that it did not exist or that they were not aware of it. Its absence from their writings suggests it is likely not original, but more confidently, it means that it was not present in the manuscripts they possessed. Probably the greatest patristic testimony comes from Eusebius (c. AD 260–340) and Jerome (c. AD 347–420) who make specific claims against the authenticity of LE. Eusebius states that it was only some of the manuscript copies that spoke of Mary Magdalene as the one out of whom the Lord cast seven demons.²¹ According to Eusebius, the majority of manuscripts did not contain 16:9-20. In addition, the LE is absent from Eusebius’ canons as well.²²

Moreover, Jerome also writes that the LE was not present in most of the Gospel manuscripts known to him and that *almost all* the Greek codices were lacking it.²³ According to Jerome, the LE could be rejected “especially since it seems to narrate what is different from and contradictory to the other evangelists.”²⁴ What

²¹ Eusebius, *Quaest. Marin.* 1.1-2. [PG 22:937; NPB 4.255ff]. “But one is the Magdalene from —after the Sabbath in Matthew, and yet another again is also the same Magdalene who in John came to the tomb early; but this is the one indicated also in Mark, according to some of the copies, —from whom he cast out seven demons.” See also Bruce M. Metzger, “St. Jerome’s Explicit References to Variant Readings in Manuscripts of the New Testament,” in *Text and Interpretation: Studies in the New Testament Presented to Matthew Black* (ed. Ernest Best and R. McL. Wilson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 182.

²² Comfort, *Text and Translation*, 159.

²³ Jerome, *Ep. Ad Hedibiam* 120.3. [CSEL 55, 481] “This problem has a twofold solution. Either we do not accept the testimony of Mark, because this final portion is not contained in most of the Gospels that bear his name – almost all the Greek codices lacking it – or else must affirm that Matthew and Mark have both told the truth, that our Lord rose on the evening of the Sabbath, and that He was seen by Mary Magdalene in the morning of the first day of the following week.”

²⁴ Metzger, “St. Jerome’s Explicit References to Variant Readings in Manuscripts of the New Testament,” 182. One mark against the weight of Jerome’s letter to Hedibia, an

complicates the interpretation of Jerome's comment is that even though Jerome staunchly remarks on the erroneous addition of the LE to manuscripts, he still decides to include it in his Latin Vulgate (vg, c. AD 384). This is likely due to the prevalence of the LE in the Latin texts that Jerome was using to compile the Vulgate and does not discredit his testimony against the authenticity of the LE.²⁵ Severus (c. AD 465–538) can also be added to the list who claimed that the more accurate copies of Mark's Gospel end with "for they were afraid."²⁶

However, the testimony of the patristic fathers is not unanimously against the LE. Later church fathers make reference to the LE.²⁷ But there is a significant early witness laying claim to the reading of the LE. Irenaeus (c. AD 130–202) quotes only three times from Mark's Gospel, one of which includes a

educated lady of Gaul, was that Jerome appears to be paraphrasing Eusebius' answer to Marinus (Eusebius, *Quaest. Marin.* 1.1) on the comparison of the resurrection accounts in Matthew and Mark. Therefore, we may not legitimately place full weight on Jerome's statement as his personal testimony but rather on a reiteration of Eusebius'. But Jerome does make the clarification that it is the Greek manuscripts in particular that lack the LE. However, this could have been a simple convention for explaining the absence for his Latin readers.

²⁵ In fact, to demonstrate the wide spread acquaintance Jerome had with different endings of Mark's Gospel, he quotes additional verses (the Freer Logion) between 16:14 and 15 that were not found in any Greek manuscript until the discovery of the Codex Washingtonianus (W, c. AD 400.) in 1906.

²⁶ Severus, *Hom.* 77. [PO 16.5:840, 842]. "In the more accurate copies, the Gospel according to Mark has its end at—for they were afraid. In some copies, however, this also is added, —Now when He was risen early the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven devils."

²⁷ *Apostolic Constitutions* [Epiphanies] (c. AD 375), Pelagius (c. AD 354–418), Nestorius (c. AD 386–450), Ambrose (c. AD 340–397), and Augustine (AD 354–430). Comfort, *Text and Translation*, 159.

reference to a verse in the LE (16:19).²⁸ Irenaeus' citation of 16:19 suggests that the LE was either known or inserted into some existing manuscripts within the 2nd century. Such an early addition to the text makes it challenging, and most likely, quite impossible to determine its location of inception. With such a paucity of evidence from that time even speculation on the origin of the LE is unfeasible.

