

IS MARK 16:9-20 PART OF THE MARCAN AUTOGRAPH?

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Mark 16:9-20 is perhaps the most well-known problem in NT textual criticism. Lincoln says, “The questions that surround the ending of Mark’s Gospel have long held a fascination for its readers.”¹ Robinson asserts that the passage “is a flash-point in NT criticism.”² Magness states the present situation well:

Books and articles written in the last quarter of the twentieth century still grapple with various aspects of the problem. Over a millennium and a half, through changing theological perspectives and hermeneutical approaches, from the pens of ancient Alexandrian allegorists and modern French structuralists, discussion of the shortened ending of the shortest gospel persists.³

There are actually three disputed endings of Mark, not including omission. A shorter ending, dating to the seventh century, is not regarded as part of Mark. Metzger affirms, “The internal evidence for the shorter ending is decidedly against its being genuine.”⁴ A fourth-century expansion of the long ending is preserved only in one manuscript (Codex Washingtonianus) and “has no claim to be original.”⁵

This leaves only two realistic options: either include the long ending, or omit it entirely. Thomas succinctly states the dilemma for some conservative scholars:

However, one passage, the last chapter of Mark, causes more puzzlement and consternation among conservatives than most of the other passages of the Greek NT that contain variant readings. Not only is the legitimacy of a traditional reading questioned (16:9-20), but the prospects of Mark ending his gospel at 16:8 are simply too problematic for most scholars.⁶

¹Andrew T. Lincoln, “The Promise and the Failure: Mark 16:7, 8,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108/2 (1989), 283.

²Maurice A. Robinson, “The Long Ending of Mark as Canonical Verity,” in *Perspectives on the Ending of Mark*, ed. David Alan Black (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2008), 40.

³J. Lee Magness, *Sense and Absence: Structure and Suspension in the Ending of Mark’s Gospel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 2.

⁴Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, corrected (London: UBS, 1975), 125.

⁵*Ibid.*, 124.

⁶John Christopher Thomas, “A Reconsideration of the Ending of Mark,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 26/4 (December 1983), 407.

While Thomas overstates the *angst* among conservatives, he is right in pointing out the problem. For approximately 1600 years, the long ending of Mark was not questioned. However, with the rise of textual criticism and the discovery of ancient NT manuscripts in the nineteenth century, verses 9-20 came under scrutiny, leading in 1920 to Gregory's assertion: "Mark 16.9-20 is neither part nor parcel of that Gospel."⁷ While this was the consensus of scholarship for most of the twentieth century, in recent years some have reopened the issue.

It shall be the purpose of this paper to examine the question of whether Mark 16:9-20 was part of the Marcan autograph. The evidence for omission of the passage will be presented. External evidence must be scrutinized. The evidence for inclusion of the passage will be presented. Similarly, external evidence (manuscripts, versions, early Christian witnesses) will be shown. The internal evidence will also be brought forth. Some possible solutions to the problem must be examined, and a tentative conclusion will be drawn. Gideon's comments serve as an appropriate starting point for the study:

The average contemporary student is no longer satisfied with the traditional explanations concerning the reliability of Mark 16:9-20. He usually permits little room for critical studies, seemingly feeling that the New Testament is not to be subjected to modern critical studies. He searches for "pat" answers to "pet" questions. Therefore, world renowned New Testament scholars have been forced by positions of their colleagues who advocate the veracity of these verses to reinvestigate a question formerly believed conclusively settled.⁸

Leaving aside the matter of Gideon's apparent elitist attitude, he nevertheless stumbles upon an important point. The Bible scholar should examine all of the evidence and draw his conclusions from it. In this case, there is much to consider.

⁷C. R. Gregory, *The Canon and Text of the New Testament* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1920), 227.

⁸Virtus E. Gideon, "The Longer Ending of Mark in Recent Study," in *New Testament Studies: Essays in Honor of Ray Summers* (Waco, TX: Baylor Univ. Press, 1975), 3.

