

A TEXTUAL AND STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF MARK 16:9-20

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The purpose of this study is to address two questions: 1) Should Mark 16:9-20 be included in biblical exegesis and 2) If so, what are the structural features of this passage that might aid in its interpretation? In order to answer the first question, the external and internal evidence concerning this passage as a textual variant and the question of its canonicity will be explored. The second question will be answered by presenting a diagram of the passage's syntactical and semantic structure and by making observations concerning the unit's overall structure and development.

Introduction

As one teaches, preaches, or studies from the book of Mark, should he include Mark 16:9-20 in his exegesis? This question will be addressed by exploring the external and internal evidence concerning this passage as a textual variant and by considering the question of its canonicity. If Mark 16:9-20 should be included in exegesis, what are the structural features of this passage that might aid in its interpretation? This question will be answered by presenting a diagram of the passage's syntactical and semantic structure and by making observations concerning the unit's overall structure and development.

The current consensus of scholarship is that Mark 16:9-20 was not in the original manuscript¹. There are a few rare exceptions to this consensus; William Farmer is the most notable example². Most of the recent writings on this passage do not attempt to establish the ending of Mark (they assume it is v. 8), but endeavor to explain what may have happened to the real ending or why Mark may have intentionally ended his gospel

¹J. Williams, "Literary Approaches to the End of Mark's Gospel," *JETS* 42 (1999) 24, writes: "The general consensus among New Testament scholars is that the writing of Mark the evangelist ends with 16:8". N. Clayton Croy, *The Mutilation of Mark's Gospel* (Nashville 2003) 14, also states that "the secondary nature of these verses has been established to the satisfaction of virtually all scholars". Many others have made similar comments on the status of scholarship on this issue, such as C. Evans, P. Danove, and W.L. Lane.

²See W. Farmer, *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark* (New York 1974). See footnote four for examples from the past.

at v. 8³. It is interesting to note, however, that this consensus is somewhat recent to New Testament studies. Johann Greisbach, in his second critical edition (1806), may have been the first to seriously question the originality of Mark 16:9-20⁴; and it appears that not until the last half of the twentieth century

has the present scholarly agreement been so widespread⁵. A significant result of the dominance of this view is that many scholars have chosen to exclude this passage from their exegetical work⁶. Although there are certainly many questions surrounding “the long ending of Mark” (hereafter abbreviated LE), should it be excluded from exegesis? First, one must evaluate the external and internal data that is brought forth as evidence that the LE was not in the original manuscript.

External Evidence

The primary external evidence organized by text types is as follows⁷:

³ W.L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids 1974) 591: “That verse 8 marks the ending to the Gospel in its present form is scarcely debated”. For comments on what is being debated, see Lane, *Mark*, 591; P.L. Danove, *The End of Mark’s Story: A Methodological Study* (Leiden 1993) 1; D. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove 1990) 92–93.

⁴ See J.W. Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel according to St. Mark* (Ann Arbor, Michigan 1883, 1959) 83. Greisbach is the first in Philip Schaff’s list of scholars who reject the LE: “It is rejected or questioned by the critical editors, Griesbach, Lachmann, Tischendorf, Tregelles, Alford, Westcott and Hort (though retained by all in the text with or without brackets), and by such critics and Commentators as Fritzsche, Credner, Reuss, Wieseler, Holtzmann, Keim, Scholten, Klostermann, Ewald, Meyer, Weiss, Norton, Davidson”.

He also includes a list of early defenders: “The passage is defended as genuine by Simon, Mill, Bengel, Storr, Matthaei, Hug, Schleiermacher, De Wette, Bleek, Olshausen, Lange, Ebrard, Hilgenfeld, Broadus (“Bapt. Quarterly,” Philad., 1869), Burgon (1871), Scrivener, Wordsworth, McClellan, Cook, Morison (1882)”. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Volume 1: Apostolic Christianity* (Grand Rapids 1910; Oak Harbor, WA 1997). To those who defend it, A.T. Robertson adds Eichorn, Scholz, Bleek, Scrivener, Salmon, E. Miller, and Belser. See A.T. Robertson, *Studies in Mark’s Gospel* (New York 1919) 129.

Some more recent scholars that reject the LE as original include Carson, Moo, and Morris (*Introduction*), M. Holmes, J. Thomas, D. Juel, J. Williams, D. Wallace, C. Evans, C. Blomberg, D. Guthrie, R.A. Guelich, A.B. Bruce, A.T. Robertson, R. Gundry, and P. Danove.

⁵ See Croy, *Mutilation*, 28.

⁶ Some authors that do not include interaction with the text of the long ending in their works (although some comment on the textual problem) are: R.J. Decker, *Temporal Deixis of the Greek Verb in the Gospel of Mark with Reference to Verbal Aspect*; E.J. Pryke, *Redactional Style in the Marcan Gospel*; R.H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on his Apology for the Cross*; W.L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*; J.G. Cook, *The Structure and Persuasive Power of Mark: A Linguistic Approach*; D.E. Garland, *Mark*; J.A. Brooks, *Mark*.

⁷ The discussion of the external evidence can also include the sometimes ambiguous citations of the church fathers and analyses of the blank space that follows the LE in codex B. Robertson writes, “B has a blank space, which shows that the scribe knew of the longer ending but concluded not to give it”. Robertson, *Studies*, 131. Other scholars, however, point out other such seemingly random blank spaces and conclude that they have no significance. See Schaff, *Apostolic Christianity*.

