

# The Ending of Mark

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*With the recognition that Mark 16:8 is the most authentic ending of the second Gospel, debate has raged over whether this is the Evangelist's intended ending or whether his intended ending was lost. In the first part of the 20th century, the predominant view was that the original ending had been lost, but in the latter part of the century this was replaced by the view that 16:8 was Mark's intended ending, and numerous attempts were made to explain how 16:8 serves as a fitting ending for the Gospel. The present article seeks to demonstrate that 16:8 is not the Evangelist's intended ending. The two main arguments given are that Mark 14:28 and 16:7 are Markan insertions that point to a postresurrection meeting of Jesus and the disciples in Galilee and that it is very unlikely that the Evangelist would have left this prophecy unfulfilled by ending abruptly with 16:8. This would be the only unfulfilled prophecy of Jesus in Mark except for the prophecy concerning his parousia. The second argument is that in contrast to modern reader-response interpretations of 16:1–8, the emphasis of these verses is not about the disciples and their failures but on Jesus Christ, the Son of God (1:1), and the key verses are 16:6–7 and not 16:8.*

*Key Words:* Ending of Mark, NT textual criticism, *ῥᾶπ* as an ending of a book, Mark 14:28, Mark 16:1–8

## INTRODUCTION

The ending of the Gospel of Mark has been called “the greatest of all literary mysteries,”<sup>1</sup> and “the gravest textual problem in the NT,”<sup>2</sup> and in recent years it has certainly been the most discussed. Although Eusebius addressed this problem, by the middle ages, it was assumed that Mark ended with the longer ending, 16:9–20. When Erasmus produced the first published Greek NT, the half-dozen Greek manuscripts available to him all contained these verses, and consequently, the users of his text all assumed that the text ended with 16:9–20.<sup>3</sup> With the continual discovery of

1. D. E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St. Mark* (Pelican Gospel Commentaries; Baltimore: Penguin, 1963), 439.

2. James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 497.

3. Erasmus's Greek NT text was subsequently reprinted by the brothers Elzevir in Leiden in 1633, who referred to this text as the commonly “received text,” and thus this basically Erasmusian text became known as the *Textus Receptus*.

Greek manuscripts, some predating the ones used by Erasmus by almost a thousand years, questions began to arise as to the accuracy of the "received text." It soon became clear that there were a number of variant endings of Mark found in the manuscript tradition. In recent times, it has become clear that the longer ending of Mark is not Markan, and that the earliest recoverable ending of Mark ends at 16:8. The troublesome nature of this ending, however, is apparent at first glance. It is acknowledged as a theological "scandal,"<sup>4</sup> creating "an intolerable discontinuity in the narrative and in the readerly expectations created by it,"<sup>5</sup> "a shocking reversal of expectations,"<sup>6</sup> and a "mysterious anti-climax."<sup>7</sup> These quotations, it should be noted, come from advocates of the view that 16:8 is the intended ending of the Gospel. Nevertheless, they acknowledge the difficulty involved in assuming that Mark 16:8 is the Evangelist's intended ending.

Whereas in the late 19th and first half of the 20th centuries, NT scholars were inclined to believe that Mark 16:8 was not the intended ending of the Gospel, the latter half of the 20th century brought about a change and the dominating position became that Mark intended to end his Gospel with 16:8. The purpose of this article is to discuss the question of whether Mark purposely intended to end his Gospel at 16:8. It is divided into three parts of uneven length: the first discusses briefly the various endings of Mark found in the manuscript tradition; the second discusses and critiques the arguments in favor of Mark's having ended his Gospel at 16:8; and the third and longest looks at the arguments in favor of the view that the intended Markan ending is missing.

## 1. THE VARIOUS ENDINGS OF MARK IN THE MANUSCRIPT TRADITION

The various endings of Mark found in the manuscript tradition can be organized into five main groups.

### 1.1. *Mark 16:8*

In certain manuscripts, Mark ends at 16:8, which reads, "So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (NRSV). The last two words of this form of the Greek text of Mark are the now-famous ἐφοβούντο γάρ, "for they were afraid." This ending is found in two major

4. Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 67.

5. Norman R. Petersen, "When Is the End Not the End? Literary Reflections on the Ending of Mark's Narrative," *Int* 34 (1980): 154.

6. Thomas E. Boomershine and Gilbert L. Bartholomew, "The Narrative Technique of Mark 16:8," *JBL* 100 (1981): 229.

7. Donald Harrisville Juel, "A Disquieting Silence: The Matter of the Ending," in *The Ending of Mark and the Ends of God* (ed. Beverly Roberts Galenta and Patrick D. Miller; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 1.

Greek Codices—Codex Sinaiticus (Ⲱ) and Vaticanus (B), as well as in 304, certain Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, and Georgian manuscripts, and is witnessed to by Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius, and Jerome.

### 1.2. *The “Shorter Ending”*

A second ending found in the manuscript tradition is the shorter ending. This ending reads, after 16:8, “And all that had been commanded them they told briefly to those around Peter. And afterward Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation. Amen.” The best known example of this in its pure form is found in the Old Latin Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae (*it<sup>k</sup>*), which dates from the late 4th or early 5th century.<sup>8</sup> The non-Markan origin of the shorter ending is witnessed to by its poor and late textual attestation; the fact that 9 of the 34 words in this ending are not found elsewhere in Mark;<sup>9</sup> its non-Markan style; and especially the presence of the expression, “the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation,” which reflects a later date.

### 1.3. *The “Longer Ending” (16:9–20)*<sup>10</sup>

The best-known ending of Mark is the longer ending, 16:9–20. The manuscript evidence in support of this reading is too large to recite. Let it suffice

8. See Bruce M. Metzger (“The Ending of the Gospel according to St. Mark in Ethiopic Manuscripts,” in *New Testament Studies: Philological, Versional, and Patristic* [Leiden: Brill, 1980], 127–47), who points out that in most Ethiopic manuscripts of Mark the shorter ending is found immediately following 16:8 and is then followed by the longer ending.

9. Edwards, *Mark*, 498.

10. This reads as follows:

<sup>16:9</sup>Now after he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. <sup>10</sup>She went out and told those who had been with him, while they were mourning and weeping. <sup>11</sup>But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.

<sup>12</sup>After this he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. <sup>13</sup>And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them. <sup>14</sup>Later he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were sitting at the table; and he upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. <sup>15</sup>And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. <sup>16</sup>The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned. <sup>17</sup>And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; <sup>18</sup>they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

<sup>19</sup>So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. <sup>20</sup>And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it” (NRSV).

to refer to Kurt and Barbara Aland,<sup>11</sup> who claim that the longer ending is found in 99% of the Greek manuscripts as well as the rest of the tradition, and to Michael Holmes,<sup>12</sup> who refers to it being found in 95% of the Greek manuscripts.<sup>13</sup> The early attestation of this ending (*Epistle of the Apostles* 9–10 [mid-2nd century]; Tatian's *Diatessaron*; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 3.10.5; possibly Justin Martyr, *Apology* 1:45) suggests that the longer ending was composed early in the 2nd century.<sup>14</sup> The longer ending has excellent textual attestation, but a number of the manuscripts have asterisks or other markings by the text indicating that the copyists thought the longer ending was spurious.<sup>15</sup> It has, however, early patristic support, and Hengel argues that it "must be dated to the first decades of the second century."<sup>16</sup>

The evaluation of the longer ending by scholars today is almost unanimous in rejecting it as Markan. There are a number of reasons for this:<sup>17</sup>

1. *Manuscript Evidence.* Although the number of manuscripts containing this ending is impressive, the quality of manuscripts lacking it (Codexes  $\aleph$  and B, *it*<sup>k</sup> [Codex Bobiensis], Clement of Alexandria and Origen, and the comments by Eusebius and Jerome that the majority of Greek manuscripts they were familiar with lacked it) is weighty.

