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Dialectical Analysis of the End of Saint Mark's Gospel

Fai Ebenezer¹

Abstract

The conclusion of the Gospel of Mark, particularly Mark 16:9-20, remains a topic of extensive scholarly debate. A predominant scholarly perspective posits that this longer ending (LE) represents a subsequent addition to the original text of the Gospel, with the principal evidence being the termination of the earliest manuscripts at Mark 16:8. Conversely, some scholars advocate for the inclusion of the longer ending as an authentic component of Mark's original narrative. Through a dialectical analysis, this study examines the Gospel of Mark, evaluating arguments supporting both the shorter ending (16:8) and the longer ending (16:9-20), along with counterarguments to each position. The analysis reveals that the argument for the shorter ending is substantiated by the absence of Mark 16:9-20 in any Greek manuscript prior to the fifth century and its non-mention by pre-Eusebian writers. Conversely, proponents of the longer ending argue against the idea that Mark intended his Gospel to conclude with the phrase ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ (for they were afraid, 16:8), contending that an ending characterized by fear is unsuitably abrupt for a Gospel narrative. This study concludes that the longer ending likely achieved canonical status because it was regarded as integral to Mark's Gospel, despite stylistic divergences from other sections of the text. The inclusion of these verses does not propagate heretical views or contradict essential biblical doctrines, suggesting their initial integration into the Gospel of Mark.

Introduction

Every literary work possesses both a beginning and an end, with a trajectory that typically builds towards a climactic conclusion. A well-crafted piece of art culminates in an ending that emerges naturally from the narrative's progression. However, the Gospel of Mark presents an intriguing exception to this pattern, as both its opening and conclusion exhibit notable deviations from conventional expectations. This paper will employ a dialectical analysis to explore the two principal arguments concerning the ending of Mark's Gospel. Dialectical analysis, rooted in the traditions of ancient Greek thought,² provides a method for probing the ideas, values, and limitations inherent in a text. As David Barnhill notes, this approach facilitates a deeper engagement with a thinker's conceptual framework.³ Accordingly, this paper will first examine the Gospel according to Mark, the shorter ending of Mark's Gospel, presenting and countering various perspectives, before moving on to analyze the longer ending (L.E.), accompanied by its own critique.

The Gospel of Mark

The Gospel of Mark, by tradition, was written by John Mark and is believed to have been the first to be written around A.D. 45.⁴ John Mark wrote to a Roman audience to convince them about the deity and mission of Jesus Christ.⁵ Textual critics have been able to ascertain textual issues with this book, just like several other New Testament books. The Gospel narrative both

¹Fai Ebenezer is the Pastor of *Revival Baptist Church*, Binju, Nkambe, Cameroon. He is a Ph.D. Candidate, in New Testament Language and Literature at the *Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary*, Ogbomoso. Contact: +2348164584514, +237675933329, ebenefai@gmail.com

² Douglas Walton, *One Sided Arguments: A Dialectical Analysis of Bias* (New York: State University Press, 1999), Xvi.

³David Barnhill, "Dialectical Analysis," <https://www.uwosh.edu>, accessed September, 2022.

⁴ Danny McCain, *Notes on the New Testament* (Bukuru, Nigeria: Africa Christian Textbooks, 2014), 190.

⁵Ibid., 189.

has issues with the way it begins and the way it ends. This has led several textual critics to engage in scholarly and critical assertions concerning these. For instance, Mark 1:1 commences with a statement that is made up of a subject without a predicate. It is followed by an Old Testament quotation referring to John the Baptist who is never mentioned till the fourth verse thus, no grammatical connection with the verses that come before verse 4.⁶ Shreds of evidence from several canonical texts of Mark's Gospel reveal the Gospel to have four different endings; Luke Timothy John and Todd C. Penner posit that the oldest and best manuscripts of Mark end at 16:8; "the women who had come to anoint the dead body of Jesus in the tomb fled and said nothing to anyone because they were afraid." Some other manuscripts contain a series of appearance accounts (16:9-20); still, others insert a coda (a concluding part of a literary work) after 16:8, either as a conclusion or as a bridge to the L.E. of 16:9.⁷ Bruce M. Metzger contends that several witnesses including but not limited to 099, 0112, the Old Latin K in the seventh to the ninth century continue after verse 8 thus; "But they reported briefly to Peter and those with him all that they had been told. And after this, Jesus himself sent out utilizing them from east to west the sacred and imperishable proclamation of salvation."⁸ Justin Martyr in his Apology (1.45) includes five words in a different sequence in verse 20 τοῦ λόγου τοῦ ἰσχυροῦ ὃν ἀπὸ Ἱεροῦσάλημι οἱ ἀπόστολοι αὐτοῦ ἐξεληθοντες πανταχοῦ ἐκηρῶξαν.⁹ From the testimony preserved by Jerome, the traditional ending (16:1-20) circulated in the fourth century in an expanded form and had the following words between verses 14 and 15