Variant	Byzantine	Alexandrian	Western	Other
Omit vv 9-20	304	ⲁ B cop ^{sa.ms}	syr ^s mss ^{acc. to} Severus Jerome mss ^{acc. to Jerome}	arm ^{mss} geo ^{1, A} Eusebius mss ^{acc. to Eusebius}
Include shorter ending only			it ^k	
Include the shorter ending and vv 9-20		L Ψ 579 cop ^{sa.mss} , bo.mss l 1602 greek Coptic		083 099 274 ^{mg}
Include vv 9-20 with critical note or sign	205 and others			f ¹
Include 9-20	A Byz [E G (H defectively) Σ] 180 597 1006 1010 1243 1292 1342 1424 1505 2427 syr ^h	C Δ 892 1241 33 cop ^{bo} cop ^{lay} Didymus ^{dub}	D syr ^c it ^{aur, c.} d.supp. ff.2, l. n, o, q vg Irenaeus ^{lat} Augustine Rebaptism Ambrose mss ^{acc.} toSeverus; mss ^{acc. to} Jerome	Θ (W with long addition) f ¹³ 28 157 565 700 1071 syr ^{pal} arm ^{mss} geo ^B mss ^{acc. to Eusebius}

Scholars appear to be in agreement that of the five variations that are listed in the UBS 4th edition, only the omission of the LE and the inclusion of the LE are viable possibilities⁸. Michael Holmes observes that “most textual critics agree that the evidence supporting the short form . . . outweighs the evidence for the long form”⁹. This conclusion is apparently due to the high value that is place on the witnesses of ⲁ and B, which are cited as the oldest and best manuscripts¹⁰. That conclusion must be based on these witnesses, for when the age, geographic dispersion, and text type attestation are considered¹¹, the evidence for the inclusion of

⁸ See M. Holmes, “To Be Continued... the Many Endings of the Gospel of Mark”. *Bible Review* 17 (Aug 2001) 22; See also Danove, *End of Mark's Story*, 122; D.A. Carson, D.J. Moo, and L. Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids 1992) 103.

⁹ Michael Holmes, “To Be Continued”, 23.

¹⁰ Is it possible that ⲁ and B are sometimes given too much weight? Burgon believes that there is “a singularly exaggerated estimate of the critical importance of the testimony of our two old Codices”, and expends a great deal of energy demonstrating their weaknesses. See Burgon, *Last Twelve Verses*, 81-82, 150ff. It must be pointed out that Burgon argues elsewhere that the majority text preserves the inspired word of God and he is guilty of counting MSS rather than weighing them. See S.L. Cox, *A History and Critique of Scholarship Concerning the Markan Endings* (Lewiston 1993) 67. However, he may still be correct that these witnesses, at times, are given too much weight.

¹¹ These are the criteria of external evidence according to Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York 2002) 11-12; and D. Black, *New Testament Textual Criticism: A Concise Guide* (Grand Rapids 1994) 34-35.

the LE is strong¹². It is interesting to note that it was almost exclusively in the Alexandrian reading, where the omission of the LE occurred, that the addition of the short ending with the LE exists. Thus all readings that deviate from the LE are primarily Alexandrian.

Farmer summarizes the evidence according to text types: “the witness of the Alexandrian manuscripts is predominantly for omission, the witness of the Western manuscripts is predominantly for inclusion, the witness of the Eastern [Caesarea] is divided though in balance it favours inclusion,” and the witness of the Byzantine manuscripts “is virtually unanimous in favour of inclusion”¹³. Farmer concludes, “We find that early Greek manuscript evidence like the evidence of the early versions, on balance, witnesses for inclusion”¹⁴.

However, some scholars on both sides, including Farmer, argue that a definite solution to the problem cannot be reached based on the external evidence¹⁵. It is important to notice that one of the most often cited authorities concerning the textual evidence for the LE, Bruce Metzger, makes his decision based primarily on the *internal evidence*¹⁶. Farmer also observes that the internal evidence is significant in many scholars’ assessment of the problem: “The presumption that the autograph of Mark ended at v. 8 is dependent, at least in part, on a widespread belief that a careful study of the linguistic, stylistic and conceptional character of Mk. 16:9-20 indicates that these verses do not belong with the rest of the Gospels”¹⁷.

Before moving to the internal evidence, what can be concluded from the external evidence? Farmer provides a modest beginning: “We can only say with certainty (concerning Mk. 16:9-20 in this period) that manu-

¹² See chart above. John Burgon, in his characteristic style, writes that one may request “to have it explained *why* it is to be supposed that all these many witnesses, –belonging to so many different patriarchates, provinces, ages of the Church–, have entered into a grand conspiracy to bear false witness on a point of this magnitude and importance”. Burgon, *Last Twelve Verses*, 149.

¹³ Farmer, *Last Twelve Verses*, 52.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁵ Farmer writes, “A study of the external evidence... does not produce evidential grounds for a definitive solution to the problem. A study of the history of the text, *by itself*, has not proven sufficient, since the evidence is divided and the decisive period, namely the second century, remains at present largely shrouded in obscurity”. Farmer, *Last Twelve Verses*, 74; See also Holmes, “To Be Continued”, 23; Bruce Terry, “The Style of the Long Ending of Mark,” <http://matthew.ovc.edu/terry/articles/mkendsty.htm>.