2. *Transcription.* It is unlikely that a copyist would omit 16:9–20 if it was originally part of the Gospel of Mark. It is far more likely that a scribe would add 16:9–20 to 16:8 than delete it from 16:8.

3. *Lack of Attestation by Early Church Fathers.* The lack of reference to 16:9–20 by Origen, Tertullian, Cyrian, Cyril of Jerusalem, and others, indicates that they were apparently unacquainted with the longer ending of Mark.

4. *Vocabulary.* The vocabulary is non-Markan and contains 18 terms not found anywhere else in Mark.<sup>18</sup>

11. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism* (trans. Erroll F. Rhodes; 2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 292.

12. Michael W. Holmes, "The Many Endings of the Gospel of Mark," *BRev* 17/4 (2001): 19.

13. Some of the witnesses to the longer ending are: A C D E H K S U W X Y  $\Gamma$   $\Delta$   $\Theta$   $\Pi$   $\Sigma$   $\Phi$   $\Omega$  047 055 0211  $\epsilon^{13}$  28 33 274 565 700 892 1009 *lat syr sah cop goth* Justin? Tatian Irenaeus Tertullian, and so on.

14. Compare Martin Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 167–69 n. 47; and James A. Kelhoffer, *Miracle and Mission: The Authentication of Missionaries and Their Message in the Longer Ending of Mark* (WUNT 2/112; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 169–77.

15. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2nd ed.; New York: United Bible Societies, 2002), 102–6.

16. Hengel, *Studies*, 68 n. 47. Compare also Kelhoffer (*Miracle and Mission*, 75), who dates it ca. 120–150.

17. Cf. J. Lee Magness, *Sense and Absence: Structure and Suspension in the Ending of Mark's Gospel* (Semeia Studies; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 5–6.

18. James Keith Elliot, "The Text and Language of the Endings to Mark's Gospel," *TZ* 27 (1971): 258–62; and Edwards, *Mark*, 498 n. 4.

5. *Style.* The Greek style of the longer ending is quite unlike the style we find in Mark 1:1–16:8.<sup>19</sup>

6. *Theology.* The theological content is decidedly non-Markan.<sup>20</sup>

As a result, the great majority of scholars who have studied the longer ending of Mark have concluded that the Evangelist did not write it and that it was attached later to his Gospel. In fact, Taylor, in his commentary on Mark, states, “It is unnecessary to examine in detail the almost universally held conclusion that xvi. 9–20 is not an original part of Mark. Both the external and the internal evidence are decisive.”<sup>21</sup> The vast majority of Markan scholars agree with this statement.

#### 1.4. *The “Shorter Ending” Followed by the “Longer Ending”*

A fourth ending found in the manuscript tradition is the shorter ending followed by the longer ending. This is found in four uncial manuscripts dating from the 7th, 8th, and 9th centuries (L Ψ 099 0112), the Harclean Syriac manuscript, and several Sahidic, Bohairic, and Ethiopic manuscripts. The individual judgments concerning the non-Markan nature of the shorter ending and the longer ending make one even more certain that the combination of these two endings does not come from Mark.

#### 1.5. *The “Longer Ending” with the Freer Logion after Verse 14*

The fifth ending is the longer ending with the Freer Logion after v. 14. There exists an expanded version of the longer ending found in W (alternately called the Codex Washingtonianus or Codex Freerianus), 032; and Jerome, *Against Pelagius* 2.15, which includes after 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 your righteousness now’—thus they spoke to Christ. And Christ replied to them, ‘The term of years of Satan’s power has been fulfilled, but other terrible things draw near. And for those who have sinned I was handed over to death, that they may return to the truth and sin no more, in order that they may inherit the spiritual and incorruptible glory or righteousness that is in heaven.’”<sup>22</sup> The secondary nature of the Freer Logion is quite obvious.

19. Perhaps I will be permitted to share a personal anecdote here. Since my doctoral studies at Princeton Theological Seminary where I did my dissertation on Mark, I have had a continued love affair with this Gospel. I think that I can say with some measure of confidence that this is the book of the Bible of which I am least ignorant. I have become familiar with the style, vocabulary, and theological interests of the author of Mark 1:1–16:8, but I do not know the identity of the author of 16:9–20. He is a stranger to me.

20. Contra William R. Farmer, *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark* (SNTSMS 25; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 107–9. Contrast especially 16:17–18, 20 with 8:11–13. Verses 12 and 13 furthermore appear to be dependent upon Luke 24:13–35.

21. Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (London: MacMillan, 1952), 610.

22. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 104.

In summary, of the five possible endings of Mark mentioned, there is universal agreement that the shorter ending, the shorter ending followed by the longer ending, and the longer ending with the Freer Logion after v. 14 are not Markan but are later scribal additions added to 16:8. The only endings of Mark that we possess that merit consideration are 16:8 and the longer ending, 16:9–20. The latter has in its favor the great majority of manuscript evidence, but a critical evaluation of the textual evidence indicates qualitative support of 16:8 as the better ending. The witness of Codex Sinaiticus (Ⲱ) and Codex Vaticanus (B), Clement, and Origen, and the testimony of both Eusebius and Jerome that the majority of Greek manuscripts they were aware of lacked 16:9–20 is weighty.<sup>23</sup> On the basis of internal evidence, there is no doubt that 16:9–20 was not written by the Evangelist. Even F. F. Bruce, who argues that 16:9–20 should be considered “canonical,” argues strongly against its being from the hand of Mark.<sup>24</sup>

23. Some of the textual evidence put forth to support 16:8 as the intended ending of Mark is not as straightforward as sometimes assumed. The ending of Mark in Codex Vaticanus is quite unusual. This uncial manuscript contains three parallel columns or *selis* (*pagina* in Latin) on each page, containing 42 lines or *stichos* (*versus* in Latin). (The number of lines in this codex varies from 44 lines per column on pp. 1–334, 555ff., to 42 lines on pp. 335–534, and 40 lines on pp. 534–54. So Theodore Skeat, “The Codex Sinaiticus, The Codex Vaticanus, and Constantine,” *JTS* 50 [1999]: 615–16.) With respect to Matthew, Luke, and John, the following books (Mark, John, and Acts) began at the top of the next column. However, whereas Mark fills two columns on a page, the third column is left blank, unlike in the case of Matthew, Luke, and John! The reason this column, which, along with the empty space after Mark 16:8 in the second column, could accommodate Mark 16:9–20, is left blank is unclear. It may suggest that the scribe had questions as to exactly how Mark ended, whereas no questions of this sort existed with respect to the other Gospels.