One comment must be made for the appearance of the LE in Tatian's *Diatessaron* (c. AD 160-175). Such an early witness for the inclusion of the LE appears to be substantial evidence in favor of it as the original reading since the composition of it predates the oldest codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus by over two centuries. However, the witness of the *Diatessaron* is a complicated matter since what we have is not a later copy but a reconstruction from a contortion of translations. The *Diatessaron* reconstruction by Theodor Zahn in 1881 is manufactured from a Latin translation of an Armenian version of a Syriac commentary on the *Diatessaron*.²⁹ Even that description alone justifies the problematic nature of using the *Diatessaron* as a testimony for the biblical text. Simply put, Tatian's *Diatessaron* cannot reliably be trusted as a standard witness to Scripture.³⁰ And so, while it is mentioned as containing the LE, little weight is attributed to this reading in evaluating the ending of Mark's Gospel.

²⁸ Among Irenaeus' writings he quotes from the Gospels some 626 times but only 3 times from Mark's Gospel. The two readily identified references occur in *Adversus Haereses* 3.10.5 where he cites 1:1 and 16:19. Head, "The Early Text of Mark," 112 n. 14.

²⁹ Theodor Zahn, *Tatian's Diatessaron* (Erlangen: Deichert, 1881).

³⁰ Tjitze Baarda, "Tatian's Diatessaron and the Gospels," in *The Early Text of the New Testament* (ed. Charles E. Hill and Michael J. Kruger; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 348.

Another source often cited to support the LE is Justin Martyr (c. AD 100–165). Justin is significant due to the early dating of his writings. Many advocates of the LE point to Justin’s testimony as proof that the LE is supposedly original because he was early generation Christian with propinquity to the Apostles. However, it is not certain if Justin was really alluding to Mark 16:20 simply because five words from verse 20 occur in close proximity to each other at one place in his writings (*Apology* 1.45) even though in an entirely different sequence.³¹ It is possible that Justin knew of the LE but it cannot be ascertained if he was directly alluding to it.³²

Mark is spoken of by later church fathers but its rarity among early church fathers is startling. It is not until the 5th century that we find a full commentary attributed to Victor of Antioch who stated that he had “arranged in an orderly commentary the scattered explanations of Mark by the teachers of the church.”³³ Victor’s testimony only asserts that “very many copies” ended at verse 8 and “very many copies” ended at verse 20.³⁴ What this signifies is that Victor was aware of the discrepancy in Mark’s ending and that there were more than a couple witnesses attesting to both readings.

What could be the reason for the various endings to Mark’s Gospel? Head postulates that the “textual evidence suggests that the original ending of Mark was found to be less than satisfactory in some circles and a new ending (the LE Mk 16:9-20) was produced in the second century...Drawing on material from Matthew, Luke, and John this additional ending served to authenticate some aspects of the ongoing missionary

activity of the church, especially in providing support for itinerant Christian preachers.”³⁵

Regardless of the motive or manner by which the endings of Mark’s Gospel came to be incorporated into the text, the external evidence for the Gospel ending at verse 8 cannot be explained away. The early and widespread testimony of the best Greek manuscripts (Sinaiticus and Vaticanus), the most significant early versions (Latin, Coptic, and Syriac), and several key patristic writers (esp. Eusebius and Jerome) have little to no connection among themselves and provide ample proof that the ending of Mark’s Gospel at 16:8 must extend back to a much earlier stage of transmission and mostly likely to the original text.³⁶

Such a complexity of manuscript evidence along with the relative absence of Markan citations in patristic writers makes discerning the ending of Mark a more difficult and controversial matter. But even with seemingly divergent witnesses as to the correct ending of Mark’s Gospel with an overwhelming number of texts including the LE, scholars are not dissuaded that the Gospel properly ended at 16:8 in the original text. If the internal evidence has any degree of suspicion like the external evidence, it will make the case for the short ending (16:8) even that much more plausible and certain.

III. INTERNAL EVIDENCE

Textual scholars avidly recognize and affirm the non-Markan character of the LE.³⁷ (1) The vocabulary

³¹ Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 125.

³² Head, "The Early Text of Mark," 111 n. 9.

³³ Ibid, 113 n. 19.