¹⁶ Metzger reasons, “The longer ending (3), though current in a variety of witnesses, some of them ancient, must also be judged by internal evidence to be secondary... Thus, on the basis of good external evidence and strong internal considerations it appears that the earliest ascertainable form of the Gospel of Mark ended with 16.8”. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 104–105.

¹⁷ Farmer, *Last Twelve Verses*, 75.

scripts including these verses were circulating in the second century”¹⁸. One might acknowledge that a substantial case can be made for the LE’s originality based on external evidence¹⁹. However, it should at least be conceded that the external evidence is not as decisive as some make it out to be²⁰ since the LE is an admittedly early, widespread reading²¹ and much of the argument against its originality is based on internal evidence.

Internal Evidence

The two main arguments from internal evidence against the inclusion of the LE are (1) “The vocabulary and style of verses 9-20 are non-Markan” and (2) “The connection between ver. 8 and verses 9-20 is so awkward that it is difficult to believe that the evangelist intended the section to be a continuation of the Gospel”²².

Many scholars have attempted to demonstrate that the language and style of the LE are different than the rest of the gospel. Burgon, however, executes a detailed analysis of the arguments from language and style and concludes that the internal evidence is actually in favor of Markan authorship²³. More recently, Bruce Terry argues that most of the apparently unique language in the LE is actually found in Mark upon close examination. Furthermore, according to Terry, the remaining differences can be accounted for by the concept of “peak” (that the LE is the conclusion of the book)²⁴. Although in the minority, these arguments by Burgon

¹⁸ Farmer, *Last Twelve Verses*, 74.

¹⁹ In his critique of John Burgon, Steven Cox writes, “Everyone must admit that he has left a considerable amount of material for text critics to grapple with, in the attempt to find a conclusion to the question of the ending of Mark” and “John Burgon provided a strong defense of the authenticity of Mark 16:9-20, based on external evidence”. Cox, *History and Critique*, 72, 91.

²⁰ See Robertson, *Studies*, 131. Although not intended to be a scholarly work, William Barclay’s commentary states, “It its original form the gospel stops at Mark 16:8. We know that for two reasons. First, the verses which follow (Mark 16:19–20) are not in any of the great early manuscripts. It is only later and inferior manuscripts which contain them”. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark* (Philadelphia 1956) xvii.

²¹ See Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 105; B.F. Westcott and F.J.A. Hort, *Introduction, Appendix to the New Testament in the Original Greek*, Vol. 2 (New York 1882) 28–51; J.D. Grassmick, “Mark”, in J.F. Walvoord and R.B. Zuck (eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton 1985) 2, 94–197, at 194.

²² Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 104–105.

²³ Burgon, *Last Twelve Verses*, 215ff.

²⁴ Terry, “Style,” <http://matthew.ovc.edu/terry/articles/mkendsty.htm>. Danove, who concludes that the LE is not Markan writes, “Though the investigation of the vocabulary yielded results questioning its originality, it does not establish an adequate basis for its exclusion”. Danove, *End of Mark’s Story*, 125.

and Terry should not be quickly dismissed. The question of language is difficult and will not be explored further in this paper. However, it must be noted that an honest evaluation of the evidence will include these arguments in favor of Markan style. An example of these arguments is Terry's discussion of the awkward junction.

There are at least five reasons that the junction of v. 8 and v. 9 seem awkward:

- (1) The subject of verse 8 is the women, whereas Jesus is the presumed subject of verse 9; (2) the other women of verse 1-8 are forgotten in verses 9-20; (3) in verse 9 Mary Magdalene is identified even though she has been mentioned only a few lines before; (4) while the use of *anastas de* ("Now rising") and the position of *proton* ("first") are appropriate at the beginning of a comprehensive narrative, they are ill-suited in a continuation of verses 1-8; and (5) the use of the conjunction *gar* ("for") at the end of verse 8 is very abrupt²⁵.

In response to these reasons, Terry points out that there are at least five other junctures in Mark that start a new unit, have Jesus as the presumed subject ("he") without Jesus being the subject of the last verse, and do not again mention the subjects of the last verse (Mark 2:13; 6:45; 7:31; 8:1; and 14:3). This addresses the first two points. Terry argues that the identification of Mary is a "stylistic feature of giving additional information in a type of flashback about someone previously mentioned" and that it occurs four other times in Mark (Mark 3:16, 17; 6:16; 7:26). Concerning point four (that v. 9 is an inappropriate beginning to a continuation of vv. 1-8), Terry responds, "It is only necessary to point out that verse 9 is not a continuation of the section found in verse 1-8; it is the start of a new one"²⁶. Finally, the word γάρ ends the phrase because the phrase consists of only two words and grammatically should not begin with γάρ. Mark uses γάρ in several other short sentences. Although Terry admits that with all of these elements appearing in one place the juncture does seem awkward, he concludes that one cannot argue that the language and style of the LE are not Markan.

Two more arguments against the LE can be added to the internal evidence: (3) The LE appears to be a synthesis of the resurrection appearances and great commission passages of the other gospels²⁷ and therefore must be a later addition; and (4) vv. 17-18 have an apocryphal flavor²⁸.