As to Eusebius’s comments concerning the ending of Mark found in *Quaestiones ad Marimum*, he does quote someone as saying that after 16:8 “in almost all copies of the Gospel according to Mark, comes the end.” Yet he also states that 16:9–20 is “not met with in all the copies of Mark’s Gospel” and that 16:9–20 is “met with seldom, in some copies, certainly not in all” (John William Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel according to S. Mark* [Ann Arbor, MI: Sovereign Grace Book Club, 1959], 122–24; Farmer, *Last Twelve Verses*, 4; for the Greek text, see *PG* 22:937). The last two statements of Eusebius raise questions as to how exactly one should interpret his statement that “almost all” the copies of Mark’s Gospel lack 16:9–20. With respect to Jerome the evidence is even more unclear. Although in *ad Hedibiam*, he states that 16:9–20 “is met with in scarcely any copies of the Gospel—almost all the Greek codices being without this passage” (Farmer, *Last Twelve Verses*, 23; for the Latin text see *PL* 22:987), this statement is weakened by the fact that he, like the *Itala*, included Mark 16:9–20 in his *Vulgate* and the fact that he discusses it, without comment, in his commentary on Mark. In fact, Jerome does not separate 16:8 from 16:9 in the commentary in any way. On the contrary, he divides his discussion of 16:1–20 into the following paragraphs: 16:1, 2–4a, 4b–5, 6–7a, 7b–13, 14, 15, 16–20 (*PL* 30:640–44)! In addition, his reference to Mark 16:14 in *Against the Pelagians* 2.15 (*PL* 23:576) and the wide distribution of manuscripts of Mark containing 16:9–20 (see above, 1.3 “The ‘Longer Ending’ [16:9–20]”) makes it difficult to take Jerome’s statement at face value.

24. F. F. Bruce, “The End of the Second Gospel,” *EvQ* 17 (1945): 169–81; compare also Nineham, *Mark*, 449. Aside from individuals who argue for the supremacy of the Greek text of the Textus Receptus, if one wants to find supporters of 16:9–20 being Markan, one must go to writers such as John William Burgon (1871), George Salmon (1885), Gerhard Hartmann (1936), and William R. Farmer (1974). For lesser-known writers, see Kelhoffer, *Miracle and Mission*, 18–19

This then leaves 16:8 as the only ending of second Gospel that we know for certain the Evangelist wrote. Mark 16:8 is clearly the most authentic ending of Mark that we possess;<sup>25</sup> it is the oldest ending we possess for the Gospel of Mark. But is it the *original* and *intended* ending of Mark? Its being the earliest recoverable ending of Mark and being Mark's intended ending are two separate issues, and whereas there is a great consensus that 16:8 is the oldest ending of Mark that we possess, there is far less agreement as to whether this was Mark's intended meaning. As I have already mentioned, during the first half of the 20th century, the majority of scholars were inclined to argue that 16:8 was not the intended ending of Mark.<sup>26</sup> During the second half of the 20th century, a reversal took place and the majority of scholars came to believe that 16:8 was intended by Mark to serve as the ending of his Gospel. This was due in part to the work of J. Wellhausen, who, in his brief little commentary on Mark, argued for this position and stated "Es wäre schade, wenn noch etwas hinterher käme" (It would be a shame if something came after [16:8]).<sup>27</sup>

## 2. THE THEORY THAT MARK INTENDED TO END HIS GOSPEL AT 16:8

The main arguments put forward in favor of this theory are as follows.

2.1. We possess no authentic Markan material after 16:8. The shorter and longer endings of Mark and the various combinations of these are clearly not from the hand of Mark, and two major Greek manuscripts, Codex Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, which are thought by many to be the two best, end at 16:8. Mark 16:8 is unquestionably the oldest and most authentic ending of the Gospel that we possess, and it is extremely unlikely that any future manuscript discoveries will change this. This is the strongest argument in favor of this theory. To argue for there being a lost or unfinished ending and that Mark did not intend to end his Gospel at 16:8 is hypothetical. No one argues that any other book of the NT has lost its original ending. Why should we do so here in the case of Mark?

2.2. There are convincing arguments that 16:8 is an appropriate ending for Mark. Those who argue for 16:8 as the intended ending of Mark recognize that, at first glance, this seems to be a very strange and unexpected ending. Therefore, "interpretations that demonstrate coherence in

n. 68. Cf. also Jim Snapp Jr., "The Authenticity of Mark 16:9–20," n.p. Online: <http://www.curtisvillechristian.org/MarkOne.html>.

25. Robert Henry Lightfoot, *The Gospel Message of St. Mark* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1950), 80.

26. Taylor, *Mark*, 609–11; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 670 n. 1; N. Clayton Croy, *The Mutilation of Mark's Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon: 2003), 18–32.

27. J. Wellhausen, *Das Evangelium Marci* (Berlin: Reimer, 1903), 137. Compare also J. M. Creed, "The Conclusion of the Gospel According to Saint Mark," *JTS* 31 (1930): 175–80; Ernst Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Markus* (KEK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1957), 356–60; and Robert Henry Lightfoot, *Locality and Doctrine in the Gospels* (New York: Harper, 1938), 1–48, 80–97; and idem, *The Gospel Message*, 106–16.

a version of Mark ending with 16:8 add probability to arguments that deal with manuscripts of the Gospel. The reconstruction of an implied audience for whom such a narrative [ending with 16:8] would be appropriate likewise adds plausibility."<sup>28</sup> As a result, numerous attempts have been made to supply a convincing reason why Mark may have intentionally ended his Gospel at 16:8, that is, that 16:8 makes sense as a conclusion to Mark's Gospel. These include the following:<sup>29</sup>

"Mark is assiduously involved in a vendetta against the disciples. He is intent on totally discrediting them. . . . As the coup de grace, Mark closes his Gospel without rehabilitating the disciples."<sup>30</sup>

Mark was seeking to counter his readers'<sup>31</sup> obsession with miracles and their *theios anēr* Christology.<sup>32</sup>

On the basis of Mark being modeled after a Greek tragedy, "16:8 is not only perfectly appropriate but also a stroke of genius."<sup>33</sup>

Mark ends his Gospel as "unfinished business for the reader to complete, thoughtfully and imaginatively, not textually."<sup>34</sup>

Mark wanted to force his readers "to reflect on the future response of Jesus' followers, including themselves, to the commission to proclaim the gospel"<sup>35</sup> and "to think out for [themselves] the Gospel's challenge."<sup>36</sup>

The readers are to complete the story by "their dramatic participation in its conclusion."<sup>37</sup>

28. Juel, "A Disquieting Silence," 3.

29. Joel F. Williams ("Literary Approaches to the End of Mark's Gospel," *JETS* 42 [1999]: 26–35) divides the various explanations into five categories: (1) an attempt to explain 16:8 ("terror . . . amazement . . . afraid") as a positive response to the empty tomb and the angelic message; (2) an attempt to denigrate the disciples and describe them as apostate; (3) a desire to have the readers reflect on the fact that, despite the women's disobedience, the disciples did meet Jesus in Galilee in accordance with 14:28 and 16:7; (4) an unstated apostolic commission in which the reader is to fulfill the failure of the women and the twelve; and (5) an attempt to demonstrate that God's promises and the disciples' failure typify Christian experience.

