

## A RECONSIDERATION OF THE ENDING OF MARK

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Of all the tools of historical criticism, textual criticism has been by far the most attractive to conservative scholars. George Ladd, for example, observes that

this exercise of (textual) criticism is absolutely indispensable, for it is quite clear that although God inspired the authors of the Bible to produce a divinely superintended record, He has committed the reproduction and the preservation of the text to the vagaries of human history; and the establishment of a trustworthy text is the labor of a scientific scholarship.<sup>1</sup>

Generally, evangelicals give meticulous attention to the science of textual criticism in the attempt to establish the most reliable Biblical text possible. However, one passage, the last chapter of Mark, causes more puzzlement and consternation among conservatives than most of the other passages of the Greek NT that contain variant readings. Not only is the legitimacy of a traditional reading questioned (16:9-20), but the prospects of Mark ending his gospel at 16:8 are simply too problematic for most scholars. This study will endeavor to determine the place where Mark originally ended his gospel, to explain the rise of textual variants, and to discuss the possible implications of these variants, especially for evangelicals.

Most serious NT students are aware of the various problems posed by the ending of Mark. The Greek MSS suggest six different endings.<sup>2</sup>

(1) The following MSS of Mark end at 16:8: Aleph B 304 (2386 and 1420 have a page missing at this point); syr<sup>s</sup> arm<sup>8mss</sup> eth<sup>3mss</sup> geo<sup>1,A</sup>; Clement, Origen, Eusebius<sup>mss</sup> according to Eusebius, Jerome<sup>mss</sup> according to Jerome.

(2) Latin (vt. k) 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."<sup>3</sup>

(3) The longer ending (Mark 16:9-20) is included in the following MSS: A C D E H K M S U X Y Γ Δ Θ Π Σ Φ Ω 047 055 0211 f<sup>13</sup> 28 33 274 (text) 565 700 892 1009 1010 1071 1079 1195 1230 1242 1253 1344 1365 1546 1646 2148 2174, etc.;

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<sup>1</sup>G. E. Ladd, *The New Testament and Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967) 80.

<sup>2</sup>The following information is from the Institut für neutestamentliche Textforschung in Münster as given in J. K. Elliott, "The Text and Language of the Endings to Mark's Gospel," *TZ* 27 (1971) 255-262.

<sup>3</sup>B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (United Bible Societies, 1971) 123-124.

lectionaries 60 69 70 185 547 833; Latin<sup>vt aur c d<sup>supp</sup> ff<sup>2</sup> l n o q vg syr<sup>e p h pal</sup> cop<sup>sah boh fay</sup> goth arm<sup>mss</sup> geo<sup>8</sup>; Diat<sup>Arabic, Italian, Old Dutch</sup>; Justin(?), Irenaeus, Tertullian, Aphraates, Apostolic Constitutions, Didymus, Hippolytus, Marinus (as quoted by Eusebius), Epiphanius.</sup>

(4) MS W (also known as the Freer Logion) expands the longer ending at v 14, "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 thy righteousness now'—thus they spoke to Christ. And Christ replied to them, 'The term of years for Satan's power has been fulfilled, but other terrible things draw near. And for those who have sinned I was delivered over to death, that they may return to the truth and sin no more; that they may inherit the spiritual and incorruptible glory of righteousness which is in heaven.'"<sup>4</sup>

(5) The longer ending is included in the following MSS marked with asterisks, or obeli, or with a critical note added: f<sup>1</sup> 137 138 1110 1210 1215 1216 1217 1221 1241<sup>vid</sup> 1582.

(6) The following MSS add the shorter ending (number 2 above) before the longer ending: L Ψ 099 (incomplete up to *syntomōs*) 0112 (omits *panta . . . meta de*) 579 274<sup>mg</sup>; lectionary 1602; syr<sup>hmg</sup> copt<sup>sah<sup>mss</sup> boh<sup>mss</sup> eth<sup>mss</sup>.</sup>

Of these options, reading 4 can be dismissed as an expanded form of the longer ending. Metzger notes, "The obvious and pervasive apocryphal flavour of the expansion, as well as the extremely limited basis of evidence supporting it, condemns it as a totally secondary accretion."<sup>5</sup> Reading 2 can be disregarded as the original due to its scanty MS support.<sup>6</sup> Reading 5 obviously considers the longer ending to be somewhat questionable and casts doubts on the veracity of 16:9-20. Reading 6 is evidently a conflating of the shorter reading with the longer one and can be considered, for all practical purposes, as a part of 2 or 3.