²⁵ Terry, "Style," <http://matthew.ovc.edu/terry/articles/mkendsty.htm>.

²⁶ Terry, "Style," <http://matthew.ovc.edu/terry/articles/mkendsty.htm>.

²⁷ See Guthrie, *Introduction*, 91; Carson, et al., *Introduction*, 103; D.C. Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels* (New York 1997) 138ff.

²⁸ See A. B. Bruce, *The Synoptic Gospels*, *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids 1970) 454.

Craig Blomberg writes, “Some of the theology is potentially both heretical and fatal (see v. 18)!”²⁹ The fact that there are parallels in the other gospels (argument three) does not prove that the author of the LE used the other sources. If one could prove literary dependence, he still must show which work is dependent upon which. Argument four is a theological argument and requires an extended exploration of its own. However, one would have to demonstrate that its teachings were unorthodox in order to prove that it did not belong in the canon.

The difficulty with ending the gospel at v. 8 is (again) the awkward ending with the preposition γάρ and the failure of the women, and the absence of any resurrection appearances³⁰. There is currently a great deal of literature that attempts to prove that such an ending is grammatically acceptable and has literary significance that fits into Mark’s style³¹. The purpose of this review of internal evidence is to establish the *possibility* of arguing that the LE fits into Mark’s style and that its connection to v. 8 is not insurmountably awkward. Again, one might at least begin his study of the matter with the understanding that the current consensus of scholarship may not be as conclusive as it appears.

Possible Solutions

There are several solutions that one may choose from to try to make sense of this evidence. Farmer presents five: (1) Mark wrote the LE and it was in the original autograph; (2) Mark used older traditions to write the LE and it was in the original autograph; (3) The LE existed independent of this gospel and Mark used it with little or no modification; (4) The LE was written by a later writer who sought to imitate Mark’s style and language; and (5) The LE was written by a later writer who did not seek to imitate Mark’s style and language³². Farmer concludes that option two “affords a ready explanation both for evidence weighing in favour of Marcan authorship of 16:9-20 and for evidence weighing against it”³³.

Some interesting modifications to option two arise when one considers the evidence that Mark’s gospel is a record of Peter’s preaching. In their introduction to *Mark* in the *Ancient Christian Commentary* on

²⁹ C. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey* (Nashville 1997) 75.

³⁰ See Guthrie, *Introduction*, 91; Danove, *End of Mark’s Story*, 46; D.B. Peabody (ed.), *One Gospel from Two: Mark’s Use of Matthew and Luke* (New York 2002) 328–29.

³¹ See Cox, *History and Critique*, 211.

³² See Farmer, *Last Twelve Verses*, 107.

³³ See Farmer, *Last Twelve Verses*, 108.

Scripture, Thomas Oden and Christopher Hall write, “The early church widely regarded the author of Mark’s Gospel as the authentic voice and interpreter of Peter. This view was early stated, largely uncontroverted during the early Christian centuries and ecumenically received by the church. The primary textual evidence for this viewpoint is strong and ancient”³⁴. David Black suggests that Mark’s gospel, based on Peter’s preaching, may have circulated without the LE and Mark added his own conclusion in a later edition³⁵. Robertson also mentions the possibility that Mark may have made several editions and added the LE to the last one³⁶. In this scenario, Mark could have written the LE himself, redacted it from other sources, or lifted the whole LE from another source.

The patristic testimony concerning Mark may also suggest a modification of option one. The fact that Mark may have originated in Rome, as tradition indicates, could affect one’s evaluation of the external data. Cox explains, “If one could prove the origin of Mark in Rome, it would be less than reasonable to suggest any other ending other than the longer ending, based on the geographic dominance of the longer ending in the provinces surrounding Rome”³⁷. If the LE was in the original MS, then a scribe may have accidentally³⁸ or intentionally omitted it. He may have intentionally omitted it due to the extraordinary signs and the focus on the unbelief of the disciples. These modifications to options one and two provide possibilities that can explain both the apparent difference in style and language as well as the existence of MSS that omit the LE. These possibilities also remove the need for a “lost ending, “as many scholars postulate”³⁹. The theory of a “lost ending” must face questions of inspiration and canonicity: Could a part of God’s Word, inspired by the Holy Spirit, be lost?

³⁴ T.C. Oden and C.A. Hall (eds.), *Mark* (Downers Grove 1998) xxi. Guthrie also argues for the connection between Peter and Mark: “The general agreement of all the extant early traditions on this matter establishes a strong probability that it is based on fact, which requires more than a mere possibility to dislodge”. Guthrie, *Introduction*, 1030. Included in the evidence are several subscriptions in the MSS that testify to Mark’s authorship and to Peter as a source in Rome. See C.A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20* (Nashville 2001) 544.

³⁵ D.A. Black, *Why Four Gospels? The Historical Origins of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids 2001) 30.

³⁶ Robertson, *Studies*, 137. Robertson also says that this theory requires that Mark’s gospel contains the *writing* of Peter (in order to explain the difference in style). This, however, does not follow. The style of Peter’s *preaching* may have been reflected in Mark’s recording of it. A question arises from this theory: Why would Peter’s preaching not include the resurrection appearances?

³⁷ Cox, *History and Critique*, 212.

