

Mark: the Gospel with Two Endings

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Mark's gospel ends in 16.8, but many versions include verses 9-20 as well. Verse 8 actually ends mid-sentence in the most reliable manuscripts, leaving off with the preposition "for" or "therefore." Most scholars believe verses 9-20 (the "coda") were not composed by John Mark, but were added later in order to give more closure to the gospel. Today, we'll be examining both endings of Mark to see what lessons each offers us.

Read Mark 16.1-8

1. Some questions from David Hewitt's commentary:
 - a. If it was Mark's intention to finish the gospel at vs. 8, in what way would it have been an appropriate ending? Is the gospel story complete?
 - b. What is the significance of the special mention of Peter in vs. 7?
 - c. If Mark's gospel had been lost, what would be missing from our understanding of Jesus? What is distinctive about Mark's portrait of Jesus?
2. Why does the angel specifically mention Christ going ahead into Galilee? Besides the literal meaning, what could Galilee be referring to?
3. Verse 8 records that the women who visited the tomb were "trembling and bewildered" at the young man's message. Let's reflect on other times in Mark's gospel when people expressed wonder and amazement. Look at the following references and identify what aspect of Jesus' character or ministry amazed those around him: 1.27, 2.12, 4.41, 5.20, 10.24, 10.32, and 15.5. How is this final mention a fitting ending to the gospel?
4. Compare Mark's resurrection account in 16.1-8 with the other gospels. What portions of these accounts agree, and where do they disagree? What's the significance of the points of agreement/disagreement?

Read Mark 16. 9-20

5. The resurrection appearances discussed in vs. 9-14 appear to be condensed accounts of appearances mentioned in other gospels. Identify these appearances and discuss why the writer includes them here. Why does each account end with unbelief (disbelief)?
6. Lamar Williamson comments on unbelief in the Marcan "coda":

The risen Jesus' reproach of his unbelieving disciples is consistent with Mark (4.40; 9.19) and is at least as relevant to the church today as it was to the church of the first and second centuries. The dimensions of unbelief within the church today are many: practical atheism in the common decisions of life, identification with the powerful instead of the poor, the struggle for security instead of

fidelity, complicity in worldly power and fear of being crushed by it.
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Respond to Williamson's quote. Do you see these kinds of unbelief in your daily experience? What should we do to prevent these lapses?

7. Verses 17-18 describe signs that believers will manifest, including snake handling and drinking poison. The book of Acts records instances of miraculous signs, such as Acts 5.12-16, and Luke's gospel even mentions snakes in Luke 10.19. However, some Christian sects have taken these signs literally and have incorporated elements such as snake handling and drinking poison into their church services. How would you respond to someone who told you that these practices were biblical?
8. What other gospel passages do verses 19-20 resemble? If this gospel were composed for the early Gentile church, why might this second ending be more appropriate?
9. Some closing quotes to contemplate:

Athanasius: In the time of the old covenant, the Sabbath was highly revered. Now under the gospel the Sabbath has been recast, now viewed as the Lords' resurrection day. The Sabbath formerly had pertained to the pedagogy and rudiments of the law. When the great master himself came and fulfilled them all for us, all that had prefigured his coming was transformed. The old Sabbath was like a candle lit in the night before the rising and appearing of the sun. (*Ancient Christian Commentary 240*)

Constitutions of the Holy Apostles: The resurrection in which we believe is that which has already been demonstrated in the resurrection of our Lord. For it is he that raised Lazarus after he had been in the grave four days, and Jairus' daughter, and the widows' son. It is he that raised himself by the command of the Father in the space of three days, who is the pledge of our resurrection. For he says: "I am the resurrection and the life." Now the very One who brought Jonah alive and unhurt out of the belly of the whale in the space of three days, and who brought the three children out of the furnace of Babylon and Daniel out of the mouth of the lions, does not lack power to raise us up also. (*Ancient Christian Commentary 244*)