Evidence Against Mark 16:9-20

External Evidence

Manuscripts

Juel raises an intriguing point: “Until the great Alexandrian codices were known, few paid attention to the scattered references to a Gospel of Mark that lacked a proper conclusion.”⁹ It was far easier to defend the inclusion of the passage without such evidence. However, the discovery of the Alexandrian codices changed the landscape.

Two prominent uncial manuscripts do not include the long ending. Codex Vaticanus (B) dates to the fourth century, and “is the most important witness to the Alexandrian text.”¹⁰ Codex Sinaiticus (Aleph) also dates to the fourth century, and “is one of the principal witnesses to the Alexandrian texttype.”¹¹ Additionally, a twelfth century minuscule manuscript, 304, also omits the passage.¹²

One other twelfth century manuscript, 2386, was assumed to have omitted the text and was so indicated in earlier editions of the UBS Greek text; but, as Metzger states, it “is only an apparent witness for this omission.”¹³ This will be further explained below. It speaks to the weight given B and Aleph that the majority of critical editions of the Greek New Testament, as well as many modern English translations, end at verse eight.¹⁴ France even says that this “is the virtually unanimous verdict” of modern scholarship.¹⁵

⁹Donald Harrisville Juel, “A Disquieting Silence: The Matter of the Ending,” in *The Ending of Mark and the Ends of God*, ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa & Patrick D. Miller (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 1.

¹⁰Daniel B. Wallace, “Mark 16:8 as the Conclusion to the Second Gospel,” in *Perspectives on the Ending of Mark*, ed. David Alan Black (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2008), 14.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²J. K. Elliott, *The Language and Style of the Gospel of Mark* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 204.

¹³Metzger, *A Textual*, 122f.

¹⁴Elliott, “The Last Twelve Verses of Mark: Original or Not?” in *Perspectives on the Ending of Mark*, ed. David Alan Black (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2008), 82.

¹⁵R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 685.

Versions

The Latin manuscript Bobbiensis (k) does not include verses 9-20. Elliott affirms that this version “is textually the oldest witness to the Latin Bible, with a text going back to the early third century.”¹⁶ That being said, it must be noted that this version includes a short ending which is not accepted as genuine: “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.”¹⁷

The Sinaitic Syriac version, which dates to the third/fourth century,¹⁸ also omits the passage. The Sahidic Coptic version dates from the third century;¹⁹ it does not include verses 9-20.²⁰ Most Armenian manuscripts omit the passage; these manuscripts date from the fifth century.²¹ “Some 99 of the 220 registered Armenian MSS lack the verses.”²²

It was assumed at one time that a number of manuscripts from the Ethiopic version omit the passage.²³ This version, now in the British Museum, dates to about 500 A. D.²⁴ However, Metzger states otherwise:

This statement, made originally by D. S. Margoliouth and reported by William Sanday in his *Appendices ad Novum Testamentum Stephanicum* (Oxford, 1889), p. 195, is erroneous²⁵...The present writer, having examined the ending of Mark in sixty-five Ethiopic manuscripts, discovered that none, contrary to the statements made by previous investigators, close the Gospel at xvi.8, but that most (forty-seven

¹⁶Elliott, “The Last Twelve Verses,” 86.

¹⁷Thomas, “A Reconsideration,” 407.

¹⁸Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, & Bruce M. Metzger, eds. *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Rev. Ed. (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft: United Bible Societies, 2001), 27*.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 28*.

²⁰Elliott, *The Language and Style*, 204.

²¹Aland et al., *The Greek*, 28*.

²²Metzger, 122.

²³Elliott, *The Language and Style*, 204.

²⁴Aland et al., 29*.

²⁵Metzger, 123f.

manuscripts) present the so-called shorter ending directly after vs.8, followed immediately by the longer ending (verses 9-20).²⁶

The fifth-century Georgian manuscripts do not include verses 9-20.²⁷ It is evident that, based on the manuscript and version evidence alone, a case can be made for the exclusion of the passage. On the other hand, plausible explanations have been given for the exclusion of the passage in the manuscripts from the Marcan text—which will be examined below.

