

ON THE LONGER ENDING TO MARK'S GOSPEL

What we find in Mark 16:9-20 is often referred to by commentators as the “Longer Ending” to Mark’s Gospel, a phrase that suggests that there are alternatives. The purpose of this paper is not to address any proffered alternatives except the possibilities that (1) Mark’s Gospel ends in 16:8 or (2) Mark’s Gospel should properly include 16:9-20. The weight of authority in the present day is in agreement that the following Longer Ending was not authored by Mark as part of his Gospel:

Now when *Jesus* was risen early the first *day* of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils. *And* she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept. And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not. After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country. And they went and told *it* unto the residue: neither believed they them. Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with *them*, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.

Except for the New King James translation, all modern translations include notes casting doubt on the authenticity of the Longer Ending. In my view, all of the secondary arguments lodged against the Longer Ending can be reasonably

answered, leaving in the final analysis the question of whether the absence of the Longer Ending from the two fourth century manuscripts Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus should be outcome determinative on the matter. In my view, these two manuscripts are not sufficient to overcome the majority witness to the proper inclusion of the Longer Ending in Mark.

As one modern treatise puts it, the issue presented is most difficult and it is not my intent to be dogmatic in my argument: “Verses 9-20 represent one of the most difficult textual problems in the New Testament. The two oldest and most important Greek manuscripts of the New Testament omit the longer ending of Mark, as do several early translations, versions, and testimonies of church fathers.”¹ Commentator James Edwards calls the issue the “gravest textual problem in the NT.”² The overwhelming consensus of modern scholars is that the solution to this “gravest textual problem in the NT” is that the Longer Ending is not authentic.

According to most contemporary scholars, the oldest and best attested manuscripts and versions, plus principles of textual criticism, tend in the direct of ending Mark with v. 8. The external evidence seems to indicate that the Longer Ending was in circulation by the middle of the second century and was probably composed in the first half of the same century.³

The rejection of the authenticity of the Longer Ending seems to have occurred quickly after the publication of the critical text in the 19th century, so that we find,

¹ Gary M. Burge and Andrew E. Hill, eds., *The Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2012), 1054.

² James R. Edwards, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 2002), 497.

³ Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger III, eds., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1994), 204.

for example, in a commentary on Mark published in 1881: “The majority of modern authorities regard these verses as the work of some other person than Mark.”⁴

Broadly speaking, the arguments against the authenticity of the Longer Ending fall into two categories: the internal evidence and the external evidence. According to Edwards, the external evidence is primarily that Sinaiticus and Vaticanus do not include the Longer Ending, certain early translations and other manuscripts also do not, and certain church fathers do not mention it:

The two oldest and most important manuscripts of the Bible, codex Vaticanus and codex Sinaiticus, omit 16:9-20, as do several early translations or versions, including the Old Latin, the Sinaitic Syriac manuscript, about one hundred Armenian manuscripts, and the two oldest Georgian manuscripts. Neither Clement of Alexandria nor Origen shows any awareness of the existence of the longer ending, and Eusebius and Jerome attest that vv. 9-20 were absent from the majority of Greek copies of Mark known to them.... The apocryphal *Gospel of Peter* does not contain the longer ending, and concludes, as does Mark 16:8, with the fear of the women.⁵

There are several objections based on the internal evidence. First, there is the unique vocabulary used in the Longer Ending: “The literary character of 16:9-20 also differs from that of the rest of the Gospel of Mark. Twenty-seven new words occur in the longer ending, plus several stylistic features otherwise absent from Mark. The role of signs in 16:17-18 contradicts Mark 8:11-13. These and other factors make it virtually certain that Mark did not write 16:9-20.”⁶ Similarly, the *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* summarizes the vocabulary objection: “Of the 75

⁴ W. N. Clarke and George R. Bliss, *An American Commentary on the New Testament: Mark and Luke*, ed. Alvah Hovey (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society 1881), 254.

⁵ Edwards, 497.