³⁸ Croy suggests that the beginning and ending of Mark were lost due to the mutilation of the book. Croy, *Mutilation*.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

Canonicity

As one observes the conclusions of various scholars, there seems to be some confusion concerning what question is being asked about Mark's LE. Is the question whether or not the LE is written by the same author, whether or not the LE was in the original manuscript, or whether or not the LE belongs in the canon of the New Testament? Although related, these questions must be asked separately. It is possible that LE was written by a different author and added to the original manuscript by Mark⁴⁰. It is also possible that the LE was added to a later edition of Mark by the same author⁴¹. Furthermore, it is possible that in either of these cases the LE could belong in the canon since both possibilities would retain the passage's apostolicity. Should the Bible scholar interpret the square brackets around the LE in the UBS 4th edition to mean "this really does not belong in the text?"⁴²

Cox writes that "the acceptance of the canonicity of the longer ending has received objection from only a few scholars"⁴³. Westcott and Hort claim that "it manifestly cannot claim any apostolic authority"⁴⁴. Robert Gundry writes, "We should not think of that ending as canonical any more than we think of the myriad other inauthentic readings in the *Textus Receptus* as canonical. The canonizers may have mistaken inauthentic readings for the text of the autographs, but their purpose was to canonize the text of the early, apostolic writings"⁴⁵.

Robert Bratcher and Eugene Nida argue against Lagrange and Lightfoot, who say that even though there are doubts about its authenticity, the LE is canonical because it is ancient, was regarded as apostolic, and was accepted by the universal church. Bratcher and Nida claim that "the principle enunciated by Lagrange and Lightfoot, strictly applied, would mean that the text of the New Testament, as found in the *Textus Receptus*,

⁴⁰ See option three above and Farmer, *Last Twelve Verses*, 107.

⁴¹ Black, *Why Four Gospels?*, 30.

⁴² An affirmative answer is strengthened by the fact that the short ending, which all agree does not belong in the text, is also included in double square brackets. However, Metzger explains that "out of deference to the evident antiquity of the longer ending and its importance in the textual tradition of the Gospel, the Committee decided to include verses 9-20 as part of the text, but to enclose them within double square brackets to indicate that they are the work of an author other than the evangelist". Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 105-106. Why then do they also include the short ending, which doesn't have good textual support, in double square brackets?

⁴³ Cox, *History and Critique*, 94.

⁴⁴ Westcott and Hort, *Introduction*, 51.

⁴⁵ R.H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on his Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids 1993) 1009.

is finally and forever *the* Canon, including all words, phrases, verses and larger sections which the critical study of the text in the last two centuries has shown not to have been part of the original text”⁴⁶. Bratcher and Nida place a great deal of certainty upon the findings of textual criticism and seem to dismiss the widespread acceptance of the LE throughout history. It is true that textual analysis does show that some variants are not original, but often the evidence is not conclusive. Is it not possible to argue for the canonicity of the LE without claiming that the *Textus Receptus* is “finally and forever *the* Canon?”

Although many scholars have not forthrightly objected to the LE’s canonicity, many are doing so in practice. Without saying so, it appears that many scholars are concluding that if the LE was not in the original MS or if it was not written by Mark, then the LE does not belong in the canon. As was pointed out earlier, for example, there are many works that do not deal with the LE exegetically or theologically⁴⁷. How many preachers continually avoid preaching Mark 16:9-20 due to the textual questions surrounding it?

Some scholars, however, conclude that the LE is not Markan but still believe it is canonical. Cox claims that “most scholars from the nineteenth century to the present day rejected the authenticity of the longer ending, whereas, they continued to view these verses as canonical.”⁴⁸ Many scholars also believe that the apostolic and early church fathers regarded the LE as canonical. B. Harvie Branscomb noted that citations from Irenaeus (180) and Tatian “show that the ending had been added long enough before this date for these writers to accept the passage without question”⁴⁹. Cox writes, “The Church eventually included the longer ending of Mark in its Canon and read these verses in public services, based on this periscope’s antiquity, widespread manuscript support, and Patristic attestation”⁵⁰.

It is significant that Metzger, who argues that the LE was added later by a different author, argues for its canonicity. He writes, “The question of the canonicity of a document apparently did not arise in connection with discussion of such variant readings, even though they might involve

⁴⁶ R.G. Bratcher and E.A. Nida, *A Translator’s Handbook on the Gospel of Mark* (Leiden 1961) 521.

⁴⁷ See footnote 6.

⁴⁸ Cox, *History and Critique*, 92. Schaffer also explains that “some of these opponents, however, while denying the composition of the section by Mark, regard the contents as a part of the apostolic tradition”. Schaff, *Apostolic Christianity*.

⁴⁹ B. Harvie Branscomb, *The Gospel of Mark* (London 1937) 313.

⁵⁰ Cox, *History and Critique*, 91.

quite considerable sections of text.”⁵¹ Neither Eusebius nor Jerome, who mentioned the variations of the LE, “suggested that one form was canonical and the other was not.”⁵² Metzger goes on to conclude,

Already in the second century, for example, the so-called long ending of Mark was known to Justin Martyr and to Tatian, who incorporated it into his *Diatesseron*. There seems to be good reason, therefore, to conclude that, though external and internal evidence is conclusive against the authenticity of the last twelve verses as coming from the same pen as the rest of the Gospel, the passage ought to be accepted as a part of the canonical text of Mark⁵³.

