

Mark

Lesson #20

The Epilogue

(Mark 16: 9-20)

Review

In Lesson #19 we examined Mark's terse version of Jesus' resurrection, and we were shocked to find that when the angel tells Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome to tell Jesus' disciples that he is risen and will meet them in Galilee, they fled the tomb in panic and "said nothing to anyone, for they were [terrified]."

This abrupt ending to Mark's Gospel brings the lightening-fast narrative, packed with tension and mounting conflict to a sudden stop, leaving the reader wondering what just happened! On closer examination, however, Mark's Gospel ends precisely as it should. Having begun with a proclamation—"Beginning the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God"—the Gospel ends, creating an urgent "call to action" addressed to Mark's audience in Rome during the persecution under Nero, A.D. 64-68 and the initial rumblings of the Great Jewish Revolt of A.D. 66-73.

Mark's Gospel is a clarion call to stand up for Christ and be counted, regardless of the cost.

Preview

Mark's gospel ends with its "call to action" at 16: 8, but a longer ending was appended later as an "epilogue," written in a very different vocabulary and style, sometime between the gospel's original composition and the end of the 2nd century.

Although clearly a later addition to the gospel, the verses are mentioned by the Church Fathers: St. Ambrose, St. Augustine and Peter Chrysologus; they are included in St. Jerome's Latin Vulgate; and the Roman Catholic Church accepted the verses as canonical at the 4th session of the Council of Trent (1546) in the document "*Decretum de Canonicis Scripturis*," ("Decree on the Canon of Scripture").

In Lesson #20 we take a close look at these additional verses and discover why they may have been added to the gospel.



At the end of Lesson #19 we discussed the rationale for Mark ending his Gospel abruptly at 16:8, it's sudden stop creating a dramatic "call to action" for Mark's audience in Rome during the persecution under Nero, A.D. 64-68 and the beginnings of the Great Jewish Revolt, A.D. 66-73.



We may also add that Mark's Gospel resembles a "closet drama," a literary genre similar to a play, but meant to be read, not performed. Closet dramas often had shocking endings that prevented closure to the story, similar to Mark's ending at 16: 8. Many of Seneca's tragedies were closet dramas. Seneca lived in Rome 4 B.C. – A.D. 65, and his dramas were enormously popular. Interestingly, Nero was a student of Seneca, and he may have participated in some of Seneca's dramas; Seneca's elder brother Gallio is mentioned in Acts 18: 12-17.

The "closet drama" genre, and its popularity, may have influenced Mark's choice of a narrative strategy for his Gospel.

See Stephen H. Smith's "A Divine Tragedy: Some Observations on the Dramatic Structure of Mark's Gospel." *Novum Testamentum* 37 (3) 209-231.



By the end of the 2nd century, however, many people who were familiar with the Gospels of Matthew, Luke and John were confused by Mark's abrupt ending, wondering, "What happened to the rest of Mark's Gospel? Where are the resurrection appearances—the 'Upper Room' and 'Road to Emmaus' stories—and what about Jesus' Ascension?"