⁶ Gary M. Burge and Andrew E. Hill, 1054.

significant words in vv. 9-20, 15 does not appear elsewhere in Mark and 11 others have a different meaning. In other words, more than a third of the words are non-Markan. The marked differences in vocabulary between 16:9-20 and the rest of Mark's gospel makes it difficult to believe that they came from the same author."⁷

According to the *Bible Expositor's Commentary*, however, the connection between verses 8 and 9 is an even stronger internal argument against the Longer Ending:

Here the argument against Markan authorship of vv. 9-20 is even stronger. The connection between v.8 and vv.9-20 is abrupt and awkward. Verse 9 begins with the masculine nominative participle *anastas*, which demands for its antecedent 'he,' i.e., Jesus; but the subject of the last sentence of v.8 is the women, not Jesus. Mary Magdalene is referred to as if she had never been mentioned before; yet she appears three times in the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection narratives that immediately precede. The angel at the tomb spoke of a post-resurrection appearance in Galilee to the disciples, but Jesus' appearances in vv.9-20 are confined to Jerusalem and its immediate vicinity. All these facts weigh heavily against the Longer Ending.⁸

The *American Commentary* likewise comments about the abrupt change in style:

As to the internal evidence, there is no good connection between the passage and what precedes it, and no allusion in it to the context; the purpose of it is not a continuation of the purpose of Mark's record; it has the character of an epitome, in which it is unlike anything else in Mark; it contains certain additions to the statements of the other Gospels, but they are not in the least like Mark's characteristic additions; the peculiar words and phrases of Mark are absent, and about twenty words and phrases are found that occur nowhere else in his Gospel.⁹

⁷ Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger III, 204.

⁸ *Ibid*, 204.

⁹ W. N. Clarke and George R. Bliss, 255.

Along the same lines, Edwards forcefully refers to verse 9 as a “conspicuous non sequiter.”¹⁰ Edwards further notes, by way of example of the internal inconsistencies, that Jesus is for the first time called the “Lord Jesus” or “the Lord” rather than just “Jesus.”¹¹ Critics also point to the theological content as aberrant and unsubstantiated in the rest of the New Testament. The *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* remarks of the content that it is where “the most serious objections are encountered.”¹² The treatise bases this conclusion largely on the serious rebuke by Jesus of the disciples allegedly not found elsewhere in Mark and the reference to signs because it is doubtful these would be promised to all believers.¹³ The *American Commentary* summarizes the state of the evidence from the perspective of those that reject authenticity: “It May be said that external evidence is mainly, but with important exceptions, in favor of the acceptance of the passage as the production of Mark, and that internal evidence is mainly, and without important exceptions, against it.”¹⁴

These objections from the internal and external evidence have swayed most scholars to conclude that the Longer Ending was most likely a late compilation from the other three canonical gospels. The *Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary*, for instance, comments: “This longer ending of Mark, which was added in the early

¹⁰ Edwards, 498.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger III, 204.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ W. N. Clarke and George R. Bliss, 255.

decades of the second century, consists of a resurrection harmony excerpted from the other three Gospels. The various excerpts appear to have been selected and edited in the secondary ending in accordance with the theme of the unbelief of the disciples.”¹⁵ Edwards believes the evidence leaves no doubt: “It is virtually certain that 16:9-20 is a later addition and not the original ending of the Gospel of Mark.”¹⁶ He refers to the later ending as “an incongruous addition to the Gospel” that is mere “patchwork” from the other gospels:

External and internal evidence thus necessitates the conclusion that 16:9-20 is not the original ending of Mark but rather a later addition to the Gospel. The longer ending is a patchwork of resurrection appearances (or summaries) taken from the other three Gospels, the chief them of which is the unbelief of the disciples (vv. 11, 13, 14, and 16). Although the longer ending is clearly secondary, it is nevertheless very old.¹⁷

All of this raises the question of whether Mark intended his Gospel to end with the bewilderment of the women in verse 8, or if some other ending was written and lost. The minority view among those that reject the authenticity of the Longer Ending is that Mark’s Gospel ends in verse 8. Representative of this view is Hendriksen’s view that the ending is essentially picked up by Matthew in the progressive revelation of God: “Though it may well be true that the Gospel according to Mark lies before us in unfinished form, *the story itself* is brought to a

¹⁵ Gary M. Burge and Andrew E. Hill, 1054.