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 [or, does not allow what lies under the unclean spirits to understand the truth and power of God]. 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 those who have sinned I was delivered to death, that they may return to the truth and sin no more, so that they may inherit the spiritual and incorruptible glory of righteousness in heaven."¹⁰

However, Metzger notes that only one extant Greek manuscript has this coda: Codex Washingtonianus.¹¹ This leaves the reader with one fundamental question: "Which of these was the original Markan conclusion?" The next section presents the arguments for the shorter ending of Mark's Gospel.

Arguments for the Shorter Ending of Mark

This part discusses the views and scholarly arguments that prefer the shorter ending of Mark as ending in 16:8. Frank W. Beare posits that the passage usually printed at the end of the Gospel of Mark (16 9-20) is not an authentic part of this or any other gospel; the textual evidence here is decisive. The passage is not found in any Greek manuscript earlier than the fifth century. It is not mentioned by any writer earlier than Eusebius, the fourth-century bishop and church historian.¹² Textual criticism rules undoubtedly inform this; the manuscripts with

⁶ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Leicester, England: Apollos, 1990), 93.

⁷ Luke Timothy John and Todd C. Penner, *The Writings of the New Testament, rev. ed.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 164.

⁸ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Companion to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament, 3rd ed.* (n.p: United Bible Societies, 1971), 123-124.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ "The Genuineness of Mark 16:9-20: The Textual Evidence Four Textual Possibilities," <https://apologeticspress.org/is-mark>, accessed September, 2022.

¹¹ Metzger, 124.

¹² Frank W. Beare, "Speaking with Tongues: A Critical Survey of the New Testament Evidence," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 83, No. 3 (September, 1964): 229.

the earlier date are closer to the original autograph than the later ones. R. A. Guelich avers that when one looks carefully at Mark's narrative from the position of a literary text, the present ending fits his literary style quite well. That is to say Mark has not been one given to verbosity or rather too many details. Mark has been very vivid in his writing from the very beginning, especially with his καὶ εὐθὺς transitional phrases; therefore, it will not be out of place if he ends the way he does in 16:8. Guelich further asserts that the ultimate climax of the plot according to Mark is seen in the crucifixion and the demise of Jesus with the ironic taunts of the Jewish leaders and the declaration of the Roman centurion that show Jesus was indeed the Messiah, Son of God as introduced in the opening sentence in 15:32-39.¹³ The irony in the plot from Guelich's assertion is because the Jewish leaders who "knew" and read the prophecies about the coming of the Messiah saw him and never recognized him; yet a Roman centurion who did not read those prophecies concludes from the turn of events after the arrest of Jesus that He was indeed the Messiah.