Patristic Evidence

At first glance, the patristic evidence seems decisive. Clement of Alexandria, dated before 215 A. D.,²⁸ is silent about the long ending. Origen, who is dated c.253/254 A. D.,²⁹ also shows “no knowledge of the existence of these verses.”³⁰ Eusebius of Caesarea, dated 339 A. D.,³¹ is explicit:

This can be solved in two ways. The person not wishing to accept [these verses] will say that it is not contained in all copies of the Gospel according to Mark. Indeed the accurate copies conclude the story according to Mark in the words...they were afraid. For the end is here in nearly all the copies of Mark.³²

To this, Metzger adds: “The original form of the Eusebian sections (drawn up by Ammonius) makes no provision for numbering sections of the text after 16.8.”³³ Jerome, dated 419/420 A. D., notes that the long ending is found in “scarcely any copies of the Gospel—almost all the Greek codices being without this passage.”³⁴

²⁶Metzger, “The Ending of the Gospel according to Mark in Ethiopic Manuscripts,” in *Understanding the Sacred Text*, ed. John Reumann et al. (Valley Forge, Pa: 1972).

²⁷Elliott, *the Language and Style*, 204.

²⁸Aland et al., 33*.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 123.

³¹Aland et al., 33*.

³²Eusebius, *Quaestiones Ad Marinum*, 1.

³³Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 123.

³⁴Jerome, *Epistola* 120.

Thus it would seem that the patristic evidence conclusively points away from acceptance of the long ending. However, as will be shown below, there are witnesses—much earlier than both Eusebius and Jerome—who attest otherwise. Additionally, the argument from silence as per Clement and Origen is not strong. Parker, who favors ending the Gospel at verse eight, admits: “Those who wish to argue for the originality of the Long Ending point to the weakness of this argument, and not unreasonably. It cannot be argued that the Long Ending was unknown to or rejected by Clement and Origen.”³⁵

Miller demonstrates how the argument from silence falls short:

Of course, simply showing no knowledge is no proof for omission. If we were to discount as genuine every New Testament verse that a particular patristic writer failed to reference, we would eventually dismiss the entire New Testament as spurious. Though virtually the entire New Testament is quoted or alluded to by the corpus of patristic writers—*no one writer refers to every verse*.³⁶

As to Jerome, the quotation above is his translation of Eusebius’ statement from Greek into Latin. Though Wallace argues that it reflects Jerome’s own opinion,³⁷ this must be discounted—since Jerome included verses 9-20 in the Vulgate, while excluding others that did not have sufficient manuscript verification. Later, Jerome quoted approvingly from the Long Ending.³⁸

Miller makes an interesting point concerning Eusebius:

(I)t should be noted that the statement made by Eusebius occurs in a context in which he was offering two possible solutions to an alleged contradiction (between Matthew 28:1 and Mark 16:9) posed by a Marinus. One of the solutions would be to dismiss Mark’s words on the grounds that it is not contained in all texts. But Eusebius does not claim to share this solution. The second solution he offers entails retaining Mark 16:9 as

³⁵David Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 136-37; however, Parker goes on to argue, “neither can silence indicate that the Short Ending was unknown.”

³⁶Dave Miller, “Is Mark 16:9-20 Inspired?” *Reason & Revelation* 25/12 (Dec. 2005), 91.

³⁷Wallace, “Mark 16:8,” 22.

³⁸Jerome, *Against the Pelagians*, II.15.

genuine. The fact that he couches the first solution in the third person (i.e., “This, then, is what a person will say...”), and then proceeds to offer a second solution, when he could have simply dismissed the alleged contradiction on the grounds that manuscript evidence was decisively against the genuineness of the verses, argues for Eusebius’ own approval.³⁹

While many scholars would take issue with Miller’s assertions, he nevertheless makes some valid points based on the evidence from Eusebius’ writings. Indeed, Wallace—in arguing for the validity of using Jerome against verses 9-20—relies on speculation as to why Jerome included the verses in the Vulgate.⁴⁰ As it is, the patristic evidence is not as conclusive as has been presented by some.