The conclusions that one makes concerning the canonicity of Mark 16:9-20 have several important implications. If scholars continue to neglect this passage in their exegetical, linguistic, and theological inquiries, then biblical studies in Mark will be hindered. Such scholarly work will also not be at the disposal of preachers who do attempt to preach this text. Daniel Wallace reasons that “since this is part of the text that many pulpiteers will need to wrestle with in their preaching ministries (due to their own bias or that of their audience), it ought to be addressed⁵⁴”. Those preachers face an audience that has this passage in most of their Bible translations. If Mark 16:9-20 is canonical, and it continues to be treated as non-canonical by biblical scholars, theologians and preachers, then the church will be robbed of one its important commission passages.

Although it is possible to come to conclusions regarding the LE’s canonicity without answering all its textual questions, those textual questions certainly influence an analysis of the discourse structure of Mark. If the LE was added later, composed by a different author, or taken from another source, then it relates quite differently to rest of the discourse. How conclusions on the textual problem of the LE of Mark relate to the discourse analysis of the gospel could be an interesting topic for research. The discourse structure of the book of Mark and how the LE relates to it will not be explored in this article. However, one can still consider the syntactical and semantic structure of the LE as a discourse unit.

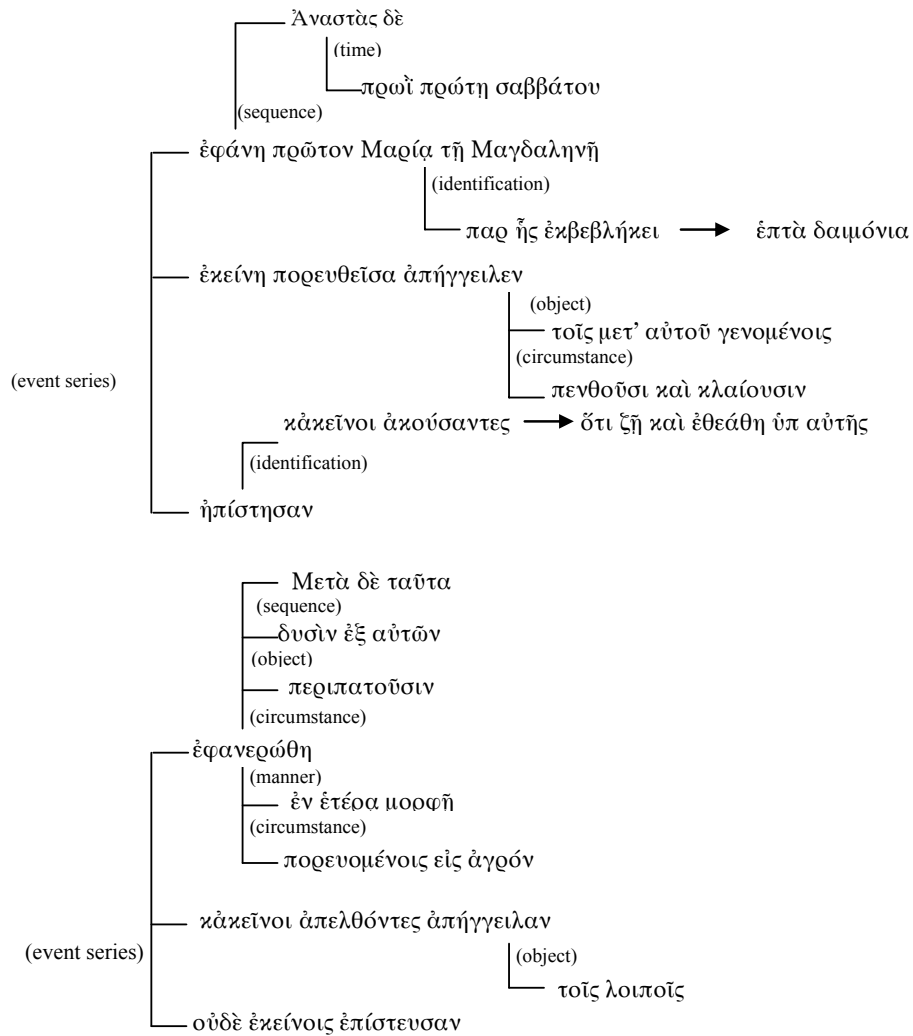
⁵¹ B.M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford 1987) 269.