Guthrie, citing A. Lindemann who favors the abrupt ending of Mark, affirms that it was simply a theological design by Mark to end that way.¹⁴ Guthrie further cites T. E. Boomershine and G. L. Bartholomew, who concur with Lindemann, affirming that Mark 16:8 was Mark's literary technique.¹⁵ This means that he invented his unique style to end his Gospel; there should be nothing wrong with that. J. M. Creed attempting to debunk the assertions that it is not proper to end a story with ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ (they were afraid for), opines that there is nothing wrong with how he ended, for he decided to end his narrative with the story of the burial of Jesus and the empty tomb; thus Mark explained what needed explanation;¹⁶ in this case, the fact that the women were afraid and said nothing to anyone. Metzger pitches his tent with scholars who posit that Mark ended in 16:8. He argues that the vocabulary and style of verse 9-20 are not Markan, and the connection between verse 8 and verse 9-20 are so awkward that it is difficult to believe the evangelist intended the section to be a section of the Gospel.¹⁷ Responding to other scholars who avow that Mark would not have ended his story by presenting the failure of the disciples, Guelich avouches that this was not the first time the disciples failed in Mark's narrative; they repeatedly failed to grasp the total import of Jesus and his teaching on His being the Messiah, and yet that failure never altered Jesus' course as Messiah nor did it lead to Jesus giving up on them.¹⁸ The meaning of Guelich's assertion is that the disciples being described as failing was not a novelty in this Gospel, even if it appeared at the end of the Gospel. John Drane argues that there is no evidence for the L.E. of Mark in 16:9-20 even though some scholars note that the L.E. was torn off at an early stage and eventually got lost; that may be why later writers tried to remedy the situation by adding 16:9-20.¹⁹ He quickly refutes the idea raised by scholars who opine that Mark has an L.E. and have asserted that the abrupt ending means Mark did not believe in the final glorification of the crucified Christ. The following verses are used to state that Mark had already referred to the resurrection of Jesus Christ though in a general way (9:2-8, 13:26-37 and 14:62).²⁰ Guelich is convinced and argues that both the shreds of evidence that have been externally drawn from the witnesses of the ancient

¹³ R. A. Guelich, "Gospel of Mark," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, eds., Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 524.

¹⁴ Guthrie, 92.

¹⁵ Ibid., 92.

¹⁶ J. M. Creed, "The Conclusion of the Gospel According to Saint Mark," *The Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 122 (January, 1930): 179-180.

¹⁷ Metzger, 124.

¹⁸ Guelich, 524.

¹⁹ John Drane, *Introducing the New Testament: Completely Revised and Updated* (Oxford, England: Lion Book, 1986), 200.

²⁰ Ibid., 200.

manuscript traditions and the ones internally drawn based on vocabulary and style negate the authenticity of any other ending apart from Mark 16:8.²¹

John and Penner using the rules of textual criticism, avow that the best attested, shorter, and more complex endings are generally to be preferred to readings that are longer, smoother, and less well-attested in manuscripts.²² A critical look at this submission points to the fact that Mark 16:8 qualifies to be where the narrative ended because it is the most complex to understand or explain due to the abruptness. Guthrie cites H. B. Swete, opining that the internal evidence supports the view that verses 9-20 are not authentic, as proven by the differences of the Greek style between 16:9-20 and the rest of the Gospel.²³ The argument further reveals that contrary to the view of scholars who question the shorter ending as ending in $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$, entire sentences and even books have been known to end with conjunctions.²⁴ The weakness of this argument is that it has not provided examples of such sentences or books that end with the conjunction $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$. One other assertion these scholars present is that it is far easier to present or explain the origin of the longer ending than it is to explain its loss; to them, Mark 16:7, (But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goes before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you) did open a way for scribes to supply what they saw as the natural fulfillment of the prophecy especially if they know the endings of Mathew and Luke. This could be because the L.E weaves together traditions found in other canonical Gospels (16:9=John 20:11-18, 16:12=Luke 24:13-35; 16:15=Matt 28:16-20; 16:19-20=Acts 1:9-11).²⁵ If this point is to be considered, what happens with the tradition that Mark was the first to write his Gospel while Matthew and Luke rewrote some passages?²⁶ John and Penner posit that it is most likely that Matthew and Luke used this shorter version since they both have an empty tomb account close to his but diverge dramatically in their appearance narratives after that.²⁷ Suzanne Watts Henderson affirms that from internal evidence, there is a disconnect between 16:8 and the following verse 9 because, in verse 8, the implied subject is the woman. Still, in the next verse, which begins the long ending, the subject shifts to Jesus without a grammatically short explanation.²⁸ Peter M. Head opines that not only does the earliest Greek manuscripts end in 16:8 but that there is evidence that the Latin, Syriac, Sihidic, Aramaic, and Armenian also end in 16:8. He posits that these further buttress the earlier claims of Eusebius of Mark ending in 16:8.²⁹ The next section deals with the rebuttal of the shorter ending.