In 1920 Caspar Rene Gregory remarked, "Mark 16.9-20 is neither part nor parcel of that Gospel."<sup>7</sup> For years nearly all NT textual critics were unanimous in their support of Gregory's position. Recently, however, a few scholars have differed with the consensus position in part or in whole. Consequently a close examination of readings 1 and 3 is necessary.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>5</sup>B. M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968) 227.

<sup>6</sup>H. B. Swete observes, "As to the origin of this ending there can be little doubt. It has been written by some one whose copy of the Gospel ended at *ephobounto gar*, and who desired to soften the harshness of so abrupt a conclusion, and at the same time to remove the impression which it leaves of a failure on the part of Mary of Magdala and her friends to deliver the message with which they had been charged. Terrified as they were, he adds, they recovered themselves sufficiently to report to Peter the substance of the Angel's words. After this the Lord Himself appeared to the Apostles and gave them orders to carry the Gospel from East to West; and these orders, with his assistance, were loyally fulfilled." *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1898) ci.

<sup>7</sup>C. R. Gregory, *The Canon and Text of the New Testament* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1920) 227.



The external evidence for the longer reading is old and has good family representation. The Byzantine witnesses include A E H K S  $\Pi$ . The Caesarean witnesses include W f<sup>13</sup> 28 565 700 arm geo. The Western witnesses include D and Tatian's *Diatessaron*. The Alexandrian texts are represented by C 892 Coptic (Sahidic and Bohairic). A C D W arm and geo all date from around the fifth century, while the Coptic Sahidic and Bohairic date from the third and fourth centuries respectively with Tatian's *Diatessaron* ultimately going back to ca. 170. Such weight is quite impressive and should—by mere bulk, variety and date—be cause for further consideration.

The two oldest and most valuable uncial MSS available, however, support the abrupt ending of Mark 16:8. Aleph and B, both fourth-century compositions, are representatives of the Alexandrian witnesses, and except for Syriac<sup>8</sup>, Eusebius and Origen, which are Caesarean witnesses, support from other families is lacking. However, due to the stature of the text found in Aleph and B and the fact that original readings are sometimes preserved in only a few MSS, most scholars believe Mark ended at 16:8.

William Farmer is one of the few scholars who attempts to defend 16:9-20 as the original reading.<sup>8</sup> In discussing Origen's somewhat negative estimation of 16:9-20, Farmer suggests that Origen might have been influenced by Celsus' accusation of contradictions in the resurrection accounts given by Matthew and Mark. The question about the legitimacy of 16:9-20 could be used in defense of this charge of inconsistency. Farmer also examines another Alexandrian MS in favor of omission, Vaticanus, which by the fourth century ended with *ephobounto gar*. Yet it appears that there was some amount of uncertainty about the gospel's original ending. For after 16:8, and the subscription *Kata Markon*, the remainder of the column and the whole of the next column are left blank. The scribe "only knew that the text he was copying up to 16:8 was a matter of dispute. By not copying anything beyond 16:8 he met the essential requirement of those who felt that the Gospel needed either an ending or some word of explanation following 16:8."<sup>9</sup> The scribe therefore allowed the future owner of the MS the opportunity to make any modification deemed necessary.

Farmer also appeals to a possible allusion to 16:20 in Justin (*Apology* 45.5) as grounds for an early date of 16:9-20. Irenaeus is referred to as witnessing to 16:9 and is cited as additional weight in arguing for the possibility of originality.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, one of the most interesting arguments posed by Farmer is the text-critical rule of preferring the more difficult reading. The argument is this: If the last twelve verses of Mark are not original, in what context could they have been accepted and in turn produced? The teachings of these verses pose such problems as taking up serpents and drinking deadly poisons. As Farmer points out, there has been no evidence produced to demonstrate an area in Christendom that would either condone these actions or be powerful enough to impose them

<sup>8</sup>Although Farmer might not admit this as his thesis, his conclusions clearly imply his preference for the longer reading. The following discussion will be based on W. Farmer, *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>10</sup>This much is clear: The longer ending is quite old, dating at least to the middle of the second century.

on the Church at large through an addition to the text of the second gospel. This is an argument that has not been answered sufficiently.

As difficult as it might be to explain the origin of this ending, it is just as difficult to explain why Aleph and B omit the entire passage instead of simply omitting a couple of lines in the column, thus eliminating the difficult admonitions while salvaging the resurrection appearances. The fact remains that while external evidence is not conclusive two of the most important MSS omit these verses. Therefore internal evidence must be consulted in order to decide which reading is original.