¹⁶ Edwards, 497.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 499.

most triumphant finish in Matt. 28:16-20.”¹⁸ In his commentary on Mark, W. N. Clarke found the explanation persuasive from the *Encyclopedia Britannica* that Mark stopped in verse 8 because that is where the gospel tradition ended: “Now, that a page should have been torn out containing just that part of Mark which followed after the close of the common tradition would be a most remarkable and unlikely coincidence. It seems far more probable that Mark ends his Gospel here because the common tradition ended here, and because he scrupled to add anything to the notes and traditions which he knew to rest upon a higher authority than his own.”¹⁹

In contrast, most modern scholars reject the idea that verse 8 is the true ending. According to the *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*:

One final question arises: Did Mark actually intend to end his gospel at 16:8? Although some defend this view, it does not adequately explain (1) why the early church felt so strongly its lack of completion, witnessed by the insertion of both the Shorter and Longer endings, (2) why a book that purports to be the “good news about Jesus Christ” should end with the women being afraid; and (3) why it records no fulfillment of Jesus’ promised resurrection appearances to Peter and the other disciples (cf. 16:7).”²⁰

Edwards adds to the argument against the Gospel ending in verse 8 as contrary to the genre: “An ending of the Gospel of Mark at 16:8 is thus not only an aberration among the canonical Gospels but also among the diverse and fluid Gospel genres of the early centuries of Christianity.”²¹ As Edwards explains, the view that it ends

¹⁸ William Hendriksen, *The New Testament Commentary: The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker House Books 1975), 687.

¹⁹ W. N. Clarke and George R. Bliss, 256.

²⁰ Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger III, 204-05.

²¹ Edwards, 502.

with verse 8 is too heavily influenced by modern literary theory rather than the nature of ancient writings in the first century: “The suggestion that Mark left the Gospel ‘open ended’ owes more to modern literary theory, and particularly to reader-response theory, than to the nature of ancient texts, which with very few exceptions show a dogged proclivity to state conclusions, not suggest them.”²² Indeed, “it seems incongruous for Mark to conclude with a resurrection announcement rather than a resurrection appearance.”²³ The *Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary* draws similar conclusions as Edwards on similar reasoning:

Although Mark *may* have ended his Gospel at 16:8, it is not certain—and perhaps even unlikely—that he did. It seems hard to imagine that Mark, who begins his Gospel with a direct and bold declaration of Jesus as God’s Son and promised Messiah, would end his Gospel on a note of bewilderment (16:8). Very few ancient texts end as inconclusively as 16:8, which breaks off in mid-sentence.²⁴

For all of these reasons, most scholars argue that the true ending to Mark’s Gospel is lost. The *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* concludes: “Thus the best solution seems to be that Mark did write an ending to his gospel but that it was lost in the early transmission of the text.”²⁵ The explanation for the loss of the true ending to Mark’s Gospel is usually through wear and tear. As the *Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary* states, “Not infrequently ancient manuscripts suffered the loss of first and last pages due to wear and tear, and this may have been the fate of the final leaf

²² *Ibid*, 501.

²³ *Ibid*, 501-02.

²⁴ Gary M. Burge and Andrew E. Hill, 1054-55.

²⁵ Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger III, 205.

of Mark's original manuscript."²⁶ Edwards similarly comments, "The most plausible suggestion is that it was lost due to wear-and-tear on the last leaf of a codex."²⁷ At the end of the day, according to Hendriksen, the Longer Ending is not reliable and should not be the basis for preaching doctrine:

What, then, must we think of Mark 16:9-20, that is, of *the ending*? It is an interesting summary of some of the appearances of the risen Savior and of his subsequent ascension and session at God's right hand. As such it is instructive, for it shows us an early church view—how extensively held cannot be precisely indicated—of these matters." *To the extent* in which this *ending* truly reflects what is found elsewhere inside the covers of our Bible it can be described as a product, however indirectly, of divine inspiration. Since it would be very difficult—perhaps impossible—to defend the thesis that every word of this *ending* is without flaw, ***no sermon, doctrine, or practice should be based solely upon its contents.***²⁸

Even among its detractors, it is admitted that the Longer Ending does have supporting evidence. Clarke summarizes the evidence succinctly:

The reasons in favor of the passage are as follows: (1) It is contained in all the ancient manuscripts except those mentioned above, and in all the versions. (2) The nineteenth verse is quoted by Irenaeus (about A.D. 170) with the introduction, 'Mark says, at the end of the Gospel.' From that time on the passage is freely cited by Christian writers generally, who treat it as they do other Scripture. (3) It has a place in the lectionaries, or selections of Scripture for public reading, which were in use in the Eastern Church 'certainly in the fourth century, very probably much earlier'. It held a place of honor, indeed, in being taken as the Scripture for a special service at matins on Ascension Day. There is no question that the passage came down, to say the least, from very nearly the same date as the Gospel of Mark, or

²⁶ Gary M. Burge and Andrew E. Hill, 1055.