30. Theodore J. Weeden, *Mark—Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 50–51.

31. When we speak of Mark's "readers," we should not envision a group of "readers" silently reading Mark's original scroll or codex but a group of *hearers* listening to Mark's text being read to them. See Robert H. Stein, "Is Our Reading the Bible the Same as the Original Audience's Hearing It? A Case Study of the Gospel of Mark," *JETS* 46 (2003): 63–78.

32. John Dominic Crossan, "Empty Tomb and Absent Lord (Mark 16:1–8)," in *The Passion in Mark: Studies on Mark 14–16* (ed. Werner H. Kelber; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 135–52.

33. Gilbert G. Bilezikian, *The Liberated Gospel: A Comparison of the Gospel of Mark and Greek Tragedy* (BBMS; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 134.

34. Petersen, "When Is the End Not the End?," 153.

35. Thomas E. Boomershine, "Mark 16:8 and the Apostolic Commission," *JBL* 100 (1981): 239.

36. Ernest Best, *Mark: The Gospel as Story* (Studies of the New Testament and its World; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983), 132.

37. Magness, *Sense and Absence*, 102.

Mark seeks to encourage readers to persevere despite the disobedience and failure of the disciples.<sup>38</sup>

Mark seeks to challenge the reader to become “the perfect disciple” and fulfill what the disciples and women failed to do.<sup>39</sup>

Mark seeks to have the readers “make their [own] decision” of obedience.<sup>40</sup>

Mark seeks “to leave his readers to make the crucial step of faith for themselves, without presenting them with less ambiguous evidence for the resurrection.”<sup>41</sup>

“The women’s flight challenges the reader of Mark to complete the story, based on earlier clues about the true nature of following the suffering Son of Man.”<sup>42</sup>

“The readers are asked to complete the story, not only by imaging the fulfillment of the promise of appearances, as 14:28 and 16:7 should probably be interpreted, but also by imaging the fulfillment of the dramatic and vivid promises that the Son of Man would return (13:24–27; 14:62).”<sup>43</sup>

Mark creates a “tender trap” in which the real reader recognizes that “who indeed but I” will proclaim the angelic message of 16:7 and elicit “a call for deeper commitment . . . from [the] hearers.”<sup>44</sup>

The ending is a “‘highly sophisticated’ narrative trap”<sup>45</sup> whose “narrative breakdown *demand*s the actual reader’s involvement in rescuing the story, which is its ultimate rhetorical effect.”<sup>46</sup>

“Perhaps Mark is suggesting that in some mysterious way the Gospel is still proclaimed even by failed, fragile, and unfaithful disciples. To

38. Andrew T. Lincoln, “The Promise and the Failure: Mark 16:7, 8,” *JBL* 108 (1989): 283–300.

39. Mary Ann Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark’s World in Literary-Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 297–99.

40. T. J. Geddert, *Watchwords: Mark 13 in Markan Eschatology* (JSNTSup 26; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 172.

41. Morna E. Hooker, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark* (BNTC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 392.

42. PHEME PERKINS, “‘I Have Seen the Lord’ (John 20:18): Women Witnesses to the Resurrection,” *Int* 46 (1992): 36.

43. Adela Yarbro Collins, “The Empty Tomb in the Gospel according to Mark,” in *Hermes and Athena: Biblical Exegesis and Philosophical Theology* (ed. Eleonore Stump and Thomas P. Flint; Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 123.

44. Paul L. Danove, *The End of Mark’s Story: A Methodological Study* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 221–22.

45. J. David Hester, “Dramatic Inconclusion: Irony and the Narrative Rhetoric of the Ending of Mark,” *JSNT* 57 (1995): 63.

46. *Ibid.*, 62.

put this another way, human success does not guarantee the gospel's ongoing impact. The Gospel is ultimately God's act."<sup>47</sup>

"Only the readers are left to complete the story."<sup>48</sup>

"Mark presents true followers who fail, but he also offers hope, because he shows that Jesus does not give up on them."<sup>49</sup>

"The audience must act to provide its own conclusion,"<sup>50</sup> and so on.<sup>51</sup>

We cannot interact with these suggestions individually, but we shall discuss them in general in the third part of this article. Here it should simply be noted that the intended readers/hearers envisioned by these suggestions are for the most part very unlike the actual readers that Mark had in mind.<sup>52</sup> They appear to be more like highly-educated 20th- and 21st-century existentialists than like 1st-century Christians, the great majority of whom could not read or write.

2.3. There is nothing unusual with Mark ending his Gospel with a "for (γάρ)." A number of scholars have argued that we find examples of this in Greek literature.<sup>53</sup> There are indeed numerous examples in the literature, in which γάρ is found ending a sentence. We find an example of this in John 13:13, in which the sentence ends with "I am (εἰμι γάρ)" and in Gen 18:15 in the LXX, in which the first sentence ends with "For she was afraid (ἐφοβήθη γάρ)." This argument is not so much a positive argument in favor of understanding that 16:8 is the intended ending of Mark as it is a counter argument against people who seek to argue that a book could not have ended with a γάρ. We shall look into this matter shortly in part three, but it should be admitted from the start that Mark could have ended his Gospel with a γάρ. If Greek sentences can end with a γάρ, and they do, then books can end with a γάρ! In fact, Mark could have ended his Gospel

47. Michael Trainor, "The Women, the Empty Tomb, and *That* Final Verse," *TBT* 34 (1996): 181.

48. David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 143.

49. Williams, "Literary Approaches," 35.

50. Bridget Gilfillan Upton, *Hearing Mark's Endings: Listening to Ancient Popular Texts through Speech Act Theory* (Biblical Interpretation Series 79; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 151.

51. See A. J. M. Wedderburn, *Beyond Resurrection* (London: SCM, 1999), 135-44; Williams, "Literary Approaches," 26-35; and Croy, *The Mutilation*, 72-112, for additional attempts to explain why Mark ended his Gospel at 16:8.

52. Our only certain knowledge of Mark's readers/hearers comes from the text of Mark, itself, not information concerning authorship, date, audience, and so on obtained from "extra-Markan" material. For some examples of what we can learn from the text of Mark concerning his intended readers, see Stein, "Is Our Reading," 63-72. Our knowledge of Mark's willed meaning of his text comes from our understanding of how his intended readers would/should have interpreted the text he gave to them.

53. Compare Lightfoot, *Locality and Doctrine*, 11-15; P. W. van der Horst, "Can a Book End with a ΓΑΡ? A Note on Mark XVI.8," *JTS* 23 (1972): 121-24; Stephen L. Cox, *A History and Critique of Scholarship concerning the Markan Endings* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Biblical Press, 1993), 223-27; Croy, *The Mutilation*, 47-50.

with a string of ten ἐφοβῶντο γάρ in a row, if he wanted. The issue involves not possibility but probability, and we shall look at this shortly.

