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Over the centuries, scholars and theologians have debated the credibility, canonicity, and accuracy of several passages of the modern day Bible. Logical and fallacious arguments have mingled with biased and opinionated estimation to form a muddled view on things. The 16th chapter of Mark contains 12 key verses that have been the subject of much of this kind of dispute. But why is there so much debate? And what should we as modern Christians think about this issue? How does it affect us?

To put the problem simply, certain Bible translators have excluded Mark 16:9-20 from their copies of Scripture because several of the original Greek manuscripts, including some of the oldest texts, do not contain these verses. However, the *majority* of manuscripts do indeed contain these verses. Translators differ because some are in favor of the majority, while others prefer the accuracy of an older document. The age old quality versus quantity debate is re-opened in this discussion, and it is a crucial turning point in deciding the fate of these 12 verses.

The *Commentary on the Holy Bible* explains part of the hesitancy surrounding style, vocabulary, and phraseology. It says “Internal evidence points definitely to the conclusion that the last twelve verses are not by St. Mark…The style is that of a bare catalogue of facts, and quite unlike St. Mark's usual wealth of graphic detail. The section contains numerous words and expressions never used by St. Mark. Mark 16:9 makes an abrupt fresh start, and is not continuous with the preceding narrative.[[1]](#footnote-1)”

If you look at Mark’s description of the burial of Christ[[2]](#footnote-2) you will find it much more detailed than the description given by other gospels. This is the case for most of Mark – he uses lots of detail to paint a memorable picture of the scene. But this is not the case in these few debated verses. Mark describes ‘The Road to Emmaus’ in only 2, simple, un-detailed verses, while Luke chronicles the event in much more detail.[[3]](#footnote-3)

These verses have been called a later addition by many for several reasons, including this lack of Mark’s traditional detail. Also, as noted above, several Greek words and phrases are used for the first time in Mark; they are not his usual choice of wordage. Such phrases include “After that” in verse 12 (KJV); the Greek word  in verse 16, which is translated “He who does not believe” (KJV); and the passive “see,” translated “had been seen” in verse 11. These seemingly innocent words may seem normal on the outside, but every author uses his pre-defined though often invisible set of vocabulary.

On the other hand, the debated verses do still follow Mark’s usual pattern of verb tense; that is, most of the verbs follow the *aorist[[4]](#footnote-4)* tense, with present tense verbs intermingled. The extended verses fit this pattern, too, for Mark also uses short bursts of future tense verbs, which is also included here in verses 17 to 19. The Greek New Testament nearly always uses the aorist tenses, but Mark is the main gospel that uses the present tense like this.

But while style is important, it is not everything. Perhaps Mark intended a different style to conclude his gospel. More important is the question: how historically accurate is this ending?

Beginning in verses 9-11, we see the verses backed by John 20:11-18, and Luke 8:2. Verses 12-13 are supported by Luke 24:13-35. Luke 24:36-53 partially lines up with verses 14-20; it supports the meal, Christ’s rebuke, the command for gospel proclamation, and ascension. And while the signs mentioned in vs. 17-18 are not present in any other gospel, they *are* fulfilled in Acts, for example Acts 28:3-6.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Whether or not these additional verses are actually written by Mark or not, they at least are historically accurate, and match up to the rest of scripture. However, this does not prove that the verses are part of Mark’s original writing. Two of the oldest manuscripts of Scripture, the Codex Sinaiticus and the Codex Vaticanus, both Alexandrian manuscripts from the 4th century, do *not* contain these verses from Mark. However, the Codex Alexandrinus, the Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis, and the Ephraemi Rescriptus Manuscripts are all from roughly the 5th Century, and *do* contain the verses. So while the oldest manuscripts and a handful of other documents don’t contain the verses, three nearly as old manuscripts and more than 14 other writings *do* contain it[[6]](#footnote-6). Interestingly enough, the Sinaiticus actually leaves a large space between Mark and Luke, possibly because the writer knew of the missing verses.[[7]](#footnote-7)

But what does it all matter? Why do scholars make a fuss? There is no huge theological statement that would be proven true or false by the extended verses; all the events or themes are backed by the other gospels. The phrase “whoever believes and is baptized will be saved” *could* be questioned by overcautious examiners, but it is easily resolved when considered in light of sanctification.

The real problem lies in this one fact: that the Bible is God’s holy, inspired Word, and cannot be added to[[8]](#footnote-8). If these verses really are part of Mark, they likely[[9]](#footnote-9) are part of the Canon as well. Suffice it to say, determining if these verses are inspired is important, so the debate continues.

