



How the Gospel of Mark Ends
Mark 16:9-20
April 28, 2019

Most of us have seen movies or heard stories that had an unsatisfying ending. Sometimes writers provide an unexpected ending on purpose; sometimes not. Similarly, we may not be satisfied with the way Mark ends. We can't be certain, but there are three main views about the ending.

Some have regarded Mark 16:9-20 as the original ending, and these verses have been included in some Bibles for many years. Yet there are good reasons for thinking Mark did not write them. As a number of Bible versions indicate (including NIV, ESV, NASB, RSV, NRSV), the verses do not appear in some of the oldest and most reliable ancient manuscripts and versions of the New Testament. Some matters of content, flow, and style also suggest they are not original to Mark. The prevailing view among scholars is that these verses were compiled from the other Gospels and attached to Mark early in the second century (AD 100-150). As such, they form an old tradition of what happened and are true in their basic content. We can benefit from them in as much as they correspond to the rest of the New Testament, although we shouldn't make a big point out of something that is mentioned only in this section and nowhere else.

In that spirit, the two main themes in vv. 9-20 are indeed taught elsewhere. First, the disciples didn't believe those who told them that Jesus had been raised from the dead, and Jesus rebuked them for this (Mark 16:9-14; cf. Luke 24:9-11, 25-26).

We cannot please God if we do not trust Him (Mark 2:5; 4:40; 5:34; 6:6; cf. Hebrews 11:6). Second, Jesus' followers are called to tell the good news about Him, by the power of God (Mark 16:15-20; cf. Matthew 28:18-20; Acts). Personally, I have some reservations about the ways signs are sometimes practiced today, and we do need to be careful (Mark 13:22-23). At the same time, I strongly resist telling God what he will and will not do. Instead, I try to focus on telling the gospel to others and supporting it with the supernatural love and unity that Jesus said would lead others to believe (John 13:34-35; 17:20-21).

Other people say we do not have the original ending of Mark. Some believe Mark intended to write more beyond v. 8 but for some reason was prevented from doing so. Others believe he originally wrote more but that it is now lost.

Finally, many today believe Mark deliberately ended his Gospel with v. 8. That would be a somewhat unusual way to end it, because the last word (in Greek) would be "for" and because it would end on a note of fear. It would also leave us without any actual resurrection appearances, such as the other Gospels have (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:5). Yet the fear could be holy fear or reverence, which would be appropriate. And perhaps Mark intended to leave the ending open, as if to ask his readers what they intend to do with all they have heard. In that sense, each of us is writing an ending to the Gospel. Does ours match Mark's style and emphasis?

What have you done with all the messages you have heard from Mark? What do you intend to do? We'll summarize the book next week, and that may remind you of other things, but for today, how are you doing on the core matters repeated in vv. 9-20? How healthy is your actual trust in Jesus? Are you helping NW share the good news with others? And is your practice of love and unity Spirit-empowered so as to bolster the credibility of Christ to others. Or are you undermining it?