In summary, and please excuse my being somewhat simplistic, the single strongest argument in favor of the theory that Mark intended to end his Gospel at 16:8 is essentially textual in nature. We do not possess any authentic Markan material after 16:8! This is a strong argument in favor of this theory. The argument that 16:8 is an appropriate ending for Mark that fits well with the Markan motifs of astonishment and fear<sup>54</sup> and of the disciples' failure found in the Gospel is not so much a positive argument as it is a counter argument seeking to diffuse the criticism that 16:8 is an inappropriate ending of the Gospel. The same can be said about the argument that the Gospel could have ended with a γάρ.

### 3. THE THEORY THAT MARK'S INTENDED ENDING IS MISSING

Let us now look at the theory that Mark 16:8 is not the intended ending of the Gospel and that the intended ending is missing, whether by accident (the beginning and ending of a scroll were most subject to wear and tear)<sup>55</sup> or it was intentionally mutilated or something happened to Mark and he never finished his Gospel (whether death, persecution, or some other reason). The main arguments put forward in favor of 16:8 not being the intended ending of Mark are as follows.<sup>56</sup>

3.1. Mark has emphasized the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecies throughout his Gospel. The description of his passion with its mocking and scourging (8:31; 9:31; and esp. 10:33–34), the rejection by the Jewish leadership (8:31; 10:33), the betrayal of Judas (14:18–21), his being delivered over to the Gentiles (10:33), the desertion of the disciples (14:27), Peter's denial (14:29–30), finding a virgin colt for Jesus' entry into Jerusalem (11:2–3),

54. William L. Lane, *The Gospel according to Mark: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 591–92.

55. Danove (*The End of Mark's Story*, 127) argues that usually the first part of a scroll was more likely to be lost or mutilated than the end, but N. T. Wright (*Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 3: *The Resurrection of the Son of God* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003], 619) points out that the Dead Sea Scrolls that have been preserved for the most part in their entirety are often damaged at both ends. Colin H. Roberts and T. C. Skeet (*The Birth of the Codex* [London: Oxford University Press, 1983], 54–61, esp. 55), suggest that the Gospel of Mark may have originally been written in codex form, and the loss of its outermost leaf would explain the missing ending. Cf. Croy, *The Mutilation*, 136–63. See, however, Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 57–66. Whereas some argue that in a single quire codex the loss of the last sheet would also entail the loss of the first sheet as well (cf. Larry W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006], 87), Gamble (*Books and Readers*, 66) argues that a quire of this sort would not have been sown together at the fold of the sheets but at the side, so that the loss of the end or beginning sheet would not have necessitated the loss of the other.

56. For additional arguments see Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 1009–12; and Wright, *The Resurrection*, 617–24.

finding a man carrying a jar of water who would lead them to a prepared upper room (14:13–15), which Mark later points out takes place just as “he told them (14:16),” and so on, are all shown by Mark to have been precisely fulfilled. Yet, if the Gospel ends at 16:8, the frequent prophecies of Jesus’ resurrection (8:31; 9:9, 31; 10:34; cf. also 14:28, 58; 15:29; 16:7) are less satisfactorily fulfilled. Instead of an actual appearance of the risen Jesus and the disciples’ meeting Jesus in Galilee, Mark concludes with the fact of the empty tomb and the angelic statement “He is risen” (16:6). The additional prediction that Jesus would meet his disciples in Galilee in 14:28, which is emphatically repeated by the angel and given added emphasis by the words “just as he told you!” in 16:7, is unfulfilled. The readers were well aware that this took place, but the account of an appearance of this sort, referred to in Matt 28:16–20, John 21:1–23, and 1 Cor 15:5, is missing in our present form of Mark.<sup>57</sup>

3.2. Matthew (28:8, 10), Luke (24:9–11), and John (20:1, 11–18) all record the women’s telling the disciples of the resurrection of Jesus. This indicates the existence of multiple traditions of the angelic command to the women (16:7) being carried out. It seems strange that Mark would report the angelic command to the women to tell the disciples that Jesus would meet them in Galilee and then, despite the awareness that his readers knew of the tradition that he did, decide not to include it. Similarly, the resurrection appearances of Jesus were such an integral part of the early church’s preaching (1 Cor 15:5–8; Acts 1:3–11, 22; 2:32; 3:15; 10:41; 13:31; the other three Gospels, etc.) that it is difficult to believe that Mark would have ended his Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (1:1) without an account of this appearance.

3.3. It is hard to imagine that a Gospel that begins with a bold, straightforward “The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (1:1) would end with a negative response of fear and fright by the women in 16:8. Mark clearly wrote with his 1st-century readers in mind, and Mark’s readers would have found this intolerable. There was no need to be “coy” about what Mark’s readers and all Christians knew to be true—that Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to his disciples (1 Cor 15:4–8).<sup>58</sup> In light of 1:1, it is unlikely that at 16:8 the narrative “has reached its

57. Hypothetical reconstructions of what Jesus’ appearance, missing in Mark, was like usually resemble Matt 28:9–20 (esp. vv. 16–20) in one form or another, because Matt 28:5–8a follows Mark very closely. Cf. Eta Linnemann, “Der (wiedergefundene) Markusschluss,” *ZTK* 66 (1969): 255–87; G. W. Tropic, “The First Resurrection Appearance and the Ending of Mark’s Gospel,” *NTS* 18 (1971): 315–25; Grant R. Osborne, *The Resurrection Narratives: A Redactional Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 58–65; Gundry, *Mark*, 1021; Edwards, *Mark*, 503; France, *Mark*, 674; Wright, *The Resurrection*, 624.

58. France (*Mark*, 671–72) points out that ancient writers were more in the habit of saying as clearly as possible their intended meaning than “teasing the reader with unfulfilled promises and undelivered messages.” Compare also Edwards (*Mark*, 501), who states that ancient texts in general “show a dogged proclivity to state conclusions, not suggest them.” Rhetorical subtlety does not seem to fit the 1st-century church.

goal and been completed,"<sup>59</sup> for the Gospel of Mark is essentially about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, not the followers of Jesus.

