

Making Sense of the End of Mark
Pastor Russ Reaves
Immanuel Baptist Church, Greensboro, NC
January 27, 2009

Anyone who has ever read the Gospel of Mark carefully has likely noticed that most Bibles contain a footnote, a marginal note, or some other device or feature to indicate that there are questions about the authenticity of Mark 16:9-20. Almost every modern English version does in some way. Following are some examples of how this is done:

- A bracketed heading before verses 9-20 which states, “The earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20.”¹
- A footnote containing explanations similar to the following: “Some of the earliest manuscripts (or “mss.”) do not contain verses (or “vv.”) 9-20.”²
- A footnote that reads, “Verses 9 through 20 are not found in the most ancient manuscripts, but may be considered an appendix giving additional facts.”³
- A heading before verses 9-20 which reads, “An Ancient Appendix” or something similar.⁴
- A footnote that offers a more detailed description of the situation, such as the following or similar: “Vv. (verses) 9-20 are bracketed in NU (an abbreviation for the Greek text known as *Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament* and *United Bible Societies Greek New Testament*) as not original. They are lacking in Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus (two Greek manuscripts dating to the fourth century), although nearly all other mss. (manuscripts) of Mark contain them.”⁵
- Bracketing around verses 9-20, with an explanatory notation in the footnotes stating, “Mark 16:9-20 [the portion in brackets] is contained only in later manuscripts,” or similar.⁶

In other versions, we come across information that may complicate the issue for the average reader even further. For instance, some translations include two alternate endings. Following Mark 16:8 in the *New Living Translation* [NLT], one finds an italicized, bracketed heading stating “[*Shorter Ending of Mark*]” followed by an unnumbered verse which reads, “Then they reported all these instructions briefly to Peter and his companions. Afterward Jesus himself sent them out from east to west with the sacred and unfailing message of salvation that gives eternal life. Amen.” This is followed by another italicized, bracketed heading which reads, “[*Longer Ending of Mark*],” with verses 9-20 included below it. A footnote in the *New Living Translation* reads, “The most reliable early manuscripts conclude the Gospel of Mark at verse 8. Other manuscripts include various endings to the Gospel. Two of the more noteworthy endings are printed here.”

¹ For example, the *New International Version* [NIV].

² For example, *The Amplified Bible* [AMP].

³ For example, *The Living Bible* [TLB].

⁴ For example, J. B. Phillips, *The New Testament in Modern English* (New York: Macmillan, 1958), 111 [JBP].

⁵ For example, the *New King James Version* [NKJV].

⁶ For example, Eugene Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 1845 [MSG]; the *Holman Christian Standard Bible* [HCSB]; *New American Standard Bible* [NASB].

In the *Contemporary English Version* [CEV], both alternate endings are also included, with the longer one (verses 9-20) printed first, indicated with a capitalized heading that reads “ONE OLD ENDING TO MARK’S GOSPEL,” and a footnote that explains that these verses are not in some manuscripts. The other alternate ending appears at the end, with a capitalized heading that reads, “ANOTHER OLD ENDING TO MARK’S GOSPEL,” and an explanatory footnote which indicates, “Some manuscripts and early translations have both this shorter ending and the longer one (verses 9-20).” The *Today’s English Version* [TEV, also called *The Good News Version* or *Good News for Modern Man*] handles the ending of Mark in a similar way to the CEV. In the NASB, the shorter alternate ending appears italicized and in brackets following verse 20, with a footnote indicating that it is contained in a few late manuscripts and versions, usually after verse 8.

The New Revised Standard Version [NRSV] is perhaps the most thorough in disclosing the entire situation. A footnote on verse 8 indicates, “Some of the most ancient authorities bring the book to a close at the end of verse 8. One authority concludes the book with the shorter ending; others include the shorter ending and then continue with verses 9-20. In most authorities verses 9-20 follow immediately after verse 8, though in some of these authorities the passage is marked as being doubtful.” Between verses 8 and 9, the “Shorter Ending of Mark” is set off by a heading, and it is followed by another heading that introduces the “Longer Ending of Mark” (verses 9-20). What is unique about the NRSV’s treatment of the ending of Mark is a footnote attached to verse 14 which indicates, “Other ancient authorities add, in whole or in part, *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 terrible 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.’*” Thus an entirely different variation to the ending of Mark is introduced to English readers.

Those who insist on the superiority of the King James Version [KJV] often point to this phenomenon as evidence for why only that version should be used. The KJV includes Mark 16:9-20 and most editions of it make no mention of the problem. It was translated into English using a singular Greek manuscript (known as the Textus Receptus) which contained the debated passage, but which came into being much later than most of the Greek manuscripts and other ancient versions that translators have access to today. However, pretending the problem does not exist does not help us resolve it or make it go away. The ancient texts of the New Testament contain multiple variations at the end of Mark, and this is a fact with which we must deal.

Though the writings of early Christians (the “Church Fathers”) address the various endings early in Church history, it was not until the publication of the Westcott and Hort Greek New Testament in 1881 that the issue became a hotly debated topic among biblical scholars. In that edition of the Greek New Testament, Westcott and Hort ended Mark at 16:8, followed by a colon (:) and six asterisks (*). The colon indicated that the scholars who prepared this edition of the Greek New Testament did not believe 16:8 was a suitable ending to the book. The asterisks

indicated that they believed more information was originally included but now was lost, or that Mark intended to follow 16:8 with more information but did not for some reason.⁷

Since that time, scholars have spent much time and ink addressing the issue of the ending of Mark at length. Most of what has been published on the issue is beyond the grasp of the average Christian church member, and perhaps even beyond the abilities of the average seminary graduate. There exists today a need for the issues to be addressed in “layman’s terms” to aid pastors, Christians, and casual Bible readers. There is a fear among some that doing so would cause doubts to arise over the integrity and authority of Scripture, and that fear is legitimate. It is the aim of this study to address the question of Mark’s ending in a way that preserves the integrity and authority of the Bible while making the issues clear and understandable for those who are not academic scholars.

The Bible: God’s Inerrant Word

Southern Baptists have summarized their beliefs in a document called *The Baptist Faith and Message* [BFM]. The most current edition of BFM was adopted by the Convention in 2000. It sets forth the view of Scripture held by most Southern Baptists and Southern Baptist Churches in the following statement:

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God’s revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.⁸

This is the opening declaration of the BFM, indicating that Southern Baptists affirm the centrality of the Bible to all we believe. The following Scripture passages are listed in the BFM as supporting evidences for the statement: *Exodus 24:4; Deuteronomy 4:1-2; 17:19; Joshua 8:34; Psalms 19:7-10; 119:11,89,105,140; Isaiah 34:16; 40:8; Jeremiah 15:16; 36:1-32; Matthew 5:17-18; 22:29; Luke 21:33; 24:44-46; John 5:39; 16:13-15; 17:17; Acts 2:16ff.; 17:11; Romans 15:4; 16:25-26; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 1:1-2; 4:12; 1 Peter 1:25; 2 Peter 1:19-21.*

During the latter part of the twentieth century, a debate raged among Christians (including Southern Baptists) concerning the nature of the Bible. Of chief concern was whether the Bible was to be considered “inerrant” (having no errors) and “infallible” (incapable of error). There are many who insist that the Bible cannot be inerrant and infallible because of what they perceive to be internal contradictions, inaccuracies, and variations found in the manuscripts and versions of the Bible that have been handed down through the centuries. On the other hand, there are many

⁷ J. Lee Magness, *Marking the End: Sense and Absence in the Gospel of Mark* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 1.

⁸ <http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfm2000.asp>. Accessed 1/27/2009, 3:25 PM

who insist that the perceived contradictions only represent flawed interpretations, the inaccuracies are due to a lack of full information or literary license, and that the textual variations can be explained satisfactorily. In October, 1978, a gathering of more than 200 prominent evangelical leaders and scholars took place which sought to clarify exactly what is meant by the concept of “inerrancy.” This group produced a document known as “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy,” consisting of a series of affirmations (what we believe) and denials (what we do not believe) about this important issue. The statements address the interrelated subjects of the inspiration of the Scriptures (plainly taught in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, among other places in the Bible), the inerrancy and authority of the Bible. The document affirms the belief that “inspiration was the work in which God by His Spirit, through human writers, gave us His Word. The origin of Scripture is divine” (Article VII). The divine origin and inspiration of the Bible guarantees “true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak and write” (Article IX). The statement goes on to say, “We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture” (Article X).

The “autographic text” (or “autographs”) refers to the actual original documents written by the human biblical writers under the inspiration of the Spirit. It must be admitted up front that all of these have disappeared with the passage of time, leaving us only with ancient copies, translations, and quotations of the original documents. From the study and comparison of these existing documents, we are able to arrive with confidence at conclusions regarding the wording of the original autographs. These ancient texts “range in size from scraps little larger than postage stamps to complete manuscripts of the Bible.”⁹ There are over 5,600 New Testament manuscripts and fragments available to us in the Greek language alone, dating from the second to fifteenth centuries. In addition, we have at our disposal over 19,000 early translations of the New Testament. These startling figures assure us that we have more material with which to deal in handling the New Testament than any other work of ancient literature. In fact, we should be more surprised at the alarming consistency of agreement we find among these ancient texts than at the occasional discrepancy we find.

Discrepancies among the copies, translations, and quotations do occur. Usually, the variations involve a word, a sentence, or very brief segment of text. The overwhelming majority of variations have little or no bearing on the meaning of the text, the doctrines of the Christian faith, or the practices of faithful Christians. However, there are two passages of considerable length which produce more concern for students of Scripture: John 7:53-8:11 and Mark 16:9-20. When it comes to these two lengthy passages, we find manuscripts that include them and manuscripts that omit them. Though even here there is little concern over theological beliefs or practices, readers cannot help being concerned over the uncertainty that exists with two such sizeable passages. Whether the passage is brief or long, an attempt must be made to determine which of the variations is most likely original and authentic, and thereby inerrant and authoritative. This is the science of “textual criticism.”

⁹ James R. Edwards, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 497.

Textual Criticism

Textual criticism is defined as “the scholarly discipline of establishing the text as near to the original as possible or probable.”¹⁰ The tools of this trade in New Testament study include Greek manuscripts and portions, early translations of the Greek text into other languages (also called “versions”), and the writings of the early Church Fathers. The Greek manuscripts and fragments available include very old fragments written on fragile papyrus (an early kind of “paper” made from the reeds of papyrus plants). Most of these can be dated to the third and fourth centuries, but some range from the second to eighth centuries. There are approximately eighty-eight papyrus manuscripts which have been located to date. “Every New Testament book is attested by at least one papyrus manuscript.”¹¹

In addition to these papyrus manuscripts and fragments, there are many parchment documents. Over time, parchment (“paper” made from animal skins) replaced papyrus as the primary writing material. Earlier parchment manuscripts are called “uncials” because the writers used only “capital” (or “uncial”) letters in writing. Most of these date from the fourth to tenth centuries. By the ninth century, a smaller style of writing had developed, and manuscripts of this kind are called “miniscule” (meaning “small-lettered”). There are over 2,500 hundred Greek parchment manuscripts available to us today.

Other Greek documents helpful for study are lectionaries which contain New Testament passages arranged for weekly reading in church worship services. Portions of every New Testament book with the exception of Revelation are found in the ancient lectionaries. Though a majority of these date from the tenth century and later, some have been found which are dated as early as the fifth century.

In addition to the Greek materials used in textual criticism, there are many translations of the New Testament, some of which were produced in the second century very soon after the original writings. These include Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Georgian, Ethiopic, Gothic and Arabic, and include numerous dialogues of some languages. These aid us in determining the date of original readings and the geographical distribution of those variations. The writings of the Church Fathers are also useful in this regard since many of them quote the Scriptures frequently and at length. “It has been said that if all the New Testament manuscripts were destroyed, the text of the New Testament could still be restored from the quotations made by the church fathers.”¹²

When one studies the variations in manuscripts, one finds cases of accidental and intentional changes. We must bear in mind that prior to the printing press, Bibles and other works of literature were meticulously copied by hand. Since the original writings contained no punctuation or spacing between words, scribes would occasionally place spacing or punctuation between letters and words at the wrong places. Also, as is common in our own copying, the eye of the scribe would jump from one place to another when copying, resulting in the accidental

¹⁰ Arthur G. Patzia and Anthony J. Petrotta, *Pocket Dictionary of Biblical Studies* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 114.

¹¹ David Alan Black, *New Testament Textual Criticism: A Concise Guide* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 19.

¹² *Ibid.*, 24.