Various scholars have appealed to the internal evidence as proof of the non-Markan origin of 16:9-20, yet relatively few have done an exhaustive study. On the other hand, a handful of scholars have argued, on the basis of internal evidence, that part or all of 16:9-20 is Markan.

Robert Morgenthauer uses "word-statistical research" in an attempt to disprove conclusively Markan authorship of the last twelve verses.<sup>11</sup> For instance, Morgenthauer argues that the number of times *kai* appears in the longer ending is lower than the average in Mark 1:1-16:8, while the number of times *de* appears in the longer reading is greater than in the rest of Mark. Recently these arguments have been called into question. In fact Eta Linnemann<sup>12</sup> and William Farmer have both demonstrated the problems involved in this analysis.

In analyzing Morgenthauer's methodology, Linnemann attempts to demonstrate that 16:15-20 is Markan while Farmer argues that no good reason exists to dismiss 16:9-20 as non-Markan. Consequently, the distinctive features of 16:9-20 must be examined in order to see if either Linnemann or Farmer is on firm ground.

*Verse 9.* The first peculiar point is that the subject changes from v 8 without being named. Farmer suggests that since Mark uses the name Jesus sparingly in other places (1:21; 1:30-2:4) its absence is not so unusual here.<sup>13</sup> Although these examples do support Farmer's point, the fact remains that the transition is not as smooth here as in other places. *Prōi*, a favorite Markan linking word, is found here (cf. Mark 1:35; 11:30; 13:35; 15:1; 16:2). This is the only place in the NT that the verb *ephanē* is used of a resurrection appearance. While this verb is used with reference to Elijah in Luke 9:8, this does not seem to be a resurrection appearance. In considering *par hēs ekbeblēkei*, Farmer points out that while *para* plus the genitive is found in several other places in Mark (3:31; 5:20; 8:11; 12:2; 14:43) the phrase in question is found nowhere else in the NT. Gould comments, "This is the only case of the use of this preposition in describing the casting out of demons, and it is as strange as it is unexampled."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup>R. Morgenthauer, *Statistik des neutestamentlichen Wortschatzes* (Zurich, 1958) 58-60. This short critique is based on information found in Farmer, *Last* 79-83, and Elliott, "Text," as well as Morgenthauer's work.

<sup>12</sup>E. Linnemann, "Der wiedergefundene Markusschluss," *ZTK* 66 (1969) 255-287. In addition to this article Elliott's work is relied on in assessing Linnemann's argument.

<sup>13</sup>Farmer, *Last* 83-84.

<sup>14</sup>E. P. Gould, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1896) 305.



*Verse 10.* *Ekeinē* is not characteristic of Markan style, although it occurs three times in the longer ending (vv 10, 11, 20). The pronoun is common in the Johannine writings. Although *poreuomai* is quite a common verb in the NT, it occurs only once in Mark (9:30), and there in a compound form. It occurs three times, however, in the last twelve verses (10, 12, 15). Further, the expression *tois met autou gegomenois* occurs nowhere else in the NT and is an unusual way of referring to the disciples.<sup>15</sup> Although *penthousi* does not appear anywhere else in Mark, as Gould observes, "that does not count, as it is about the rate of its use in the other books of the New Testament."<sup>16</sup>

*Verse 11.* Farmer suggests that Mark's use of *kakeinoi* is a syntactical peculiarity since *kakeinon* is also found in Mark 12:4-5 and provides a syntactical parallel.<sup>17</sup> The verbs *etheathē* and *ēpistēsan* occur twice in the longer ending but nowhere else in Mark.

*Verse 12.* Both Luke and John often employ the expression *meta de tauta*, but this is its only occurrence in Mark. However, twice Mark does employ *meta* plus the accusative (1:4; 14:28).<sup>18</sup> *Ephanerōthē* occurs elsewhere in Mark, but of course only here in reference to a resurrection appearance of Jesus. As for the use of *hetera*, Mark seems to have a clear preference for *allos*. In addition there is no firm example of *heteros* anywhere in Mark.<sup>19</sup> Except for its appearance here, *morphē* is used in the NT only by Paul (Phil 2:6-7).