Rebuttal of the Shorter Ending

Ben Witherington III is unflinching as he refutes the position that Mark ended his narrative in 16:8. He responds to the argument by the scholars (R.A. Guelich, John Drane, Donald, Guthrie, John and Penner) who aver that the way Mark 16:8 ends is perfectly appropriate and that the ending is a possibility grammatically even if it seems to be abrupt to moderns who always

²¹Guelich, 523.

²²John and Penner, 165.

²³Guthrie, 90.

²⁴John and Penner, 165.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Mark Goodacre, *The Synoptic Problem: A Way through the Maze* (York Road, London: T and T Clark International, 2001), 76.

²⁷ John and Penner, 165.

²⁸Suzanne Watts Henderson, "Discipleship after the Resurrection: Scribal Hermeneutics in the Longer Ending of Mark," *The Journal of Theological Studies, New Series*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (April, 2012):109.

²⁹ Peter M. Head, "A Case against the Longer Ending of Mark
An argument that Mark 16:9–20 is not original and so not inspired Scripture," [A Case against the Longer Ending of Mark \(textandcanon.org\)](https://textandcanon.org), accessed September, 2022.

expect happy endings with all loose ends neatly tied up.³⁰ In Witherington's assertion, the problem with this gross neglect of resurrection events is that Mark thought they were not crucial to understanding or revealing Jesus' identity, which is very problematic.³¹ That is to say; there is no logical reason to think of Mark's Gospel rather ending in 16:8 because Mark's Gospel is an ancient biography, and as a narrative, its very purpose is stated quite early in writing wherein it is said that the book is about the beginning of the good news about Jesus, the Son of God.³² This makes the book fall into the genre of ancient biographies, which focuses on presenting a vivid portrait through the chronicling of words and deeds of some great ancient persons – Jesus, in this case.³³ His question is, if 16:8 is where the plot in Mark ends, where is the final critical Christological moment where the central character one final time appears on the stage to confirm the central theme of the work, as was the case with ancient biographies?³⁴ Comparing Mark's narrative with his contemporaries like Plutarch, who writes about Julius Caesar, who, like Jesus, died an untimely death at the hands of his enemies; at the end, Plutarch does not end the story with Caesar's death or the mourning of his friends but says what happens to his killers to show that Caesar had been right and the gods had avenged his death.³⁵ Witherington argues that just like Plutarch, who wrote this ancient biography of Caesar and did not leave his audience bewildered, a biographical work as encomiastic as the Gospel of Mark could not have ended in 16:8, leaving the audience in that confused state. If the plot ends in 16:8, one cannot say if the audience knew how events about the resurrection eventually turned out. According to Witherington, since Mark is an ancient biography, if it ends in 16:8, it would have failed to provide a suitable ending showing not just how God vindicated Jesus but that his memory would be carried forward.³⁶

One area which advocates for the shorter ending is the audience Mark wrote to. Tradition has it that the Gospel was written to a Gentile audience whom he wanted to prove the deity of Jesus to. Merrill C. Tenney opines that Mark's Gospel was for the un-evangelized non-specialists of practical Roman mentality.³⁷ If Jesus was supposed to be presented as such, could it be factual that Mark would allow his story about this same Jesus to have been disobeyed by his followers, the women he gave instructions to? Everything ends in suspense with no explanations. That certainly raises issues that need answers. The ensuing section discusses the arguments for the L.E. of Mark.

Arguments for the L.E. of Mark

This part discusses the arguments by scholars who are advocates for the L.E. Donald Guthrie's notes that the majority of authors who prefer the longer ending fault the Abrupt Ending with the observation of whether Mark intended to end his writing with *ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ* (for they were afraid 16:8). They argue that finding a Gospel or good news ending with a note of fear is awkward.³⁸ Mark's narrative is a Gospel, and under a gospel being good news, ending on a note of fear does not qualify it as Gospel. Mark as a Gospel is good news, and often it does not end in fear; thus, it is impossible that he intended to end in 16:8 with that negative news.

³⁰Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 42.

³¹ Witherington, 42.

³² Ibid., 42.

³³ Ibid., 42.

³⁴ Ibid., 42.

³⁵ Witherington, 43.

³⁶ Ibid., 43.