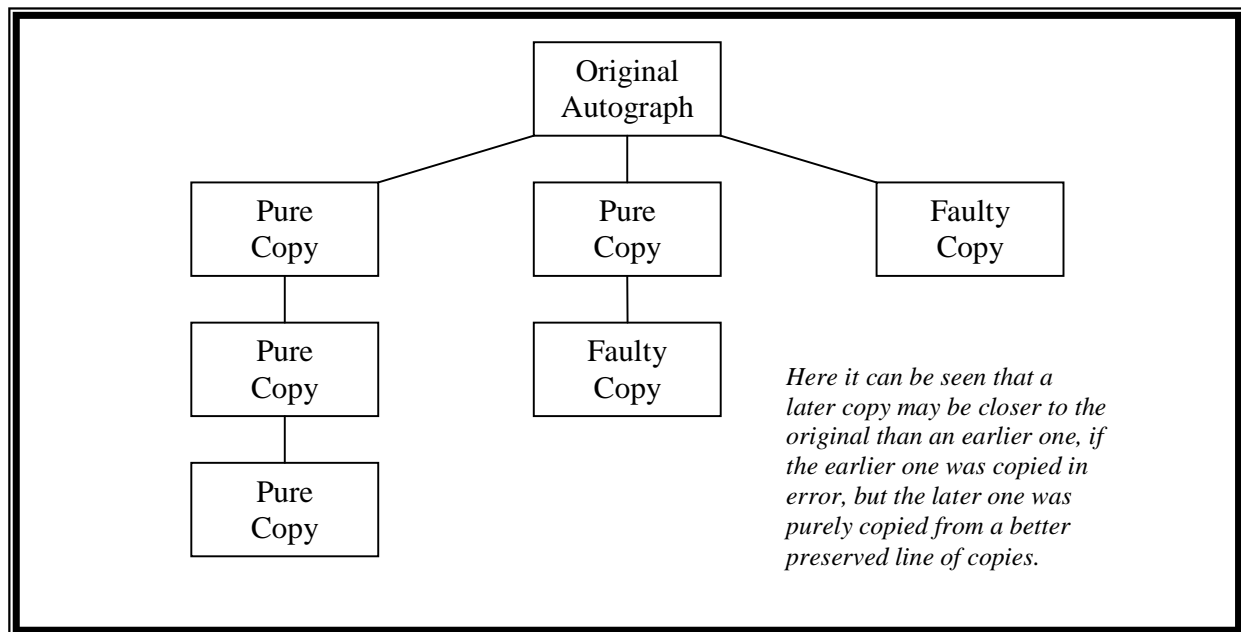
omission of words, sentences, or verses. There are cases when scribes would write a letter or word once when it had originally been written twice and vice-versa, or transpose words or letters accidentally. These are understandable cases of human error, but intentional variations can also be identified in the copies. There are cases where scribes sought to improve the grammar, spelling or vocabulary of the original, to clarify commonly misunderstood passages, to harmonize what appeared to be contradictions, or to alter the doctrinal teachings of a text. In the cases of these intentional changes, there may have been some scribes who were motivated by wrong aims, but most were probably pure-hearted attempts to help the readers of the Bible. If we put ourselves into the shoes of these scribes, we can envision their desire to make the reading of the Bible as simple as possible. I have often imagined the scribe enjoying dinner with his peers and talking about his day's accomplishments. It is much more likely that he may say, "Today, I took a difficult passage and made it easier to understand," than that he would say, "Today, I really confounded a relatively simple text just for the fun of it." We must remember that these were pious, godly, skilled laborers who were entrusted with a tremendous responsibility for their generation and those to follow.

In wrestling with the variations, scholars seek to examine "external evidence" and "internal evidence." The external evidence is found in the available manuscripts, versions, etc. Here, the scholar seeks to determine which reading is the most reliable reflection of the original document. The manuscripts and versions, as well as the readings in the lectionaries and the fathers, reflect "family resemblances" or common features that have prompted scholars to divide them into groups or families called "texttypes." There are four of these: Alexandrian (emerging from the region around Alexandria, Egypt); Byzantine (originating in the Byzantine empire with its capital in modern-Turkey); Caesarean and Western (neither of which find much consensus among scholars as to date or place of origin).

After grouping texts into their most likely family (texttype), scholars make decisions based on several criteria. First, generally speaking, the oldest manuscripts are to be preferred. This is not always an exact science, however, because dating is a difficult task, and errors could have crept in very early. Figure 1 below visually illustrates the possibility that a later manuscript may in fact preserve a more original reading.

Additionally, preference is given to the reading found in the most diverse geographical areas. It is more likely that an original reading would have been copied, translated and distributed widely than an erroneous one. Finally, preference is given to the reading supported by the greater number of texttypes. These families of texts tended to share common characteristics within themselves, so when a reading is preserved across family divides, it is likely to be original.

Figure 1.



The general rule of thumb when it comes to handling internal evidence is to prefer the reading that best explains the origin of the other variations. This decision is based on several factors. First, it is more likely that a scribe would add rather than take away, therefore the shorter reading is preferred. Second, it is more likely that a scribe would simplify rather than complicate a text, therefore the harder reading is more likely original. Third, biblical writers tend to employ characteristic style, vocabulary, and theological emphases, therefore the passage is to be compared with the larger book of the Bible and other books written by the same writer. Preference is to be given to the one which is most similar to his other writings.

By wrestling with these issues, we are able to come to conclusions on most textual variations regarding the original wording of the inspired autographs. This gives us confidence that the Bibles we hold in our hands are the infallible, inerrant, and authoritative Word of God and faithfully reflect what was written in the original first-century documents. On most of the variations found in the New Testament the scholars are unanimous or else the consensus is so strong to eliminate any serious doubt about the wording. However, Mark 16 presents what is likely the most controversial and uncertain case where scholarly consensus has yet to be found. It is to this thorny issue that we turn our attention now.

The Ending of Mark

As indicated in our English translations and their footnotes, there are multiple endings for the Gospel of Mark found in the manuscripts, versions, and other ancient documents. It may be an overstatement, but if so only barely, to say that this is “the greatest of all literary mysteries”¹³ and “the gravest textual problem in the New Testament.”¹⁴ It is necessary at this point to set forth the possible endings of Mark that are found in the documents as well as the theories offered by leading scholars:

1. An ending at 16:8 (For the sake of clarity, I will refer to this as the “Short Ending”).
 - Scholars who hold to the Short Ending are divided among themselves as to the explanation of the Short Ending. Some suggest Mark intended to end the Gospel here, but others insist that it either originally included more (which has now been irretrievably lost), or that Mark was hindered from completing the work by arrest, persecution, death, or other intervening circumstances.
2. The “Shorter” or “Intermediate” Ending (While most English Bible versions and scholarly works refer to this as “the shorter ending,” I choose to refer to this as the “Intermediate Ending” to distinguish it from the ending at verse 8).
 - This ending reads, “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. Amen.”
 - This text, when included in English Bibles does not typically have a verse number. There are multiple variations of this are found among several manuscripts.
3. An ending which contains 16:9-20 (I will refer to this as the “Long Ending”).
4. The “Freer Logion” occurring between verses 14 and 15 of the Long Ending.
 - It is so labeled because, aside from a quotation of it in the writings of the Church Father Jerome, it has only been found in Codex Washingtonianus (also known as “W” or 032), purchased in Egypt by Charles Freer in 1906 and presently housed in the Freer Gallery of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D. C.
 - It reads, “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 [*or*, does not allow what lies under the unclean spirits to understand the truth and power of God]¹⁵. 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 terrible 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. The Intermediate Ending followed by the Long Ending.

Several important assertions must be made before considering the evidence for each view. First, it should be noted that the various endings may all be classified as “orthodox” in theology.

¹³ Magness, 1, citing Nineham and Brascomb.

¹⁴ Edwards, 497.

¹⁵ Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* [2nd ed] (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 104

Rightly interpreted, none of them would cause readers to fall into great heresy. Most of what is found in the Long Ending, for example, is also taught elsewhere in the New Testament. As Darrell Bock writes, “The presence or absence of this text [16:9-20, the Long Ending] does not impact the core of Christian teaching at all. The best I can tell, only the issue of snake handling and drinking poison is at stake”¹⁶ Therefore, the issue is not between conservatives or liberals, and one should refrain from using those labels to describe those who disagree on the conclusion of the matter. There are conservative and liberal scholars who hold to the originality of the Long Ending, as well as conservative and liberal scholars who reject the Long Ending.

Second, all scholars who wrestle with this issue are using the same set of evidence. “Sometimes it is not clear where the evidence starts and stops (forming the dots), and where ‘connecting the dots’ (i.e., interpreting and making judgments) begins. Sometimes we differ on what are dots and what are dot connectors.”¹⁷ Undoubtedly, the presuppositions held by scholars influence their handling of this issue. For instance, if one believes that Mark wrote after Matthew or Luke, it would seem highly unlikely for Mark to omit what they had included in their final chapters. Also, preference for a specific texttype (described above) will lead one to adopt a conclusion that preserves the integrity of that family. If one holds to the doctrine of preservation, which states that God has miraculously preserved the text of the Bible and kept it free from error in copying and translating, then one will not accept the possibility of a lost ending. Daniel Wallace issues a much needed but seldom heeded warning about the influence of presuppositions: “Evangelical scholars must be in the business of pursuing truth, regardless of where it takes us, rather than protecting our presuppositions.”¹⁸

Third, it must be recognized that each of the views has certain strengths in its favor and weaknesses working against it. This is a complex problem which will not be easily resolved. As Bock states, the ultimate task “is trying to resolve who has the most comprehensive solution to our problem, and even that solution may well not be problem free. Any solution to a difficult problem like this one is likely to leave loose ends untied.”¹⁹ Apart from the very unlikely event of an unprecedented manuscript discovery, we will probably be wrestling with the issue until Jesus returns.

Finally, in spite of the many variations we know of, we can detect a trend in the manuscript history. The earliest evidence we have indicates that most ancient copies ended at 16:8. As time went on, the Short Ending was increasingly the subject of suspicion and question, and eventually came to be rejected. The Long Ending was at first considered inauthentic, then timidly accepted, then finally considered to be authentic. Yet even then, many scribes registered doubts about it.²⁰

Before tackling the evidence in favor of and against the Long and Short Endings, other alternatives can be dismissed rather quickly, leaving us with only two legitimate options.

¹⁶ Darrell Bock, “The Ending of Mark: A Response to the Essays,” in David Alan Black ed., *Perspectives on the Ending of Mark: 4 Views* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008), 125

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Daniel Wallace, “Mark 16:8 as the Conclusion to the Second Gospel,” in David Alan Black ed., *Perspectives on the Ending of Mark: 4 Views* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008), 9.

¹⁹ Bock in Black, *Perspectives*, 127.

²⁰ Wallace, 24, 29.

The Freer Logion

The Freer Logion is a passage that has been found in only one manuscript, inserted between Mark 16:14 and 15: “*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 terrible 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.’*”

The Church Father Jerome, writing near the turn of the fifth century, made mention of only a portion of this text: “*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.’*” Jerome indicated that this was found “in certain copies [of Mark], and especially in Greek codices.”²¹ However, modern scholars knew of no such copy or codex (a bound “book”) until 1906. It was then that Charles Freer purchased the codex in Egypt which came to be known as Codex Washingtonianus. This Greek manuscript, dating to the fifth century and containing only the four Gospels, is the only one presently known to exist which contains the passage. No reputable scholar believes this portion of Mark to be authentic. As is evident by a reading of the text, the subject matter and vocabulary finds no parallel in the rest of the New Testament. Most would readily agree with Bruce Metzger: “The whole expansion has about it an unmistakable apocryphal flavor.” By this, he means that the piece reflects language and theological ideas that were common among the Gnostics and others who began to corrupt New Testament teaching in the second century, issuing various writings that were immediately rejected (hence the label *apocryphal*) by most Christians. Metzger concludes, “It probably is the work of a second or third century scribe who wished to soften the severe condemnation of the Eleven in 16:14.”²² Because of its scarce evidence among the manuscripts and its unparalleled vocabulary and theology, the Freer Logion is best rejected and removed from the discussion of the likely original ending to Mark.

The Intermediate Ending

Following Mark 16:8, this passage reads, *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. Amen.*”

Only one ancient version has been discovered that contains the Intermediate Ending by itself. Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae, also known as “Old Latin k” or “it^k,” dates to around the turn of the fifth century (400 AD) and contains only portions of Matthew and Mark. It is named for the monastery in Bobbio, Italy where it was formerly housed before being relocated to its present home at the National University Library in Turin. Interestingly, the Latin equivalent phrase “they

²¹ Cited in Robert G. Bratcher & Eugene A. Nida, *A Handbook on The Gospel of Mark* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1961), 510.

²² Metzger, 104.

said nothing to anyone” has been omitted from 16:8, and 16:3 has undergone significant editing in this document.

Most of the manuscripts and versions which include the Intermediate Ending have it placed between verse 8 and the Long Ending. Of all the New Testament manuscripts and fragments we have access to today, no more than seven Greek manuscripts include the Intermediate Ending, all of them being of the Alexandrian texttype. It is also found in a handful of Syriac, Coptic, and Ethiopic versions, and a very small number of lectionaries. All of these date from the fourth century or later. There is little or no trace of the Intermediate Ending in the writings of the Church Fathers.

There is internal evidence that indicates that the Intermediate Ending is not original. The style and vocabulary are unusual when compared to the rest of Mark. Most noticeable is the seemingly out of place use of the word “Amen” at the conclusion of the section. While this would not be problematic if the Intermediate Ending was the final conclusion of Mark (as it is in Codex Bobiensis), in every other known manuscript and version that word “Amen” is followed by verses 9-20. Nowhere else in Mark’s Gospel do we find such an unusual placement of “Amen.” Additionally, of the thirty-four words contained in the Greek text of the Intermediate Ending, nine occur nowhere else in Mark. The rhetorical tone is also unusual compared to the rest of Mark.²³ Also, there is an apparent contradiction between the Intermediate and Long Endings. The Intermediate has Mary telling the disciples about the resurrection followed by their commission to proclaim the message of salvation. The Long Ending has her telling them, followed by their disbelief. The tension of this contradiction could be relaxed somewhat if the Intermediate Ending followed the Long Ending, but no manuscript or version does this.²⁴ It always precedes the Long Ending (except in Bobiensis which lacks the Long Ending).