*Verse 14.* Though *hysteron* is found in the other gospels, Mark does not use it. *Hendeka* is a technical word used to describe the eleven remaining disciples. It occurs only in post-resurrection situations, which might explain why Mark did not use it before.<sup>20</sup> This is the only place in the NT where *oneidizō* is used of Jesus rebuking the disciples.<sup>21</sup> This is the only place in the NT where the faults *apistian . . . kai skēlērokarkian* are leveled at the disciples.<sup>22</sup>

*Verse 15.* Since Mark begins his gospel with *euangelion*, Farmer states that the occurrence of the word lends more credence to possible Markan authorship of these verses.<sup>23</sup> It is only here that *ktisei* means the sum of creation rather than the creative act.<sup>24</sup>

*Verse 16.* Although *katakriō* occurs in 10:33; 14:64, this is the only time the passive *katakrithēsetai* appears.

*Verse 17.* Paul talks of "speaking in tongues," but this is the only place that *glōssais . . . kainais* ("new tongues") are mentioned in the NT.

*Verse 18.* *Opheis* does not occur in Mark 1:1-16:8. *Thanasimon*, a rare word, does not appear anywhere else in the whole of the Greek Bible except in the apocryphal Acts of John. *Blapsē* only occurs in Luke 4:35 in the NT. Even though Mark uses *kalōs* in other passages, the combination *kalōs exousin* appears only here in the NT.

<sup>15</sup>Elliott, "Text" 259.

<sup>20</sup>Farmer, *Last* 93.

<sup>16</sup>Gould, *Critical* 306.

<sup>21</sup>Elliott, "Text" 259.

<sup>17</sup>Farmer, *Last* 89.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>23</sup>Farmer, *Last* 94.

<sup>19</sup>Elliott, "Text" 259.

<sup>24</sup>Elliott, "Text" 260.

*Verse 19.* The combination *men oun* occurs nowhere in Mark, with *oun* itself being rare.<sup>25</sup> Jesus is never given the Christological title in Mark's gospel.

*Verse 20.* While *ekēryxan pantachou* is found only here in the gospels, the verbs *synergountos*, *bebaiountes* and *epakolouthountōn* are found only here in the NT.

In drawing some conclusions about the internal evidence, Farmer remarks that "evidence for non-Markan authorship seems to be preponderant in Verse 10. Verses 12, 14, 16, 17, 18, and 19 seem to be either basically, or in balance, neutral. Evidence for Markan authorship seems to be preponderant in verses 9, 11, 13, 15, and 20."<sup>26</sup>

Given the difference in the subject matter of the gospel of Mark and the last twelve verses, it is possible to see some reason for a small change in vocabulary. Linnemann, however, seems to be mistaken in separating vv 9-14 from vv 15-20. The last verses belong together since several words appear in both sections that are not in Mark 1:1-16:8. Farmer attempts to explain the non-Markan elements present in 16:9-20 by attributing them to the redactional use of older material by the evangelist and suggests that the last twelve verses belong to the autograph.<sup>27</sup> This suggestion is possible but not probable. It seems that Mark uses tradition as his own and modifies it more than Farmer would like to say. Mark's treatment of the passion is an example of this.

Therefore, what does the evidence suggest about the ending of Mark? The tentative conclusion about the problem of the place of the last twelve verses would seem to demand one to acknowledge that the text as we now have it ends at 16:8, despite Farmer's ingenious presentation. Yet it does appear that the last twelve verses are quite old. These resurrection appearances were added to Mark's gospel at an extremely early stage to soften the abrupt ending found at 16:8.<sup>28</sup> Metzger observes, "Since Mark was not responsible for the composition of the last twelve verses of the generally current form of his Gospel, and since they undoubtedly had been attached to the Gospel before the Church recognized the fourfold Gospels as canonical, it follows that the New Testament contains not four but five evangelistic accounts of events subsequent to the resurrection of Christ."<sup>29</sup>

At this point the question must be raised: Did Mark originally end his gospel at 16:8? Three possible solutions are often suggested: (1) Mark was physically unable to finish his gospel due to death or persecution; (2) at one time there existed an ending to his gospel, but somehow it was separated and lost; and

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>26</sup>Farmer, *Last* 103.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>28</sup>On the basis of an Armenian manuscript of the gospels, copied A.D. 989, C. R. Gregory adamantly suggests that the last twelve verses were added by the Presbyter Ariston. As intriguing as this might be, it is doubtful that this valuable piece of information could have eluded all the manuscripts until the end of the tenth century. Gregory, *Canon* 511.

<sup>29</sup>Metzger, *Text* 229.



(3) Mark ended his gospel at 16:8 for a specific reason. As is easy to imagine, each of these theories has many supporters.