3.4. There have been numerous attempts to discover other Greek books that end with a "for (γάρ)." That sentences can end this way (cf. John 13:13; Gen 18:15 [LXX]) is evident. Cox<sup>60</sup> has found over a thousand examples of this in Greek literature, and we know that paragraphs and sections can end this way,<sup>61</sup> but whether a book ever ended in this manner is still debated. The examples most frequently cited are Plotinus, *Ennead* 5.5; Plato, *Protagoras* 328c; and Musonius Rufus, *Tractatus* XII; but it is debatable whether these are legitimate examples of a "book" ending with "γάρ." With regard to Plotinus's *Ennead* 5.5, it is generally agreed that 5:5 (treatise 32) was originally part of a larger treatise consisting of treatises 30, 31, 32, and 33. Van der Horst, who uses this as an example, acknowledges this.<sup>62</sup> Regardless, even if it is granted that a book can end this way, it must be admitted that such an ending of this sort would be most unusual. That Mark could have ended his Gospel in this manner cannot be denied. Even if there were no evidence elsewhere and Mark were the only person in the history of the world to have done so, he could have ended his Gospel in this manner if he wanted. However, the probability that he chose to end his Gospel in this most unusual manner is low, as the lack of a really clear example of this sort of occurrence in Greek literature indicates. In a recent article, Iverson states, "The fact is *concluding γάρ statements are extremely, extremely rare at all times and in all genres*" (author's italics).<sup>63</sup>

3.5. The existence of the shorter and longer endings of Mark and the preference of these endings over 16:8 show that the early scribes were deeply dissatisfied with 16:8 as the final ending of Mark. How should we compare their dissatisfaction with the satisfaction of modern-day exegetes who see 16:8 as an appropriate ending? Juel has stated, "For less sophisticated readers who are familiar with Matthew, Luke, and John, it is difficult to even hear Mark."<sup>64</sup> But is not this the point? Does not the great dissatisfaction with 16:8 as Mark's intended ending found among the scribes indicate that 16:8 was seen as a totally inappropriate ending? And Mark's original readers were even less sophisticated than these scribes! The simplicity of Mark's Greek, whether due to his own lack of sophistication or due to his accommodation to his intended audience, indicates that his readers were relatively uneducated (probably only about 10% could read).<sup>65</sup> They probably fit well Paul's description of the Corinthian Christians as "not many . . . wise by human standards, not many . . . powerful, not many . . . of noble birth" (1 Cor 1:26, NRSV). Most present-day

59. Petersen, "When Is the End Not the End?," 152.

60. *A History and Critique*, 223–27.

61. Lightfoot, *Locality and Doctrine*, 10–15; van der Horst, "Can a Book End," 123–24.

62. *Ibid.*, 123–24.

63. Kelly R. Iverson, "A Further Word on Final Γάρ (Mark 16:8)," *CBQ* 68 (2006): 93.

64. Juel, "A Disquieting Silence," 4.

65. Stein, "Is Our Reading," 71.

evaluations of the rhetorical skills of Mark's implied readers are not accurate reflections of the intellectual ability of Mark's actual, 1st-century readers/hearers.<sup>66</sup>

C. S. Lewis, in his article "Fern-Seed and Elephants," states, "The idea that any man or writer should be opaque to those who lived in the same culture, spoke the same language, shared the same habitual imagery and unconscious assumptions, and yet be transparent to those who have none of these advantages, is in my opinion preposterous."<sup>67</sup> If, as Juel and other proponents of 16:8 being Mark's intended ending admit, less sophisticated readers find it difficult to understand Mark 16:8 as the Evangelist's intended ending, are "less sophisticated readers" more reliable or less reliable guides for interpreting Mark's Gospel than modern-day literary critics, who are deeply entrenched in Kafka-like existentialism and a reader-response hermeneutic? Are not Mark's intended<sup>68</sup> readers, who treated Mark 16:1-8 as an "historical narrative," more reliable interpreters of Mark than modern-day "reader-response" critics who apply the rules of fictional narrative to Mark's text? I would suggest that Mark's 1st-century, unsophisticated Christian readers, familiar with the Gospel traditions concerning Jesus' resurrection and his appearances to his disciples,<sup>69</sup> would not only find 16:8 a difficult ending for Mark but an impossible one. And since Mark wrote with such an audience in mind, this argues that 16:8 is not his intended ending.

Whatever the value or legitimacy of a modern reader-response hermeneutic may be, it is inappropriate for the question at hand. How we may choose to interpret Mark 16:8 is irrelevant with respect to the historical question of whether Mark intended to end his Gospel at 16:8. Whether a modern-day reader chooses to interpret 16:8 in light of modern or post-modern literary criticism and existentialism is a hermeneutical question, but how Mark ended his Gospel is an historical question and involves what the author of the second Gospel sought to teach his 1st-century readers/hearers by Mark 16:1-8. (See below, 3.7 "The Meaning of Mark 16:1-8.") The only way we can learn this is by understanding how his intended readers would (or should) have understood it.<sup>70</sup> The general dissatisfac-

66. Compare Danove, *The End of Mark's Story*.

67. "Fern-seed and Elephants," in *Fern-seed and Elephants and Other Essays on Christianity* (ed. Walter Hooper; London: Fontana, 1975), 112.

68. It is assumed that Mark's "actual" readers were his "intended" readers, that is, that the readers he had in mind as he wrote (his "intended" readers) were the recipients (his "actual" readers) of his Gospel.

69. Cf. Stein, "Is Our Reading," 66-67.

70. The modern reader has access to the meaning of ancient authors, in this case "Mark," because he possesses (1) the work of the author in its original language (textual criticism may not be able to guarantee that the reader possesses the exact text of Mark but does assure us that we have a reliable copy of the text) and (2) sufficient understanding of the 1st-century Greek of Mark and his readers in order to understand what the Evangelist was seeking to convey by his text. The latter is achieved by seeking to understand how Mark's intended readers would have understood this Greek text within the context that the text itself provides. (Other

tion of the scribes with 16:8 as the Markan ending, as evidenced by the preference of their use of the longer ending of Mark, is a good clue in this regard and indicates that they did not understand Mark 16:8 as the Evangelist's intended ending.<sup>71</sup>

There is no convincing reason why Mark would have wanted to end his Gospel at 16:8. The various explanations given earlier (see 2.2) would not have convinced the 1st-century readers of Mark. They seem rather to arise from a 20th-century existentialism that revels in paradox<sup>72</sup> and dislikes "naive happy-ever-after endings."<sup>73</sup> Lincoln reveals this great difference between modern interpreters of Mark and Mark's intended readers when he states, "Whereas for ancient readers it was the notion of the women's failure that was initially alienating, for modern readers it may well be the aspect of failure in the story that is most appealing."<sup>74</sup> Most modern attempts to interpret 16:8 as a satisfactory ending of Mark are based less on trying to understand Mark's own purpose in writing his Gospel than on modern literary theory. This is conceded by Hooker, who, in her commentary, states that "at least the gospel's ending offers us a fine example of the value of 'reader response' criticism, since it provides us with an interpretation of the text to which author and reader together can contribute—an interpretation which corresponds with the experience of many readers of the gospel, *whether or not it was in the mind of the evangelist*" (italics added).<sup>75</sup> However, compare Knox, who, although frequently criticized, still seems to be closer to the truth when he wrote "To suppose that Mark originally intended to end his Gospel in this way [i.e., with 16:8] 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."<sup>76</sup>

3.6. One of the strongest arguments that Mark did not originally end at 16:8 involves Mark 14:28 and 16:7. These two verses, heavily Markan in nature, are insertions by Mark into the tradition that he inherited.<sup>77</sup> They

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contexts, such as the world of the 1st-century, the specific world of the intended readers, knowledge of the situation that occasioned the text, and so on are more hypothetical and far less certain.) An assumption associated with this view is that the author was competent and able to express adequately what he wished to convey by the words he used. If "inspiration" is attributed to the biblical text, this assumes in some way a divine competency or enablement of the author in writing his text.