Because of these internal factors, no serious scholar today considers the Intermediate Ending original. The external factors of a heavy presence among the Alexandrian manuscripts, as well as the concentration of occurrences in Ethiopic and Coptic versions, lead many to believe that it was written in Egypt or elsewhere in North Africa at a later date.²⁵ It may have been written to provide a more acceptable ending to Mark (if it originally concluded at verse 8), to smooth the difficult transition between verses 8 and 9 (although in actuality, placement of it there causes more problems than it solves), or to replace the Long Ending because of theological concerns (addressed below). The latter suggestion seems highly unlikely, given that all but one of the ancient documents which include the Intermediate Ending also contain the Long Ending. The possibility has also been suggested that the Intermediate Ending was composed to round off a lectionary reading that would have otherwise concluded at verse 8, since verse 8 is too abrupt an ending and verses 9-20 would make the reading too long for a Sunday worship service.²⁶ These are merely speculations, and the real origin of the Intermediate Ending will likely never be known with certainty. What is generally agreeable among scholars is that it is not original.

²³ Ibid, 105.

²⁴ Wallace, 25.

²⁵ For example, Maurice Robinson, “The Long Ending of Mark As Canonical Verity,” in David Alan Black ed., *Perspectives on the Ending of Mark: 4 Views* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008), 56.

²⁶ Ibid, 74.

We have briefly surveyed the case for and against two of the possible endings for Mark and dismissed them fairly. This eliminates from contention those manuscripts containing the Freer Logion, the Intermediate Ending, and the Intermediate and Long endings together. Thus, we are left with only two viable options. The Gospel of Mark either ends at verse 8 (intentionally or accidentally) or else it originally included verses 9-20.

The Long Ending

A very strong case can be made for the originality and authenticity of the Long Ending, Mark 16:9-20, which is found in most of our English Bibles. The passage is found in an overwhelming majority (at least 95%) of ancient manuscripts and versions, including many which are very early and considered to be very important. It is found among manuscripts from all four texttypes: Byzantine, Alexandrian, Western and Caesarean.²⁷ However, in many of these manuscripts, scribes have included notations and symbols that indicate there was some debate over the authenticity of the Long Ending even very early in the transmission process. It should also be noted that the Long Ending is absent in Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae, which is “the oldest witness to the Latin Bible”²⁸ (early third century) and “the best exemplar of the earliest African Old Latin text.”²⁹ Other versions that lack the Long Ending include the oldest Syriac version of the Gospels (the Sinaitic Syriac of the late fourth or early fifth century), approximately one hundred Armenian versions, several important Ethiopic texts, and the two oldest Georgian versions.

Two manuscripts are frequently cited as the most important witnesses against the Long Ending, Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus (both of the fourth century). These are the earliest complete manuscripts of Mark that we have access to today. It is worth mentioning that if these two manuscripts had not been preserved, much of the controversy surrounding the Long Ending would disappear. However, even these two manuscripts which argue so strongly against the originality of the Long Ending contain unusual features at the end of Mark which may suggest that Long Ending was known to the scribes who prepared them. Whereas in most of Vaticanus, one book immediately follows the preceding one by beginning in the next column of text, there is a blank column at the end of Mark, with Luke beginning on the next page. Some suggest that this unusual blank column indicates that the scribe was aware of the Long Ending and left room for it to be included, though he ultimately omitted it for some unknown reason. In Sinaiticus, four pages containing the end of Mark and beginning of Luke have been replaced by the work of another scribe with noticeably different handwriting. Though we cannot know for certain what the original pages contained, it is at least a possibility that they contained the Long Ending and were replaced by another scribe who felt that the Long Ending should be omitted. Thus, even the manuscripts which scholars believe present the strongest case against the Long Ending may somewhat inadvertently be witnesses for the Long Ending. However, after careful analysis of the handwriting of the scribes behind these manuscripts, it has been proven with some measure of certainty that the Long Ending could not have originally fit into these spaces unless the writing had been unusually cramped. It would be more possible for them to have included the Intermediate Ending, yet there are relatively no scholars who have asserted that the Intermediate

²⁷ John Christopher Thomas, “A Reconsideration of the Ending of Mark” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol. 26 No. 4 (December 1983), 410. Electronic edition (Garland, TX: Galaxie Software, 1998).

²⁸ Elliott, 86.

²⁹ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), 683.

Ending was the original ending of Mark. There are also no indicators in the text or margin of these manuscripts that would suggest that the scribes were aware of textual variations as we find in other passages where variation occurs.

The inclusion of the Long Ending in our English Bibles is due primarily to the fact that it appeared in the manuscripts used by Desiderius Erasmus (c. 1466-1536) in the development of his Greek New Testament, which became the basis for the *Textus Receptus*. This was the Greek New Testament that was used in the making of King James Version. Because of the Long Ending's inclusion in the King James Version, most subsequent English versions have been reluctant to omit it likely because of fear of public outcry. Yet the oldest manuscript that Erasmus had was from the tenth century, and his primary manuscript was from the fifteenth century. Vaticanus and Sinaiticus predate these manuscripts by 600 to 1,100 years. Therefore, they should not be discarded from the discussion too quickly.

At least ten Church Fathers writing from the second to fifth centuries cite portions of the Long Ending.³⁰ Irenaeus, writing around AD 180, is the first to make explicit reference to the Long Ending. He writes, "Also, towards the conclusion of his Gospel, Mark says," followed by a quotation of verse 19. Victor of Antioch, who lived around the turn of the sixth century, was aware of "many" manuscripts that ended at verse 8 and "many" that included the Long Ending. His commentary on the Gospel of Mark, which became the standard for many centuries, demonstrates his opinion that the manuscripts containing the Long Ending were more accurate.

Evidence for the Long Ending may be found among the writings of the Fathers even prior to Irenaeus. Justin Martyr, writing in the middle of the second century, uses a phrase that is only elsewhere found in Mark 16:20. This indicates that he may have been aware of the Long Ending. Some doubt this claim on the basis that Justin does not cite Mark 16:20 explicitly and that he only used five words, even rearranging the order of two of them. However, Tatian, a disciple of Justin, includes the Long Ending in his harmony of the Gospels, the *Diatessaron* (circa AD 170), reinforcing the possibility that Justin knew of it, and making it almost certain that it was known in his lifetime. Additionally, the writer of the apocryphal *Epistula Apostolorum* (which claims to be written by the eleven apostles, a claim which no reputable scholar considers possible), written around the middle of the second century, demonstrates possible familiarity with the Long Ending in its description of the visit of the women to the tomb and their return to the disciples. From these manuscripts, versions, and other ancient writings, we can see that the Long Ending is at least as old as the Short Ending, and was widely used by the Church very early in its history.

Interestingly, though some of the most important witnesses for the Long Ending are Alexandrian manuscripts, the Alexandrian Fathers Clement and Origen never quote from or allude to the Long Ending. The Long Ending is also not found in the "Eusebian Canons," which is a thorough and careful system of cross-referencing parallel passages in the Gospels devised by Ammonius in the second century and later adopted by Eusebius in the fourth century (hence the name "Eusebian Canons"). Eusebius was aware of the existence of the Long Ending, but stated around AD 325 that "in nearly all the copies of the Gospel according to Mark" the end was at 16:8. He remarks that the "accurate" copies of Mark end at verse 8. Similarly, Jerome wrote around AD 407 that "almost all the Greek codices do not have this concluding portion." In a somewhat

³⁰ Bock in Black, *Perspectives*, 130.

inexplicable paradox, Jerome chose to include the Long Ending in his Latin version (the Vulgate) in spite of this. This may indicate that Jerome was aware of the popular reception of the Long Ending, and like modern English translators, feared an outcry if he omitted it.

As we turn to internal evidence, Maurice Robinson has noted that there are two recurring themes throughout the Gospel of Mark which argue for the inclusion of the Long Ending. The first is a repeated pattern of Old Testament prophecy, a prediction made by Jesus based on that prophecy, and the fulfillment of both. Relevant here is the prophecy from Psalm 110:1 of the exaltation of the Messiah quoted in Mark 12:36, followed by the prediction of Jesus based on that prophecy in 14:62. According to Robinson, this pattern is not completed until we come to the fulfillment in 16:19. If the Long Ending is omitted, fulfillment of the prophecy and prediction does not occur within the pages of this Gospel.³¹

Another recurring theme that Robinson draws attention to in Mark is that of Jesus as the “new Elijah.” If Mark was intentionally seeking to draw a parallel between Jesus and Elijah, Robinson insists that the ascension of Jesus (paralleling Elijah’s ascent) would have to be recorded to complete it. In 16:19 we find repetition of the exact language used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) to describe the ascension of Elijah. The commissioning of the disciples, who would be authenticated by the various sign gifts listed in Mark 16:17-18, parallels the passing of Elijah’s mantle to Elisha, whose ministry was also validated by signs and wonders. Without the Long Ending, the Elijah theme is not fully developed.³² In fairness, it should be recognized that it is less than certain that Mark intended to weave this theme throughout his Gospel. If he did, even this is no guarantee that there would be an exact parallel between every element of Elijah’s life and ministry and that of Jesus. After all, to omit the ascension is no more problematic than the fact that Elijah never died while Mark clearly states that Jesus did.

Robinson also points out thematic and verbal parallels between the Long Ending and various other sections of Mark’s Gospel. He charts out 13 such parallels between Mark 1:32-39, the beginning of Jesus’ earthly ministry, with the Long Ending, the end of Jesus’ public ministry. This is strong evidence for the Long Ending, indicating that perhaps Mark intended to use these two passages as “bookends” on his Gospel. Robinson also notes parallels between Mark 3:14-15 (the first commissioning of the disciples), Mark 6:7-13 (a subsequent commissioning) and verses 14-18 of the Long Ending (the final commissioning of the disciples). In addition, he plots the parallels between Mark 7:24-38, an overview of Jesus’ ministry, and the Long Ending, an overview of the ministry of Jesus that will be continued through His disciples. These parallels indicate the possibility that Mark wrote the Long Ending with the intention of bringing several key themes of his Gospel to a close.³³

Much of the discussion involving internal evidence within the Long Ending weighs heavily against it. Four primary factors are the vocabulary, style, content, and theology of the Long Ending. When it comes to these matters, those on both sides of the issue are dealing with the same raw data in the text. Remember that we have already noted how presuppositions can

³¹ Robinson, 67.

³² Ibid, 67-68.

³³ Ibid, 69-71.

influence one's handling of the issues. So we find here that even though we have the same set of "dots," each side "connects the dots" in different ways and comes to different conclusions.

In the Greek text of the Long Ending, there are 166 total words. Taking into consideration the duplication of a few words, there are 101 different words used in the Long Ending. Subtracting from that number the proper names, connective words, numerals, prepositions, particles and articles, there are seventy-five different words of significance to examine and compare with the rest of Mark. It has been well noted that at least fourteen (counting duplicates of those words, the total comes to eighteen) of these seventy-five words do not occur anywhere else in the Gospel of Mark. Eleven of the seventy-five words are used elsewhere in Mark in a different sense. Thus, some one-third of the significant words used in the Long Ending are unique to this portion of Mark. At least one such unusual word usage occurs in every verse of the Long Ending.³⁴ Several thorough analyses have been conducted on the Long Ending which have concluded that no other single passage of Mark stands out as starkly different from the rest of Mark besides the Long Ending.³⁵ The treatment of different subject matter may require the use of different words that have not been used previously in Mark, but even allowing for this, "it would appear that the marked degree of difference between the vocabulary of 16:9-20 and the Gospel of Mark argues strongly against a single author for both."³⁶

This conclusion drawn from the vocabulary-related evidence is disputed by those who hold to the authenticity of the Long Ending. Examining the same Greek text, Robinson (among others) has concluded that the vocabulary is not as strongly opposed to the originality of the Long Ending as has been suggested. He chooses to focus on those words which do occur elsewhere in Mark instead of the words that are unique to the Long Ending. As Robinson brings to light, of the 166 words found in the Long Ending, 106 can be found elsewhere in Mark in the exact same form; forty-eight occur elsewhere in Mark in slightly different forms (as compounds, different parsings or declensions). Thus, a total 154 (or 92.7%) of the 166 words in the Long Ending have some related parallel elsewhere in Mark. According to Robinson's figures, there are only eleven words in the Long Ending which occur nowhere else in Mark, and these words (with one exception) are rare in the whole of the New Testament.³⁷

Scholars arguing for the originality of the Long Ending also point out that in other portions of similar length throughout Mark, just as high a frequency of rare words and words unusual to Mark are used. For instance, John Broadus found seventeen words, phrases, or stylistic usages in 15:44-16:8 which are not elsewhere employed in Mark. Bruce Terry found over twenty items in 15:40-16:4 that are used only once in Mark, including 13 words found only in that section of Mark. Maurice Robinson states that seven of sixty-two words (11.2%) in Mark 4:26-29 are unique, while fifteen of 202 words (7.4%) in Mark 14:42-52 are unique. Allowing for fifteen unique words of the 106 in the Long Ending, only 9.04% of the vocabulary of the Long Ending is distinct from the rest of Mark. This percentage falls roughly half-way between that of the other

³⁴ Bratcher & Nida, 519.