It is often argued that the gospel could not possibly end at 16:8 since the final word of the text is *gar*. This ending would be strange indeed, for only a handful of sentences can be offered in support of this unconventional ending. W. L. Knox writes:

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 odds against such a coincidence (even if we could for a moment entertain the idea that Mark was indifferent to canons which he observes scrupulously elsewhere in his Gospel) seem to me to be so enormous as not to be worth considering.<sup>30</sup>

Recently, however, P. W. van der Horst has sought to prove once and for all that a book can end with *gar*.<sup>31</sup> Noting the examples of scholars such as R. H. Lightfoot, S. E. Johnson and Walter Bauer, van der Horst seeks to add one final, convincing example. Plotinus ends his thirty-second treatise as follows: *teleioteson gar*. Even though it is now agreed that treatises 30, 31, 32 and 33 were formerly one extended treatise, Richard Harder, a distinguished Plotinus scholar, maintains that Porphyry divided these treatises where he did intentionally.<sup>32</sup> Consequently van der Horst contends that since a philosophical discourse can end with *gar* so can any other work. This proposal certainly casts new light on this long discussed problem, but one must wonder if van der Horst is completely justified in claiming that "the argument that a book cannot end with the word *gar* is absolutely invalid."<sup>33</sup>

Others who attempt to deal with the problem of a book ending with *gar* propose a variety of solutions. J. Luzarraga thinks that an oral or written Semitic tradition was adopted by Mark in v 8 and that Mark, confusing the emphasis in a Semitic word *bhl* that connotes both fear and haste, used the Greek word for "fear" rather than translating it as "haste," which was intended in the original Semitic tradition.<sup>34</sup> Frederick W. Danker explains that Mark ends with *gar* because of a haplographic omission that took place during the copying process.<sup>35</sup>

C. F. D. Moule suggests that the *gar*-clause was originally parenthetical and that the main sentence continued after it. If the words *kai euthys legousin tois*

<sup>30</sup>W. L. Knox, "The Ending of St. Mark's Gospel," *HTR* 35 (1942) 21-22.

<sup>31</sup>P. W. van der Horst, "Can a Book End with *gar*? A Note on Mark XVI. 8," *JTS* 23 (1972) 123.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>34</sup>J. Luzarraga, "Retraduccion Semetica de *phobeomai* en Mc 16, 8," *Bib* 50 (1969) 497-510. I am indebted to Michael Clemmer for this reference.

<sup>35</sup>F. W. Danker, "Post-script to the Markan Secrecy Motif," *CTM* 38 (1967) 26.

*mathêtais peri panta toutōn* were added after *ephobounto gar*, the problem would be cleared up.<sup>36</sup>

G. W. Trompf argues that if Mark ended at v 8 he abandoned his pattern of always ending a pericope with Jesus' comforting words. Mark's usual pattern (cf. 1:27; 2:12b; 4:41; 5:42, 43; 6:2, 52; 7:37; 9:6, 7; 10:32, 33; 11:18; 15:44; 16:5, 6) would indicate that Jesus should appear and dispel the women's fears. Jesus does not appear, and therefore the original ending should be reconstructed on the basis of Matthew. Furthermore, the ending would need a divine action.<sup>37</sup> The absence of this ending might have a "simple" explanation. It is possible that vv 9-20 belong to a "second edition" of Mark.

The answer may well have a good deal to do with the coming of the four Gospels into one corpus—another mid-second century phenomenon. If the four-Gospel canon was sponsored so early both in the West and East, then it was apparently the revised edition of Mark which was sponsored with it, Mark's text now conforming to those of the other (more dominant) evangelists. In view of heretical attempts to corrupt gospel texts in the second century, an authoritative Markan text had to be established. The longer ending thus acquired official support. For largely following the recent and reliable-looking Lukan account, it compromised the earlier traditions by presenting both an appearance to one woman (Magdalene) and to the eleven, whilst putting old "political" problems into forgotten oblivion by specifying neither a first appearance to Jesus' mother, nor to Peter.<sup>38</sup>

The other endings would easily have fallen under the category of unauthorized and fallen out of use. Trompf's argument is an intricate one based on redaction criticism, but it leaves one wondering if it is feasible. For even if Trompf has discovered the original ending of Mark, his explanation about the absence of such an ending in all of the available manuscripts is a very difficult one to accept.