³⁷ Merrill C. Tenney, *New Testament Survey* (Bedford Square, W.C.I: The Intervarsity Fellowship, 1961), 157.

³⁸ Guthrie, 91.

Another argument these scholars present is how practicable Mark could have written a Gospel without any resurrection appearances.³⁹ What makes the Christian religion stand out amongst other world religions are the claims of Jesus' resurrection and his eventual ascension; thus, Mark, who wrote to Gentile believers intending to convince them about Jesus being God, could not have ignored that fact. A look at verse 8 of chapter 16 shows how it ends abruptly, "they went out and fled from the tomb, for they were trembling and astonished. They said nothing to anyone. For they were afraid." R. A. Guelich affirms that how the verse ends abruptly and the resurrection appearances in the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John implied by the promise of Mark 14:7 have led to the conclusion that a more comprehensive and better ending of Mark has certainly been lost.⁴⁰ Guthrie affirms that most Greek manuscripts contain the full twenty verses, though most are late (seventh to the ninth centuries).⁴¹ John and Penner, presenting the case of those in support of the L.E, assert that the Greek text 16:8 end with a conjunction γάρ, and by that very fact, it would seem that it demands another clause.⁴² They argue that γάρ should not end a sentence, let alone end a whole book in such an indeterminate way. Another issue they raise is that "there you will see him" equally demands fulfillment of the L.E support.⁴³ Witherington, in a bid, to debunk Mark ending in 16:8, queries the verb tenses and structure of the verse. He asserts that the key verbs are imperfect with two γάρ clauses, not one. He further asserts that this grammatical imbalance suggests that the women were afraid and possessed with fear and trembling; thus, they fled from the tomb, and because they were afraid, they said nothing to anyone. Both the "fleeing" and "speaking" is in the aorist tense, indicating a punctiliar action, in this case, "fear." This combination of verbs seems to set up an expectation for a sequel in which they presumably are finally obedient to the angelic command. Still, it is hard to believe that Mark wanted to leave his audience with the picture of the women's disobedience and denseness.⁴⁴

Drane affirms that the best manuscripts (Sinaiticus and Vaticanus of the fourth century) have the ending of Mark designated at 16:8, and it appears to be part-way through a sentence which certainly is an odd way to conclude a book.⁴⁵ Guthrie arguing for a shorter ending notes that the Alexandrian Uncial manuscripts, the Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, all end with ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ (16:8), the Sinaitic Old Syriac similarly omits the ending of 16:9-20, and most of the Armenian manuscripts end at 16:8.⁴⁶ To him, the L.E of Mark must have been attached to the Gospel at a very early period in its history. In addition, he notes that it must have been added in an attempt to fill a gap.⁴⁷ F. Kermode avouches that such an ending is either intolerably clumsy or incredibly subtle.⁴⁸ Witherington posits that, from the textual history of this Gospel, it is evident that more than one of the early Christians in the second century did not feel that 16:8 properly brought the Gospel to a satisfactory ending. He opines that it is most likely that readers in the early century understood the literary conventions of documents such as Mark's Gospel more than the present reader almost two thousand years later would know when a narrative did not end appropriately.⁴⁹

³⁹ Ibid., 91.

⁴⁰ Guelich, 423.

⁴¹ Guthrie, 89.

⁴² John and Penner, 164.

⁴³ Ibid., 164.

⁴⁴ Witherington, 45.

⁴⁵ Drane, 200.

⁴⁶ Guthrie, 90.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 90.

⁴⁸ F. Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 66.

⁴⁹ Witherington, 46.

The outline of Mark is also suggestive that the Gospel could not have ended in 16:8. This Gospel did not only interest itself in silence but had key moments of disclosure of revelation concerning the identity of Jesus.⁵⁰ A look at 14:28 and 16:6-7 both set up an expectation in the readers' mind that there was going to be at least an appearance account at the end of the Gospel narrative, appearance in Galilee to Peter and other disciples.⁵¹ Witherington further asserts that the disclosure accounts which are placed at the beginning (1:9-11), in the middle (8:27-30; 9:2-8), and towards the end of the book (14:61-62) all set up anticipation that the book will close with a final climatic disclosure of Jesus' identity to the very disciples that we are told in 14:28 and 16:6-7 will receive such a disclosure.⁵² Mark would not have intended for his readers to think of "the Gospel concerning Jesus the Messiah, Son of God," as seen in 1:1, ending with the failure of the women. He bolsters the argument additionally that the transfiguration, the command that the disciples should not reveal it until the resurrection (9:29), the promise of the coming of the Son of man in 13:26 following the mission period, which entailed much suffering (13:9-13), the warning to the Sanhedrin about the coming of the Son of man (14:62) all point to the anticipation of the future found in the parables of the kingdom of 4:1-34 making it crystal clear that Mark's story could not have ended in 16:8.⁵³ Guthrie avows that the most satisfactory explanation by all textual shreds of evidence is that the three endings were different editorial attempts to work on verse 8.⁵⁴