³⁵ See for example, Morganthaler, cited in Magness, 5; Turner, cited in Keith Elliott, "The Last Twelve Verses of Mark: Original or Not?" in David Alan Black ed., *Perspectives on the Ending of Mark: 4 Views* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008), 90.

³⁶ Bratcher & Nida, 519.

³⁷ Robinson, 60.

two passages, neither of which are questioned concerning their authenticity or originality. Therefore, regardless which side one eventually comes down on concerning the Long Ending, we may agree with Robinson that in the study of these vocabulary issues, “far less is gained ... than often is claimed.”³⁸

A number of stylistic issues are raised in the examination of internal evidence regarding the Long Ending. Considering the big picture of what is presented therein, there is an evident change from the vivid details Mark usually includes in narrative passages to a much more bland presentation of facts in summary form.³⁹ Also, the flow of the narrative seems a bit disjointed as one moves from verse 8 to verse 9. The opening words of verse 9 may be appropriate if they stand at the beginning of an entirely new section, but they do not seem to follow the verses that precede them and provide the context for them. “The Long Ending seems to start over as though vv1-8 did not exist.”⁴⁰ In verse 8, the subject is the women, while verse 9 assumes but does not state Jesus as the subject. Verse 9 introduces Mary Magdalene almost as a new character to the story, even though she has already been mentioned three times before in the immediate context (15:40, 47; 16:1). The other women who are with her at the tomb quickly disappear from the narrative after verse 8, never being mentioned again. Thus Metzger concludes, “The connection between v8 and vv9-20 is so awkward that it is difficult to believe that the evangelist intended the section to be a continuation of the Gospel.”⁴¹

More technically, “Several of Mark’s signature stylistic features are absent from the Long Ending.”⁴² One of these is the Greek word *euthys*, typically translated in our English Bibles as “immediately.” It has been noted by most commentators on Mark that this word carries the action of the narrative forward through Mark from beginning to end. It occurs some forty-four times in Mark 1:1 to 16:8. However, the word is noticeably absent in the Long Ending (the last usage of it is in Mark 15:1). Also, very frequently throughout Mark, the writer will begin sentences with the Greek conjunction *kai*, usually translated “and” in English. It has been estimated that 376 of 583 (64.5%) sentences in Mark begin with *kai*.⁴³ In the first eight verses of Mark 16, eight sentences begin with *kai*. Yet when we come to the Long Ending, *kai* begins a sentence only six or seven times in twelve verses.

Additionally, throughout his Gospel Mark demonstrates a tendency to narrate stories in the “historical present” tense; that is, he describes past action with present tense verbs to add more life to the flow of the story. We do this in conversation, saying things like, “So I am walking down the street, and here comes this car out of nowhere.” In our English Bibles, historical present verbs are usually translated in the past tense, however the NASB and some other English versions mark them with a prefixed asterisk to indicate that they are present tense in the Greek. An example from Mark would be 16:2-6, where the action is carried along by historical present verbs: “... they are coming to the tomb ... they see that the stone had been rolled away ... and he says to them.” Mark uses this verb tense some 150 times throughout his Gospel as a unique

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Bratcher & Nida, 519-521.

⁴⁰ James A. Brooks, *The New American Commentary: Mark* (Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 273.

⁴¹ Metzger, 104-105.

⁴² Edwards, 498, including footnotes 4, 5, 6.

⁴³ P. Ellingworth, cited in Rod Decker, “εὐθὺς”, <http://faculty.bbc.edu/RDecker/documents/euqus.pdf>. Accessed 1/22/2009, 2:50 PM.

stylistic feature. In much longer writings, Matthew uses the historical present only seventy-eight times, and Luke only four. However, there are no historical present verbs in the Long Ending! This marks a sudden change in the writer's style which indicates the strong possibility that what we have in the Long Ending is the work of a different writer.

Somewhat related to the style issue is the issue of content. If the Long Ending is original, then we might expect it to fill out the expectations that have been raised for the reader in the preceding verses. Primarily, we would expect to find that Jesus appears to the disciples and to Peter in Galilee (16:7, compare also with 14:28). However, all of the action of verses 9-20 takes place in and around Jerusalem. The only portion of the Long Ending which bears any similarity to a Galilee appearance found in other Gospels is found in verses 15-16. These verses are similar to what Jesus said in Matthew 28:19, which took place in Galilee (Matthew 28:16). However, even here, Galilee is not mentioned by Mark, leaving the reader to assume (perhaps incorrectly) that they are still in a setting close to Jerusalem.

What is contained in the Long Ending appears to be a patchwork of information gleaned from the other Gospels and Acts. Mention of Mary Magdalene's demons (verse 9) is similar to Luke 8:2, and her encounter with the risen Lord corresponds to what we find in John 20:1-2. Even here, there is a disharmony between the other Gospels, for in them, Mary's report is that she has seen the empty tomb, not the risen Christ. The disbelief of the disciples (verse 11) is parallel to Luke 24:11. The appearance of Jesus in an unrecognizable form to two disciples walking from Jerusalem into the country (verse 12) may well be the same account as the Emmaus Road encounter in Luke 24:13-35. Their report (verse 13) can be compared to Luke 24:33-35, though Luke does not imply that their report was not believed. Jesus' appearance to the eleven (verse 14) is parallel to Luke 24:38-41 and His rebuke of their unbelief corresponds to John 20:19-29. Mark's account of the Great Commission is most similar to Matthew 28:18-20 (but see also Luke 24:46-48). The wording of Mark 16:16 is somewhat similar to that of John 3:18 and 3:36. The signs promised to follow the disciples in verses 17-18 reflect the signs recorded in Luke 10:19; John 14:12; Acts 2:3-4; 3:7; 5:12; 9:12, 17; 10:46; 16:18; 19:6; 28:3-6, 28:8. The ascension narrative of verse 19 finds parallel with Luke 24:50-53 and Acts 1:2, 9-11, and the conclusion (verse 20) seems to be a "sentence summary" of the entire book of Acts. Therefore, it is widely assumed that the Long Ending was written by someone other than Mark who, being unsatisfied with an ending at verse 8, wove together details from other writings at a later date and attached them to the ending of Mark. Considering that Mark is often found last among the Gospels in some ancient manuscripts, this postscript may have been added as a conclusion to the entire Gospel collection rather than to Mark alone.

Here again, scholars on the other side of the issue examine the same data and reach different conclusions. After all, if we are dealing with a true account, would we not expect to find similarities between the Biblical writers? Yet still, some point to the "new" elements introduced in the Long Ending which are unparalleled in the other writings as evidence of its authenticity. Robinson points out eleven such unparalleled elements, and states, "Were an independent writer attempting to summarize the Resurrection appearances found in the remaining three Gospels (or even those cited in Acts 1 and 1 Corinthians 15), closer parallels would be present and the problematic non-harmonious material would *not* have appeared."⁴⁴ However, it may be that

⁴⁴ Robinson, 73.

Robinson has been too generous in counting eleven new elements, given the comparisons cited above. A careful examination will reveal that there are only three such “new” elements in the Long Ending. We find no mention elsewhere of the disciples being found weeping and mourning (verse 10), though it only seems natural that they would have been. Also, the report of the two who encountered Jesus on the road is paralleled in Luke 24, but Mark introduces the unique idea that their report was not believed (verse 13). Thirdly, only in Mark is there such a strong connection between baptism and salvation found (verse 16). So, we must conclude that there are not many unique elements to Mark’s Long Ending. The proposal that it is a patchwork compilation of fragments from other writings is still highly plausible.

Finally, in our consideration of the internal evidence within the Long Ending we must consider the theological concerns that are raised in it. Before jumping into the obvious concerns found verses 16-18, a more subtle theological issue should be addressed which occurs in verse 19. Here Jesus is referred to as “the Lord Jesus.” While there is no unorthodoxy at risk in such a title, what catches our eye here is that nowhere else in Mark has this title been used. Typically, Mark only refers to Him by name, “Jesus.” Though Mark includes other titles for Jesus, like Son of God, Christ, etc., Mark in his role as narrator has not used any of them in telling the stories. They occur in dialogue. Even the use of the simple phrase, “the Lord” in verse 20 is unusual for Mark. Elsewhere this title is found only in Old Testament quotations (1:3; 11:9; 12:11; 12:29-30, 36) or by Jesus to refer seemingly to God the Father (5:19; 13:20). In fact, in all but two usages of “the Lord”, the title is spoken by Jesus. The narrator only uses the title in 1:3 (an Old Testament quotation) and 16:19-20. Those who argue against the originality of the Long Ending suggest that this indicates it was a late addition, for the title only became popular in Christian usage sometime after Mark wrote.⁴⁵ This is not entirely accurate however, for “The Lord Jesus” occurs once in Luke and many times in Acts, and throughout the New Testament epistles, some of which likely predated Mark. It would be just as fitting to argue for the originality of the Long Ending on the basis that Mark opens and closes by referring to Jesus as “the Lord,” first in stating an Old Testament prophecy (1:3) and finally by demonstrating that Jesus fulfilled that prophecy (16:19-20). All we can objectively state about the usage of “the Lord Jesus” and “the Lord” in the Long Ending is that it is unusual in Mark.

Weightier questions of doctrine arise when one examines verses 16-18. First, does Mark 16:16 indicate that baptism is a necessary requirement for salvation? At first reading it does appear to state just that: “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved.” If this is the intended teaching of Mark’s Gospel, then we are right to be concerned, for it flies in the face of salvation by grace alone through faith alone, a doctrine that saturates the entire New Testament. Throughout the New Testament baptism is a testimony of one’s faith in Jesus, not a means of obtaining salvation. Might this indicate that the Long Ending came about later, perhaps from the hand of someone who had corrupted the Gospel by affixing works to the promise of salvation? Perhaps it does, although we should not jump to that conclusion too hastily. An examination of the rest of the New Testament will indicate that baptism, although not a necessary prerequisite for salvation, is the most common public profession of faith in the early church. The Great Commission commands the baptizing of new converts, and the preaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost concluded with a call to baptism as a demonstration of repentance and faith in Jesus (Acts 2:38). It is fair to say that baptism is almost always assumed to be the first step of faith and

⁴⁵ For example, see Edwards, 498.

obedience by converts to Christ in the New Testament. While modern evangelicals may believe that we have purified the Gospel by separating the act of baptism from the event of salvation, we have in fact merely replaced the biblical act of baptism as a profession of faith with other (unbiblical) acts of profession such as walking an aisle, filling out a card, etc. So, it may be that the close connection between baptism and salvation in Mark 16:16 is not intended to convey the idea of a works gospel, but to clarify that the biblical demonstration of one's public profession of faith in Christ (which saves them) is by baptism (as a testimony to that salvation). After all, in the phrase immediately following in verse 16, condemnation is reserved not for those who have believed and not been baptized but for those who have not believed: "but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned." So, although this wording is perhaps a bit uncomfortable to modern evangelicals, the issue of baptism in the Long Ending is not without plausible explanations.

More difficult to work around are the concerns related to the sign gifts in verses 17 and 18. Mark 16:20 presents a very clear and orthodox description of the purpose of sign gifts: "And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed." Casting out demons, speaking with new tongues, and laying hands on the sick for healing are frequently found in the book of Acts as signs that accompany the disciples on mission as they proclaim the truth about Jesus. Throughout biblical history, miracles seem to occur with more frequency and intensity during seasons of new revelation being given. These signs confirm the revelation as being divine, authentic, and authoritative. Since the revelation of God has been completed in the person of Jesus Christ and the completion of the New Testament canon (the authoritative collection of inspired writings) and no further revelation is to be given, we should not anticipate that all modern Christians will experience these signs on a regular basis as proof of their relationship with Christ or as validation of their Christian witness. It does appear from anecdotal evidence that sign-gifts are more common "in many parts of the world today, especially where concomitant signs help convince non-Christians that the Christian God is more real and powerful than local religious beliefs and cults."⁴⁶ So, with the purpose statement of verse 20 being present, there is no real concern here in the Long Ending over the presence or function of these signs. It is the specific nature of the signs that is questionable.

Mark 16:17 is the only place in all four Gospels that the use of tongues is mentioned. No other Gospel writer makes mention of the sign gift of tongues, though the promise of the Spirit's coming is found in other Gospels. The emphasis in these other Gospels rightly falls on the Giver rather than the gifts. Interestingly, the Long Ending makes mention of the gifts, but is silent concerning the Giver, the person of the Holy Spirit. If Jesus had promised the disciples the supernatural ability to speak in new languages in advance, then there is no record of them reflecting on such promise when the events of Pentecost unfolded. In fact, when Peter offers explanation of the Pentecostal phenomena to the bystanders, he says, "This is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel," (Acts 2:16) not "This is what was spoken of by the Lord Jesus." However, as we look through the book of Acts, we find that God did supernaturally enable the disciples of Jesus to speak with other tongues when the Gospel was being communicated across cultural lines, so there is no real difficulty with the presence of tongues here, except that their mention here is unique among the Gospels.

⁴⁶ Edwards, 507.