Revisiting the Manuscripts

As noted above, the manuscript evidence seems to be a strong witness against inclusion of verses 9-20. Both Vaticanus (B) and Aleph end Mark’s Gospel at verse eight. A natural assumption would be: if the long ending were original with Mark, then no compelling reason exists for its removal from the manuscripts. Leaving aside for the moment the issue of whether there are any manuscripts that include the passage, there are other factors that must be considered. Westcott & Hort describe an interesting discovery in connection with Vaticanus:

In B, the scribe, after ending the Gospel with v. 8 in the second column of a page, has contrary to his custom left the third or remaining column blank; evidently because one or other of the two subsequent endings was known to him personally... The omitted words... were in existence... when the extant MS was written, and were known to its scribe.⁴¹

³⁹Miller, “Is Mark 16:9-20,” 91.

⁴⁰Wallace, 23.

⁴¹Brooke F. Westcott & Fenton John Anthony Hort, *Introduction to the New Testament in the Original Greek: With Notes on Selected Readings* (repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 29-30. Hort goes on to claim that neither of the longer endings were in the extant manuscript the scribe was copying—an assumption that may or may not be correct. Nevertheless, it is curious that the blank space in Vaticanus is nowhere mentioned by Metzger in his *Textual Commentary*, nor by Metzger & Bart Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 322-27.

Wallace points out that on three other occasions, Vaticanus leaves spaces at the end of books.⁴² However, this is misleading. Two of those examples are Apocryphal books—Tobit and 2 Esdras—and the third, Daniel, has no known textual questions at its end. Additionally, there is no other example of such in the NT portion of the manuscript.⁴³

Wallace goes on to claim that the scribe of Vaticanus engaged in ancient textual criticism, by inserting umlauts in the margin of a text where a variant reading occurs. Since there is no such marking at the end of Mark, he concludes that the scribe knew only verse eight as the end.⁴⁴ However, he even admits that the implications of the umlauts “have yet to be fully explored,” and the reason for the variants “not entirely clear.”⁴⁵ Such arguments are less than compelling. That being said, it must be noted that the space Vaticanus leaves at the end of Mark is not quite large enough to accommodate verses 9-20. Robinson suggests that this could be due to a miscalculation of space by the scribe.⁴⁶ At any rate, the blank space raises more questions than those favoring the shorter ending seem to acknowledge. Thomas may be correct: “The scribe therefore allowed the future owner of the MS the opportunity to make any modification deemed necessary.”⁴⁷

With regard to Manuscript 2386, Metzger makes an interesting admission:

(A)lthough the last page of Mark closes with *ephobounto gar*, the next leaf of the manuscript is missing, and following 16.8 is the sign indicating the close of an ecclesiastical lection, a clear implication that the manuscript originally continued with additional material from Mark.⁴⁸

⁴²Wallace, 17.

⁴³Miller, 92.

⁴⁴Ibid., 18.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Robinson, “The Long Ending,” 52 f44.

⁴⁷Thomas, 409. Thomas goes on to apparently suggest just the opposite later in the article, 418.

⁴⁸Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 122. Given this statement, one is left to wonder why Metzger did not acknowledge the space at the end of Mark in Vaticanus. Perhaps later editions of his work will correct the omission.

Evidence For Mark 16:9-20

External Evidence

Manuscripts

If one were to only consider the number of manuscripts, then there would be no question concerning verses 9-20. Elliott affirms, “Only two early Greek MSS and one other, medieval, Greek MS...end Mark at 16:8.”⁴⁹ Interestingly, Elliott suggests the following concerning scribal evidence in connection with the aforementioned manuscripts (B & Aleph):

...(W)e are dealing with two MSS from the same scriptorium...Some have argued that this means we are concerned effectively with only one MS witness to the text of Mark ending at 16:8 rather than with two independent early Greek manuscripts.