The editorial attempts are proof that the way 16:8 ended did not sum up all Mark had been discussing in his narrative. Guelich posits that the cross and the empty tomb cannot be the end because Jesus' role as Messiah, Son of God, has a future chapter. Paul Burkhardt cites N. T. Wright's *The Resurrection of the Son of God* noting that, in his opinion, Mark did not intend to end at 16:8 because everything written in the entire book is to show the fulfillment of Jesus' words as well as the book being built around the resurrection predictions of Jesus. All of these build up to a climax, and 16:8 does not deliver. Hence, there was certainly a longer version that has been lost.⁵⁵ Suzanne Watts Henderson avers in favor of the longer ending that it establishes a connection between the apostles of Jesus and those who were to believe later and points out that the power of God continues unabated.⁵⁶ That is to say, the L.E. demonstrates how those who later believed in the promises of Jesus continued his work of enforcing the kingdom of God. In debunking the argument of scholars who find nothing wrong with the abrupt ending of Mark, Witherington avows that the appropriateness of modern abrupt endings to novels ought not to lead one to think such an approach was equally appropriate in the case of ancient biographies. He again cites *Plutarch's Lives* and notes that, just like in other ancient biographical pieces of literature, it was a normal belief that how someone's life ended revealed their true character. On that note, it could not be true that Mark, who wrote at such a time to such an audience, would want them to believe that Jesus, who was believed to be the Son of God, cried and died asking why his Father had forsaken Him.⁵⁷ It was also going to be weird for Mark to want to end his Gospel by presenting the disciples whom Jesus committed everything in their hands, as cowards who could not stand to defend their master 14:50.⁵⁸ If the

⁵⁰ Ibid., 46.

⁵¹ Ibid., 46.

⁵² Ibid., 46.

⁵³ Ibid., 46.

⁵⁴ Guthrie, 90.

⁵⁵ Paul Burkhardt, "I Wrote a Paper on the Ending of the Gospel of Mark and here it is," <https://blog.prodigialpaul.com/2013/10/04/i-wrote-a-paper-on-the-ending-of-the-gospel-of-mark-and-here-it-is/>, accessed September, 2022.

⁵⁶ Suzanne Watts Henderson, "Discipleship After the Resurrection: Scribal Hermeneutics in the Longer Ending of Mark," *The Journal of Theological Studies, New Series*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (April, 2012): 123.

⁵⁷ Witherington, 44.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 44.

gospel is meant to proclaim the good news about Jesus the Son of God to all Gentile nations, this ending is hardly in keeping with that aim; Mark 16:8 cannot be good news.⁵⁹