²⁷ Edwards, 503.

²⁸ Hendriksen, 687.

that it was generally, though not universally, accepted in the church as a part of that Gospel.²⁹

Representative of those that reject the Longer Ending, Edwards candidly admits the majority witness to the Longer Ending, but brushes that witness aside as simply evidence that it represents an early error:

Although a majority of ancient witnesses, including Greek uncial and minuscule manuscripts, church fathers, and versions in other languages do include vv. 9-20, this does not compensate for the textual evidence against them. The inclusion of vv. 9-20 in many manuscripts is accounted for rather by the fact that the longer ending, which must have been added quite early, was naturally included in subsequent copies of the Gospel. Many of the ancient manuscripts that do contain the longer ending, however, indicate by scribal notes or various markings that the ending is regarded as a spurious addition to the Gospel. External evidence (manuscript witnesses) thus argues strongly against the originality of the longer ending.³⁰

To address these objections, we may begin with Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus. Summarizing one of the leading works on the issue, that of Dean Burgon, Samuel Zwemer states:

...the manuscript testimony is shown to be overwhelmingly in favor of these verses. They are contained in every important manuscript in the world except two. However, neither Codex B nor Codex Alpha is infallible but both contain omissions and interpolations. Eighteen uncials and six hundred cursive manuscripts of the Gospel contain the verses in question. The supposed reverence for Codex B is unwarranted.³¹

Burgon gives examples of the errors in the two texts and states:

To say that in the Vatican Codex (B), which is unquestionably the oldest we possess, St. Mark's Gospel ends abruptly at the eighth verse

²⁹ W. N. Clarke and George R. Bliss, 255.

³⁰ Edwards, 497-98.

³¹ David Otis Fuller, ed., *Counterfeit or Genuine: Mark 16? John 8?* (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids International Publications 1975), 166.

of the sixteenth chapter, and that the customary subscription (KATA MAPKON) follows, is true; but it is far from being the whole truth. It requires to be stated in addition that the scribe, whose plan is found to have been to being every fresh book of the Bible at the top of the next ensuing column to that which contained the concluding words of the preceding book, has at the close of St. Mark's Gospel deviated from his else invariable practice. He has left in this place one column entirely vacant. It is the only vacant column in the whole manuscript – a blank space abundantly sufficient to contain the twelve verses which he nevertheless withheld. Why did he leave that column vacant? What can have induced the scribe on this solitary occasion to depart from his established rule? The phenomenon...is in the highest degree significant, and admits of only one interpretation. The older manuscript from which Codex B was copied must have infallibly contained the twelve verses in dispute. The copyist was instructed to leave them out – and he obeyed; but he prudently left a blank space *in memoriam rei*. Never was blank more intelligible! Never was silence more eloquent! By this simple expedient, strange to relate, the Vatican Codex is made to refute itself even while it seems to be bearing testimony against the concluding verses of St. Mark's Gospel, by withholding them; for it forbids the inference which, under ordinary circumstances must have been drawn from that omission. It does more. By leaving room for the verses it omits, it brings into prominent notice at the end of fifteen centuries and a half, a more ancient witness than itself.³²

While Burgon may be overly dogmatic in his conclusion about the scribe of Codex Vaticanus, the unusual blank space in the manuscript requires explanation, and at a minimum suggests that a decision of whether to include the Longer Ending was contemplated. If that is the case, then the scribe was aware of manuscripts at that time that contained the Longer Ending.

Based on a thorough evaluation of the texts, Farmer observes that the Beta text type (that of Sinaiticus and Vaticanus) clearly testifies to exclusion of the Longer Ending, but a majority of other texts argue for inclusion. He concludes that the external evidence alone will not answer the question satisfactorily:

³² *Ibid*, 166-67.