So what are we to think of the opinions presented? With most scholars, this ‘internal evidence[[10]](#footnote-10)’ is enough to convince them, just as the difference of Hebrews from other epistles convinces them Paul was not the author. This is probably the biggest reason for denying the authenticity of the verses, but it faces a multitude of manuscripts that say otherwise. The question is, who should we believe?

Even though the style, the abrupt change from verse 8, and the unusual Greek words would point away from Mark as the author, it is definitely a possibility that Mark drastically changed his style on purpose to focus on the ending. Also, the ‘fresh start[[11]](#footnote-11)’ is not entirely strange; there are similar occurrences elsewhere in Mark[[12]](#footnote-12).

As to the manuscripts, it seems likely that one or more of several things happened.

The first possibility is that the verses were written by Mark along with the original manuscript with a focus on emphasizing the ending, but they were lost somewhere between the first century A.D., the time of the writing, and the fifth century, when they reappeared in manuscripts. This seems quite likely, as several manuscripts suddenly include it, signifying the discovery of some document. However this could apply to the next possibility as well. And the way the Greek manuscripts were bound, it would have been easy for the last page to slip out or be damaged[[13]](#footnote-13), especially if the document was in codex form.

The second possibility is that the verses were written by someone else, anywhere from the first century to the fifth; and were discovered in the fifth century, thought to be Mark’s, and placed in the Codex Alexandrinus, the Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis, and the Ephraemi Rescriptus Manuscripts. Considering Mark is thought to have been, in a loose sense, writing for Peter, it is possible that Peter himself, before his death, wrote this ending[[14]](#footnote-14). It is not really possible for Mark to have written a second ending later, for his death and the writing of the gospel nearly coincide.

Another possibility is that Mark died before he could finish the manuscript, as his death occurs around the same time as the writing of his gospel[[15]](#footnote-15), thus leaving his gospel unfinished. This seems unlikely in light of the sudden stop in vs. 8, and is backed by the fact that earlier manuscripts end here as well.

The fourth suggestion is that the *original* ending of Mark was lost or destroyed, and the extra verses are either a forgery or a later addition by another author. This would go hand-in-hand with the second possibility, but could still include the idea of Peter writing for himself. Again, if the manuscript was codex, this last page would have been easily lost or damaged.

The last, most simple suggestion is that “the evangelist intended to close his Gospel at this place[[16]](#footnote-16).” This, however, seems quite abrupt for Mark; his story endings are normally quite smooth.

Another thing that is quite interesting to note is that two other early, fifth century manuscripts contain other different variations on the ending. One African codex contains the “Freer Logion,”[[17]](#footnote-17) while a Latin codex contains a shorter ending. However, since both of these additions are only backed by one or two manuscripts, they have generally been disregarded as the actual ending to Mark’s gospel.

When we weigh all the options, it seems that most of the evidence is in favor of some combination of options three, four, and two. By logical reasoning alone, the proof points to either option three or four, with option two explaining the extra verses. But the others could be possible as well.

In closing then, we see that, while these additional verses generally are not held as scripture, they do have a great deal of manuscript support.

Whether or not Mark 16:9-20 is God’s Holy Word or not, we know this: God’s sovereignty has put them in front of us, and we would do well to listen to them, and to God.

# Bibliography

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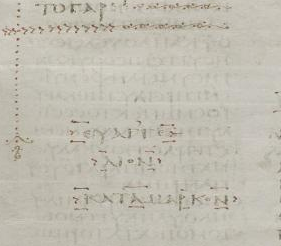
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I was short on time, so I couldn’t add in the extra info I wanted to add. But here’s the picture:



Note large spaces and gaps. These are unusual, I looked, and the other gospels don’t have gaps in between.



1. Dummelow, pg. 732-733 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 15:42-47 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Luke 24:13-35 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The aorist tense is a tense unable to be translated into English, and though often translated as the past tense, its real meaning implies a detachment from *any* tense, which connects to Mark’s use of the present tense to describe past events. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The only event not fulfilled is the immunity to poison, but the likelihood that one surviving poison would *know* he had done so is slim anyways, so it could not be recorded. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The Greek Lectionaries are split on this issue, but are not as reliable since they only contain parts of Scripture as it is. (Why Mark 16:9-20 Belongs in the Bible - Endnote 3) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See picture at end of document [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Revelation 22:18 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. I say likely, for we cannot always be sure [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See earlier [quote](#DummelowQuote) from *Commentary of the Holy Bible.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See earlier [quote](#DummelowQuote) from *Commentary of the Holy Bible.* [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See transition from Mark 1:13 to Mark 1:14 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. C.H Turner [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Some of the non-Markan vocabulary used in vs. 9-20 *is* used in Peter’s epistles. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Eusebius, pg. 74 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Metzger, pg. 126 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Metzger, pg. 104 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)