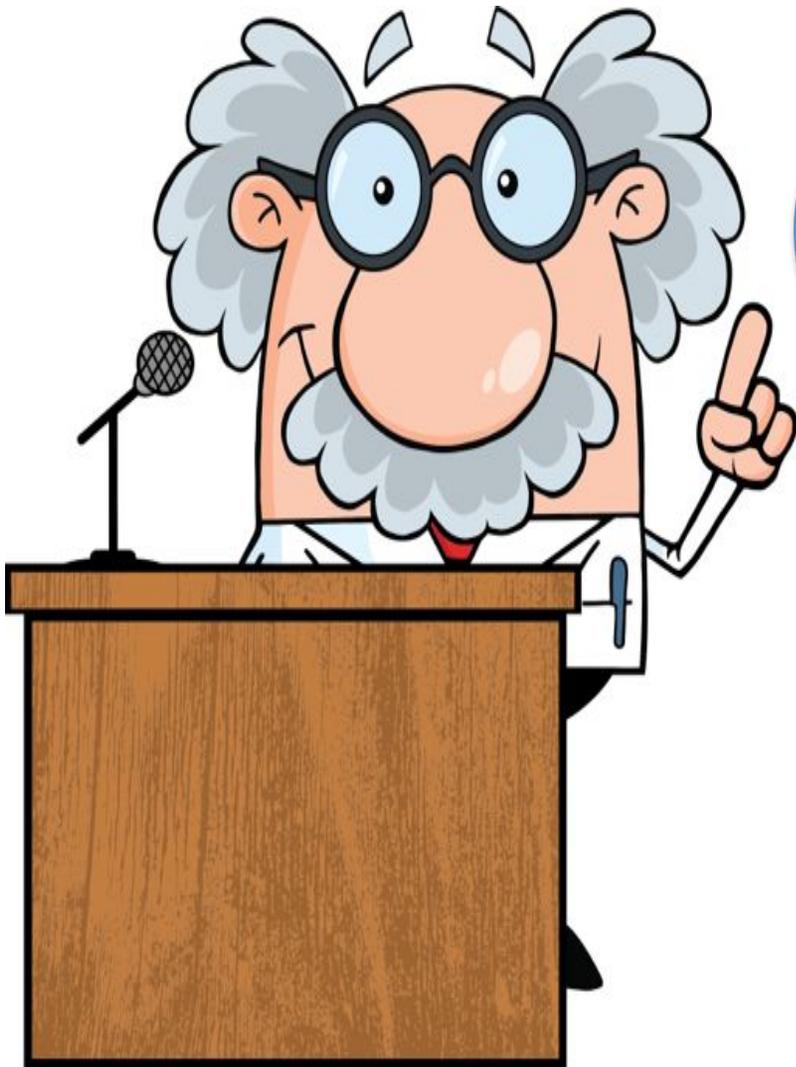


Imagine a late 2nd-century scribe copying Mark, with the text ending at 16: 8 —“*[The women] went out from the tomb seized with trembling and bewilderment. They said nothing to anyone, for they were [terrified].*”

He may very well have thought that leaves were missing from his source manuscript!



Because he wants his copy of Mark to be complete, such a scribe may well have gone to other sources and compiled —*what in his mind*—is a more appropriate and complete ending to Mark's Gospel.