When we come to the issues of handling snakes and drinking poison we have more difficulty finding a reasonable explanation for the inclusion of the Long Ending, or at least these phrases in it. If the Long Ending is a later addition pieced together from separate accounts in the Gospels and Acts, then the writer may have had the incident of Paul's snakebite (Acts 28:1-6) in mind when he included the phrase, "they will pick up serpents." However, it would be improper to conclude that what happened to Paul there would be normative in the experience of all Christians everywhere. Acts 28 is a "descriptive" passage, relating an account of what happened to Paul at a particular place and time in history, rather than a "prescriptive" passage indicating what we can expect to happen on a universal and regular basis.

Those who argue for the inclusion of the Long Ending rightly recognize that the snake-handling of Mark 16 is not based on Acts 28, for two different Greek words are used to describe the creatures in each passage. The Long Ending does use the same word for "serpents" that is found in Luke 10:19. The similarity between that passage and the Long Ending can be handled different ways by those on each side of the issue. Those who argue against the Long Ending may say that it is further evidence of a patchwork compilation, while those who argue for it would likely conclude that Mark 16:18 is corroborated by Luke 10.

An interesting and creative attempt to handle the snake handling issue has been proposed based on the usage of the same Greek word for serpent in the Long Ending and the Greek translation of Genesis 3. This view holds that the wording of the Mark 16:18 is figurative, creating the possibility that the image of handling of snakes may be a metaphor meaning that "in the age of salvation the curse of the serpent has been overcome."⁴⁷ While it seems to be a far-fetched suggestion initially, the contextual meaning of Luke 10:19 appears to be something very similar to this point. However, the Luke passage corresponds more precisely with Genesis 3, with "tread upon" as a parallel to the imagery of the heel and head in Genesis 3, and finds further correspondence with what Paul says in Romans 16:20: "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." In all these passages, the idea revolves around the foot, indicating triumph, while Mark's mention of snakes involves picking them up with the hand. In the end, we have to conclude that a discussion of snake handling alone in the Long Ending does not help us resolve the issue of the Long Ending's originality.

We come then to the even more problematic statement about drinking deadly poison. This is more difficult to grasp than the other signs of Mark 16:17-18 because, unlike them, there is no other mention of such in the entire New Testament. Some have suggested that it may be a restatement of the idea in Luke 10 of treading upon serpents and scorpions, both of which may be poisonous. However, Mark 16:18 clearly refers to *drinking* poison. The closest parallel we find to this in ancient Christian writings comes from Eusebius in his most famous work *Ecclesiastical History*. There he relates a third-hand account, which he learned from reading Papias, who heard from the daughters of Philip (Acts 21:8-9), that Justus Barsabas (one of the men considered but not chosen as a replacement for Judas among the apostles, Acts 1:23) "though he drank a deadly poison, experienced nothing injurious through the grace of the Lord."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Ibid, 506.

⁴⁸ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*. Translated by C. F. Cruse (Grand Rapids: Baker; repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1998), 105. In other versions of Eusebius, this can be found in 3.39.9.

James Edwards notes that “in the late first century a cult related to poisonous drugs was exerting at least some influence in Jewish-Christian circles.”⁴⁹ This is apparent from a reference in Josephus’ *Antiquities* (4.279) to the use of magic potions (*pharmakoi*) or poison (*thanasimos*, the same word found in Mark 16:18). Ignatius, the Church Father who died shortly after the turn of the second century, wrote to the Trallians warning them to abstain from the deadly poison (*thanasimos*) of heretics.⁵⁰ The text of Ignatius’ letter is partially corrupted at this point, and while it appears that he intends “poison” to be taken figuratively here to refer to the heretical teachings, it may be that they used literal poisonous mixtures in their rituals.⁵¹ Thus, Edwards offers as a possibility, “The reference to drinking deadly poison without harm ... signals to Mark’s readers that those who believe and follow the gospel are guaranteed immunity from heresy, including heretical potions to drink.”⁵²

Though each of these miraculous phenomena have possible explanations, taken as a whole, they are difficult to reconcile with the rest of Mark. As Edwards notes, “The prominence given to charismatic signs in verses 17-18 stands in stark contrast to the reserve of Jesus in Mark with regard to signs and sensation.”⁵³ In Mark 8:11-13, when the Pharisees pressed Jesus for a sign of confirmation, “Sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, ‘Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation.’” Bratcher and Nida add, “Yet in the Longer Ending he is portrayed as promising the believers ‘signs’ as crassly materialistic and supernatural as any the Pharisees would have asked for!” Thus they conclude, “The bizarre promise of immunity from snakes and poisonous drinks is completely out of character with the Person of Christ as revealed in the Gospel of Mark, the other Gospels, and in the whole of the New Testament. Nowhere did Jesus exempt himself or his followers from the natural laws which govern this life, nor did he ever intimate such exemptions would be given those who believed in him. That such miracles have in fact occasionally taken place is a matter of record; what is to be doubted is that the Lord should have promised them indiscriminately to all believers as part of the blessings which would be bestowed upon them.”⁵⁴

Given all of these concerns, it seems that proponents of the Long Ending would be hard pressed to make their case in its defense. However, some have argued that these vocabulary, style, and theological difficulties may in fact render the Long Ending the “harder reading,” which is often given preference in textual criticism. One of the most ardent advocates of the Long Ending, William Farmer, suggests that there is no evidence available “to demonstrate an area in Christendom that would either condone these actions or be powerful enough to impose them on the Church at large through an addition to the text of the second gospel.”⁵⁵ Any attempt to add such difficult sections to the Gospel later would be immediately recognized and rejected, therefore Farmer concludes that they must be original.

⁴⁹ Edwards, 506-507.

⁵⁰ Ignatius, *Epistle to the Trallians*, 6. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.v.iv.vi.html>. Accessed 1/23/2009, 11:38 AM.

⁵¹ Edwards, 507.

⁵² *Ibid*, 507.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 499.

⁵⁴ Bratcher & Nida, 520-521.

⁵⁵ Thomas, 410.

Other proponents of the Long Ending have gone to great lengths to offer historical reconstructions which would explain the obvious differences between the Long Ending and the rest of Mark while preserving the authenticity and originality of it. David Alan Black builds his case on the scenario that the entirety of Mark up to 16:8 is a transcript (or at least a close paraphrase) of the teaching and preaching of Peter. That Peter influenced Mark's Gospel is widely accepted on the basis of comments made by the Church Fathers. The Long Ending, Black theorizes, consists of Mark's own postscript to Peter's teachings. He proposes that originally some copies of Peter's teachings circulated without this postscript, but when Mark added it later, copies containing the postscript also began circulating, thus explaining the variations we find among the ancient manuscripts and versions. This is a fascinating and ingenious theory, but in the end amounts to nothing more than unsupported and speculative reconstruction. All attempts to interpret Scripture will inevitably include some measure of reconstruction and speculation. As D. A. Carson notes, "A little speculative reconstruction of the flow of history is surely allowable if we are attempting to fill in some of the lacunae (or "gaps") left by insufficient evidence."⁵⁶ However, reconstructions must be based on actual evidence that does exist, and in the case of Black's proposal, such a connection is not easily seen. For instance, it would seem that if the difference in style between the whole of Mark and the Long Ending amounted to a difference between Peter's style of preaching and Mark's style of writing, then the Long Ending would be the only portion of Scripture that would give us any indication of Mark's style. Those characteristic features of style described earlier would actually be Peter's, not Mark's. Thus, we should be able to identify similarities between the bulk of Mark and the epistles of Peter (First and Second Peter) and his sermons in Acts. However, we do not find similarities between these in terms of vocabulary, style or theology (beyond the basic agreement of the orthodox doctrines of the faith). Schelle writes, "No distinctive Petrine theology can be discerned behind the Gospel of Mark."⁵⁷ In the end, it appears that in spite of its creativity and well-intentioned effort to preserve the integrity of the Long Ending, Black's hypothesis is not very well supported by the evidence.

Some have suggested that Mark is responsible for the Long Ending indirectly, in effect "copying and pasting" it from established pieces of oral tradition that he had received. If Mark has done this, then he has done so knowing that the language, style, and even theology of the passage are different from the remainder of his gospel. It would appear that he made no effort to make it "his own." While some biblical writers do make use of other sources, it is rare that a writer will lift an entire narrative, "lock, stock and barrel" without refashioning it somewhat into their own style. For instance, if Matthew and Luke did in fact borrow from Mark throughout their gospels (a widely held view which is not accepted by Black and others), then they have not retained Mark's characteristic elements, but made the passages their own by changing wording, adding and omitting certain details.⁵⁸

Still others suggest that the Long Ending is original, but fell out of some copies because of the practice of marking the end of lectionary readings (described above) with the little Greek word *telos*, meaning "the end." Some manuscripts have been found with this word written at the end of verse 8. It is therefore proposed that a scribe came to this word and assumed that it meant that the

⁵⁶ D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 132.

⁵⁷ Udo Schnelle, *The History and Theology of The New Testament Writings* (Minneapolis, Fortress: 1998), 200.

⁵⁸ Elliott, 91.

entire Gospel of Mark ended there, when in fact only a designated portion for reading in the local church ended there. While this is entirely possible, it does not do justice to the fact that many other such uses of the lectionary *telos* occur throughout this and every other book of Scripture which have not caused such confusion among the scribes. It also fails to explain why there is so much variation among the manuscripts and versions, as this error would likely be an isolated case, easily corrected by other scribes who had access to other copies before it was widely distributed. Elliott is right to dismiss this theory as “weak and unnecessary.”⁵⁹ There is no reason to believe that a lectionary reading would have to end for the sake of brevity at verse 8 without going on to include verses 9-20, since there are many other readings which are that long or longer, and since the Long Ending does not occur elsewhere in lectionary readings until around the eighth century.

As we have seen in weighing the pros and cons of the various pieces of internal evidence in the Long Ending, much of the arguments on both sides regarding style and vocabulary amount to what Wallace calls “an unprincipled approach that picks bits of data willy-nilly.”⁶⁰ Each side looks at the same data and draws different conclusions, having subjectively adapted the evidence to fit into a framework that seems to already exist in their own minds. However, there is a cumulative weight to the factors which argues strongly against the Long Ending. While scholars who defend the Long Ending are able to point to other passages in Mark where anomalies of vocabulary and style occur, these “elsewheres” are “all over the map; there is not a single passage in Mk 1:1-16:8 comparable to the stylistic, grammatical, and lexical anomalies” found in the Long Ending.⁶¹ The combination of all of the unusual words, stylistic features, and theological difficulties in such a short amount of space strongly favors viewing the Long Ending as a later addition by another writer. This evidence is even more persuasive given the suspicions which arise based on the external evidence of the manuscripts and versions.

Additionally, though Robinson and others have gone to great lengths to show that there are in fact characteristic features in the Long Ending which correspond to those Mark uses elsewhere in his Gospel, this does not automatically prove their point. In fact, if the Long Ending was written by someone later who intended for it to be accepted widely as authentic, we would expect that scribe to intentionally employ these characteristics to give his writing more credibility. He would have studied Mark thoroughly enough to pass off a believable fake. Both the Intermediate Ending and Freer Logion share a few verbal and stylistic similarities with the rest of Mark, including some which do not occur in the Long Ending, but both of these have been overwhelmingly rejected. A modern scenario illustrates this principle precisely. Morton Smith claimed to have discovered a long-lost document in 1958 that came to be known as “Secret Mark.” Smith suggested that based on verbal and stylistic similarities, this document must have been written by Mark. Many New Testament scholars were quick to join in Smith’s excitement over this discovery. However, after years of careful analysis many scholars have concluded that the document is a fake, and that it was written by none other than Morton Smith himself. If a twentieth-century American professor of history could pass off a believable fake that would fool even his contemporary scholars, it is not hard to imagine that an ancient scribe who may have

⁵⁹ Ibid, 96.

⁶⁰ Wallace, 30.

⁶¹ Ibid.

been a native Greek speaker could have carefully studied Mark and done so even more convincingly.⁶²

Many of the Long Ending's advocates propose that it was suppressed early on by scribes who felt that the sign emphases were theologically problematic or that the resurrection account did not harmonize with the other Gospels. This is a very appealing theory on many levels. It preserves the antiquity of both readings, while offering a plausible explanation of how they came into being. This proposal fails however to take into account that when scribal suppression occurs, as it often has in the transmission process, typically only the problematic elements are removed. While we may understand the desire of a scribe to omit verses 16-18 in part or altogether, here the entire passage would have been omitted. As we have already noted, much of what is found in the Long Ending is not problematic at all, and parallels for almost all of it can be found elsewhere in undisputed texts of the New Testament. Additionally, when we find the Long Ending referenced by the Fathers, they make mention of verses 15-20 (the allegedly "embarrassing" portions) far more frequently than verses 9-14 (which are decidedly more agreeable to the rest of Scripture).⁶³ Therefore it seems that the scribes were successful in suppressing the problematic elements of the Long Ending if they ever sought to do so.

Might scribes have intentionally suppressed the Long Ending because of a lack of harmony between it and the other resurrection accounts? While this is theoretically feasible, a comparison of the details will reveal that it would be unlikely. Mark 16:9 agrees with Luke 24:1 and John 20:1, whereas Matthew 28:1 differs slightly from all three. Therefore, if the scribes intended to omit something because it did not harmonize, they would have more likely omitted Matthew 28:1, not Mark 16:9 and the verses following it. This also leads us to conclude that if Mark wrote first, and his Gospel was later used as a source by Matthew and/or Luke, then they must not have had access to the Long Ending. If they did, then their endings would be more similar to Mark's. If Mark wrote later and made use of Matthew and/or Luke, it does not seem likely that he would omit the more detailed elements of the resurrection narratives that they have included.