³⁴ Wallace, "Mark 16:8 as the Conclusion to the Second Gospel," 23-4.

³⁵ Head, "The Early Text of Mark," 110.

³⁶ Also, it is important to recognize that the short ending at verse 8 is attested by the Alexandrian, Western, Caesarean, and possibly the proto-Byzantine text types. Wallace, "Mark 16:8 as the Conclusion to the Second Gospel," 28.

³⁷ Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 325-27.

and style of the pericope is markedly different with numerous foreign terms and expressions that do not fit with the rest of the Gospel.³⁸ Moreover, the rhetorical tone differs dramatically from what is observed in Mark's simple style through the Gospel.³⁹ (2) The non-contiguous nature of the transition between verses 8 and 9 seems artificial and quite perplexing. In verse 8, the subject is the women fleeing from the tomb in amazement and terror and they told no one because they were afraid. Then, in verse 9, there is no supplied subject but instead the reader must infer that Jesus is the one being spoken of. In addition, Mary Magdalene is introduced on the scene with the added description, "from whom he had cast out seven demons," as though she was a new character in the passage and in need of a quick back story (v.9), even though she was mentioned by name only a few verses prior (v. 1) and was present at the conclusion of verse 8.

A thorough review and discussion of the internal arguments against the authenticity of the LE has already been set forth by J. K. Elliott with others following.⁴⁰ One can note the high frequency of rare words in the LE but that alone does not prove the passage to be non-original. It has been demonstrated that such a high frequency of rare words occurs elsewhere in the Gospel

in the same general length of text.⁴¹ Nonetheless, a high frequency of rare words is significant along with the suspicion of external evidence. Also, the variation in linguistic style is not a standalone certification of non-authenticity. The style of the LE is quite certainly dissimilar to the rest of the Gospel, but it is not the only unique section in the Gospel with a dramatically different pattern of writing.⁴² Elliott claims that there is not another passage like the LE with such betraying stylistic and lexical anomalies.⁴³

Thematic coherence, however, is likely the most disputable element for the ending of Mark because ending at verse 8 or ending at verse 20 can be persuasively argued depending upon what emphasis is placed on the themes in conjunction with the rest of the Gospel. Robinson demonstrates numerous thematic parallels between the LE and the rest of Mark's Gospel.⁴⁴

Metzger surmises that that all the odd characteristics of the added passage (vv. 9-20) and the inconcinnities between it and the preceding text (vv. 1-8) resemble an *ad hoc* approach by scribes to fill an obvious gap, and it is likely the LE was taken or adapted from another document.⁴⁵ Even the first word of the LE seems out of place. The verb *ἀναστὰς* ("after having risen") is an aorist active participle indicating

³⁸ While having foreign terms and expressions does not automatically disqualify the authenticity of the passage, it contributes more weight for its questionable origins. This data compiled with additional material is what has added up to the conclusion that 16:9-20 is not original to Mark's Gospel. For a recent treatment of the stylistic issues of the LE, see Travis Williams, "Bringing Method to the Madness: Examining the Style of the Longer Ending of Mark," *BBR* 20 (2010): 397-417. On the other hand, for a defense against the differing vocabulary and style of the LE, see Maurice A. Robinson, "The Long Ending of Mark as Canonical Verity," in *Perspectives on the Ending of Mark: 4 Views* (ed. David A. Black; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008), 59-64.

³⁹ Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 126.

⁴⁰ J. K. Elliott, "The Text and Language of the Endings to Mark's Gospel," *TZ* 27 (1971): 255-62.

⁴¹ Robinson, "The Long Ending of Mark as Canonical Verity," 60-6.

⁴² An older study done in defense of the authentic style of the LE was published over a century ago by John A. Broadus, "Exegetical Studies: Style of Mark xvi. 9-20, as Bearing Upon the Question of Genuineness," *BQ* 3 (1869): 355-62.

⁴³ J. K. Elliott, "The Last Twelve Verses of Mark: Original or Not," in *Perspectives on the Ending of Mark: 4 Views* (ed. David A. Black; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008), 88-90.

⁴⁴ Maurice A. Robinson, "The Long Ending of Mark as Canonical Verity," *ibid*, 69-72.