...while a study of the external evidence is rewarding in itself and can be very illuminating in many ways, and while it enables us to understand how the practice of omission might have arisen, it does not produce the 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. We can only say with certainty (concerning Mk. 16:9-20 in this period) that manuscripts including these verses were circulating in the second century. Whether there were also manuscripts ending [in v. 8] circulating in this archaic period, we do not know. It may be conjectured with some reason that such manuscripts were circulating *in Egypt* by the end of the second century. There is nothing to support a conjecture that such manuscripts were circulating outside Egypt this early.³³

In short, placing the entire resolution on Sinaiticus and Vaticanus is a two-legged stool. More evidence must be examined.

This points to the fundamental problem in the analysis of many modern scholars—a seeming prejudice in favor of the two uncials representing an older witness to Mark that is not justified. It is usually said by those disputing the authenticity of the Longer Ending that it is not supported by early Christian writers, but in fact, an examination of this point demonstrates again that there were ancient copies containing the Longer Ending. Eusebius is often noted for having indicated that most copies of Mark lacked these verses. As Farmer explains, however, in reference to a fragmentary work of Eusebius wherein he provides a two-fold answer to a questioner about the potential discrepancy in the timing of the resurrection in Matthew and Mark:

...That these verses were absent from some copies of Mark, and that in certain locales the majority of the copies of Mark in general circulation ended at εφοβουντο γαρ, would seem to be the minimal

³³ William R. Farmer, *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 74-75.

factual basis for the statements placed on the lips of our imagined proponent of excision.

But it is highly improbable that the last twelve verses of Mark were 'met with seldom' in copies of Mark circulating throughout the *whole* of the ancient church. For we cannot imagine the earliest translations – Latin, Syrian, and Coptic – the lectionaries of the church, and Tatian's text all possessing these disputed verses if in fact they were 'met with seldom' in copies of Mark circulating in the churches known to these Fathers. Perhaps that explains why the author of this twofold response, though he seems to have scrupulously avoided passing judgment on the genuineness of either variant reading, has been constrained to use the optative mood in framing the first solution [that the Longer Ending is not authentic]. He seems to recognize that the proponents of omission are capable of making exaggerated claims on behalf of this proposition.³⁴

In other words, when Eusebius said the Longer Ending was "met with seldom" he almost certainly meant in the manuscripts at his disposal, but recognized the existence of others containing it and in particular that the person to whom he was writing about the resurrection timing in Matthew and Mark was asking his question based on the inclusion of the Longer Ending in the texts at his disposal: "Realizing that his questioner is one who knows Mark *with* those verses and wanting to provide him with an answer which will satisfy those who, in spite of objections that can be raised against their authenticity, want to receive these verses, and therefore would not be satisfied with his first solution, and wanting to justify his taking this position seriously, he prefaces his second solution with a rationale for a conservative attitude on this matter."³⁵ Thus, Eusebius' writing recognizes the

³⁴ *Ibid*, 12-13.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 13.

existence of both readings at the same time and does not truly pass judgment on which is best.

Jerome (347-420) is also cited for stating that the Longer Ending is found in “scarcely any copies of the Gospel,” but as Farmer demonstrates, Jerome’s letter written in 406 or 407 was secondary to (i.e., directly relying on) the work of Eusebius addressed above.³⁶ Even though Jerome plainly recognized that there were manuscripts in his time without the Longer Ending, in his Latin translation and his own *Commentary on Mark*, he included the Longer Ending: “..it seems clear that Jerome testifies not only to the existence of the twofold textual tradition in the fifth century but to a responsible scholarly preference for inclusion rather than omission at that time.”³⁷ Origen (184-253) is likewise cited, but this is an argument from silence based on the fact that he did not mention the verses from the Longer Ending in Mark when he answered the writing of Celsus who rejected the resurrection, but did interact with Matthew, Luke and John.³⁸ However, it does appear that Celsus (c. 177-180) was familiar with the Longer Ending.³⁹ Moreover, knowledge of the Longer Ending is also to be found with Irenaeus in the second century, with Tatian around 170, with Justin Martyr around 150, so that Farmer concludes that the “external evidence from the second century for Mk. 16:9-20 is stronger than for

³⁶ *Ibid*, 22-23.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 23.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 27.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 31.