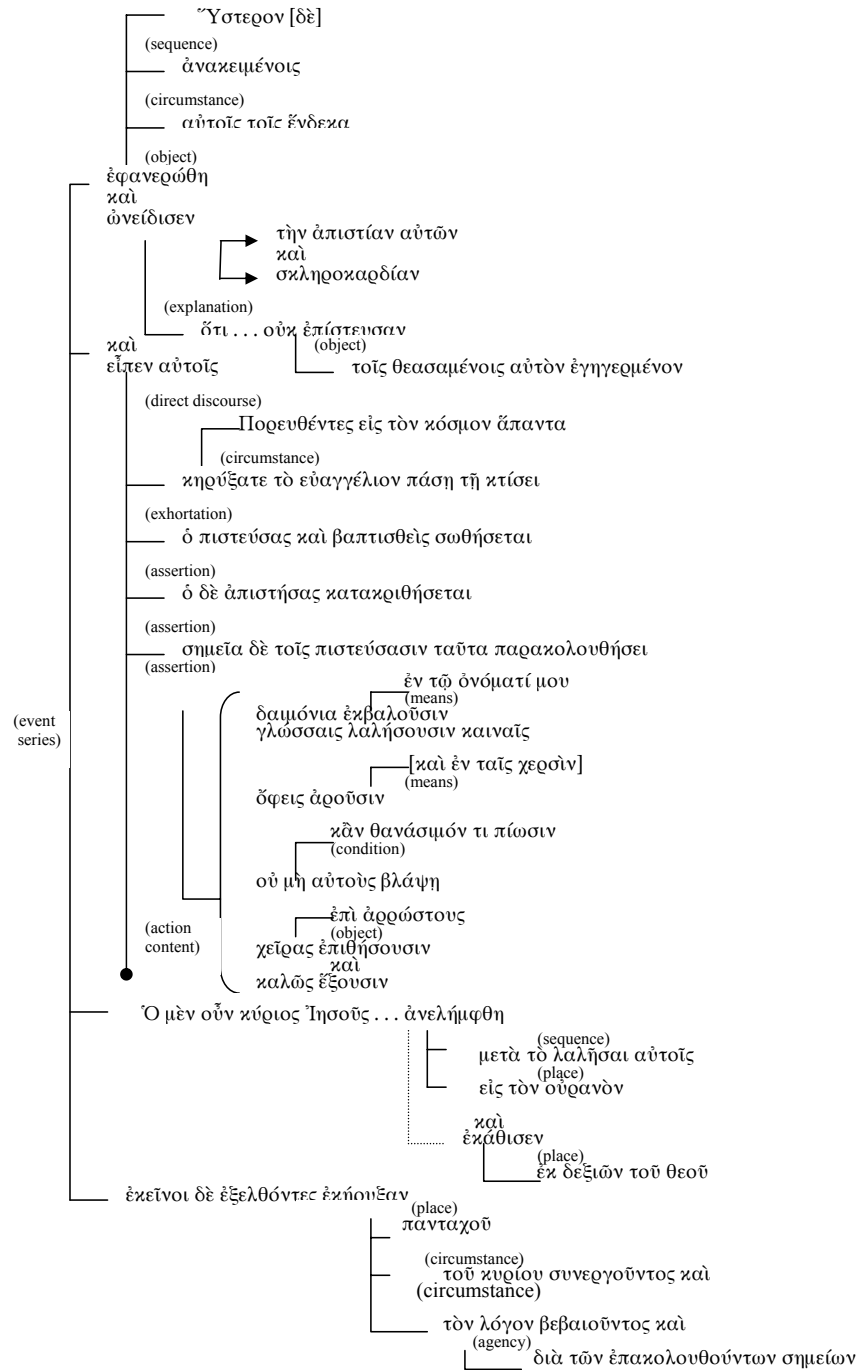
⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 270.

⁵⁴ D.B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids 1996) 405.

Syntactical and Semantic Analysis of Mark 16:9-20





Mark 16:9-20 can be considered a discourse unit for several reasons. The language, concluding content, parallelism, and thematic unity of this passage indicate that it is a new and distinct section. Some of the internal evidence used to argue that the LE was not written by Mark is the same type of linguistic evidence used to determine unit boundaries⁵⁵. The subject of the narrative changes in v. 9 from the women to Jesus. The women with Mary Magdalene in vv. 1-8 are no longer mentioned in vv. 9-20 and a new series of events involving Jesus and Mary is introduced. This new series of events is introduced with “now after he rose” (ἀναστὰς δὲ) and “first” (πρώτη), which mark the beginning of a comprehensive narrative.

Those who argue that v. 8 is the original, intended ending of Mark work hard at explaining how it could function as a meaningful and stylistically acceptable ending. It is clear to all that whoever wrote or added the LE was supplying a conclusion to the gospel. Its literary function as a conclusion sets this discourse unit apart. It is possible that the sub-units vv. 14-20 or vv. 19-20, could be seen as the conclusion. These sub-units, however, do not stand on their own, but are tied in to the whole unit by the connecting narratives, the parallelism, and the thematic unity.

Before noting the parallelism and themes that unify this passage, it is necessary to have a more detailed understanding of its overall structure. The discourse unit consists of three sub-units. Each sub-unit is a series of events. The events of each sub-unit are directly connected and remain in a single narrative context. The narratives of the three sub-units are loosely connected by indicators of sequence, “now after this” (μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα), and “now afterward” (ὕστερον δὲ).

The parallelism and thematic unity of this passage further unifies the three sub-units, sets it off as a discourse unit, and is important for understanding the message of the passage. The first finite verb of each sub-unit communicates that Jesus appeared (ἐφάνη, ἐφανερώθη). The last finite verb in each sub-unit describes the actions of the disciples: “they did not believe” (ἠπίστησαν), “they did not believe” (οὐδὲ ἐκεῖνοις ἐπίστευσαν), and “they preached” (ἐκήρυξαν). The repetition of the actions of the disciples, alongside the parallel of Jesus’ appearances, makes it clear that the author is stringing these narratives together in a meaningful way in order to communicate his message. The message is partly discovered in the progression of the disciples’ reaction to the resurrection of Christ, from unbelief to preaching everywhere.