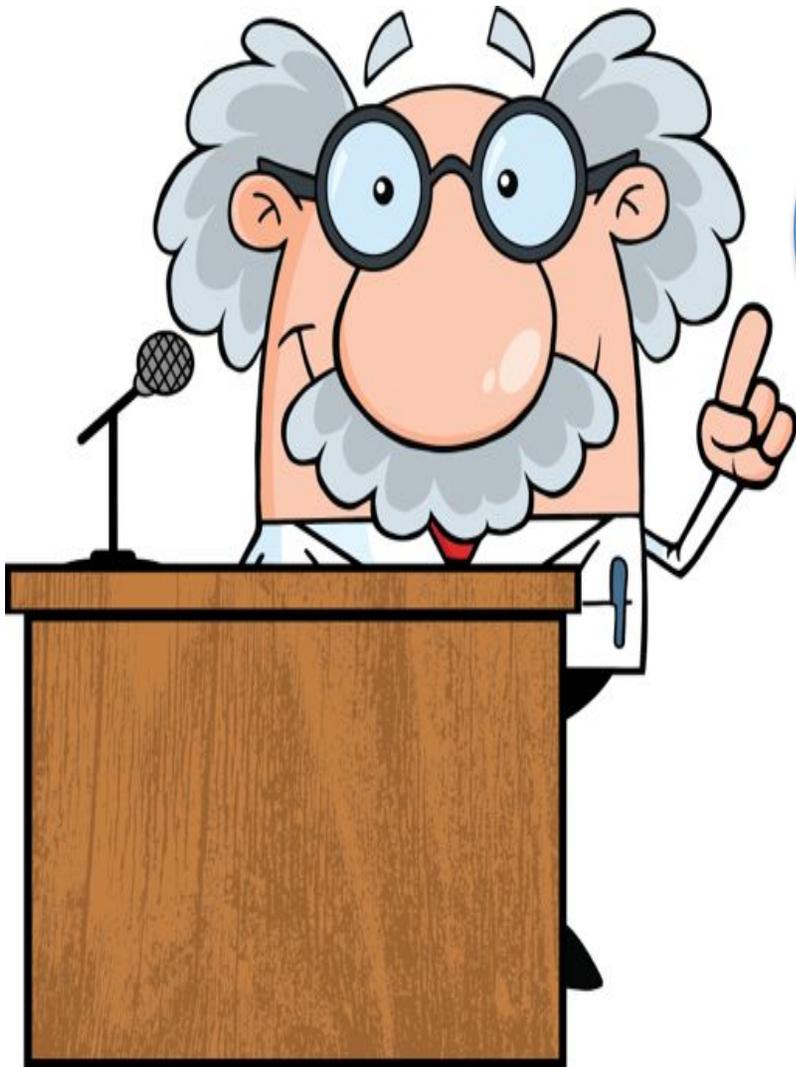


**And that's precisely
what happened!**



Mark's Original Ending, 16: 8

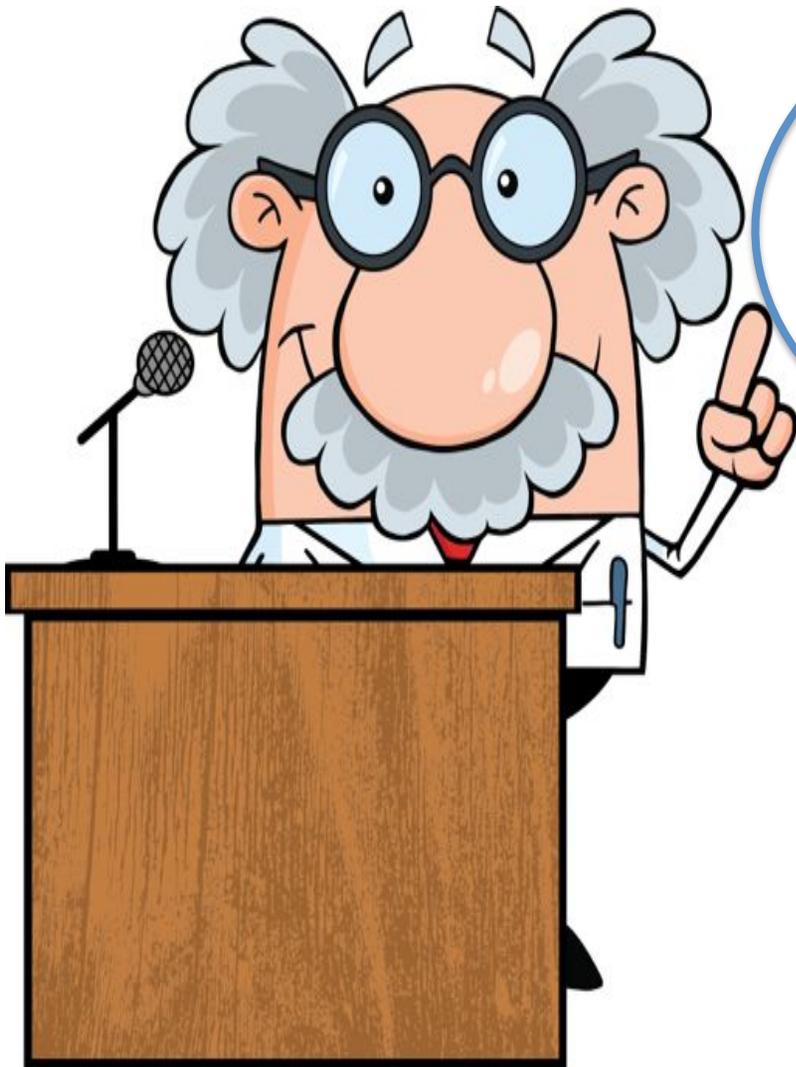
- ✓ The earliest complete manuscripts of Mark, dating from the 4th century—Codices Sinaiticus, Vaticanus and Alexandrinus all end at 16: 8.
- ✓ Both Eusebius and St. Jerome support 16: 8 as Mark's proper ending.



Many disagreed with Eusebius and St. Jerome, however, and a minority of later manuscripts include a “shorter,” more satisfactory ending.

Mark's "Shorter" Ending

"And they reported all the instructions to Peter's companions. Afterwards Jesus himself, through them, sent forth from east to west the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation."



You can see immediately that the prose style and vocabulary in the “shorter” ending differ dramatically from the main body of Mark’s Gospel. *It is clearly a later addition.*