The number of manuscripts including verses 9-20 is huge. Holmes states, “This long form is found in more than 1,600 Greek manuscripts.”⁵⁰ Metzger is just as direct: “The traditional ending of Mark...is present in the vast number of witnesses.”⁵¹ Aland makes an interesting admission:

It is true that the longer ending of Mark 16:9-20 is found in 99 percent of the Greek manuscripts as well as the rest of the tradition, enjoying over a period of centuries practically an official ecclesiastical sanction as a genuine part of the gospel of Mark.⁵²

The passage is found in one of the three earliest uncial manuscripts—Codex Alexandrinus (A), which dates to the fifth century.⁵³ Two other uncials include the passage: Codices Ephraemi Rescriptus and Bezae Cantabrigiensis, both of which also

⁴⁹Elliott, “The Last Twelve Verses,” 82.

⁵⁰Michael W. Holmes, “To Be Continued...The Many Endings of the Gospel of Mark,” *Bible Review* 17/4 (August 2001), 19.

⁵¹Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 124.

⁵²Kurt Aland & Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 287.

⁵³Aland et al, *The Greek New Testament*, 10*.

date to the fifth century (some date Bezae to the sixth century).⁵⁴ Wallace says that verses 9-20 “is found in all the major texttypes—Western, Caesarean, Byzantine, and even the secondary Alexandrian. Thus, there is a broad geographical spread for these verses.”⁵⁵

Versions

The Old Latin version has several manuscripts which contain verses 9-20. These date from the fifth through the seventh centuries.⁵⁶ As has been shown, Jerome included the passage in the Vulgate, which dates to the fourth and fifth centuries.⁵⁷ In spite of his apparent early reservations, he accepted the passage as genuine.

Verses 9-20 are also found in the Bohairic and Fayyumic manuscripts of the Coptic version. These manuscripts date to the third century.⁵⁸ To this may be added the Armenian version, which dates to the fifth century.⁵⁹

Among the Old Syriac, the Curetonian manuscript contains verses 9-20. The Curetonian dates to the third and fourth centuries.⁶⁰ The Peshitta manuscript, which dates to the first half of the fifth century,⁶¹ includes the passage—as does the sixth century Palestinian.⁶² Many other versions, covering a wide geographical area, have verses 9-20 as part of Mark. After listing the versions above, Farmer asserts,

It is clear that the acceptance of the last twelve verses of Mark was widespread. Throughout the ancient church...the evidence for knowledge and acceptance of the authenticity of the last twelve verses of Mark in the ancient church is impressive.⁶³

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Wallace, 10.

⁵⁶Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, 25*.

⁵⁷Ibid., 27*.

⁵⁸Ibid., 28*.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid., 27*.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid., 28*.

⁶³William R. Farmer, *the Last Twelve Verses of Mark* (London: Cambridge, 1974), 34.

Patristic Evidence

The patristic witness to the genuineness of verses 9-20 is extensive, and predates both the manuscript evidence and the testimony of Eusebius and Jerome. To this, Robinson makes an important point:

Most discussions concerning the patristic evidence relative to the Markan ending focus on the speculations of the fourth and later centuries... Yet the opinions of later patristic writers should not negate earlier patristic testimony that supports LE inclusion... Under almost any circumstances, these citations should outweigh patristic speculations of some two centuries later.⁶⁴

Justin Martyr, who dates to about 165,⁶⁵ demonstrates a familiarity with the passage. As Metzger points out, “he includes five words that occur, in a different sequence, in ver. 20.”⁶⁶ Robinson focuses on the phrase *exelthontes pantachou ekeruxan* (“having gone forth, preached everywhere”). He says that this “three-word combination appears *only* in Mark 16:20... The collocation of these three terms occurs nowhere else in the NT or Septuagint.”⁶⁷ The only difference between Justin’s citation and that found in 16:20 is the swapping of the order of the last two words. Hengel states that “Justin uses no other written sources for the Gospel material which he includes than the Canonical Gospels.”⁶⁸ It is difficult to imagine where else Justin would have gotten the quote. This would indicate that Justin knew of the passage around 150,⁶⁹ which is a quite early date for knowledge of the verses. There is no question that Tatian quoted from the passage. A disciple of Justin, his *Diatesseron* dates toward the middle of the second century.⁷⁰

⁶⁴Robinson, 46.

