

Mark 16:9-20: Textual Criticism

Slide 1

This morning is going to feel more like a seminary class than a sermon. So you might want to make sure you have a pen and paper and a lot of coffee. I also uploaded my sermons notes and these slides to the website last night so they are available now for you to look at if you want them.

Last week I made an astonishing claim that Mark's gospel actually ends in **Vs. 8**. And that **Vss. 9-20** are not part of the actual biblical text. So I want to work through that this morning.

Now, let me just say that most of the content of these verses is found in other areas of the Bible. So although I don't believe they are part of Mark's gospel, the content is mostly just a duplicate of other biblical passages. No doctrine is affected here.

Vs. 9-10: confirmed by John's account and **Luke 8:2**

Vs. 11: Is confirmed by **Matt 28:17** and **Luke 24:11**.

Vs. 12-14 is basically a paraphrase of **Luke 24:13-43** talking about the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

Vss. 15 is a paraphrase of the great commission in **Matt. 28:19-20**.

Vss. 16-18 are unusual. We don't have Jesus saying these things anywhere else. **Vs. 16** seems to indicated baptismal regeneration - that belief and baptism are required for salvation. We reject that view. Salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone. And even here Jesus goes on to say if you don't believe then you are condemned; so faith alone is still taught here. We also know that the apostles preached that if you believe in Jesus you need to be baptized. It's a command.

Casting out demons, speaking in tongues, being bitten by snakes and healing people are all things the apostles did throughout the book of Acts. These are not promises that we can do them, as **Vs. 17** might suggest, but they are things the apostles actually did. Except for the drinking poison, that's the odd one.

Vss. 19-20 is just a summary of the ascension and the whole book of Acts.

So to be clear, most of what is written here is found in the Bible. What I am specifically saying is that these verses are not part of the original gospel that Mark wrote down. That scribes added these verses over time and they became part of the biblical copies and as Christians committed to the truth, we need to be honest with this.

We really are people who are dedicated to the truth so we can't shy away from these types of difficulties.

Here, the reality is that for the last 1600 years or so these verses have been suspect. And most modern conservative, Bible-believing scholars do not believe that **Mark 16:9-20** is part of what Mark originally wrote.

Our Bibles even acknowledge the issue.

Slide 2 - KJV, NKJV, NASB

Now, we'll discuss more what those terms mean later, but I think it's pretty clear that there's something going on here that should give us pause.

The KJV doesn't mention anything about the differences because the KJV was translated off of more recent copies of the NT that include these verses. As time has gone on we've found earlier manuscripts that don't have them.

The NKJV mentions the issue but almost defensively - it says these verses are "lacking."

Look at the NASB. It doesn't say lack, what does it say? Add. That's the important word? That's a huge admission by the NASB translators that the words aren't missing from earlier versions, they were added to later translations.

Slide 3 - NIV, ESV

The NIV actually explains a little more of the problem of this section and say other witnesses do not have these verses. We'll talk about the witnesses in a bit.

By the time the ESV came out in 2000, the discussion was over and they discovered more difficulties - there are actually 2 different longer endings in the historical record.

So what's going on here? Are people cutting stuff out of the Bible that should be in there? Or at one point did people add things to the Bible that should not have been there? The answer is: it's complicated.

Now, let me quote some friendly people so you don't think I'm totally nuts.

John MacArthur: "The external evidence strongly suggests that these verses were not originally part of Mark's gospel...fourth-century church fathers Eusebius and Jerome noted that almost all Greek manuscripts available to them lacked verses 9-20." (MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*. Kindle Page 1261)

R.C. Sproul; "So, this internal analysis, as well as manuscript evidence, leads scholars to conclude that the long ending of Mark [9-20] was not in the original manuscript but was added to this gospel later in time by someone other than Mark. I agree with that conclusion." Sproul, R. C. (2011). *Mark* (First Edition, p. 419). Reformation Trust.

RT France: "Near unanimous verdict" among scholars that Mark ends in **Vs. 8**. France, Gospel of Mark, NICNT, Appendix.