⁵⁵ To use this linguistic data to demonstrate that the LE is a discourse unit does not necessarily concede that the data proves that the passage was written by a different author. In fact, it explains that what is claimed to be an “awkward junction” may just be a clear demarcation of a new discourse unit.

These three concepts, Jesus' appearing (and resurrection), belief (or unbelief), and preaching, appear several other times in the passage and thus also become elements of its thematic unity. In addition to each sub-unit recording that Jesus appeared (ἐφάνη, ἐφανερώθη), the first sub-unit says that "he was alive and had been seen" (ζῆ καὶ ἐθεάθη) and the third sub-unit refers to "those who saw him after he had risen" (τοῖς θεασαμένοις αὐτὸν ἐγγεγραμμένον). In addition to the references to the disciples' unbelief in the first two sub-units and their preaching (and thus belief) in the last, the last sub-unit also refers to faith five more times (τὴν ἀπιστίαν αὐτῶν καὶ σκληροκαρδίαν, ἐπίστευσαν, ὁ πιστεύσας, ἀπιστήσας, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν). Finally, each sub-unit contains the concept of preaching or announcing: Mary reported Jesus' appearance, the two disciples reported Jesus' appearance, Jesus commanded the disciples to preach, and the disciples went out and preached. The content of the disciples' message can be implied from the parallel to the other reports: preach that Jesus is alive!

In addition to these themes, there is also the unifying sub-theme of the demonstration of supernatural power. Mary is identified in sub-unit one as the one "from whom he had cast out seven demons" (παρ ἧς ἐκβεβλήκει ἑπτὰ δαίμονια). Some have argued that this identification indicates that Mary is being introduced for the first time and therefore reveals that the LE has a different author or is from another work. However, as Terry points out, this is a literary device that identifies someone who has already been introduced in the form of a flashback. Mark uses this device four other times in his gospel. The author may be using this device to make a special emphasis. Its presence becomes even more significant as one notices that each sub-unit mentions some demonstration of supernatural power. The second sub-unit mentions the fact that Jesus appeared "in another form," which, as we learn in Luke, caused them not to be able to recognize him. The third sub-unit includes the miraculous signs that will accompany those who believe.

Embedded in the third sub-unit is the direct discourse of Jesus. This contains one exhortation and three assertions. The exhortation is Mark's version of the great commission. It focuses on proclamation, like Luke, instead of discipleship, like Matthew. It emphasizes the universality of the mission even more than Matthew and Luke by making the territory "into the whole world" (εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἅπαντα) and the audience "all creation" (πάση τῇ κτίσει) instead of "every nation." The first two assertions are parallel and have unique structural features of their own. Each begins with a substantival participle that is used generically⁵⁶. Paul

⁵⁶ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 615.

Mirecki explains the parallelism, “Mark 16:16 is an independent saying structured in antithetic parallelism and centered on the cause-and-effect relationship between belief and salvation and their logical antitheses, disbelief and condemnation”⁵⁷. Although this passage has been used to argue that baptism is necessary for salvation, most evangelical scholars point out that baptism is the faith expression of salvation and that the exclusion of baptism in the parallel line indicates that faith is the only issue concerning salvation⁵⁸.

Conclusion

After evaluating the external evidence, it appears that it is not as decisive as some suggest since the LE is an admittedly early, widespread reading and much of the argument against its originality is based on internal evidence. A consideration of the internal evidence demonstrates that it is possible to argue that the LE fits into Mark’s style and language and that its connection to v. 8 is not insurmountably awkward. One might at least admit that the current consensus of scholarship is not as conclusive as it appears. The theories that Mark wrote the LE or used older traditions to write the LE, modified by the understanding that Mark is a record of Peter’s preaching and that the LE could have been added in a later edition, provide several possibilities that can explain both the potential difference in style and language as well as the existence of MSS that omit the LE.

Without saying so, it appears that many scholars are concluding that if the LE was not in the original MS or if it was not written by Mark, then the LE does not belong in the canon. This does not necessarily follow. It would be helpful for those who work on the LE to distinguish between questions of originality, authenticity, and canonicity. Since the Church, beginning with the earliest church fathers, accepted the LE as Scripture, the evidence that would cause the present day church to regard it as non-canonical should be strong and certain. The external and internal evidence does not conclusively prove that the LE was not original or inauthentic; even if it did, this would not prove that it does not belong in the Canon. Therefore, it does not seem justified to remove Mark 16:9-20 from exegetical considerations.

⁵⁷ P.A. Mirecki, “The Antithetic Saying in mark 16:16: Formal and Redactional Features,” in A. Birger (ed.), *The Future of Early Christianity* (Pearson, Minneapolis 1991) 229–241, at 229.

⁵⁸ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 688.

What are the structural features of this passage that might aid in its interpretation? The language, concluding content, parallelism, and thematic unity of this passage indicate that it is a discourse unit. The repetition of the actions of the disciples, alongside the parallel of Jesus' appearances, makes it clear that the author is stringing these narratives together in a meaningful way in order to communicate his message. The message is partly discovered in the progression of the disciples' reaction to the resurrection of Christ, from unbelief to preaching everywhere. These three concepts, Jesus' appearing (and resurrection), belief (or unbelief), and preaching, appear several other times in the passage and thus also become elements of its thematic unity. In addition to these themes, there is also the unifying sub-theme of the demonstration of supernatural power.