⁶⁵Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, 34*.

⁶⁶Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 124.

⁶⁷Robinson, 46-47.

⁶⁸Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Collection and Origin of the Canonical Gospels* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000), 225n109.

⁶⁹Farmer, *The Last Twelve Verses*, 31.

⁷⁰Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, 34*.

Irenaeus also dates toward the middle of the second century. In his *Against Heresies*, he alludes to verses 9-20 in both Greek and Latin:

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.”⁷¹

Westcott & Hort accepted this quotation by Irenaeus as genuine.⁷² In light of the patristic evidence, Kelhoffer—who does not accept Marcan authorship of verses 9-20—concedes that it dates at least to the early decades of the second century.⁷³

The chart below summarizes the external evidence:⁷⁴

ORIGINAL NEW TESTAMENT DOCUMENTS			
Century	Greek Manuscripts	Ancient Versions	Patristic Writers
2nd		Curetonian Syriac Sinaitic Syriac	Irenaeus Justin Martyr? Tatian/Diatessaron
3rd		Coptic–Sahidic	Tertullian Cyprian Gospel of Nicodemus <i>De Rebaptismate</i>
4th	Vaticanus Sinaiticus	Vulgate Coptic–Bohairic Coptic–Fayyumic Gothic Armenian	Aphraates Ambrose Didymus Apostolic Constitutions Asterius? Eusebius?
5th	Alexandrinus Ephraemi Rescriptus Washington	Palestinian Syriac Peshitta Syriac Old Latin–Bezae Old Latin–Corbeiensis II Old Latin–Sangallensis	Jerome Chrysostom Leo Severian Marcus-Eremita Nestorius Augustine
6th	Bezae Cantabrigiensis	Syriac Harclean	

Blue = Contains or quotes from Mark 16:9-20

Red = Does not contain Mark 16:9-20

[NOTE: Dates are taken from the UBS Greek text critical apparatus.]

⁷¹Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3:10:5, <<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/augustine/arch/irenaeus/advhaer3.txt>>

⁷²Westcott & Hort, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 39.

⁷³James A. Kelhoffer, *Miracle and Mission: The Authentication of Missionaries and Their Message in the Longer Ending of Mark* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 175.

⁷⁴Miller, 93.

Internal Evidence

While scholars admit that verses 9-20 are ancient and were widely accepted for centuries, they nevertheless point to internal evidence that points away from the passage being part of the autograph. When combined with the external evidence that does not include verses 9-20, it seems decisive. Common is the claim made by Metzger: “The longer ending, though current in a variety of witnesses, some of them ancient, must also be judged by internal evidence to be secondary.”⁷⁵

Vocabulary and Style

Elliott has pointed out twenty-seven words and phrases which are not found anywhere else in Mark—and, in some instances, the rest of the New Testament.⁷⁶ Additionally, the transition between verse eight and verses 9-20 is deemed to be awkward. Finally, Mary Magdalene is identified in verse nine, although she was mentioned already in verse one.

All of this seems to be decisive; Kelhoffer argues that the author of the passage was familiar with all four Gospels and deliberately crafted verses 9-20 to harmonize with them.⁷⁷ Metzger flatly states, “the vocabulary and style of verses 9-20 are non-Markan.”⁷⁸ Elliott is just as emphatic. After showing how many of the words and phrases occur more than once, he declares: “It is self-deceiving to pretend that the linguistic features are still ‘open.’”⁷⁹

⁷⁵Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 125.

⁷⁶Elliott, *The Language and Style*, 206-11.

⁷⁷Kelhoffer, *Miracle and Mission*, 121.

⁷⁸Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 125.

⁷⁹Elliott, “The Last Twelve Verses,” 89. It is curious that a scholar of Elliott’s stature would attempt to cut off debate in such a fashion.