These are just a few really solid guys who believe Mark ends at **Vs. 8**.

There are other places in the Bible where scholars are pretty sure the verses are not original. You remember the woman caught in the act adultery in **John 8**? The religious leaders want her to be stoned and Jesus writes something in the dirt, the leaders slowly go away? Jesus says to her "go and sin no more." You'll see the same footnotes and brackets because it's almost certainly not part of the Gospel of John.

1 John 5:7: A verse I loved in high school because it was a verse on the Trinity. "For there are three that bear witness in heaven: The Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one."

How could anyone deny the Trinity with that verse? One problem: it's not in the Bible. No ancient church father ever quoted that verse in any Trinity debate. The massive Nicene controversy over the deity of Jesus? No one quoted that verse. Why not? It wasn't there. We defend the Trinity from other verses.

Those 3 passages are the biggest examples. Throughout the Bible there are a few words, or phrases or numbers here and there we're not 100% sure about. But nothing affects our doctrine or our core beliefs. But we need to be honest.

Now, to be fair, there are some scholars who think these verses are original but they are in the very small minority.

Slide 4 - Textual Criticism

Now, this whole discussion is called textual criticism which seeks to figure out what an original document said when we don't have the original document.

"The science of analyzing copies to figure out what a lost document said."

We don't have any of the original documents of the Bible. We don't have the original book of James or Hebrews or Zechariah or Leviticus. All we have are copies, called manuscripts. And there are differences in the copies. So how could we ever know the original? Well, there's a scientific method that can get us very, very close.

So how do people do that? Imagine 4 ancient documents arrives by FedEx at your home. There's a note that says these are copies of the Gospel of Mark. Where do we begin?

Step 1: We look at them.

We divide this up into 2 parts: external and internal evidence.

1 - External evidence. External evidence is asking "what do we know about where these came from?" How old are they? The older they are probably - not always - but probably the more accurate they are.

Where did they come from? Are they copies just copies of copies? Or can we tell that they are a copy of the original work? We do this with Homer or Plato or any other ancient document.

With the Bible, we have 2 other amazing external sources. We have ancient translations into other languages. And we have the writings of the early church fathers. Remember the NIV footnote that said "other ancient witnesses?" Ancient Bible versions and church fathers are the witnesses.

So we can go look ancient Bible versions to see if these verses are in there. So, for instance, very early the Bible was translated into Syriac, Latin, Armenian, Georgian, Ethiopian, Adysh and Opiza - these are all ancient languages that had their own Bible translations. And in all of earliest ones **Vss. 9-20** are not in there. That should give us pause.

The other external evidences are the writings of the early church fathers. These are commentaries, books, letters that ancient pastors and theologians wrote.

Put it this way, if all the Bibles in all the world were burned and lost, there were no copies of any biblical text anywhere, we could actually recreate the entire Bible just from the quotes of the early church fathers. The sheer volumes of material they wrote would give us the whole Bible back many times over.

You know what we don't find when we read the earliest church fathers? We find no quotes from verses 9-20. Clement of Alexandria, Origin, Jerome, others never quoted 9-20. Just like they didn't quote 1 John 5:7. Why not? The verses didn't exist.

Slide: Manuscript Chart

What this chart shows is how many manuscripts we have from each century. We have fewer of the very oldest ones and a lot of the more recent ones. Which do you think are more important in determining what was actually in the original?

The earlier ones. For the most part, the closer we get to the original the fewer changes there will be. Remember when the NKJV note said the verses are missing in a few manuscripts but nearly all others have them? Well, that's true, but those are from the 900s to the 1200s. It makes sense that the older the manuscript the less there would be because they would get destroyed over time.

Here's the reality, the earliest manuscripts - the ones from the 2nd-4th centuries - don't have it in there. When we look at them, they are completely missing this section.

So the external evidence - the age of the manuscripts we have - and the lack of early church fathers citing these verses is a huge deal.

