

The Question Mark at the End of Mark
~Mark 16:9–20~

Brian Edwards notes,

“It is a straightforward matter of fact that there is no piece of ancient literature so well attested as the Bible, or with copies that are closer to the original autographs. This includes, among many others, the works of Plato, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristotle and Caesar. The earliest manuscripts we have for any of these are from at least 1200 years after the authors death—compared with documents for the New Testament that are dated with a few decades of the death of Christ.” (Edwards, 240)

When Jerome was preparing the Latin Vulgate, he wrote, “Almost all the Greek copies do not have this concluding portion.”

Three considerations for what to do with Mark 16:9–20:

1. Textual issues—internal considerations

A. Context

B. Style

C. Vocabulary

Most scholars agree with the conclusion of C. E. B. Cranfield, who writes, “In style and vocabulary they are obviously non-Markan” (*The Gospel According to Saint Mark* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1972], 472).¹

D. Logic

John 20:11–18

John 20:1

Luke 8:2

Luke 24:10–35

Matthew 28:16–17

Luke 24:36–43

John 20:19–29

1 Corinthians 15:5

Matthew 28:19-20

Acts 1:8

Acts 2:38; 16:31

John 3:18, 36

Luke 10:17

Acts 5:16; 8:7; 16:18; 19:12

Acts 2:4–11; 10:46; 19:6

Acts 2:43; 4:30; 5:12

2 Corinthians 12:12

Luke 10:19

Acts 28:3-6

Acts 3:1–10; 5:12–16; 9:12, 17–18

James 5:14–15

Acts 16:18

Acts 2:4

Luke 24:50–53

Acts 1:9–11

Luke 22:69

Acts 2:33; 7:55

Romans 8:34

Colossians 3:1

Hebrews 10:12; 12:2

1 Peter 3:22

¹ John MacArthur, [Mark 9–16](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2015), 411.

Acts 14:3
Hebrews 2:3–4
Luke 24:51–53
Acts 1:9
Hebrews 1:3
Acts 2:33; 5:31; 7:55

John MacArthur writes,

“Though they reflect traditions from early church history, they are not part of the inerrant and authoritative Word of God”.²

2. Manuscript issues—external considerations

A. It is not in the earliest and best manuscripts.

Bruce Metzger calls our attention to the fact that, “Clement of Alexandria and Origen show no knowledge of the existence of these verses; furthermore, Eusebius and Jerome attest that the passage was absent from almost all Greek copies of Mark known to them.” (Garland, 539)

B. It is noted by early scribes.

David Garland writes, “The transcriptional probability is that the longer ended would have been added to the abrupt ending in Mark’s original text.” (Garland, 539)

3. Acceptance issues—content considerations

A. The question of geography

B. The question of Mary Magdalene’s introduction

C. The question of universal, miraculous gifting of believers

D. The question of the “shorter ending”

A couple of final thoughts...

1. The Bible has been scrutinized more than any book in history, and it has stood the test of time and unparalleled analysis.
2. We cannot offer the world a reliable Savior with an unreliable Bible.

Brian Edwards concludes:

How can we be sure of truth on any issue if we are suspicious of errors anywhere? An airline pilot will ground his aircraft even on suspicion of the most minor of faults, because he is aware that one fault destroys confidence in the complete machine. If the history contained in the Bible is wrong, how can we be sure that the doctrine or moral teaching is correct? (Edwards, 127)

Mark 1:1

² John MacArthur, [Mark 9–16](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2015), 413–416.