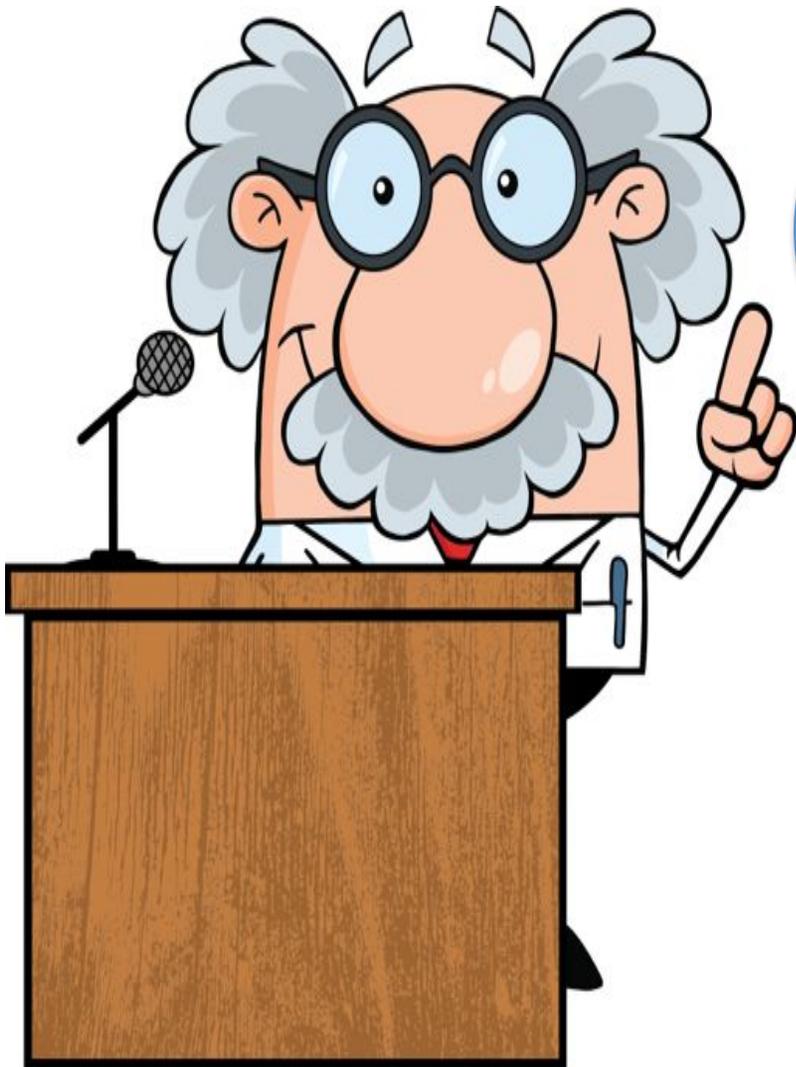


The vast majority of manuscripts have the “longer ending” of 16: 9-20, which includes Jesus’ resurrection, commissioning his disciples and Jesus’ ascension.



Mark's "longer" ending consists of four parts:

1. Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene
2. Jesus appears to two disciples
3. Jesus commissions his Apostles
4. Jesus ascends into heaven



**We shall work through
each of these four
parts, one at a time.**

Mark's "longer" ending, Part 1 Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene

"When he had risen on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. She went and told his companions who were mourning and weeping. When they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe."

(16: 9-11).