most other parts of that Gospel."⁴⁰ Others also reflect a familiarity with the Longer Ending, including Hippolytus (3rd century), Vincentius (256), Porphyry (c. 270), in the *Acta Pilati*, Aphraates (337), Ambrose (4th century), Epiphanius of Constantia (374-76), Chrysostom (4th century), *The Apostolic Constitutions* (written in Syria c. 380), Jerome in the Vulgate, Augustine, Nestorius (429), and Gregory of Nyssa (possibly quoting Severus).⁴¹ In addition to these writers and works, Farmer also lists the witness of the lectionary systems of the ancient church that originated and developed in the fourth century.⁴²

The response to the supposed differences in vocabulary in the Longer Ending can be answered in two ways. In the first place, as Burgon notes, some of the 27 supposed problem words or phrases are somewhat artificial (e.g., a variation on the word Sabbath, the mention of Mary Magdalene have been delivered from evil spirits when she is plainly referred to earlier in the chapter, the use of the verb "go" is not used elsewhere but compounds of it are used 24 times).⁴³ In the second place, as Broadus demonstrated, the prior twelve verses (Mark 15:44-16:8) likewise contain 17 peculiar words not found elsewhere in Mark.⁴⁴ It would appear, then, that the supposed evidence from the vocabulary is somewhat contrived, and in any event adds little or no weight to the argument against the Longer Ending. Farmer gives

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 31-34.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 34-35.

⁴³ Fuller, 168.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

the diction small weight, concluding on close examination of the Greek text that the evidence for “non-Marcian 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 Marcian authorship seems to be preponderant in verses 9, 11, 13, 15 and 20.”⁴⁵ It cannot be said, then, that the diction squarely establishes the Longer Ending as not original.

In my view, the argument that the theological content of the Longer Ending weighs against its authenticity needs little attention. The context of the references to signs and serpents is Jesus’ words to the Eleven, and no promise is made here to all believers for all time. While I think the evidence already examined tips in favor of the Longer Ending, there is one more critical point that further bolsters the argument. Namely, if as almost all commentators on both sides of the argument agree, Mark’s Gospel did not originally end in verse 8, then what happened to rest of it if the Longer Ending is not authentic? The argument that the last page was lost is purely conjectural, and it seems highly improbable that a manuscript otherwise carefully maintained would have been lost in part, or for that matter, that it would not have been copied long before the last page was ever lost.

The question comes down to the issue of preservation. Would God inspire it and then allow part of it to be lost? As William Combs persuasively argues, while many verses offered in support of preservation are subject to differing interpretations, at least some unavoidably teach preservation:

⁴⁵ Farmer, 103.

In discussion of the doctrine of preservation by those in the KJV/TR camp, one is often presented with a long list of Scripture texts that purport to support that doctrine. However, as our analysis has shown, the Scriptures themselves have little to say about their own preservation. And, in fact, Wallace and Glenny have openly denied a doctrine of preservation. Yet two verses, Psalm 119:52 and 160, would seem to suggest a more direct promise of preservation, while Isaiah 40:8 and Matthew 24:35 may play a more indirect role. Beyond that, the seemingly undeniable existence of a corollary between inspiration and preservation demands a doctrine of preservation. Equally important are the implications from texts such as Matthew 5:18 and John 10:35, which teach a continuing authority for Scripture, an authority that demands their preservation.⁴⁶

Thus, on theological grounds, we can reject the notion that the true ending to Mark was not preserved. By implication, then, the Longer Ending that is preserved in the substantial majority of manuscripts, based on all available evidence, would appear to be the preserved ending.

In the final analysis, evidence from the manuscripts is not nearly as strong against the Longer Ending as many suppose, with the great majority of manuscripts including the Longer Ending, as do many early Christian writers so that the Longer Ending must at least date to the second century. The shorter ending may have existed in the second century, but that is conjectural, and the internal evidence is either neutral or in favor of authenticity. The evidence does not justify excluding the Longer Ending, and the supposed abruptness of verse 9 and the style and diction (which are not nearly as significant as some seem to make it out), may simply reflect that Mark made redactional use of older material.⁴⁷ If Mark is not the earliest gospel, then he may have drawn from some of the other gospels as well as another

⁴⁶ William W. Combs, "The Preservation of Scripture," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 5 (Fall 2000), 43.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 107.

older source. But a peculiar use of some vocabulary, without more, does not establish a different author in the face of the abundant witness for the Longer Ending in the early church. In the end, the substantial manuscript witness and early church witness to the Longer Ending combined with the theological argument on preservation establishes that the Longer Ending is, more likely than not, authentic.