Another argument advocating a lost ending is that proposed by Charles J. Reedy, who seeks to resolve the problem by making a textual analysis of Mark's gospel. In Mark 8:31-11:10 Reedy claims to have found a pattern that the passion predictions follow while unfolding the messianic secret. The five-part structure is as follows: (1) The Son of Man is betrayed to the authorities; (2) the authorities kill the Son of Man; (3) the Son of Man will rise from the dead; (4) the Son of Man will teach the true meaning of discipleship; and (5) the Son of Man will be given messianic authority. Reedy points out that Mark's passion-resurrection narrative follows this structure consistently through (3) but does not describe the last

<sup>36</sup>Moule comments, "In that case, I dare to question whether any commentator would have puzzled long over the parenthesis. Would it not obviously mean that their trembling and amazement made them run straight back to the disciples, uttering not a syllable either to the young man at the tomb or to anybody they may have met on the way? The refusal to linger over the normal eastern exchange of greetings is a familiar mark of haste or urgency: II Kings IV.29, Luke X.4 are obvious examples from Scripture." C. F. D. Moule, "St. Mark XVI.8 Once More," *NTS* 2 (1955) 58-59.

<sup>37</sup>G. W. Trompf, "The First Resurrection Appearance and the Ending of Mark's Gospel," *NTS* 18 (1972) 308-330.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 328-329. Trompf continues: "For those writers (Origen, Eusebius, Gregory of Nyssa, or Jerome) age was not the crucial question, and by 'accuracy' they did not mean the application of modern scientific principles of form and textual criticism. The simple facts of manuscriptal divergence and the integrity of tradition are their key concerns, and nothing they say excludes the possibility of our 'original ending,' nor leads one to put great store by their critical acumen."



two parts of the fulfillment of the messianic secret. Consequently Reedy concludes:

On the basis of the textual evidence delineated in this study, it would not seem rash to suggest that the original Marcan Gospel went beyond 16:8, including points D and E, that is depicting the risen Jesus teaching his disciples, in some sort of Farewell Discourse, the nature of true discipleship and openly displaying his Messianic authority in fulfillment of 9:9. For in the words of Anton Chekhov, "If you hang a pistol on the wall in the first Act, you must fire it by the third." We must hold Mark accountable to this literary principle.<sup>39</sup>

Rudolf Bultmann can also be added to the list of those who suspect that Mark originally went beyond 16:8. For Bultmann, it seems that an appearance of the risen Jesus in Galilee has been lost.<sup>40</sup>

Two other reasons may be offered in support of a lost ending. First, *phobeomai* is used with an object about half the times it appears in Mark. Second, if Mark ends at 16:8, this gospel would begin with "good news" and end with "fear." It seems that something more is expected.

Is it possible to conceive that the last page of a manuscript could be lost? One obstacle to this view is that nearly all the documents from the first century are scrolls. Since the scroll would expose the beginning of the text it is difficult to comprehend how this would be conducive to a theory that the end of Mark was accidentally lost. On the other hand, Peter Katz has suggested that the Gentile Christians early adopted the codex-form for their Scriptures instead of the roll-form, in a deliberate attempt to differentiate the usage of the Church from that of the synagogue.<sup>41</sup> Metzger points out the advantages of the codex-form over the scroll-form: "(a) It permitted all four Gospels or all the Epistles of Paul to be bound into one book, a format which was impossible so long as the roll was used; (b) it facilitated the consultation of proof-texts; (c) it was better adapted to receiving writing on both sides of the page, thus keeping the cost of production down."<sup>42</sup> If the only copy of Mark was in a codex form, it is possible that during the time in which Matthew and Luke were dominant Mark was not recopied and the only existing codex became worn, consequently losing the last page.

Another explanation of Mark's ending concerns a deliberate alteration. If the "original" ending of Mark was not harmonious with the other gospel accounts, it is possible, for the sake of consistency, that the ending was intentionally omitted. J. Jeremias has suggested that Mark stopped where he did in order to keep from pagan readers what was to follow.<sup>43</sup> While such conjectures are possible, it is hard to say with any certainty that these proposals are probable.

Consequently a growing number of scholars asserts that Mark 16:8 is the point at which the author originally intended to end his gospel. One of the first to

<sup>39</sup>C. J. Reedy, "Mk 8:31-11:10 and the Gospel Ending: A Redaction Study," *CBQ* 34 (1972) 196-197.

<sup>40</sup>R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (New York: Harper, 1968) 285.

<sup>41</sup>P. Katz, "The Early Christians' Use of Codices instead of Rolls," *JTS* 44 (1945) 63-65.

<sup>42</sup>Metzger, *Text* 6.