Yet, is it? Terry examined verses 9-20 in light of the claims made on the basis of “non-Markan words,” and made an interesting find:

But in spite of the fact that the presence of several of these words is explainable, it still remains that there are sixteen words which are used only in these twelve verses in Mark. Nothing can be inferred about the genuineness of this section of Mark from the presence of any one of these words; rather, it is the large number of them which calls the style of the passage into question. However, looking at the twelve verses of Mark 15:40-16:4, one finds not just sixteen such words, but twenty to twenty-two, depending on textual variants. This shows that the author knew quite well how to use in a brief passage many new words which he had not previously used.⁸⁰

Much of what is asserted concerning against verses 9-20 from alleged “non-Markan” words and phrases is overstated. “Far too many problems arise from excessive claims regarding vocabulary and style involving a limited portion of text.”⁸¹

Concerning the transition between verse eight and verses 9-20, Terry again examined the textual evidence carefully:

There are at least five other verses in Mark which meet the following conditions: (1) the verse must begin a new section; (2) Jesus must be the presumed subject (referred to only as “he”); (3) the previous verse must not refer to Jesus; (4) the previous verse must have a subject other than Jesus; and (5) the subject of the previous verse must not be mentioned in the new section. Mark 2:13; 6:45; 7:31; 8:1; and 14:3 all meet these conditions.⁸²

⁸⁰Bruce Terry, “The Style Of The Long Ending Of Mark,” 11pp. <<http://matthew.ovc.edu/terry/articles/mkendsty.htm>>, 1996. Interestingly, Wallace acknowledges Terry’s work with begrudging praise: “Although Terry makes a decent case, unfortunately he interacts with virtually no one, but simply speaks of the arguments against the LE. This allows him to not examine in detail what these arguments really are, keeping them almost at the level of hearsay.” Wallace, 30 f82. Wallace also goes “over the top” in asserting twice, “there is not a *single* passage in Mark 1:1—16:8 comparable to the stylistic, grammatical, and lexical anomalies that we find clustered in vv. 9—20.” Wallace, 30. In the footnote to this statement, he writes: “In particular, Terry’s treatment of the cumulative argument is weak, even though he is able to show quite successfully that many of the anomalies in 16:9—20 can be found scattered throughout the rest of Mark.” Wallace, 30 f84. To say that this is contradictory is an understatement. How could Terry make a “decent case” and be successful when, according to Wallace, he is wrong?

⁸¹Robinson, 62.

⁸²Terry, “The Style.”

With regards to the mention of Mary Magdalene, Terry points out that this is a kind of “flashback” that gives additional information about her. Far from being a peculiarity, this same kind of construction is found four times elsewhere in Mark.⁸³ One tends to agree with Robinson: “Style and vocabulary remain ephemeral, particularly when dealing with a limited portion of text and matters involving the Synoptic Problem.”⁸⁴

The Abrupt Ending

Verse eight ends on a note of fear; the final phrase is *ephobounto gar* (“for they were afraid”). This raises the question as to why Mark would end the gospel so abruptly, if verses 9-20 are not to be considered as the ending. In attempting to answer, several possibilities have been suggested.

The first suggestion is that the original ending of Mark’s gospel may have been lost or destroyed. Until recent years, this was the most widely held position by scholars.⁸⁵ Westcott & Hort, who believed the original ending was lost, considered the possibility that Mark intended to end the gospel at 16:8 “untenable.”⁸⁶ The problem with this supposition is that if the ending was not verses 9-20 and they were indeed either lost or destroyed, then those verses have been missing for 2,000 years—which impugns the whole process of the preservation of Scripture. If, however, verses 9-20 constitute the ending, then it is more easily explainable—especially in light of the aforementioned patristic testimony, and the manuscripts that leave a blank space at the end of Mark.

⁸³Terry, “The Style.”

⁸⁴Robinson, 62.

⁸⁵See N. Clayton Croy, *The Mutilation of Mark’s Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), for a recent defense of this view.

⁸⁶Westcott & Hort, 51. To this, Metzger agrees: “It appears, therefore, that *ephobounto gar* of Mark xvi.8 does not represent what Mark intended to stand at the end of his Gospel.” Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford, 1978 rep.), 228.

