

Does Mark 16: 9-20 Belong in the Bible?

Concerning your question about Mark 16:9-20 specifically does it belong in the Bible or not?

The statement that Mark 16:9-20 is not included in the original manuscripts and there for is not profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness as stated in 2 Tim. 3:16 is one that is stated often but does it truly have any merit?

There are several reasons given for this statement. The most common is that “some of the earlier manuscripts” do not include Mark 16: 9-20 and therefore it is not part of Mark’s original work and was added in later. This has been stated by the New International Bible translators and has carried on into many of the translations that have followed. Let’s look at this first argument:

The statement that “some of the earlier manuscripts” do not include Mark 16 :9-20 in the NIV Bible is referring to the *Nestle-Aland’s Noveum Testamentum Graece, (the 26th)* This is the collection of manuscripts that the NIV is based on and this is the source that it is sighting as “some earlier manuscripts”. The *Nestle-Aland’s Noveum Testamentum Graece, (the 26th)* is a collection of manuscripts compiled buy Ebehard Nestle and later continued on by his son. This was a compiling of several manuscripts for study with the most relied upon sources being the *Codex Sinaiticus* which contains the entire NT, the *Codicies Alexandrinus*, and finally the *Vaticanus*. Let’s look at these manuscripts and see how they record Mark 16:9-20.

Concerning (Mark 16: 9-20) “The remainder of the chapter is not found in the *Vatican* or *Siniatic* Greek MSS, but is found in the *Alexandrian*. These are the three oldest and most reliable MSS. Some hold these verses to be a later addition, but as **they are found in all the most ancient versions they must have been a part of Mark's Gospel** when the first century. Schaff, Plumptree, Olshausen, Lochman and others regard them genuine.” (People’s New Testament Notes)

“While other critics consider them doubtful... the *Vatican MS* has a vacant space for them. It seems probable that in an early copy, therefore, they were omitted for some cause by a copyist who left space for them, but did not afterwards fill it, and that the Siniatic MS was made from the mutilated copy. It is clear that #Mr 16:8 was not designed to conclude Mark's narrative.” (People’s New Testament Notes)

Concerning the reliability of the Alexandrian text:

“The Alexandrian correctors strove, in ever repeated efforts, to keep the text in there sphere free from the many faults that had infected it in the previous periods and which tended to crop up again after they had been obelized (i.e., marked as spurious). These labours must time and again have been checked by persecutions and the confiscation of Christian books and counteracted by the continuing currency of manuscripts of the older type. Nonetheless they

resulted in the emergence of a type of text (as distinct from a defined edition) which served as a norm for the correctors in provincial Egyptian scriptoria. **The final result was the survival of a text far superior...**” (The Text of the Epistles, 271-272)

Although it is helpful to know that the oldest and most reliable manuscripts in fact do support the fact that Mark 16:9-20 is the original ending to the Gospel of Mark they are not however our only historical proof. The book of Mark is dated at about 45AD. And is in all likelihood the first of the four gospels written. In addition to the witness of the oldest manuscripts that are available that do contain Mark 16:9-20 dating from the 1st century we also have the witness of our early church fathers:

“The passage from verse 9 ..., Sinaitic and Vatican, and others have it with partial omissions and variations. But it is quoted by *Irenaeus and Hippolytus in the second or third century.*” (Scofield's Notes)

The second most given and probably the real reason people want to believe that Mark 16:9-20 is not part of the original scripture is because of the content found in this passage.

“...[15] And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. [16] Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. [17] And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; [18] they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." (New English Standard Version)

The mention of drinking deadly poisons or being bitten by snakes and not being harmed is one that is uncomfortable to some. They feel that this teaches something contrary to the whole of scripture.

However, “The distinctive emphasis of **these signs** causes some to conclude that the disputed ending of Mark was added to support the spiritual gifts that are listed. Since exorcism, speaking in tongues, handling snakes, and healing occurred in the books of Acts with **drink any deadly thing** being the single exception, one must admit that the passage could be harmonized with the New Testament on this subject.” (Liberty Bible Commentary Volume II)

Another reason given for excluding Mark 16:9-20 is because of the cult groups and false doctrines that have taken this passage of scripture out of context. Sadly it has been quoted by groups that take this passage and then base their worship service around handling snakes and drinking strict nines. While misinterpretations of this passage have caused some to place their lives at stake needlessly does not mean it is not part of the Holy Scriptures.

Sadly, several scriptures have been taken out of context and used by cults to teach all kinds of false beliefs. The Mormons for instance take Jesus' words when He said He has sheep from another sheepfold to build their fable of the origin of Mormonism. Also I knew a man in

college that had plucked out his own eye and cut off his hand because he felt they were causing him to sin and taking Jesus' words literally, he felt he had done the right thing. Should we take out these passages of Scripture as well to help people that may misinterpret them in the future?

As I consider this question my answer is, surly not. There are several passages of Scripture that I find difficult to live out in my daily life and some that at my current ability to reason, I just can't completely comprehend. That does not mean that those passages are any less important or necessary to my Christian development. As we saw in the case of the ***Vatican MS*** and ***the Siniatic MS*** a mistake is still a mistake regardless of how many times it has been repeated. Like the Alexandrian scriptoria we too should diligently preserve the Holy Scripture with all diligence and hold fast to that which has been handed down to us.

The final point I wish to discuss before I close, is the question I had when I was first presented with this belief the Mark 16 stopped at verse 8 and that is why God would end the first gospel written to tell of his Son's victory over sin and death with:

“And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

I never received an answer for this question and the reason is because there is not one that itself would not go against the whole of scripture. To end the gospel of Mark at 16:8 the author would have left the disciples of God confused, scared, and most importantly, silent about the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Those who are attempting to remove the original ending (Mark 16:9-20) of the Gospel of Mark which so clearly, historically, and doctrinally belong are creating a far greater travesty and doing more damage than would ever be caused by leavening it where it belongs. It would be a far greater, albeit, a more difficult thing to teach the truths it declares and live out the faith it commands than to try to erase it and pretend it is not there.

I hope that this letter has helped you to understand the genuine treasure we have in our possession as believers and of the importance of its preservation that has been carried out by the ones that have come before us.

Your Brother in Christ,
David Ingram
New Day Christian Ministry
Isa. 43: 18-21