<sup>43</sup>J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (London: Scribners, 1966) 132.

propose that Mark ended at 16:8 was W. C. Allen. Contrary to those who would later follow this thesis, Allen had a rather low estimate of Mark's literary abilities. Allen claims, "It is not a literary work planned by a skilled writer; but is a collection of incidents and sayings from the life of Jesus based upon reminiscences of an eye-witness."<sup>44</sup> By appealing to the transfiguration as a literary parallel, Allen attempts to explain the significance of *ephobounto gar*. The parallelism is set forth as follows:

In the resurrection account, (1) disciples see a vision of the supernatural, and (2) women receive what they deemed to be an angelic assurance that Jesus had proved himself to be conqueror of death and was alive; in the transfiguration account, (1) Peter bursts into speech not knowing what to say (or what he was saying) for he is afraid, and (2) the disciples are stunned into silence for they are afraid.<sup>45</sup> The fear was the result of reverential awe. Therefore, Allen suggests, the book ends on a high note. The *gar* is explained as the logical place to finish since an Aramaic idiom is being reflected (the Aramaic conjunction not coming at the end of the sentence).

Robert Meye argues that the fear in v 8 is a characteristic Markan reaction to God's power and that Markan theology emphasizes the "Word of Jesus." The resurrection was so well known that it is its own ending (or, rather, new beginnings), so there is nothing wrong with Mark ending at v 8 on the "Word of Jesus" through an angel with the fearful women. The gospel begins abruptly; abruptness is characteristic of Mark's writing; therefore the abrupt ending should be expected.<sup>46</sup>

Danker speculates that the silence and the nature of the messianic secret in Markan theology demand revelation only at the proper time (i.e., after the resurrection). Verses 1-8 are the report of the message through the women to the apostles that it is time to break the silence and to reveal the secret—there is no more than that to the chapter.<sup>47</sup>

Theodore Weeden approaches the problem from a different angle. Presupposing that Mark was written as a severe rebuke of the disciples, Weeden asserts that Mark's ending is more important than often realized:

The crowning evidence for attributing the programmatic, denigrated picture of the disciples in Mark to the evangelist himself lies in his treatment of, or rather his failure to treat, the disciples after the denial of Peter. Following Peter's denial the disciples do not reappear again in the narrative. . . . What is even more startling, following their total renunciation of Jesus, not only are the disciples conspicuously absent from all subsequent events—even the kerygmatic event upon which any claim for apostleship must be based: the resurrection—but there is no indication by

<sup>44</sup>W. C. Allen, "St. Mark XVI.8 'They Were Afraid.' Why?", *JTS* 47 (1946) 46.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup>R. P. Meye, "Mark's Special Easter Emphasis," *Christianity Today* (1971) 584-586. W. Lane observes, "Fear is a constant reaction to the disclosure of Jesus' transcendent dignity in the Gospel of Mark (cf. Chs. 4:41; 5:15, 33, 36; 6:50; 9:6, 32). . . . In point of fact, the present ending of Mark is thoroughly consistent with the motifs of astonishment and fear developed throughout the Gospel." *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 591.

<sup>47</sup>Danker, "Post-script" 26.



Mark that the disciples were rehabilitated, that apostolicity *was* conferred upon them after their apostasy, as the other evangelists clearly record.<sup>48</sup>

Probably one of Weeden's most damaging statements to those who propose a lost ending involves the unsound methodology involved in basing an argument "on the one-time existence of material for which absolutely no extant trace has been found."<sup>49</sup> In light of this charge one does not necessarily have to accept Weeden's thesis about the disciples to discern the strength of his case against a lost ending. But for Weeden this polemic against the disciples is closely tied to the ending, for he comments, "Mark 16:8b must be read at full face value with all its sundry ramifications."<sup>50</sup>

Norman Petersen presses Weeden's thesis to its logical conclusion. "In literary terms Weeden's argument is that the narrator has established the character of the twelve disciples as unreliable."<sup>51</sup> The reader has been led to believe that Jesus is God's Son and that whatever he predicts will come to pass. When the reader comes to 16:8, however, having expected the disciples to meet Jesus in Galilee, he realizes that a cruel thing has taken place: Jesus is unreliable, God has made a mistake. But Petersen states that Mark does not mean what he says in 16:8. Petersen explains:

In an ironic reading of the narrator's closing sentence we have a bona fide closure and a prism through which the reader must re-view what has been read in order to complete the imaginative work required by the narrator. . . . First, the reader recognizes irony in 16:8 because a literal ending of it makes nonsense of the narrator's previous generation of expectations and satisfactions. . . . The ironic equivocation of the meaning of 16:8 redirects the reader's attention back to the immediately preceding words of the young man—he has risen; he is going before the eleven to Galilee; there they will see him, as he told them. These words restore the community interrupted by 16:8 and begin the reader's experience of the second effect of the irony. They tell the reader that even while the women are muddled about (Mark 14-15), Jesus, having risen, is on his way to Galilee where the disciples will soon see him.<sup>52</sup>

By explaining Mark's intention in this way Petersen maintains a "proper" end to a gospel and yet deals only with what the text actually says.