⁴⁵ Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 125.

that it was Jesus who raised himself from the dead. Nearly everywhere else in Mark as well as the other Gospels the passive form is used with respect to Jesus' resurrection.⁴⁶

Many scholars have observed close connections in the LE with other Gospel accounts and propose that Mark's LE is a conglomeration or piece-wise addition compiling several high points from other Gospels. When comparing the ending of Mark with Matthew, Luke (including the Acts of the Apostles), and John many similarities arise. Carl Bridges has summarized the strong and weak parallels from Mark's ending with the other Gospels and shows that there is strong correlation with Luke and also a notable correlation with John, but the only substantial correlation with Matthew is the pairing of the Great Commission (Mt 28:19) with Mark 16:15-16.⁴⁷

Philip Comfort sees the cascade of events depicted in the LE forming a sort of collage of accounts possibly adapted from other Gospel records.⁴⁸ Importantly, though, he notes the incongruent details surrounding Jesus' resurrection appearance. Specifically, in Luke the women who came to anoint Jesus' body were astonished by the words of the angels and the empty tomb, but then it was Mary who told the eleven apostles and the rest of the disciples (Lk 24:1-12). In John, Mary Magdalene comes to the empty tomb alone and goes and gets Simon Peter and another disciple and they return to the tomb together (Jn 20:1-10). Yet, no mention is made about any appearance of Jesus in Luke and John before the report of his resurrection reaches the ears of his disciples. Mark's LE has Jesus appearing to Mary Magdalene first and then Mary telling Jesus' disciples, who in return do not believe her (Mk 16:9-

11). In John, it is not until after Mary, Peter, and the other disciple visit the empty tomb that Jesus appears to Mary; Mary then announces to the rest of the disciples what Jesus had said to her (Jn 20:11-18).

IV. COUNTER ARGUMENTS

While the length of this document could be doubled by addressing the vast number of counter arguments that have been developed in favor of the LE, it will suffice to say that such debates have already been well articulated elsewhere and will greater depth and precision. If a person is interested in understanding the position of the LE proponents, I would suggest investigating two of the lengthiest defenses for the authenticity of the LE:

William R. Farmer, *The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel of Mark*, SNTS 25 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

John W. Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel According to St. Mark Vindicated* (London, 1871; repr. 1959).

For the briefest glimpse into their discussions, the chief arguments against ending Mark's Gospel at verse 8 are that Irenaeus as well as other later church fathers quote from the LE, the majority of biblical manuscripts contain the LE, and it is syntactically unusual and quite bizarre to end the Gospel with the conjunction γάρ.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ For a particularly insightful address concerning this claim, see Donald H. Juel, "A Disquieting Silence: The Matter of the Ending," in *The Ending of Mark and the Ends of God: Essays in Memory of Donald Harrisville Juel* (ed. Beverly R. Gaventa and Patrick D. Miller; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 1-14. Juel discusses the reasonableness and efficacy for ending Mark at 16:8. For Juel, there is something inescapable and satisfying about the abrupt ending that modern commentators are quick to overlook or dismiss. However, almost no modern commentators argue for originality of the LE: Gould (ICC), Swete, Bruce (EGT), Cranfield (CGTC), Taylor, Lane

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⁴⁶ Comfort, *Text and Translation*, 159.

⁴⁷ Carl B. Bridges, "The Canonical Status of the Longer Ending of Mark," *SCJ* 9 (2006): 231-242.

⁴⁸ Comfort, *Text and Translation*, 160-01.

Granted, such an ending is indeed rare, but examples have been found of writers concluding paragraphs with γάρ. However, no book has been found that ends with the conjunction. Of course, positive arguments are also set forth regarding the complementary character of the resurrection appearance with other Gospel records and Jesus' commissioning of the apostles.

Of all modern textual critics, Maurice Robinson is probably the strongest proponent for the originality of the LE. He is one of the few that hold a Byzantine text priority which will obviously color the practices of his textual criticism methods.

V. ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

For a detailed history of interpretation on the LE see:

James A. Kelhoffer, *Miracle and Mission: The Authentication of Missionaries and Their Message in the Unger Ending of Mark* (WUNT 2.112; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 5-46.

And more recently the article, Christine E. Joynes, "The Sound of Silence: Interpreting Mark 16:1-8 through the Centuries"⁵⁰ covers the implications and interpretation of the ending of Mark historically as well.