We return to face a very basic question of textual criticism: "Which is more likely, that a scribe would intentionally add the Long Ending, or that a scribe would intentionally omit the Long Ending?" Bratcher and Nida conclude that it is "inconceivable that any copyist would have omitted the twelve final verses of the Gospel if they were original. That they should have been added, however, from other sources by copyists who felt that the Gospel, ending at 16:8, was incomplete, is highly reasonable, and is, in fact, the most satisfactory solution of the problem presented by the external evidence."⁶⁴

In view of all these factors, it is reasonable to conclude that the Long Ending is not original. Though sound arguments can be offered for one item or another which would testify for the originality of the Long Ending, there is a cumulative weight of all the internal and external factors together that must be considered. As Elliott says, "Some of these anomalies can be argued over but cumulatively they tell against Markan authorship."⁶⁵ Craig Evans offers the

⁶² Ibid, 32.

⁶³ Ibid, 11-12.

⁶⁴ Bratcher & Nida, 518-519.

⁶⁵ Elliott, 90.

following as a summary conclusion statement: “The parallels with Acts and the other Gospels, the high concentration of vocabulary found nowhere else in Mark, the absence of these verses in our oldest copies of Mark and in the earliest fathers, and the awkward connection between verses 8 and 9 have led most scholars to conclude that the Long Ending of Mark was not part of the original Gospel.”⁶⁶

It is also worth mentioning that the very existence of other alternative endings is evidence against the Long Ending. It seems that early Christians wrestled with the rather abrupt ending at verse 8 and set forth various attempts to bring a more satisfying closure to the narrative. B. B. Warfield wrote, “no one doubts that this shorter conclusion [the Intermediate Ending] is a spurious invention of the scribes; but it would not have been invented, save to fill the blank.”⁶⁷ Metzger agrees, stating, “No one who had available as the conclusion of the Second Gospel the twelve verses 9-20, so rich in interesting material, would have deliberately replaced them with a few lines of a colorless and generalized summary.”⁶⁸ Had the Long Ending been original, it seems unlikely that any scribe would have intentionally chosen to omit it in favor of the Intermediate Ending, the Freer Logion, or the Short Ending.

There have been many attempts to identify the author of the Long Ending. One very interesting proposal is that it was written by the second century Christian apologist Aristion, who was believed to be a disciple of the apostle John. This is based on the fact that a tenth century Armenian manuscript of the Gospels contains a brief statement at the end of the last line of v8 and before the Long Ending which reads, “of the Presbyter Aristion.” However it is speculative to conclude that this is a certain reference to the Aristion of the second century. It is also unlikely that an Armenian scribe so far removed from the time of writing would have been the sole guardian of such an elusive and mysterious secret.⁶⁹ While this suggestion is not without merit, it must be considered merely a possibility.

Others have suggested that the Long Ending was a piece of “floating tradition” that had been passed down orally or in writing which some scribe decided to attach to Mark as either a more fitting conclusion to that Gospel, or as a conclusion to the collection of the Gospels. This is also possible, but even more speculative. The material has not been found in any other ancient writing, and if it were handed down orally, then no proof could ever be found to confirm the origin, making the entire pursuit a waste of time and effort. Without any clear evidence of the origin of the Long Ending, we are only able to say that it is unlikely to have come from Mark himself. In view of the unique vocabulary of the Long Ending and the patchwork feel to it, it is most reasonable to consider it as a second century addition to the Gospel of Mark. The vocabulary and concepts found in the Long Ending are much more in line with other writings to come out of that period than with the rest of Mark’s Gospel. This is the view held by many, as indicated by Evans: “Most think that the longer passage is a late secondary conflation of traditions found in Matthew, Luke, John, and Acts, enriched with a few legendary details.”⁷⁰ It

⁶⁶ Craig A. Evans, “Mark 8:27-16:20” in Bruce Metzger gen. ed. *Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 34B* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 547.

⁶⁷ B. B. Warfield, *Textual Criticism*, quoted in Bratcher & Nida, 518.

⁶⁸ Metzger, 105.

⁶⁹ William Lane, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 605.

⁷⁰ Evans, 545.

appears that at some point, very early (perhaps the first part of the second century) a scribe pieced together details from the other Gospels and Acts to bring Mark to a more satisfying conclusion, or else to conclude the collection of the fourfold Gospel. This leaves us with the Short Ending (verse 8) as the most likely original and authentic ending to Mark's Gospel.

The Short Ending

To conclude that the Short Ending is to be preferred requires more than a process of elimination. There are strong arguments against this possibility as well. Some of these arguments against this have been considered already as evidence in favor of the other alternatives. But as we have seen, many of these have perfectly valid counter-arguments as well. For instance, it has already been stated that a vast majority (some ninety-five percent) of manuscripts and versions contain the Long Ending. This is strong evidence against the Short Ending, nevertheless, manuscripts must be "weighed" rather than merely counted. When we evaluate each manuscript based on its own merits, we find good support for the Short Ending. Sinaiticus and Vaticanus close with verse 8, and both remain the earliest complete manuscripts we have to date of the Gospel of Mark. These fourth century manuscripts include the whole New Testament. Prior to this time, only smaller sections of the New Testament (for example, the Gospels or Paul's letters) circulated in collected form. Similarities between the two manuscripts suggest that they likely had a common ancestor, which may well have been a Gospel collection dating to the early second century. It has been suggested that they were perhaps prepared in response to Constantine's demand for fifty new Bibles to be prepared for his capital city.⁷¹ If this is correct, then we must assume that the best available manuscripts would have been used to prepare such deluxe editions.

The anomalies of these two manuscripts, the replacement leaf in Sinaiticus and the empty column in Vaticanus, have been mentioned above. Some would argue that these unusual features argue against the Short Ending. Yet, neither of these manuscripts have sufficient space that would allow for the Long Ending to be included in the same size and style of handwriting as the preceding text. Both contain a subscript that indicates that Mark has come to an end at verse 8. In Sinaiticus, Luke begins in the very next column. The gap in Vaticanus is said by some proponents of the Long Ending to be unprecedented in the manuscript, but this is a great overstatement. There are in fact four such gaps in the manuscript. The apocryphal book of Tobit ends with more than one blank column, while the Second Esdras (an early name for Nehemiah) and Daniel each have more than two blank columns at their respective ends. All three of these books end with longer blank sections than that found at the end of Mark, yet in none of these is a textual variation indicated or even known. How then can we be so certain that a variant is indicated by the gap at the end of Mark?⁷² Also, over 700 times in Vaticanus we find "umlauts" (two horizontal dots, ¨) in the margin beside the lines where the scribe is aware of a textual variation, yet there is no such indication at Mark 16:8.⁷³ Thus, even the abnormal features of Vaticanus and Sinaiticus do not undermine their testimony in favor of the Short Ending.

When we talk about manuscripts that end at verse 8, we are not merely referring to two Greek manuscripts, though these two are important witnesses. James Brooks summarizes the more

⁷¹ Elliott, 82.

⁷² Bock in Black, *Perspectives*, 131.

⁷³ Wallace, 17-18.

important manuscripts and versions which only contain the Short Ending: “Thus ends the Gospel according to Mark ... in the two earliest and generally regarded most reliable Greek manuscripts, in one inferior Greek manuscript, in most Greek lectionaries (apparently because the lectionaries reflect older texts), in one Syriac manuscript, in one Coptic manuscript (the oldest version of the Coptic New Testament), in some Armenian manuscripts, in the two oldest Georgian manuscripts.”⁷⁴ To say “some Armenian manuscripts” is to understate the evidence somewhat, since these number over 100, including almost all of the earliest ones. The Syriac manuscript Brooks mentions is the Sinaitic Syriac (late fourth or early fifth century), which is the oldest form of the Gospels in Syriac. It is very likely that this version is based upon a manuscript from the late second or early third century. In it, following verse 8 there appears in red ink the statement, “Here ends the Gospel of Mark,” followed by the beginning of Luke. This list of manuscripts and versions is only partial, but it demonstrates the early and widespread distribution of the manuscripts that end at Mark 16:8, the Short Ending.

It is safe to assume that the early Church Fathers had access to manuscripts which we cannot access today. Occasionally, the Short Ending is said to be validated by the lack of mention of the Long Ending by the Fathers. This is an argument from silence, a dangerous line of reasoning, based upon what is “not said” rather than what is said. The fact that they seldom refer to the Long Ending does not help us know whether or not they had access to it. Mark is the least frequently quoted of all the gospels among the early Fathers, so it should not surprise us to find that there are large sections of it not found among the references of the earlier fathers. Yet, as we turn to what is said, we find further evidence for the Short Ending. Many of the comments of the Fathers about the Long and Short Endings have already been stated above, but some are worth repeating here. Eusebius, the foremost historian of the early church, stated in the fourth century that “in nearly all the copies of the Gospel according to Mark” the end was at 16:8. He remarks that “accurate” copies of Mark end at verse 8, and that the Long Ending is missing from “almost all manuscripts” which were known to him. Jerome, in the early fifth century, knew of some manuscripts containing the Long Ending as well as the Freer Logion, but stated, “Almost all the Greek codices do not have this concluding portion” (the Long Ending). Additionally, by the fifth and sixth centuries, Victor of Antioch could state that he was aware of “very many” manuscripts which contained the Short Ending only as well as “very many” which contained the Long Ending as well. Thus it appears that the Long Ending only became better known after the passage of time, while the Short Ending was more commonly known in the earlier years.

When we turn to internal evidence related to the Short Ending, we find three common objections stated. First, many scholars dismiss the Short Ending on the basis that it ends with a conjunction, the Greek word *gar*, commonly translated as “because” in English. While English syntax demands that the word order be rearranged for clarity, in the Greek text, this little word is the final one in Mark 16:8. It is widely argued that this is an inappropriate way to end a sentence, much less a book. Thorough searches have been conducted across the “vast Greek literary corpus, which consists of more than sixty million words,”⁷⁵ and these have demonstrated that only a handful of exceptions can be found. However, exceptions there are, and they are found in classical Greek literature, the Septuagint, and in the early Christian writings. It is frequently stated that Mark does not end sentences with *gar* elsewhere in the Gospel, nor do any of the

⁷⁴ Brooks, 272.

⁷⁵ Edwards, 501.

other Gospel-writers. This is not entirely accurate, for it appears that John 13:13 ends with *gar*, indicating that it is not entirely unprecedented in the Gospels. Given the fact that the Greek text does not include verse numbers or punctuation, it is difficult to tell when the writer intended for a sentence to end. Therefore, there may in fact be other usages of *gar* at the end of sentences within Mark as well. Therefore, the argument against the Short Ending based on the *gar* ending is not as conclusive as some imagine.

The second item of internal evidence that is frequently discussed concerning the Short Ending is the absence of resurrection appearances. If the Gospel according to Mark ends at 16:8, then it ends with no encounter taking place between the disciples and the risen Lord. Every other Gospel, and even most of the apocryphal and Gnostic gospels, contain stories of what transpired and what was said by Jesus after His resurrection. “The only exceptions to this are *The Protevangelium of James* and *The Infancy of Narrative of Thomas*, which contain only apocryphal legends of Jesus’ youth; the *Gospel of Truth* and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, which do not focus on either the words or deeds of the historical Jesus; and the *Gospel of Thomas*, which contains only supposed sayings of Jesus, but no deeds. Even the *Gospel of Peter*, which breaks off with the fear of the women as does Mk 16:8, contains resurrection appearances of Jesus prior to that event.”⁷⁶ The post-resurrection narratives of the biblical Gospels communicate important facts that were incorporated very early into the worship and teaching of the Christian church. How then could Mark omit these elements from his Gospel? If this is indeed a “Gospel,” a message of good news, then should it not end with a joyous reunion between the disciples and their Lord? Instead, the Short Ending closes with the disciples still in a state of abandonment while the women who have come to the tomb are silent and afraid. The inclusion of at least one post-resurrection encounter would help soften this concern, yet none is offered to the reader in the Short Ending.

In response to this very strong concern, it must be noted that no other Gospel actually narrates the resurrection event itself, only the appearances of Christ after the resurrection. Therefore, Mark cannot be said to be unique in this regard, but only unique in regard to the fact that he does not include those appearances and encounters. The Gospel of Mark also omits any information regarding the birth of Jesus. Matthew and Luke both contain familiar “Christmas” stories while John begins by explaining Jesus’ eternal origins. Mark opens without either of these perspectives. Therefore, it may be that Mark’s purpose was to give an account of the earthly ministry of Jesus, which began at His baptism and concluded with His death, burial and resurrection. Mark is not entirely silent about the resurrection. The mysterious “young man” at the tomb declares it as a fact; Jesus has clearly foretold it at least three times throughout Mark; and it has been alluded to indirectly as well. So the Short Ending does not leave us with Jesus still in the tomb, but victoriously risen from the dead in fulfillment of His promise, as proclaimed by the heavenly visitor in verse 6. The resurrection appearances were an important part of the early church’s beliefs about Jesus, and therefore it is odd that Mark does not include them; odd, but not inexplicable. The ascension of Jesus was equally important to the early church, and even this is omitted by three of the four Gospels. Similarly, as central as the Lord’s Supper is to the New Testament church, John’s Gospel does not mention the meal (though he mentions much about the upper room event that others do not), nor the institution of the ordinance.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 502.