71. I do not want to be misunderstood as claiming that all who think Mark 16:8 makes sense as Mark's intended ending are Kafka-like existentialists with a radical, reader-response hermeneutic. This is not true. However, it appears fair to say (see 2.2) that the majority of those who argue that Mark 16:8 is the Evangelist's intended ending come to the text with an approach of this sort.

72. France, *Mark*, 671–72; cf. Croy, *The Mutilation*, 33–44.

73. Wright, *The Resurrection*, 619.

74. Lincoln, "The Promise," 299.

75. Hooker, *Mark*, 394.

76. Wilfred Lawrence Knox, "The Ending of St. Mark's Gospel," *HTR* 35 (1942): 22–23.

77. Robert H. Stein, "A Short Note on Mark XIV.28 and XVI.7," *NTS* 20 (1973): 445–52.

refer to Jesus' meeting his disciples in Galilee "after the resurrection,"<sup>78</sup> and the intended readers of Mark knew that this was fulfilled despite 16:8.<sup>79</sup> The fact that Mark inserts 16:7, which reads, "But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you," immediately before 16:8 makes it extremely difficult to think that he placed a reference to Jesus' meeting the disciples and Peter here and yet concluded without telling of this meeting. The angel furthermore points to the fulfillment of this prophecy by the comment, "just as he told you (καθώς εἶπεν ὑμῖν)." As I pointed out earlier (see 3.1), if Mark ended his Gospel at 16:8, this would be the only prophecy in Mark, other than those concerning the *parousia*, that is not fulfilled.<sup>80</sup> Petersen, who argues that 16:8 was the intended ending of Mark, admits "From these words [16:7] the reader understands that at the time of the young man's speech Jesus is already on his way to Galilee where he expects to encounter Peter and the other disciples."<sup>81</sup>

78. Although it was once popular to interpret 16:7 and 14:28 as references to the *parousia* (Ernst Lohmeyer, *Galiläa und Jerusalem* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1936], 10–14; Lightfoot, *Locality and Doctrine*, 55–65; Willi Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist: Studies on the Redaction History of the Gospel* [trans. James Boyce et al.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1969], 75–95; Weeden, *Mark—Traditions in Conflict*, 111–17; etc.), this view is now generally discredited (Stein, "A Short Note," 445–52; Best, *Mark: The Gospel as Story*, 76–78; Lincoln, "The Promise," 285). This is both because of the weakness of their arguments (the future tense "they shall see," ὄψεσθε [*opsesthe*]," it is claimed, must refer to the *parousia*, but a future, not-yet-realized resurrection appearance in Galilee must also use the future tense. There is no resurrection appearance of Jesus in Galilee found in Mark, but did Mark originally end his Gospel with 16:8? etc.) but above all because of the arguments in favor of interpreting 16:7 and 14:28 as referring to the resurrection. The strongest of these are: (1) When Mark wrote his Gospel, Peter had already died, and yet he is referred to in 16:7 as meeting the Lord in Galilee. This can only refer to a resurrection meeting and not the *parousia*. (2) There existed a strong tradition that after the resurrection Jesus met with Peter privately (1 Cor 15:5; Luke 24:34; and John 21:15–19; cf. also Acts 10:41). Consequently, the natural inclination of Mark's readers would have been to interpret these two passages as referring to the well-known resurrection appearance of Jesus to Peter. (3) The change in tense between the future "will go ahead of you (προὔξω)" in 14:28, which is said to the disciples before the resurrection, is now changed after the resurrection into a present "is going before you (προάγει)" in 16:7. If it referred to the *parousia*, however, one would continue to expect a future tense in both references, since the *parousia* had not yet occurred. (4) Where is Jesus ever portrayed with respect to the *parousia* as already in Galilee awaiting his disciples? For these and other reasons, it is clear that 16:7 and 14:28 refer to a resurrection appearance of Jesus with the disciples and Peter in Galilee. This has a strong bearing on whether 16:8 was Mark's intended ending for the Gospel. This emphasis on Jesus' meeting the disciples after the resurrection creates for the readers a clear anticipation of a meeting of this sort.

79. Contra Werner H. Kelber, "Apostolic Tradition and the Form of the Gospel" in *Discipleship in the New Testament* (ed. Fernando F. Segova; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 40. The early confession of 1 Cor 15:3–8 and the accounts of Jesus' appearance to the disciples in Matt 28:16–20 and John 21:1–25 provide multiple attestation of this tradition.

80. The prophecies concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple were in the stage of being fulfilled if Mark was written in the later 60s. If it was written after this, they were already fulfilled.

81. Petersen, "When Is the End Not the End?," 153. Cf. Gundry, *Mark*, 1009: "Too many other predictions of Jesus have reached fulfillment in Mark to leave any doubt that this one will likewise reach fulfillment."

At this point, it is interesting to observe how Matthew and Luke treat the reference to Jesus' meeting the disciples in Galilee found in Mark 16:7. Matthew records both this reference in Matt 28:7 and the earlier reference in Mark 14:28 to this appearance in 26:32. This is then fulfilled in Matthew's account of the disciples' meeting Jesus in Galilee in Matt 28:16–20. Luke, however, omits both references in Mark 14:28 and 16:7 to Jesus' meeting the disciples in Galilee after the resurrection. The reason for this is that he does not record any meeting of this sort. The final chapter of Luke's Gospel all takes place in and around Jerusalem. Thus it is clear that for both Matthew and Luke the references to the disciples' meeting Jesus in Galilee in Mark 14:28 and 16:7 require an account of an appearance in Galilee to fulfill these two predictions. Matthew, which has an appearance, records both prophecies; Luke, which does not have an appearance, omits both. Thus it is apparent that the two earliest commentaries on these two passages in Mark, the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, cannot conceive of a prediction of this sort without its fulfillment. Surely they reflect better the mind of Mark's intended audience, and we must remember that Mark wrote his Gospel with his intended audience in mind, rather than 20th- and 21st-century commentators who find delight in Mark's abrupt and confusing ending at 16:8. It is interesting to note that Julius Wellhausen, one of the early writers who advocated the appropriateness of 16:8 as Mark's intended ending, concluded that Mark 16:7 was not Markan but a later addition to his Gospel.<sup>82</sup> He could not conceive of Mark having intended to end his Gospel at 16:8 and allowing 16:7 to be in his Gospel. Our knowing that both Mark 14:28 and 16:7 clearly reveal Mark's own editorial hand makes an intended ending at 16:8 even more difficult to accept.