For an in-depth discussion on the textual issue at the end of Mark's Gospel, I would recommend two works that address specific concerns pertaining to the textual variants as well as the interpretation of the various endings to Mark's Gospel:

(NICNT), Gundry, Guelich (WBC), Edwards (PNTC), Evans (WBC), France (NIGTC), Collins (Herm.), or Stein (BECNT). Morna Hooker comments that it was Wellhausen (1903) who was the first to assert that Mark intended to end his Gospel at 16:8. Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel of Mark* (BNTC; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 391.

⁵⁰ Christine E. Joynes, "The Sound of Silence: Interpreting Mark 16:1-8 Through the Centuries," *Int* 65 (2011): 18-29.

Beverly R. Gaventa and Patrick D. Miller, eds., *The Ending of Mark and the Ends of God: Essays in Memory of Donald Harrisville Juel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005).

David Alan Black, ed., *Perspectives on the Ending of Mark: 4 Views* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008).

VI. CONCLUSIONS

One could read arguments for and against the ending of Mark until their head spins, but it all comes down to what criteria one uses to determine authenticity and the weight assigned to each element of evidence. However, one can attempt to explain away why a problem might have arisen within a certain passage of Scripture (e.g. Mark 16:9-20), but it can never erase the fact that a textual problem has historically existed with the reading of the passage. Therefore, a judgment needs to be made on what reading most likely represents the original text. I think the overview of external and internal evidence presented in this article speaks loudly as to what conclusion the evidence points toward.⁵¹

In summary, 1) the oldest and best Greek manuscripts omit 16:9-20 in Mark's Gospel as well as the majority of other early versions, 2) the writing style, vocabulary, and content are dramatically different from the rest of the Gospel, and 3) the transition from verse 8 into the LE is awkward and perplexing and hard to explain the change in implied subject and address. It is

⁵¹ Thus, on the basis of good external evidence and strong internal considerations it appears that the earliest ascertainable form of the Gospel of Mark ended with 16:8. Metzger concludes, "Three possibilities are open: (a) the evangelist intended to close his Gospel at this place; or (b) the Gospel was never finished; or, as seems most probable, (c) the Gospel accidentally lost its last leaf before it was multiplied by transcription." Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 126 n. 7.

on account of these primary facts alone without additional cause and the lack of adequate explanation for the appearance of the LE that textual scholars confidently maintain that verses 9-20 are not original to the Gospel of Mark. Modern critical Greek texts, though, continue to include the passage out of deference for the antiquity of the passage and the familiarity with which Christians have come to know it. However, they enclose it in double square brackets to indicate that it was not original to the Gospel but were the work of a later hand.

Books upon books have been written discussing and debating the ending of Mark, but the evidence stands and scholars have identified the error in the LE of Mark 16 but acceptance is often met with tension and resistance. Too many people like the traditional ending with the resurrection appearance of Jesus and they are not sure what to think if it is not there. Thankfully, tradition does not dictate what is true.

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CHRISTIAN ARTWORK DEPICTING THE WOMEN AT JESUS' TOMB IN MARK'S GOSPEL



“The Finding of the Empty Tomb of Christ” (1889) by Antonio Brilla, Sacro Monte di Crea, Monferrato.



A stained-glass window depicting three women at the tomb of Jesus, () St. Peter Church, Albany, NY.



“Holy Women at the Tomb” (c. 1590) by Annibale Caracci, Hermitage, St. Petersburg.



“The Holy Women at the Tomb” (1890) by William-Adolphe Bouguereau, private collection.



“The Women at the Tomb” (c. 1860-66) by Bernhard Plockhorst,



“Three Marys at the Tomb of Christ” (c. 1835) by Ludwig Ferdinand Schnorr von Carolsfeld, Georgetown University Art Collection, Georgetown.



“The Three Marys at the Tomb” (c. 1815-22) by Peter von Cornelius, Neue Pinakothek, Munich.



“The Empty Tomb” (1795) by Robert Smirke illustration from The Bowyer Bible #4547, Bolton Museum, Bolton.



“The Two Marys at the Tomb” (1613) by Bartolomeo Schedoni, Galleria Nazionale de Parma, Parma.



“The Three Marys at the Tomb” (c. 1311) by Duccio, Museo dell’Opera del Duomo, Florence.



“The Holy Myrrh Bearers” icon at St. Elias Orthodox Church, Austin.



“An Angel Greet the Three Women at the Empty Tomb” (1921) stained glass in Church of St. Marcella, Denbigh.