

The Disputed Section of *Mark*

Should It Be in the Bible?

For centuries, scholars have debated over a section of the gospel of *Mark* — *16:9-20*. Why? It does not appear in some of our earliest and most reliable manuscripts. Many translations set this section apart with brackets or italics, then insert a note about its reliability. So then, how should we view this section? Why was it included in the Bible in the first place? Should it be taken out? Can we rely on it as truth?

The Problem

In two of the earliest manuscripts of *Mark* (*Codex Sinaiticus* and *Codex Vaticanus*), his gospel ends abruptly at *Mark 16:8*, where the women who visited Jesus' empty tomb were fearful and told no one of the news. However, later manuscripts include *Mark 16:9-20*, in which Jesus appeared to several other people, charged them to share the news with others, and gave them signs of their salvation. These verses are different stylistically from the rest of the book, which indicates that Mark did not write them. Rather they were added later. Why?

Whoever added this section to the end of *Mark* must have thought that his account should not leave the reader with worried women who were afraid to tell anyone of Jesus' resurrection. Thus, the author of the new section desired to bring closure to the story by describing Jesus' appearances and final instructions.

What are we supposed to do with this section of *Mark*? Is it trustworthy and reliable?

The Solution

Since there is such debate over what to do with *Mark 16:9-20* (to add them or not), early church fathers and translators included them with a sidenote explaining the controversy to the reader (as with *John 7:53-8:11*).

Of course, it is important for readers to interpret any one verse or passage with other verses or passages of the Bible. It is also important not to formulate doctrines based on any one passage.

Having said that, can we verify the information in the disputed passage with other verses of Scripture? Yes.

First, we know that Jesus appeared many times to many people and that several of them doubted His resurrection (*v.9-14*). Nothing new there.

Second, we know that Jesus charged His followers with a great commission — to go into all the world and share the good news of salvation (*v.15*). Again, no problem there.

Third, we know that Jesus, after having finished what needed to be said, was taken back into heaven (*v.19*). Okay, all good.

Finally, the only questionable verses are those related to the signs or evidence of those who believed — casting out demons, speaking in new tongues, handling serpents, drinking poison, and healing people (*v.16-18, 20*). The last verse says, "The Lord worked through them (disciples) and confirmed the word by the signs that followed" (*v.20*).

Can we confirm these signs in Scripture? Yes. We see Christians in *Acts* casting out demons (*8:7; 16:18; 19:11-16*), speaking in new tongues (languages, *2:4-11; 10:46; 19:6*) handling serpents (*28:5*), and healing the sick (*3:7; 19:11; 28:8, 9*). The only sign that we do not see in *Acts* is the drinking of poison. However, the historian Eusebius claimed that both John and Barnabas verified this sign.

So then, what are we to do with this disputed section of *Mark*? I think the early church fathers and translators did the right thing by including it. Even though it may not have been written by Mark, the section reinforces other accounts, and it can be verified by other works. It seems wise to leave it in rather than make the error of removing something that God wanted us to have.