

The Last Verses Of Mark #2

Last week, we examined the internal evidence for the authenticity of Mark 16:9-20. This article will discuss the external evidence.

The external evidence comes from three sources: (1) manuscripts; (2) versions; and, (3) the early Christian writers, known as "the Fathers." Again, John William Burgon writes:

It is a known rule in the Law of Evidence that the burden of proof lies on the party who asserts the affirmative of the issue. But the case is altogether different, as all must see, when it is proposed to get rid of twelve verses which for 1,700 years and upwards have formed the conclusion of Mark's gospel. This assumption that a work which has held to be a complete work for seventeen centuries and upwards was originally incomplete, of course requires proof. I can only imagine one other thing which could induce us to entertain such an opinion [to brand Mark 16:9-20 as spurious] and that would be the general consent of MSS., Fathers, and Versions.

The oldest manuscripts do not contain the last verses of Mark's gospel. Our two oldest complete copies of Mark, codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, which also happen to be our oldest copies of the complete New Testament, end the gospel of Mark at verse 8. But there are also other manuscripts which do not contain vss. 9-20. The twelfth century Greek minuscule 304 does not contain them. The fourth century Old Latin manuscript "k" also does not contain these verses. Instead, it contains the "shorter ending." Several other manuscripts also include the "shorter ending," and then proceed to include the "longer ending." Along with all that, eleven minuscule manuscripts of Mark that do contain the passage, include with it an asterisk, obelisk, or some other indication that the passage is doubtful. But its absence from some copies can be accounted for by considering the many accidents by which the last leaf of a manuscript may be lost.

On the other hand, the passage is found in nearly all of the other ancient manuscripts, including the Alexandrian, which stands next to the Vatican in accuracy. These include all the uncials (numbered at 18) except three (including the fifth century uncial codices Alexandrinus, Ephraemi and Bezae) and virtually all the minuscule copies of Mark (numbered at 600). Furthermore, the abundance of manuscripts which contain the "longer ending" implies the earlier existence of their ancestors. Of all undamaged

Greek copies of the gospel of Mark (over 1500), only a relative few can be shown to have not contained Mark 16:9-20 when they were made.

The versions are early translations into different languages based off of Greek manuscripts. They are helpful because they were in existence earlier than the Sinaitic and Vatican manuscripts, and before the time of Jerome. White attempted to use versions as opponents of these verses, but this is fruitless for the versions are excellent witnesses, beginning in the second century. These verses are included in all the versions except two. The following are some examples:

- The Syriac. The oldest is the Syriac in its various forms: the "Peshitto" (cent. 2), and the "Curetonian Syriac" (cent. 3). Both are older than any Greek manuscript in existence, and both contain these twelve verses. As also does the "Philoxenian" (cent. 5) and the "Jerusalem" (cent. 5) contain these twelve verses.
- The Latin Versions: Jerome (A.D. 382), who had access to Greek MSS. older than any now extant, includes these twelve verses; but this Version (known as the Vulgate) was only a revision of the *Vetus Itala*, which is believed to belong to cent. 2, and also contains these verses.
- The Gothic Version (A.D. 350) contains all of the verses.
- The Egyptian Versions: the Memphitic (or Lower Egyptian, otherwise known as "Coptic"), belonging to cent. 4 or 5, contains them; as does the "BMC" (or Upper Egyptian, otherwise known as the "Sahidic"), belonging to cent. 3 contains them.
- The Armenian (cent. 5), the Ethiopic (cent. 4-7), and the Georgian (cent. 6) also contains them and attests to the genuineness of these verses.

In determining actual words, the evidence by the early Christian writers, known as "the Fathers," is more valuable than even the manuscripts or the versions. There are nearly 100 writers older than the oldest of our Greek codices; between A.D. 300 and A.D. 600 there are about 200 more, and they all refer to these twelve verses. The following are some examples:

- Papias (about A.D. 100) refers to vs. 15 (as stated by Eusebius, *Hist. Ecc.* iii. 39).
- Justin Martyr (A.D. 151) quotes vs. 20 (*Apol.* I. c. 45).
- Irenaeus (A.D. 180) remarks on vs. 19 (*Adv. hoer.* lib. iii. c. x.).
- Hippolytus (A.D. 190-227) quotes vss. 17-19 (Lagarde's ed., 1858, p.74).
- Vincentius (A.D. 256) quoted two verses at the seventh Council of

Carthage, held under Cyprian.

- The Acta Pilati (cent. 2) quotes vss. 15-18 (Tischendorf's ed., 1853, pp. 245, 351).
- The Apostolical Constitutions (cent. 3 or 4) quotes vss. 16-18.
- Eusebius (A.D. 325) discusses these verses, as quoted by Marinus from a lost part of his History.
- Aphraartes (A.D. 337), a Syrian bishop, quoted vss. 16-18 in his first Homily (Dr. Wright's ed., 1869, i., p.21).
- Ambrose (A.D. 374-397), Archbishop of Milan, freely quotes vss. 15 (four times), 16, 17, 18 (three times), and vs. 20 (once).
- Chrysostom (A.D. 400) refers to vs. 9; and states that vss. 19-20 are "the end of the gospel."
- Jerome (A.D. 331-420) includes these twelve verses in his Latin translation, besides quoting vss. 9 and 14 in his other writings.
- Augustine (A.D. 395-430) more than quotes them. He discusses them as being the work of Mark, and says that they were read in the churches.
- Nestorius (cent. 5) quotes vs. 20, and Cyril of Alexandria (A.D. 450) accepts the quotation.
- Victor of Antioch (A.D. 425) confutes the opinion of Ensehius, by referring to very many MSS., which he had seen, and so had satisfied himself that the last twelve verses were recorded in them.

So there are over a dozen witnesses to the last verses of Mark among the early writers, dating back to the second century. Why did none of these illustrious early writers claim that these verses were spurious? The earliest evidence for the inclusion of Mark 16:9-20 pre-dates the earliest evidence for its non-inclusion.

Also, the evidence for the early writers' use of the "longer ending" is spread over a broad geographical area: Justin (Rome), Irenaeus (Gaul), Eusebius (Caesarea), Vincentius (North Africa), and Tatian and Aphraates (Syria). Against this, the ancient Greek evidence for non-inclusion is confined to Egypt (and Caesarea, but this is because the library at Caesarea included Egyptian manuscripts). The implication of this is that copies of Mark containing the "longer ending" were in use in these locations.

It is a fact that these last twelve verses of Mark have more verifying evidences than other parts of Mark. W.R. Farmer wrote, "In fact, external evidence from the second century to Mark 16:9-20 is stronger than for most other parts of that gospel." Van Bruggen added, "If it still remains uncertain whether Mark 16:9-20 is well attested textually, then very little

of any of the rest of the New Testament is well attested.”

Though the evidence for the authenticity of Mark 16:9-20 is overwhelming, it is consistently tossed aside as questionable (at best) by modern textual critics. For example, in a recently published Moody Press commentary on Mark, Louis Barbieri, a former professor at Moody and Dallas Theological Seminary, makes this strange observation: “Since these verses are disputed, it certainly seems that one would not be wise to base any matter of doctrine or experience on a verse that was found only in this section” (p. 372). Perhaps prejudice enters the discussion more often than many would like to admit. For instance, because of the plain teaching of Mark 16:16 regarding baptism, many denominationalists would love for these verses to be removed. By taking the position that these verses were not a part of Mark’s original gospel, they can!

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