



record of the 7th Council of Carthage (ca. 258) under Cyprian cites a Vincentius of Thibarhis who spoke of the Lord's "divine precept commanded to His apostles, saying, 'Go ye, lay on hands in my name, expel demons,'" a paraphrase of 16:17. Vincentius then quoted Matthew 28:19, a parallel to the Great Commission of Mark 16:16.

thoritative. The earliest undisputed example of this is the 2nd century writings of Irenaeus. In his *Against Heresies*, he writes, "at the end of the Gospel, Mark says:†'So then, after the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat at the right hand of God'" (III.10.5). Here Irenaeus not only quotes 16:19, but claims that it is at the end of Mark. If someone barely a generation after the composition of the New Testament quotes it, how can we question the antiquity and originality of this text?

In addition, Tatian (2nd century), in his harmony of the Gospels called the *Diatessaron*, includes 16:9-20. Many early writers refer to the Lord's words in 16:18 about being unhurt by drinking poison. Among these are Papias (ca. 110) from Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* III.39; Tertullian (ca. 212) in *Scorpiace* 15; and Hippolytus (ca. 230) in *Apostolic Tradition* 36.1. The

While the question of Mark's ending was known in the 4th century, most understood this text as inspired and unquestioned. Both Ambrose (ca. 337-397) and Augustine (ca. 354-430) frequently quoted it. Augustine, in his *Harmony of the Gospels*, comments extensively on 16:12 (III.24.69). This is significant because of the emphasis he placed on the value of the Greek text. In *On Christian Doctrine*, he wrote, "As to the books of the New Testament, again, if any perplexity arises from the diversities of the Latin texts, we must of course yield to the Greek, especially those that are found in the churches of greater learning and research" (II.15, 22). Was Augustine familiar with Greek texts having 16:9-20 unknown to Eusebius and Jerome? John Chrysostom (ca. 347-407) referred to Mark 16:9 in his *Homily 38 on First Corinthians* (5; 1 Corinthians 15:8). Finally, Macarius Magnus (ca. 400) in *Apocriticus* answers pagan challenges to Mark 16:17-18 (III.16 and 24). From the 5th century onward, citations become too numerous to mention.

Conclusion

There is no question that at some point in the early history of copying the text of Mark an issue arose over Mark 16:9-20. This influenced copies and translations after it. Yet, Irenaeus quotes it "at the end of the Gospel" little more than a generation after the New Testament canon closed. This with the overwhelming evidence of manuscripts, translations, and ancient testimony leaves no doubt that these words were in the original text of Mark as inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16).

¹ The New International Version inserts this note before its translation of 16:9-20. As we demonstrate in this article, this statement assumes a great deal and fails to express all the evidence at our disposal.

² We should note that while w has 16:9-20, it adds additional material. While that reflects alteration, its inclusion of the verses provides witness to their acceptance and existence.



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Faithful Sayings

MARCH 15
2009

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Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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"Until He
comes whose
right it is"
Ezekiel 21:27

Is Mark 16:9-20 Inspired? by Kyle Pope

Many students of the New Testament have found themselves puzzled and confused by notes they encounter at the close of the Gospel of Mark claiming, "The most reliable early manuscripts and other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20"¹ Are such statements accurate? Should we question the reliability or inspiration these verses? To answer these questions there are three bodies of evidence which demand our attention.

I. Greek Manuscripts

The basis of this claim rests largely on two fourth century manuscripts of the Greek New Testament: Codex Vaticanus (B) and Codex Sinaiticus (S). The first of these manuscripts has been listed in the Vatican library catalog since at least 1475. The second, was discovered in 1844 by the renowned Greek scholar Constantin Tischendorf in a monastery in the Sinai desert just before it was about to be burned for firewood! Both manu-



The Ending of Mark in Codex Sinaiticus (S)

scripts end the Gospel of Mark at verse eight. Since the time of Tischendorf's discovery some scholars have contended that this shorter ending reflects the "original reading."

Does this prove that these verses were not original? Not at all! Both S and B leave blanks at the end of Mark where the verses could be written. S leaves almost an entire blank col-

umn and B leaves nearly a column and a half. This may suggest that the scribe knew something was missing but didn't have a copy with this section intact. To assume that these manuscripts reflect the "original reading" presumes there is no earlier evidence for the existence of these verses. As we shall see, that is not the case.