Here again, many scholars are not convinced that the Long Ending satisfies this concern much better than the Short. After all, we have been led to expect a Galilean reunion between Jesus and the disciples based on verse 8, but we are not given one in the Long Ending. This is one reason why some propose that the original ending of Mark has been irretrievably lost. This is a very attractive proposal for it takes into consideration the problems presented by the internal and external evidence against the Long Ending, and attempts to resolve the concerns held by many against the Short Ending, namely the *gar* ending and the lack of resurrection accounts. Unless the ending was lost, it seems that Mark has left the reader hanging without complete closure. Since many feel that this would require a literary sophistication beyond Mark's abilities and make use of literary devices that were far ahead of their time, the missing ending hypothesis has found many adherents.

It is not impossible that such a loss may have occurred, but it is unlikely. If Mark had been written in codex (or book form) rather than on a scroll, then it would not be unthinkable for a page or two to fall out along the way. Keith Elliott proposes that this happened not only to the end of Mark, but to the beginning also, thus explaining the abruptness of both sections. While Peter Katz has stated that Gentile Christians were early adopters of the codex form,⁷⁷ codices did not become popular until the later part of the first century, long after Mark most likely wrote. A vast majority of the writings we know of from the first century are scrolls. In a scroll, the end of a book would be the most protected portion of it, being rewound to the inside after use. It would be far more likely for a book of this kind to lose its beginning, the portion on the outside of the scroll, than its ending.

There have even been attempts by scholars to suggest what the lost ending would have contained. Since the Gospel according to John has often been criticized for having "two endings" (John 20:30-31 and John 21:24-25), Evan Powell sets forth the idea (which has not found many followers) that the original ending of Mark became attached to the end of John, the material found in John 21.⁷⁸ The similarity between Matthew and Mark to this point and the promise of a Galilean appearance in Mark 16:8 have led others to suggest that Mark's original ending contained something very similar to Matthew 28:9-20. Also, the recurring theme of Jesus' "authority" (Greek, *exousia*) throughout Mark suggests that he may have ended the account with a transfer of Christ's authority to His disciples. We find this precisely in Matthew 28:18. Edwards points out that every episode pertaining to Jesus' authority in Mark is also found in Matthew. "The only place where Matthew includes a reference to Jesus' *exousia* (authority) that is *not* found in Mark is in the parting commandment" (28:18).⁷⁹ Given the strong possibility that Matthew used Mark as a source, this view is not without merit.

Some proponents of the lost ending are content to set forth the contents of the now lost ending only in general terms, insisting that it must have included appearances in Galilee, more information about the actions of the women following their departure from the tomb, and/or a visit by the apostles to the tomb.⁸⁰ Others go farther, suggesting the exact wording for the lost ending. The highly respected New Testament scholar C. F. D. Moule suggests that Mark went on

⁷⁷ Cited in Thomas, 416.

⁷⁸ Evan Powell, *The Unfinished Gospel*, cited in Evans, 545.

⁷⁹ Edwards, 503.

⁸⁰ Magness, 10.

to say, “and immediately they told the disciples about these things.”⁸¹ Admittedly, an ending such as this would eliminate much of the present debate. Yet, the entire proposal is based on a speculative reconstruction of *possible* words which have no evidence whatsoever outside of Moule’s own imagination.

These attempts to provide the supposed lost ending do little more than to show how some scholars believe the Gospel of Mark *should have* ended. The fact remains that no lost ending has ever been found, and therefore these suggestions remains purely hypothetical and very highly speculative. As Magness rightly states, “The more important task is to forge an interpretation suitable to the ending of the book, not to construct an ending to the book which suits our interpretation.”⁸²

While the lost ending theory has much in its favor in terms of answering questions raised by other alternatives, it has been shown to raise other questions which are not so easily answered. For the ending to be lost, it must have been lost very early prior to many copies being distributed. With the bulk of material that has been preserved in manuscripts, versions, lectionaries and the writings of the Fathers, it seems highly unlikely that a sizeable portion of Scripture could go missing without leaving any trace. The loss would have had to happen perhaps as early as the original autograph. If that was so, then it is very likely that Mark or one of his companions could have provided a close, if not exact, replacement for what went missing. It is also highly unlikely that a copyist would have chosen to leave off the original ending so that it became lost to history. The Gospel of Mark was known from a very early stage to bear the influence and approval of the Apostle Peter, and it seems doubtful that anyone in the early church would have suppressed or found objectionable something that was known to have such a high apostolic endorsement. In the end, all theories related to a lost ending are based entirely “on the one-time existence of material for which absolutely no extant trace has been found.”⁸³ This is not only unnecessary, given the evidence we have for at least two other alternatives, but it is unsound methodology as well. A much more reasonable suggestion, based on more sound methodology is the speculation that Mark may have been prevented from finishing the work by illness, persecution, or other circumstances including his possible death at the hands of Nero. That scenario is much more plausible on the grounds of Mark’s historical setting. Yet even this is not entirely satisfying, for the Gospel could have been completed by someone else. This happened with the books of Moses in the Old Testament, so there is no reason it could not happen with the book of Mark in the New. It seems that the speculations of an incomplete or lost ending to Mark are just that: merely speculations. Until further evidence emerges that makes these views more plausible, they must be set aside in favor of the text we have.

We are left with the strong probability that Mark intended to end his Gospel at 16:8. Given the concerns already raised, such as the *gar* ending and the lack of resurrection appearances, and the immediate response to the news of Jesus’ resurrection being that of fear and silence, it must be admitted that Mark 16:8 is somewhat of an unusual cliff-hanger ending. W. L. Knox claimed that the conventions of ancient biographies and related literature demand “that you must round off

⁸¹ Moule, cited in Magness, 10.

⁸² Magness, 10.

⁸³ Theodore Weeden, cited in Thomas, 418.

your incident properly, leaving nothing to the imagination.”⁸⁴ Mark rounds off the other stories in his Gospel, so it is not unreasonable to expect him to do so here with this story, and with the book as a whole. Knox also states, “To suppose that Mark originally intended to end his Gospel in this way implies both that he was totally indifferent to the canons of popular story-telling, and that by a pure accident he happened to hit on a conclusion which suits the technique of a highly sophisticated type of modern literature.” The modern literature he has in mind is what is called commonly “reader-response” literature, in which the ending is left open for the reader to fill in on his own. Thus, Knox reasons, “The odds against such a coincidence (even if we could for a moment entertain the idea that Mark was indifferent to canons which he observes so scrupulously elsewhere in his Gospel) seem to me to be so enormous as to not be worth considering.”⁸⁵

The objections of Knox and others in this regard are rooted in the assumption that the Gospel according to Mark can be categorized as ancient biography, an assumption that is less than certain. Many scholars believe that the Gospel of Mark was a brand-new style of writing that had never been employed before. Therefore, assuming that his was the first gospel written, Mark’s opening words, “The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” defined an entirely new category of literature. If that is so, then it seems inappropriate to demand that Mark follow the conventions of other writings of different genres. We cannot wrestle with what Mark *should* have done, or *could* have done; we must deal with what Mark did, and that seems to be that he ended at 16:8. And if he did, then we cannot say that he was too unsophisticated to do it, even though his intention may have been lost on some or many of his early readers.

It is obvious that many in the ancient church did have trouble with a sudden ending at Mark 16:8. The various attempts to provide more satisfying conclusions are evidence of that fact. If we assume that Matthew and Luke were following Mark’s lead in their writings, then they must have also felt that his ending was too abrupt, for they supply many more details about the post-resurrection encounters of Jesus and the disciples. While some charge that readers would not have been able to supply their own ending to an open-ended Gospel, the alternative endings and the scholarly conjectures about lost endings reveal that many readers, ancient and modern, have been able to do just that.

There have been various attempts by scholars to show that 16:8 is in fact a fitting ending to the Gospel of Mark. Though some of these attempts are more plausible than others, and some are mutually exclusive, the sheer number of them suggests that it is not out of the question to think that Mark intended 16:8 to be a cohesive, satisfying, and meaningful end to his Gospel. These attempts include literary, theological, and practical approaches.

From a literary perspective, while some suggest that a narrative of this kind requires a complete and perfectly satisfying closure, it has been pointed out by others that narratives rarely provide a completely satisfying conclusion that leaves all questions answered. Even the clichéd fairy tale ending, “And they lived happily ever after,” does not answer all questions. It presupposes that there is more to follow which is not told, an “ever after” beyond what has been written. The ending is not only the end of story that has been told, but it is equally the beginning of a new

⁸⁴ Cited in Magness, 7-8.

⁸⁵ Cited in Thomas, 413-414.

story which may never be told. In fact, even the Long Ending leaves much of the rest of the story untold; that story has many more details recorded elsewhere, and continues to unfold in the Book of Acts and throughout church history to the present day.

The Gospel of Mark is not the only work of ancient literature to conclude with an open-ending. The rhetorician Dionysius of Halicarnassus of the first century BC makes reference to the “effective use of pauses, delays, stops, obstructions and abridgments. These silences which stand for what is not there, he said give emphasis to what is there. ... The Roman rhetorician Quintilian (c. AD 35-c. 96) was still interested in the power of omission as late as the end of the first century AD. ... Quintilian recognized that they could be utilized for a variety of purposes: to achieve novelty, brevity, a sense of decency, a sense of vivaciousness, vehemence, energy or passion.”⁸⁶

Magness provides a fascinating survey of well-known ancient epics which demonstrate these very facts. “The typical epic,” he says, “though it must have a close, does not have an end ... and instinctively the supreme epic poets close their work in such a way as to leave us with a vivid sense of *going-on*.”⁸⁷ In Homer’s *Iliad*, a number of coincidental parallels can be drawn with Mark’s Gospel. For example, there is some controversy over the original ending, with many scholars believing that the *Iliad*’s last two chapters are later additions. If this is so, then the *Iliad* comes to an end with these words: “So she spoke, in tears; and the women joined in her mourning.” Even if Homer concluded the work beyond that point, there is still much which the reader is led to anticipate which is never narrated. Much of the information that modern readers “know” about the story is actually read into the text and never found, or at best only briefly alluded to, within the text. These elements include the abduction of Helen, the vulnerability and ultimate death of Achilles, the outcome of the war, the fall of Troy, and even the famous Trojan Horse. Though these are all assumed by the readers, they are only scarcely hinted at or else not even mentioned within the pages of the *Iliad*.⁸⁸ Magness goes on to provide examples from Homer’s *Odyssey* to demonstrate that both of these great works leave the reader wanting more when the final page is turned. “The Epic Cycle” is a collection of works by later authors who sought to fill in the gaps they felt were lacking in the works of Homer. These show that it is not impossible for readers to imagine for themselves how the story ends by relying on information contained within the works themselves or otherwise known from history. Magness also shows how this phenomenon of an unresolved conclusion occurs in Virgil’s *Aeneid*, the works of Sophocles, and several other ancient literary masterpieces.

Magness also demonstrates that Mark is not the only Biblical narrative to leave loose ends untied. Some of the many examples he includes in his survey are sufficient to illustrate the point. The entire book of Genesis prepares the reader to find God’s people, and more specifically the prominent figure of Joseph, settled in the land of His promise. Yet the book surprisingly concludes with Joseph “in a coffin in Egypt.” It does not end the way we expected, and though the fulfillment of that expectation will occur, the information must be found elsewhere. In Exodus 15 we find the account of the bitter water made sweet, but we are not told that there was any rejoicing, thanksgiving, or even any drinking, though we are able to assume that all of these

⁸⁶ Magness, 26-27.

⁸⁷ Duckworth, cited in Magness, 28.

⁸⁸ Magness, 28-30.

occurred. The story in Exodus 17 about God providing “water from the rock” actually never tells us that the water came forth from the rock or that anyone ever drank from it. The book of Numbers builds up the anticipation that Israel will enter the Promised Land, but ends with the people camped opposite Jericho, the goal being yet unfulfilled. If Deuteronomy was intended to supply the conclusion, it fails to do so. Although suspense is increased, entry into the land does not occur. The Song of Solomon ends with the bridegroom’s words, “My companions are listening for your voice; let me hear it,” followed by the bride’s words, “Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of spices.” Are the lovers ever united? We are not told. We expect it, but we only assume it.⁸⁹

A clear Old Testament example of an open-ended conclusion is found in the book of Jonah. In this familiar story, the prophet is commissioned to take a message of judgment to a despised nation, but runs from God’s call in disobedience. After a fishy turn of events, Jonah is miraculously redirected to obedience, and his preaching sparks a revival in Nineveh. While we expect this to produce joy in the heart of the prophet, we are surprised to find him sulking in despair in the final chapter. The book comes to a close with a question that God asks the prophet: “Should I not have compassion on Nineveh ...?” We never read Jonah’s answer to that question. We are left to wonder what happened next: Did his heart change? Did he die? Did he forsake the Lord? We do not know. Some have pointed out that there are literary parallels between the first two chapters of Jonah and the last two chapters which may lead us to the conclusion that he did have a change of heart. The “missing ending” of Jonah 4 would roughly correspond in these parallels with Jonah 2:9 where the prophet recommits Himself to the worship and service of the Lord.⁹⁰ Perhaps the connection of these dots is too sophisticated for the author and audience of that day. It seems more likely that the author’s intention may have been to leave readers with the question, forcing them to wrestle with their own hearts about their obedience and their comprehension of God’s plan for the nations. The suspended ending puts the reader in Jonah’s shoes and forces him or her to answer God’s question for themselves. It is a powerful and effective conclusion to the story – much more powerful and effective than if the actual response of Jonah had been included. Could it be that Mark does something similar? If Mark intentionally concludes with the women in fearful silence at the news of the resurrection, then his purpose may be for the reader to ask, “What will I do about the news of this risen Lord Jesus Christ?”