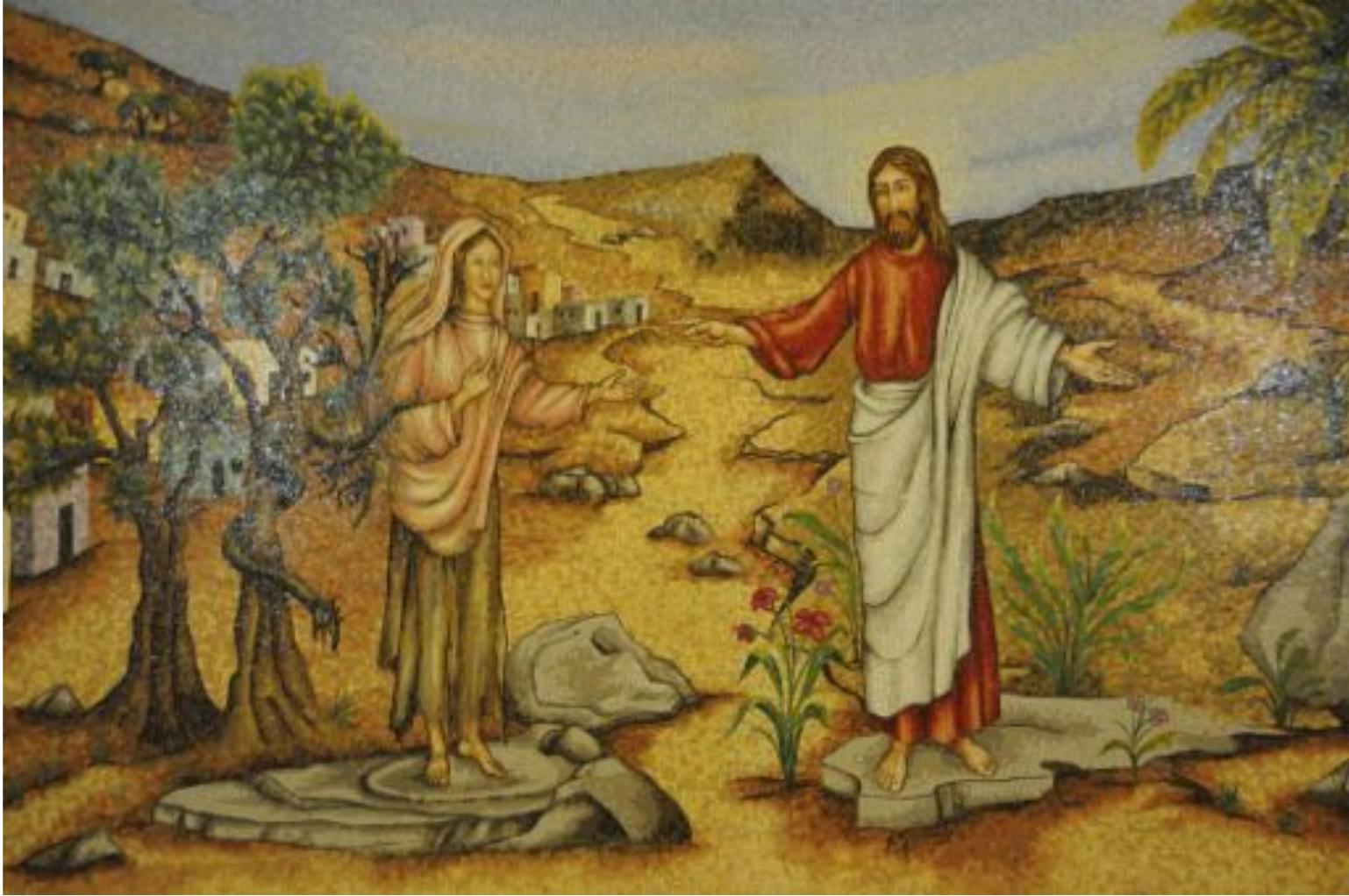
Part 1: Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

- ✓ This addition draws on Matthew 28: 9-10 and John 20: 11-18.
- ✓ Like the “shorter” ending of Mark, Part 1 of the “longer” ending differs in both style and vocabulary from the main body of Mark’s Gospel.

Notice the floppy hat →
(Why Mary didn't recognize Jesus?)



Rembrandt. *Christ and Mary Magdalene at the Tomb* (oil on panel), 1638.
Royal Collection, Windsor Castle, London.



This beautiful mosaic of Jesus casting out 7 demons from Mary Magdalene graces the side chapel at the new Spirituality Center in Migdal, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

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**This is the stunning altar in the church at Migdal, with the Sea of Galilee in the background.
Do visit it if you have the opportunity.**

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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Mark's "longer" ending, Part 2 Jesus appears to two disciples

"After this he appeared in another form to two of them walking along on their way to the country. They returned and told the others; but they did not believe them either."

(16: 12-13).



Part 2: Jesus appears to two disciples.

- ✓ This addition draws on Luke 24: 11-35, the story of Jesus on the Road to Emmaus.
- ✓ Like Part 1 of the “longer” ending, it too differs in both style and vocabulary from the main body of Mark’s Gospel.



Duccio. *On the Road to Emmaus* (tempera on wood), c. 1308-1311.
Museo dell' Opera Duomo, Siena.



Titian. *Supper at Emmaus* (oil on canvas), 1535.
Louvre Museum, Paris.

Mark's "longer" ending, Part 3 Jesus commissions his Apostles

"But later, as the eleven were at table, he appeared to them and rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart because they had not believed those who saw him after he had been raised. He said to them, 'Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned.'

Mark's "longer" ending, Part 3 Jesus commissions his Apostles, cont.

'These signs will accompany those who believe. In my name they will drive out demons, they will speak new languages. They will pick up serpents [with their hands], and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.'

(16: 14-18)



Part 3: Jesus commissions his Apostles.

- ✓ This addition draws on Matthew 28: 16-20; Luke 24: 36-49; John 20: 19-23; Acts 1: 6-8, plus allusions to several other scenes in Acts (e.g., 3: 1-10; 5: 12-16; 9: 36-41; 28: 1-6).
- ✓ Style and vocabulary continue to differ from Mark's core Gospel.