3.7. A final argument, whose importance is not often considered, involves the meaning of Mark 16:1–8. Although we have sought to argue that the intended ending of Mark's Gospel is missing and this makes it more difficult to understand the meaning of Mark 16:1–8, we nevertheless possess Mark 1:1–15:47, and this provides us with a context for understanding 16:1–8. In addition, of course, we have 16:1–8 itself. In seeking to understand the Markan message contained in Mark 16:1–8 it is important to ask, "Who is the most important character in the account?" It is clear that the most important character or characters in the account are not the women. They are not the disciples. It is not even the angelic messenger. It is Jesus!<sup>83</sup> As in all the other preceding accounts, it is critical to remember that the Gospel of Mark is about "Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1). Just as Mark 1:2–8 is not primarily about John the Baptist but rather about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to whom John the Baptist pointed; just as 2:1–12 is not

82. Wellhausen (*Das Evangelium Marci*, 136) comments that "der Vers 16,7 nicht zum alten Bestande gehört."

83. Contrast Theo K. Heckel (*Vom Evangelium des Markus zum viergestaltigen Evangelium* [WUNT 120; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999], 41–51) who gives three purposes of Mark in 16:1–8. All three involve the women. Jesus is not mentioned!

about the faith of a paralytic and his four friends but about “who is this who like God forgives sins?”; just as 2:23–28 is not about the disciples’ profaning the Sabbath but about “who is this who like God claims to be the Lord of the Sabbath?”; just as 3:20–30 is not primarily about the eternal sin but about “who is this who is master over the prince of demons?”; just as 4:35–41 is not primarily about the frightened disciples in a storm on the Sea of Galilee but about “who then is this, that both the wind and sea obey him?”; just as 6:45–52 is not primarily about the hard hearts of the disciples but about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is Lord of Nature, and so on; so Mark 16:1–8 is not primarily about the women at the tomb, the disciples, or the angelic messenger but about Jesus Christ, the Son of God who has risen from the dead (16:6).<sup>84</sup> In seeking to understand the meaning of Mark 16:1–8, we must therefore focus our attention on what the story tells us about Jesus. In other words, the purpose of Mark 16:1–8 is “christological, not parenetic.”<sup>85</sup> On the other hand, the focus of the majority of interpretations that see 16:8 as the intended ending of Mark is not on Jesus at all but on the women’s confusing reaction to the angelic message, the supposed readers’ response, the disciples, and so on. Their focus is generally anthropological and hortatory rather than Christological and declaratory. The Gospel of Mark, however, is about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and throughout his Gospel the Evangelist wants his readers to reflect on the questions: “Who is this man who claims to be Lord of the Sabbath?”; “Who is this man who raises the dead?”; “Who is this man who heals the blind?”; “Who is this man who, like God, forgives sins?”; “Who is this man who demons claim is the Son of God?”; “Who is this man who the Voice from heaven twice claims is the Son of God?”; “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him (4:35)?” Magness is right in raising the question, “What if the ending [of Mark] is intended to focus on Jesus rather than on the women or the disciples?”<sup>86</sup> Mark 16:1–8 is primarily about Jesus. It is about “who then is this who has risen from the dead and is preceding the disciples into Galilee?” Thus the highpoint of the passage is not found in 16:8 but in the angelic message in 16:5–7, for it is not the women but the angel who serves as the reliable spokesman for the Markan point of view. And the message of the angel is: the crucified Jesus has risen from the dead; he is not in the tomb; the place where he was laid is empty; he is already now proceeding into Galilee where the disciples (not the present-day readers but the disciples!) will meet him. Mark did not entitle his Gospel “The Gospel of the Failures of Jesus’ Followers.” Rather, he entitled it “The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” The assumption that 16:8 is the intended ending of the Gospel and the attempted explanations to

84. Cf. Rudolf Bultmann (*The History of the Synoptic Tradition* [trans. John Marsh; New York: Harper & Row, 1968], 287), who states, “The purpose of the story is without doubt to prove the reality of the resurrection of Jesus by the empty tomb.”

85. Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20* (WBC; Nashville: Nelson, 2001), 538–39.

86. Magness, *Sense and Absence*, 13.

justify this almost all lose sight of the main character in the story, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and focus instead on the minor characters, the women. The focus of the story, however, involves the message of the angel, who is God's reliable spokesperson in the account. Since this message tells of the disciples' meeting Jesus, who is awaiting them in Galilee, it is clear that the reader is prepared by Mark to hear something about that meeting, which the readers knew took place. Consequently, I believe that when we take into consideration Mark's intended purpose in 16:1–8, which is to tell about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, we must conclude that Mark did not intend 16:8 to serve as the conclusion of his Gospel.<sup>87</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

It is the thesis of this paper that our best-preserved ending of the Gospel of Mark is 16:8. Internal considerations from the Gospel of Mark, however, strongly suggest that this is not the intended ending of the Gospel. Several arguments have been mentioned to support this thesis. I shall recount what I think are the two strongest. The first is that Mark has in his Gospel two prophetic statements in Mark 14:28 and 16:7 about Jesus' meeting the disciples in Galilee. If Mark intended to end his Gospel at 16:8, these would be the only unfulfilled prophecies in the Gospel, other than the ones concerning the *parousia*. The fact that the second one occurs immediately before 16:8 and is especially emphasized by the angel's comment, "just as he told you" creates great expectation for the intended readers that the risen Jesus would meet the disciples in Galilee. Mark's Christian readers furthermore knew that this took place. Therefore, it is difficult to believe that Mark created this expectation and, in the very next verse, purposely choose to leave it unfulfilled. The examples of Matthew, who includes Mark 14:28 and 16:7 in his Gospel and has an account of Jesus' meeting the disciples in Galilee, and Luke, who omits these two references in his Gospel and lacks an account of this meeting, support this understanding.

The second argument is that the modern preoccupation with 16:8 as the intended ending of Mark loses sight of the meaning of Mark 16:1–8 as a whole. The account is not about the women or the disciples but about Jesus Christ, the Son of God (1:1), who is the supreme character and focus of the entire Gospel. Thus the focus of 16:1–8 involves the angelic message found in 16:5–7, and various attempts to find a meaningful ending in 16:8 lose sight of the Christological purpose of Mark in his Gospel and in this passage.

87. Some additional arguments include: Matthew and Luke continue this narrative with an account about the women, suggesting that Mark's lost account also continued with the women (Edwards, *Mark*, 539); Matthew and Luke, in their Easter stories, contain similar material that suggest a common source, and Mark would probably be this source (*ibid.*); if Mark intended to indicate that the women never told the disciples and Peter the angelic message, we would expect in 16:8 an adversative "but" (*δέ*) rather than an "and" (*καί*) before "they said nothing to anyone," as elsewhere in instances of disobedience or refusal in Mark (cf. 1:45; 7:36; 10:14, 22, 48; 15:23, 27 [*Gundry, Mark*, 1010]).

As a result of these (and other) arguments, I agree with “the conjecture that the [present] text is incomplete” because I feel “compelled to do so by the document itself.”<sup>88</sup> It is interesting to note that a number of major commentaries and works have recently appeared that believe that 16:8 was not the intended ending of the Evangelist.<sup>89</sup> Does this indicate a trend? Whether Mark’s intended ending telling of a resurrection appearance of Jesus and the disciples in Galilee was subsequently lost or intentionally mutilated or whether, for some reason, Mark was never able to write his intended ending (perhaps because of martyrdom or persecution or some other reason), however, can only be conjectured.

88. Knox, “The Ending,” 13.

89. Cf. Gundry, *Mark*, (1993); Evans, *Mark*, (2001); Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); Edwards, *Mark*, (2002); France, *Mark*, (2002); Wright, *The Resurrection*, (2003); Robert H. Stein, *Mark* (Baker Exegetical Commentary Series; Grand Rapids: Baker, forthcoming); etc.