A New Testament parallel may be found in the Acts of the Apostles. Though Luke begins by stating his intent to provide the reader with a careful and thorough presentation of factual information, the book’s ending lacks “a dearth of circumstantial detail and wants for complete closure.”⁹¹ Two points in particular that the reader has been led to expect are left unstated as the book closes: 1) What happened to Paul?; 2) Did the Gospel have an impact in Rome and beyond? “Some commentators ... insist that some interruption caused an unnatural conclusion; perhaps a third volume was planned to ‘finish’ the story (Zahn) or Luke died before completing the book (Lietzmann). Others are content to speculate about what really did happen next: the accusers failed to appear so Paul was released, Paul was tried and acquitted, or Paul was tried and executed.”⁹² Few however are willing to consider the distinct possibility that Luke intended

⁸⁹ Ibid, 54-57.

⁹⁰ For example, Magness, 60-62.

⁹¹ Ibid, 65.

⁹² Ibid, 84.

to end this way in order to pass the commission on to the reader. Now that Paul, who has been commissioned as a witness to the nations, is in chains and facing death at the hands of Nero, how will the Gospel advance to the ends of the earth? The reader is forced to decide if he will lament the unfortunate circumstances of Paul or take action himself to carry on the mission. In the successive generations, the church has been living out “Acts 29” if you will, the continuation of the message and mission of Gospel advance. This may mean that Luke understood and even copied what Mark sought to do in the ending of his Gospel – putting the unfinished story into the hands of the reader or hearer and forcing him or her to make a decision.

These examples are powerful demonstrations of the point that Magness seeks to make: “When readers supply the ending they participate in it and experience it more fully than if the writer had supplied it to them.”⁹³ It cannot be said to be too sophisticated for Mark’s day when it has been shown that others who preceded him used the tool of open-endings with great effectiveness. And it cannot be said to be beyond the ability of the audience to supply the ending themselves by consulting other works and by taking action for themselves when there is ample evidence that both modern and ancient people have been able to do just this.

To English readers, an ending at 16:8 is surprising, for we do not expect a message of Good News (1:1) to end with fear and silence. We must remember that throughout the Bible, fear has two senses. First is that sense with which we are all familiar, a fear that is akin to horror or dread. But there is another sense in which fear is used to express a sense of awe and reverence. As Brooks writes, “The fear may not be natural fright but religious awe,” citing examples from Exodus 3:3; Isaiah 6:1-5; Jeremiah 1:6-8; Ezekiel 1:22, and Luke 1:29-30.⁹⁴ Magness states, “Fear and silence are characteristic response to the miraculous in Mark.”⁹⁵

Throughout this Gospel, fear (or something akin to it) is a common reaction of those who observe the power of God manifested in the person and actions of Jesus:

1. In 1:22, 27; 2:12, the people are amazed at Jesus’ teaching, exorcism, and healing.
2. In 4:41, the disciples are terrified at the calming of the storm.
3. In 5:15, the people fear because of the casting out of the demonic legion and the subsequent episode with the pigs.
4. In 5:33, the woman with issue of blood confessed before Jesus with trembling and fear.
5. In 5:42, the disciples and parents are astonished at the resuscitation of Jairus’ daughter.
6. In 6:51, the disciples are “completely amazed” by Jesus walking on water.
7. In 9:6-13, the disciples are frightened and silent following transfiguration.
8. In 9:15, the people are overwhelmed with wonder when they saw Jesus.
9. In 9:32, the disciples are fearful and silent about Jesus’ prediction of His death and resurrection.
10. In 10:24, the disciples are amazed at Jesus’ words about the rich.
11. In 10:32, the disciples are astonished and amazed at Jesus’ determination to go to Jerusalem.

⁹³ Ibid, 47.

⁹⁴ Brooks, 273.

⁹⁵ Magness, 9.

12. In 11:18, the chief priests and scribes feared Jesus because the crowds were amazed at his teaching.
13. In 12:17, the Pharisees and Herodians are amazed at his teaching about Caesar and God.
14. In 14:50-52, the disciples deserted him and fled and the young man fled naked presumably in fear.
15. In 15:5-6, Pilate is amazed at Jesus' silence.
16. In 16:5-6, the women (the same women found in verse 8) are alarmed.

Concerning these passages, Brooks points out, "In ten of the preceding instances Mark used one of the same words as in 16:8; in five instances he used a verb that is cognate to one of the nouns in 16:8; in the other instances he used synonyms."⁹⁶ Therefore, preceding stories have prepared the readers for what is found in 16:8, and affirm that the fear of the women is not a horrible or dreadful kind of fear, but a reverential and awestruck fear that was a frequent and common response to demonstrations of the power of God in Christ. Here, that divine power has been manifested in the empty tomb and the accompanying announcement that Jesus has risen from the dead. If we examine the three clear statements of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34), we find that each one is followed by misunderstanding, fear, and silence. These passages have prepared readers to expect uncertainty, fear, and silence to follow the fulfillment of these predictions as well.⁹⁷

The event in Mark's Gospel that most clearly parallels the resurrection narrative is the account of the transfiguration in Mark 9:2-9. Both stories begin with a reference to time (9:2, "six days later"; 16:6-7, "When the Sabbath was over ... on the first day of the week"), and both involve three followers (9:2, Peter, James and John; 16:1, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome). In Mark 9:3, the garments of Jesus "became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them." Compare this with the description of the young man in 16:5, who is "wearing a white robe." In both passages, there is a proclamation from a heavenly being concerning Jesus. At the Mount of Transfiguration, God the Father speaks, saying, "This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!" (9:7). At the empty tomb, the young man (an angelic being, Matt 28:5) says, "Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they laid Him" (16:6). Both leave the witnesses with Jesus as the sole focus of their attention (9:8; 16:7). Both narratives conclude with fear and silence (9:6, 9; 16:8). The wording is very similar between 9:6 and 16:8 reinforcing the reality that "those who are confronted with God's direct intervention in the historical process do not know how to react. ... The first human response is overwhelming fear."⁹⁸

Magness proposes a model of the miracle stories in Mark which contain five recurring features:

1. Fear, a reaction motivated by confrontation with a situation which is unknown, uncontrollable, or unsolvable.
2. Recognition of Jesus as the one who can act and overcome (a cry for help, a expression of trust, a declaration of faith).

⁹⁶ Brooks, 274.

⁹⁷ Magness, 111.

⁹⁸ William L. Lane, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 590.

3. The miracle itself.
4. Fear on a new level, that of amazement or astonishment, different from the first kind of fear. This fear is based on knowledge and sight, not the fear of the uncontrollable but of the One who can control the uncontrollable.
5. Proclamation which includes a full rehearsal of the miracle or a confession of faith or a statement of joy.⁹⁹

This model plays out repeatedly in Mark's miracle stories (1:21-28; 1:40-45; 2:1-12; 3:7-12; 4:35-41; 5:1-20; 5:21-43; 6:45-51; 7:31-37). It is not surprising then to find the pattern repeated in the resurrection account. The women approach the tomb in fear of the unknown. The miracle has already occurred, but is related to them by the young man inside the tomb. The women respond with the second kind of fear, the amazed and astonished fear of the implications of One with such power. While their subsequent proclamation is not recorded, we know that they did not remain silent forever, for the other Gospels tell us what follows, and the entire history of the church is proof that they did go and tell.

Darrell Bock adds that these cases of fear arising as a result of the demonstration of God's power call for a choice to keep one's distance or have faith (5:15; 4:41; 5:36; 6:19-20; 9:32; 10:32; 11:18). "Fear can paralyze or lead into faith. The choice is with the one who fears."¹⁰⁰ It would appear that Mark has concluded his book with the intention of leading his readers to make this choice for themselves. Readers are left hanging, but they are not hanging in ignorance. They have been told what has happened and what will follow (16:6-7). This open ending allows "readers to contemplate these unusual events and make a response of faith to God's unexpected, unusual, and powerful work. ... The declaration of resurrection leaves no alternatives but to remain in fear or to believe. ... The gospel ends with Jesus' resurrection declared as an event to be believed."¹⁰¹

The conclusion drawn by Brooks is especially helpful here: "Mark ... apparently wanted an open ending to indicate that the story was not complete but was continuing beyond the time he wrote. He wanted his readers/hearers to continue the story in their own lives. By stating that the women told no one, he challenged his readers/hearers to assume the responsibility of telling the good news to everyone. He showed that ultimately Christian faith does not rest upon signs and miracles, even appearances of the risen Lord. Only five or six hundred persons (1 Cor 15:5-8) ever saw Jesus after his resurrection, and it is unlikely that any of Mark's original readers/hearers were among these. ... Mark challenged the disciples of his day, and he continues to challenge the disciples of today, to live and witness for the Lord Jesus Christ in the present and future."¹⁰²

Therefore, the Short Ending of Mark is completely consistent with the themes and patterns developed throughout his Gospel. Though readers may desire and even expect a visible proof of Jesus' resurrection, they have been presented with the authoritative Word of God that He is risen indeed. Like the conclusion of the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16, we conclude

⁹⁹ Magness, 93-98.

¹⁰⁰ Bock in Black, *Perspectives*, 135-136.

¹⁰¹ Darrell Bock, "The Gospel of Mark," in Philip Wesley Comfort gen. ed., *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Vol 11*, (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005-c2006), 554.

¹⁰² Brooks, 275.

that if they do not believe the Word that has been given, they will not be persuaded even if they see face to face the One who has risen from the dead.

In First Corinthians 15, which may have been written a decade or more before Mark's Gospel, Paul says, "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain." This Gospel that Paul proclaims consists of the facts that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time ..." (1 Corinthians 15:1-8). Mark begins his Gospel by stating that this is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And He concludes by reporting that these things have occurred:

- "Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified" (compare with Paul's statement: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures");
- "here is the place where they laid Him" (compare with Paul: "and that He was buried");
- "He has risen; He is not here (compare with Paul: "and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures);
- "He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him" (compare with Paul: "and that He appeared ...).

The core components of the Christian Gospel are not omitted from Mark's Short Ending, but rather are powerfully proclaimed by an authoritative voice as God's truth. As with all presentations of the Gospel, the offer is made, and a decision is required. Will the women believe and obey? Though their first reaction was one of awestruck fear and dumbfounded speechlessness, we know that they did believe and act in obedience to the Word of the Gospel. And so Mark concludes by offering the same choice to his readers. "What will you do with the risen Jesus?" Will you leave the empty tomb in the fear and silence of unbelief, or will you be awestruck by the Son of God, speechless at His majestic power, and faithfully go and tell the world the message of this Good News that He is risen?

Conclusion

The day may or may not ever come when more evidence is found to confirm which of the possible endings of Mark is original beyond all shadows of doubt. Until that time, God has contented Himself to leave us with the evidence we have, entrusting us to draw fitting conclusions from that evidence. By weighing the internal and external evidence and the cases made for the various proposals, we are able to come to the conclusion that Mark most likely intended to end his Gospel at 16:8. What then shall we do with the material found in 16:9-20? There is understandable reluctance to expunge them from our Bibles, since a strong case exists for their inclusion, though perhaps not as strong as the case for their omission. Since most of what is found in the Long Ending is taught elsewhere in Scripture, we need not fear that a Christian brother or sister will fall into rank heresy or apostasy by following the teachings of the Long Ending. However, given their uncertain status, we must handle these verses carefully and beware of basing any belief and practice on these verses alone. For instance we should not infer from Mark 16:16 that baptism is a necessary requirement for salvation, or from verses 17-18 that

we should go out grabbing snakes by the tail or drinking poison. Based on other clear and undisputed teachings of Scripture, we know that these would be faulty conclusions. We are promised throughout the entire Bible that salvation is a gift of divine grace received by faith alone and not by works, and that works (even baptism) are testimonies to one's receiving of such grace, not means of receiving it (Ephesians 2:8-10, for example). We have warnings elsewhere about putting the Lord to the test (Matthew 4:5-7, for instance), and we are promised that living for Christ in this fallen world may result in suffering (2 Timothy 3:12, for instance). We are not promised that we will always escape the serpents or poison with our earthly lives intact, but we are promised that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life and he who believes in Him will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Him will never die (John 11:25-26). Therefore, we may be content to leave the Long Ending where it is, surrounded by its brackets, marked by its asterisks, clarified by its footnotes, in our English Bibles. We can view it as an early Christian attempt to round off the ending of Mark, or to conclude the entire collection of Gospels, while maintaining that Mark 16:8 is the only sure conclusion we have to the Gospel. And that ending is sufficient to prompt us all to decide what to do with the risen Jesus. It appears that Mark's aim was to present the audience with enough evidence to rightly choose to believe in Him and to walk in faith and obedience as we tell this Good News of the risen Lord to the nations.