**Let's look at Part 3
carefully, Jesus
commissioning his
Apostles.**

Mark's "longer" ending, Part 3

Jesus commissions his Apostles

"But later, as the eleven were at table, he appeared to them and rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart because they had not believed those who saw him after he had been raised."

The source is Jesus appearance in the upper room where the disciples are in hiding for "fear of the Jews," and later when Thomas is present with them and Jesus appears once again, presenting the evidence of his wounds to Thomas.



**Caravaggio. *The Incredulity of St. Thomas* (oil on canvas), c. 1601-1602.
Sanssouci Palace, Potsdam, Germany.**

Mark's "longer" ending, Part 3 Jesus commissions his Apostles, cont.

"He said to them, "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned."

Here our scribe draws upon the Great Commission which concludes the *Gospel according to Matthew*, 28: 19-20.

Estimated Distribution of Christian Population by Country and Territory in 2010

Only the 32 countries with more than 1 million Christians in 2010 are shown.



There are 2.3 billion Christians in the world today; half are Roman Catholic, 34% Protestant, 12% Orthodox. Source: Pew Forum.

Mark's "longer" ending, Part 3 Jesus commissions his Apostles, cont.

"These signs will accompany those who believe. In my name they will drive out demons, they will speak new languages."

Demons crawl all over the *Gospel according to Mark*. Jesus drives them out, and in 6: 6-13 his disciples do the same. Speaking new languages refers to the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 when the Apostles "speak in tongues."



Duccio. *Pentecost* (tempera on wood), c. 1308-1311.
Museo dell' Opera Duomo, Siena.

Mark's "longer" ending, Part 3 Jesus commissions his Apostles, cont.

"They will pick up serpents [with their hands], and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

Picking up serpents and "drinking" deadly things refers to St. Paul when he is shipwrecked on Malta. As he is putting brush on a fire to keep warm, he is bitten by a venomous serpent and no harm comes to him (Acts 28: 1-6). The "drinking deadly things" refers to the serpent's poison.

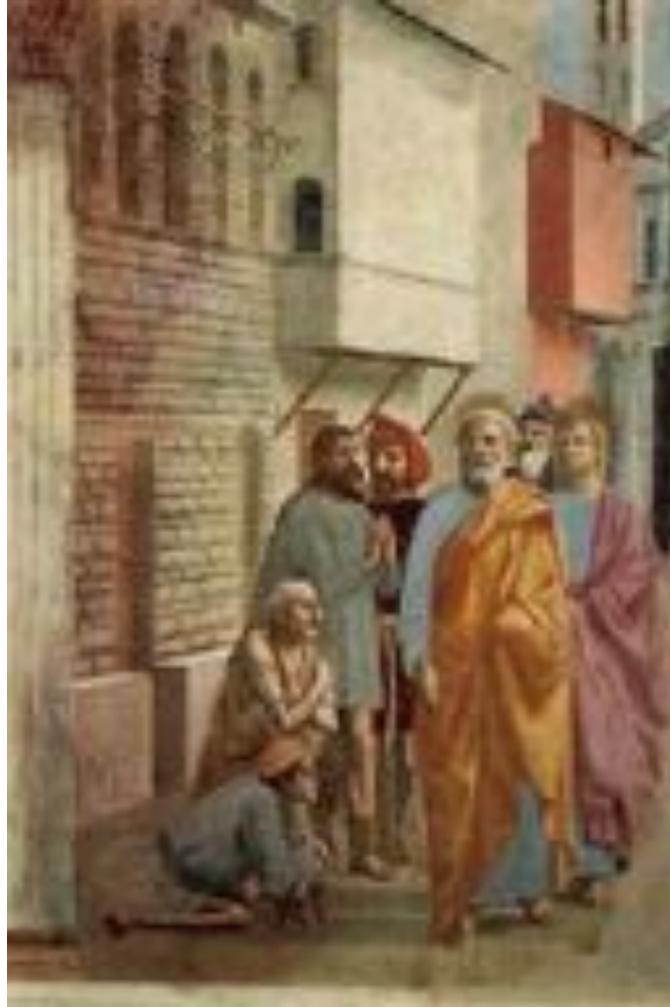


**Laurent de La Hyre. *St. Paul Shipwrecked on Malta* (oil on canvas), 1630.
Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, Alabama.**

Mark's "longer" ending, Part 3 Jesus commissions his Apostles, cont.