Wilfred Laurence Knox arguing against the shorter ending of Mark, opines that if Mark wanted to end his Gospel in 16:8, it would mean he was indifferent to the canons of famous storytelling, which is not true because he does not appear to show such indifference in the other parts of the narrative.⁶⁰ If he did not ignore the canons of famous storytelling in previous chapters and verses, he could not do that in concluding the narrative. Mark 1:8 promised the believers were to be baptized with the Holy Spirit and to say Mark ended in 16:8 leaves that prophecy unaccounted for.⁶¹ In other words, 16:8 could not be where the Gospel ended without anything said about the prophecy. Shawn Nelson cites David Warren, David Hester, and Maurice Robinson to argue that the L.E. is canonical whether or not Mark wrote it. They argue that some books in the Old Testament, like Deuteronomy, which Joshua completed after the death of Moses, or even Phinehas and Eleazar, completed the book of Joshua after he died. Gath and Nathan completed the book of Samuel. Though posthumously completed, they are all considered canonical, so why not Mark 16:9-20.⁶² A. Ferrar asserts that rats might have nibbled the ending of Mark.⁶³ This might sound hilarious, but it cannot be ignored. H. Y. Gamble posits that Mark's ending must have been lost; he argues that looking at ancient scrolls reveals that they may have been treated carelessly, just like people would mishandle their files today, and some can end up getting tampered with.⁶⁴ Gamble explains that since Mark's Gospel was written on a scroll, it is possible that after it was read, it was not rewound, which exposed the edges to wear and tear.⁶⁵ Witherington notes that as a result of this wear and tear, when Mark began to be copied in the second century, it was the truncated version that was copied, not the one that was known much earlier to Matthew. Thus, there are traces of it in Matthew as he is copying Mark in Matthew 28:8 and making an effort to alleviate the harshness of Mark's presentation.⁶⁶ What follows Matthew 28:9-10 and 28:16-18 is the redaction of what Matthew found in his Markan source. But then, Witherington counsels that vast theological and literary castles should not be built on the assertion that Mark 16:8 must have been the end of Mark's Gospel.⁶⁷ John and Penner affirm that Mark 16:9-20 remains part of the canonical text and contains a venerable tradition about the resurrection that is theologically significant in its own right.⁶⁸ It should not be scrapped if it is in the canonical text.

Rebuttal of the Longer Ending

David A. DeSilva refutes the assertion of Witherington regarding the grammatical imbalance of $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$ ending a sentence. He avers that $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$ never stands at the beginning of a clause, but in a two-word clause such as the second part of Mark 16:8, it can stand. The rules of Greek Grammar place $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$ in the second position at the end, thus making Mark correct to place it at

⁵⁹ Ibid., 45.

⁶⁰ Wilfred Lawrence Knox, "The Ending of St. Mark's Gospel," *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (January, 1942):23.

⁶¹ Robert Oliver Kevin, "The Lost Ending of the Gospel According to Mark: A Criticism and a Reconstruction," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 45, No. 1/2 (1926):81-103.

⁶² Shawn Nelson, "Which Ending of Mark's Gospel is Correct?" <https://nelson.ink/which-ending-of-marks-gospel-is-correct/>, accessed September, 2022.

⁶³ A. Ferrar, *A Study of Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1951), n.p.

⁶⁴ H. Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 56-57.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 56-57.

⁶⁶ Witherington, 48

⁶⁷ Ibid., 48.

⁶⁸ John and Penner, 165.

the end of a sentence.⁶⁹ DeSilva recognizes that several authors end sentences or paragraphs with γάρ, but Mark is the only one to end a book with it.⁷⁰ According to DeSilva, it is Mark's unique way of ending his narrative.

The preceding argument clearly demonstrates that the majority of the L.E.'s assertions neglect the principles of textual criticism. The omission of reference to the most authoritative manuscripts of the fourth century, specifically Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, which are considered closest to the original autographs, suggests that their claims lack objectivity and are therefore inherently subjective. Consequently, their submissions warrant disregard.

Conclusion

The writer offered a nuanced examination of the debate surrounding the conclusion of the Gospel of Mark, presenting arguments both for and against its shorter and longer endings, and addressing counterpoints to each position. Reconciling the diverse arguments concerning Mark's ending proves challenging due to the compelling nature of each perspective. Most scholars who have studied the final twelve verses of Mark 16:9 affirm the inherent reliability of these passages.⁷¹ While these verses do not introduce significant teachings absent from other scriptural texts, their inclusion in the canon suggests they were considered integral to Mark's Gospel. The writer contends that, despite stylistic differences, these verses likely form an authentic part of Mark's work, as they neither propagate heretical ideas nor undermine essential biblical doctrines, possibly reflecting a deliberate stylistic shift by the author at the Gospel's conclusion.

⁶⁹ David A. DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods and Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2004), 225.

⁷⁰Ibid., 225.

⁷¹ Dave Miller, "Is Mark 16:9-20 Inspired?" *R and R*, Vol 25, No. 12 (2005):2 <https://apologeticspress.org/is-mark-169-20-inspired-704>, accessed September, 2022.

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