Still another point of view is J. D. Crossan's contention that the empty tomb was created to avoid and oppose the idea of a resurrection. The women's silence at the end of Mark demonstrates that the "Jerusalem community led by the disciples, and especially Peter, has never accepted the call of the exalted Lord communicated to it from the Markan community."<sup>53</sup>

<sup>48</sup>T. Weeden, *Mark: Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) 44.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>51</sup>N. Petersen, "When is the End not the End?", *Int* 34 (1980) 160.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 162-163.

<sup>53</sup>J. D. Crossan, "Empty Tomb and Absent Lord," *The Passion in Mark* (ed. W. Kelber; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) 149.

Robert Tannehill argues that 16:8 should really cause no problem at all. Throughout the gospel, Mark uses various means to convey his point, but one thing is always evident: Whatever Jesus foretells comes to pass. On the basis of Jesus' past performances, the reader of Mark grows to expect fulfillment of "prophecy." Consequently when the reader is faced with Mark 16:8 he naturally concludes that Jesus will indeed see his disciples in Galilee. Thus the gospel ends on a high note.<sup>54</sup>

What is one to conclude from this investigation concerning the ending of Mark's gospel? Several summary statements will draw this inquiry to a close.

1. Although Mark 16:9-20 has much old and good MS support, it appears that this longer reading is quite old but, still, only secondary. Even with the peculiarities of Vaticanus, the variety of family representation of 16:9-20, and the problem of the content of the longer ending, the abrupt ending at 16:8 is to be preferred.

2. Due to a large number of words that appear in 16:9-20 but nowhere else in Mark, in some cases the whole of the NT, the strange syntactical constructions, and the abrupt transition between vv 8 and 9, it seems that this section does not belong to the canonical Mark. Even though it is possible to argue that Mark 16:9-20 may have been an ancient collection of resurrection appearances reworked by Mark, it is more probable to assume that those Markan peculiarities that occur in 16:9-20 are due to the compiler's attempt to imitate Markan style.

3. Because of the problems caused by a document ending with *gar*, the many passion predictions, and the mounting expectation of a resurrection appearance in Galilee, the reader is not totally unjustified in expecting a different ending than what exists (16:8). Since it is not probable that a codex would lose its last page (although some did), it is not absurd to believe that one or more words may have accidentally been omitted after *gar*, in 16:8, if the word(s) was at the top of an "extra" page. If there were any more words to the gospel, then Moule's suggestion is probably the best.

4. Due to the fact that conjectural emendation is not the norm in text criticism, one is compelled to regard 16:8 as the last words penned by Mark. This reading explains the origin of the other readings, which seek to smooth the abrupt ending, and must be considered the more difficult reading (although snake handling and drinking poison are quite difficult in themselves).

5. Several scholars have attempted to interpret Mark on the basis of 16:8 as the end. The most responsible means of dealing with this problem is, as Weeden suggests, to make sense of what exists, not conjecture. Of the several proposed solutions, those of Petersen and Tannehill seem to have the most to commend them. For the reader is allowed to believe that fear was a natural response for the women, but despite this fact the predictions of Jesus will be fulfilled. The reader is assured that Jesus did go to Galilee, fulfilling his own predictions. Thus the gospel ends with hope, not despair. This conclusion is of great apologetic value to the evangelical. In addition, Mark 16:9-20 is then a fifth witness to the resurrection recorded in the gospels (assuming non-Markan origin).

Where will future research lead in the discussion of this problem? Farmer's work will probably inspire more research among those who for theological rea-

<sup>54</sup>R. C. Tannehill, "The Gospel of Mark as Narrative Christology," *Semeia* 16 (1979) 57-95.



sons feel compelled to cling to 16:9-20. For those scholars incapable of believing a gospel can end with fear, not to mention *gar*, other attempts can be made in conjecturing a conclusion. Yet the most profitable area for further inquiry will be with those who view 16:8 as Mark's ending. Petersen and Tannehill have initiated a fruitful area to explore, demonstrating that the gospel ends on a positive note.