"They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

The reference is to both Peter and Paul healing the sick on multiple occasions in Acts.



**Masaccio. *St. Peter Healing the Sick with His Shadow* (fresco), c 1426.
Cappella Brancacci, Santa Maria del Camine, Florence.**

Mark's "longer" ending, Part 4 Jesus ascends into heaven

"So then the Lord Jesus, after he spoke to them, was taken up into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of God. But they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs."

The reference here is to Jesus' ascension in Acts 1: 6-12.



Rembrandt. *The Ascension* (oil on canvas), 1636.
Alte Pinakothek, Munich, Germany.



In addition to the “shorter” and “longer” ending of Mark, a 3rd addition to Mark’s ending survives in a unique manuscript.



The *Codex Washingtonensis* is a 4th or 5th-century manuscript of all four Gospels, written in Greek on vellum. It was purchased in Egypt by Charles Lang Freer in 1906, and it is now located at the Smithsonian Institution at the Freer Gallery of Art, in Washington, D.C.

The manuscript consists of 187 leaves, written in single columns, 30 lines per page.

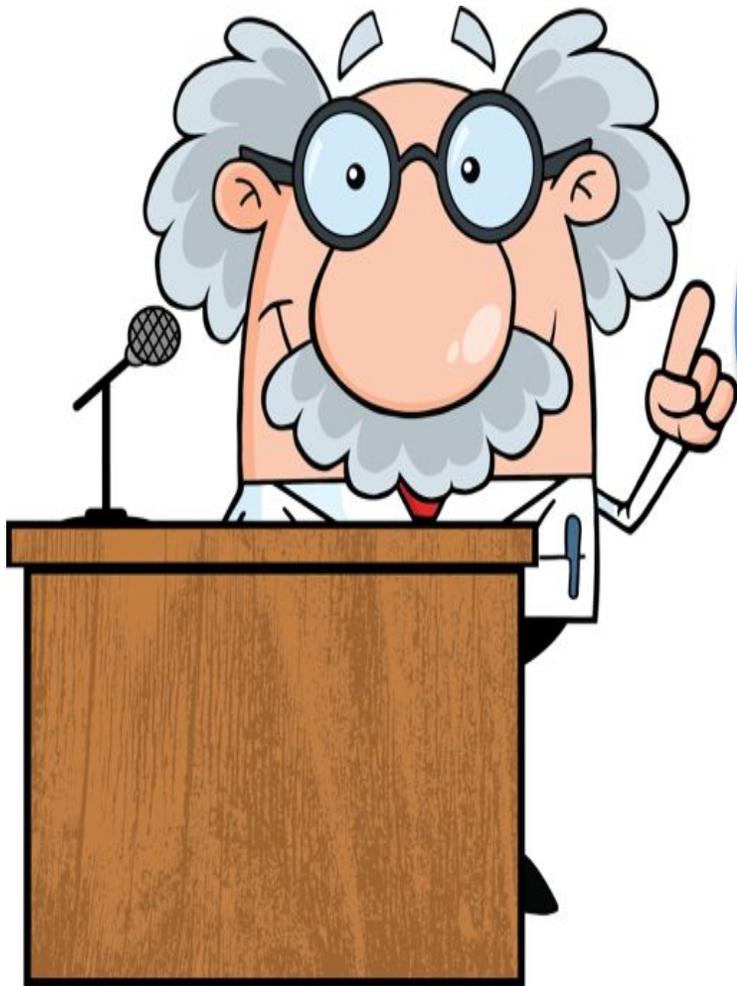
It has a unique insertion after Mark 16: 14, referred to as the “Freer Logion.”

Here’s what it says:



Mark 16: 12-17, with the “Freer Logion” at 16: 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 thy 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 delivered over to death, that they may return to the truth and sin no more in order to inherit the spiritual and incorruptible glory of righteousness which is in heaven.’”



The Gospel according to Mark, with its “longer” ending (not including the Freer Logion), was accepted as “canonical” at the 4th session of the Council of Trent (1546) in the document “*Decretum de Canonis Scripturis*,” (“Decree on the Canon of Scripture”). It is considered “inspired Scripture” by most Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox churches.



When we began our study of the *Gospel according to Mark*, we noted that Mark's written gospel emerges sometime in the mid to late 60s, a very tumultuous time in the Roman Empire. Nero had launched the first state-sponsored persecution against the Church in Rome, A.D. 64-68; the Great Jewish Revolt began in Palestine, A.D. 66-73; and political unrest rocked the Empire. Fear gripped not only the Christian community in Rome, but all of Roman society.