A growing opinion among scholars seems to be that Mark indeed intended to end his Gospel at verse eight. Juel is one of the most prominent advocates for this position; utilizing narrative criticism, he argues that Mark used great literary subtlety in ending at verse eight.⁸⁷ Magness picks up on this and argues that Mark was utilizing a literary convention known in his day: the suspended ending. Magness says that it “causes a complex impact on readers which runs far deeper than simple rejection or acceptance and reaches beyond the simple process of identifying with this or that character.”⁸⁸ Iverson, building on the work of van der Horst, demonstrates that there were several classical works contemporary with Mark which ended with final *gar*.⁸⁹ That being said, Iverson admits that such occurrences are “sparse.”⁹⁰

While some scholars are enamored with this view, by far not all are convinced. Elliott asserts, “If Mark was subtly leaving his Gospel with a cliff-hanging ending...then that subtlety was lost on his immediate followers and into the next century.”⁹¹ Given the fact that Elliott favors ending the Gospel at verse eight, his pointed criticism of these theories is telling. That being said, it does seem that many scholars are becoming enamored with these explanations. It is strange that scholars who call for biblical interpretations which stay in the context of ancient times would accept such a late-twentieth century Western grid to be placed over Scripture.

⁸⁷Juel, “A Disquieting Silence,” 4-12; also *A Master of Surprise: Mark Interpreted* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 107-21, and *The Gospel of Mark* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 167-76.

⁸⁸Magness, *Sense and Absence*, 124.

⁸⁹Kelly R. Iverson, “A Further Word on Final Γαπ (Mark 16:8),” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 68 (2006), 81-87; P. W. van der Horst, “Can a Book End with a ΓΑΠ? A Note on Mark XVI.8,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 23 (1972), 121-24, esp. 123; Musonius Rufus, *Twelfth Tractate* (concludes with γάρ).

⁹⁰Iverson, 87.

⁹¹Elliott, “The Last Twelve Verses,” 93.

Indeed, one wonders how ancient readers of Mark's Gospel could have anticipated modern-day literary critics, steeped in "Kafka-like existentialism and a reader-response hermeneutic."⁹² This points away from a first-century perspective. As Elliott affirms, the view that Mark was reluctant to add the post-resurrection appearances is "odd."⁹³

Conclusion

When all of the evidence is considered, certain points become clear. Mark 16:9-20 is an ancient text, at the very least. The patristic evidence alone suggests that it was known and in circulation by the middle of the second century, if not earlier.⁹⁴ While two of the three oldest uncial manuscripts do not contain the passage, one of them (Vaticanus) has a space at the end of Mark—at least calling into question whether the manuscript originally contained an ending past verse eight. The sheer number of manuscripts and versions containing the passage, some dating to the third and fourth century, ought to give one pause before omitting it. As Robinson states,

Were the LE not absent from codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, the few manuscripts that contain both the Long and Intermediate Endings, and the limited adverse versional and patristic testimony would not be sufficient to maintain the controversy.⁹⁵

The internal evidence against inclusion of the passage is not as compelling as it seems. Several have demonstrated that Mark uses words and phrases in his Gospel apart from verses 9-20 which are not found elsewhere. The argument that the concentration of

⁹²Robert Stein, as quoted in Wallace, 33. For examples of the various theories, see John Dart, "Unfinished Gospel?" *The Christian Century* 123/8 (April 18, 2006), 28; J. David Hester (no relation), "Dramatic Inconclusion: Irony and the Narrative Rhetoric of the Ending of Mark," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 57 (1995), 62; Marie Sabin, "Women Transformed: The Ending of Mark Is the Beginning of Wisdom," *Cross Currents* 48/2 (Summer 1998), 166.

⁹³Elliott, "The Last Twelve Verses," 94.

⁹⁴Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1970), 79.

⁹⁵Robinson, 45.

such in verses 9-20 is decisive proof that Mark could not have written it is dubious. If Mark wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, then it is quite possible for him to have used other words and phrases that he did not use previously. Arguments to the contrary notwithstanding, it is improbable that Mark would have concluded his Gospel without any post-resurrection appearances. With all of these factors taken into consideration, verses 9-20 belong at the end of Mark's Gospel.

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