There are over 5000 extant manuscripts of the Greek New Testament. It is often asserted that \aleph and B are the "oldest manuscripts" of the New Testament. That is not true. There are many fragmentary papyri which predate both texts. One of the most significant of these is the Chester

Beatty Papyri (\mathfrak{P}^{45}), a 2nd or 3rd century papyri of the Gospels and Acts. Unfortunately, it is damaged before 4:36 and after 12:8. However, the majority of extant manuscripts include 16:9-20. Some of these are only slightly younger than \aleph and B. For example, Codex Alexandrinus (A), a 5th century text presented to Charles I in 1627 by Cyril Lucar, Archbishop of Constantinople has 16:9-20. Codex Bezae (D) from the 5th-6th century, acquired by Theodore Beza from a French monastery and given to the Cambridge library in 1581 has both the Greek and Latin. It is also in Codices Ephraemi Rescriptus (C) from the 5th century and Washingtonensis (W) from the 4th-5th century.² A few manuscripts with 16:9-20 add scribal notes indicating that some copies didn't include it. This simply identifies the fact that an omission was present in the manuscript tradition, but proves nothing about the originality of the passage. Must we reject Mark 16:9-20 in all other manuscripts because of two manuscripts which may have left space for its inclusion?



The Ending of Mark in Codex Vaticanus (B)

II. Ancient Translations

Very early in the history of the transmission of the New Testament text, translations were made from the original Greek into languages where the gospel spread. Undoubtedly, if a manuscript from which a text was translated, had errors or omissions, these would show up in the translation also. As such, some early translations (just as in \aleph and B) end at verse eight. Bruce Metzger, in *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* writes that these include, "the Old Latin codex Bobiensis, the Siniatic Syriac manuscript, about one hundred Armenian manuscripts, and the two oldest Georgian manuscripts (written A. D. 897 and A. D. 913)" (122-23). There is also one Coptic manuscript which omits 16:9-20.

Metzger's reference demands some clarification. It is true that the 4th or 5th century Old Latin codex Bobiensis omits 16:9-20, but it adds a short unique ending of its own. Does this reflect greater accuracy, or does it evidence a lack of consistency? Jerome claimed of the Latin

texts of his day, "there are almost as many forms of texts as there are copies" (*Preface to the Four Gospels*). This in part led to his work towards an "authorized version" for the Roman world—the Latin Vulgate. In an age before the printing press, and photo imaging, human error and alteration always played a role in the production of manuscripts. That didn't mean God's word was lost. Jesus said, "**heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away**" (Matthew 24:35). It simply meant since error and alteration could occur, caution and comparison was needed in preservation of the text.

Just as the majority of Greek manuscripts preserve 16:9-20, so the majority of ancient translations do as well. These include the Syriac Peshitta (2nd-3rd century); the Sahidic Coptic (2nd-3rd century); the majority of the Old Latin translations (2nd-4th century); the Latin Vulgate (4th-5th century); the Gothic (4th century) – although it is damaged in the middle of verse 12; many Armenian manuscripts (5th century) and Ethiopic manuscripts (5th century). To question the originality and inspiration of Mark 16:9-20 demands we disregard the efforts of centuries of scholars and translators. These were people who carefully compared and investigated the text, believing it to be the inspired word of God. Can we so easily reject their scholarship?

III. The Testimony of Ancient Writers

We have seen that there is evidence that very early a textual issue arose concerning Mark's ending. The question is, does this reflect a copying error or an alteration of the original text? There is evidence as early as the 4th century that writers knew that some manuscripts omitted these verses. Two 4th century writers address this in questions regarding how Matthew and Mark harmonize accounts of the resurrection. Both writers mention that the answers depend upon whether the words are taken to be original or not. The first, historian Eusebius in his *Questions to Marinus*, writes that after verse eight "at those words, in almost all copies of the Gospel according to Mark, comes the end" (1). He further claims that "what follows" (i.e. vss. 9-20) is found "rarely in some but not in all" copies (ibid.). The second, Biblical scholar Jerome, in a *Letter to Hedibia*, claimed

that 16:9-20, "is carried in few gospels, almost all the books of Greece not having this passage at the end" (Question 3). Both Eusebius and Jerome did not emphatically reject the reliability of 16:9-20 but only acknowledge that they were disputed.

It is clear that Jerome's words cannot be construed as rejection of the reliability of 16:9-20 because of his own use of the passage. In his work *Against the Pelagians*, he uses 16:14 to argue that the Apostles showed unbelief (II.15). He even included the verses in his own Latin Vulgate translation. This is significant because Jerome stated in a *Letter to Marcella* regarding the unreliable form of the Latin texts, "I have wished to recall them to the Greek original from whence none deny, they have been translated" (27.1). Did Jerome find additional Greek texts which had Mark 16:9-20, or did he recognize that those which lacked it were flawed?

Overwhelmingly the evidence from the testimony of ancient writers falls in support of the antiquity and originality of the passage. Not only contemporaries of Jerome and Eusebius, but writers which predate \aleph , B, and the translations use it as au-