We noted Mark's carefully balanced two-fold structure, framed by a prologue and an epilogue that pivots on Peter's confession of faith at Caesarea Philippi, a simple structure that suggests order and harmony.

Prologue (1: 1-15)

"Who is this man?" (1: 16 – 8: 26)

Peter's Confession of Faith (8: 27 – 9: 13)

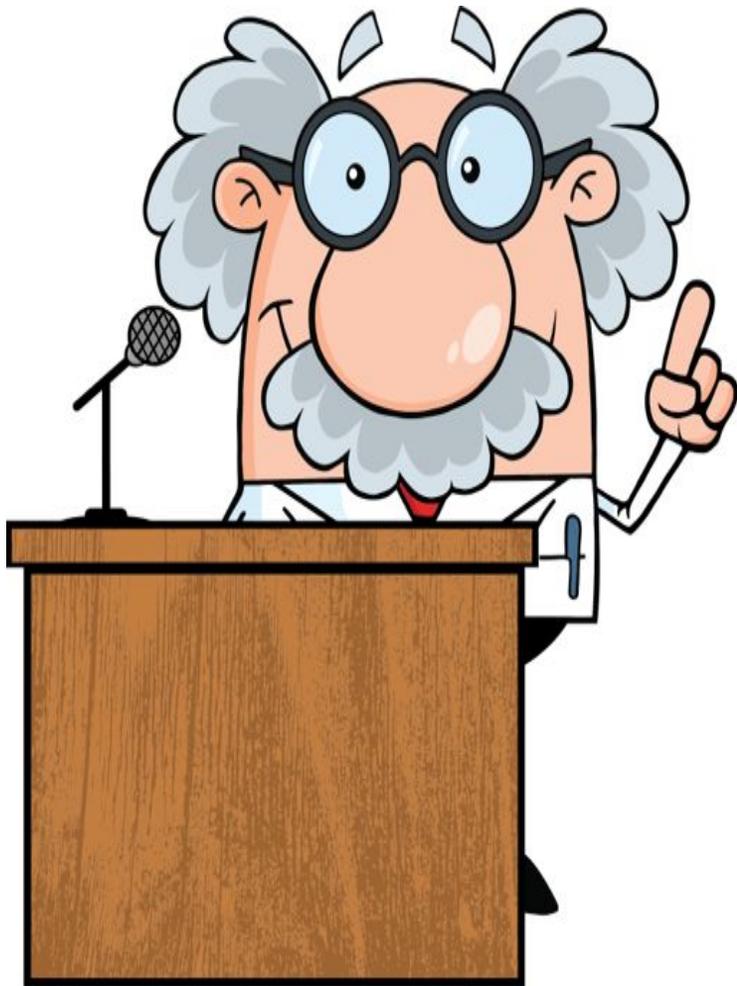
"What does it all mean?" (9: 14 – 16: 8)

Epilogue (16: 9-20)



Yet, juxtaposed to this balance, we also noted that Mark produces spring-tight tension, speed and dramatic forward movement by employing an unusual set of stylistic devices, from 1: 1 – 16: 8.

- The repetitive use of the connective “and”; (of the 11,022 words in Mark, 1,084 are “and”)
- The repetitive use of “immediately”; (Mark uses it 41 times, often in combination, “*and Immediately*”; Matthew uses “Immediately” only 5 times; and Luke only once); and
- The use of the “historical present” tense (suddenly shifting a past event to the grammatically present tense, intensifying the sense of urgency).



All in all, Mark is a magnificent Gospel!

Perhaps the earliest of the written Gospels, Mark is by no means “primitive” as some have claimed. The *Gospel according to Mark* is a work of deceptive, subtle simplicity that soars in the literary stratosphere of ancient literature.

BRAVO!



Jacob Jordaens, *The Four Evangelists* (oil on canvas), c. 1625-1630.
Louve Museum, Paris.

Questions for discussion and thought

1. Why would later scribes add to the ending of Mark's Gospel?
2. If in fact they did, where did the material come from?
3. Why does the Church, for the most part, recognize the "longer" ending of Mark as canonical?
4. If you include the "longer" ending of Mark as part of the Gospel, does that change its meaning?
5. How important is understanding the historical and cultural context in understanding the *Gospel according to Mark* for readers today?

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