Slide - Textual Criticism

2 - Internal evidence. When FedEx drops the copies at your door you are trying to figure out how old they are and where they came from, but also you actually read the documents. Internal evidence is asking about the content of the passage itself. What was actually written down?

Does this passage sound like Mark, does it contradict other areas of the Bible? Just reading the words here, do we have reason to be suspicious?

There are some reasons to be suspicious. The insinuation that all who believe in Jesus could do these miraculous things is odd. Drinking poison is very odd.

But also in these few passages there are 14 words that Mark has never used. You know when you talking to a friend they have their own vocabulary or phrases? Well it would be weird if all of a sudden they sounded different. That's what's happening here in these verses. Fourteen unique words in 11 verses at the end of a long letter is odd.

Also, the abrupt ending of **Mark 16:8** matches with the rest of the whole gospel stories on a note of amazement. In Vss. 9-20 there is no more amazement but a continual theme of disbelief. Five times in these verses it is mentioned that people did not believe. It's completely opposite from what Mark's whole point was. **Read 9-14**

So it goes from amazement and astonishment that Jesus isn't in the tomb to nobody believes and Jesus is rebuking them. It's totally opposite the whole thrust of Mark's gospel.

Also, as your footnotes point out, some manuscripts actually have a different ending than this - so which is it?

And how do we account for the manuscripts that suddenly end at Vs. 8? Why would so many copies all stop precisely at Vs. 8 if they knew there was more to the gospel?

The best we can guess is that is that scribes tried to make a nicer ending to Mark's gospel. The sudden stop didn't seem right so they added some information. We don't know their motive, of course, all we have is paper trail.

So if copies showed up on our door that's what we'd do: we'd look at the external and internal evidence to see if they are authentic.

Now, with our time this morning is explain how the Bible we hold in our hands got to us and walk through some of the process and how it plays in here. And my goal is that at the end you'll have more confidence that what you hold in your hand is the accurate Word of God.

So how did it go from Moses or the apostle Matthew to your hands in english?

Slide 4 - "1 2 3 4"

So this is the basic way in which we have received our Bible. When Jude or John or Samuel were moved by the Holy Spirit to record Scripture, they wrote it down. And scholars call that an autograph.

When a baseball player signs their name it's an autograph, he writes his name down. The autographs are the original books of the Bible.

How many autographs do we have today? Zero. Now, don't let that bother you. There are a lot of ancient documents where we don't have the original. Homer, Plato, Josephus, Tacitus - these are ancient Greek authors and we have none of the originals.

What we do have are hand written copies, or manuscripts.

And for the OT we have about 14,000 and for the NT we have about 5,700. One manuscript could be the size of a postage stamp with a few letters on it, while one manuscript could be the whole NT or the whole book of Isaiah.

I already mentioned we also have ancient Bible versions - Syrian or Latin or Egyptian. There are about 20,000 versional copies that we know of.

I also mentioned the early church fathers: we have over 1 million quotes from the fathers. 1 quote could be one verse, it could be a whole chapter. So we know with 99.99% certainty what the original text said.

Daniel Wallace - the world's premier Greek scholar - said that what we have is an embarrassment of riches when it comes to copies of the Bible text.

Thought experiment: If I turned off all the lights in here, had you take off your glasses, contacts and had all of us write out the book of Galatians do you think there might be some errors? Absolutely.

But do you think that with those 50 copies of Galatians we could figure out what the actual text of Galatians said? Sure.

Well, the same thing is true with the biblical text. We have thousands of copies & with those copies we have created what are called "critical texts." Critical sounds bad, but it's actually a good thing here.

Slide - Critical Version

A critical version is like a Bible that has taken all the manuscripts into account and given us the best idea at what the autograph - the original document said in the original language. And it has notes below that text that give alternate ideas and how reliable they are.

I have a Hebrew and Greek critical version here if you want to look later. The really complicated notes at the bottom are sort of code words for helping translators know when there is a difference between copies.

When they translated the KJV there were about 6 major **Gk** manuscripts to compare at the time. Today, there are almost 6,000.

Slide - "1 2 3 4"

So we have zero autographs, thousands of hand copies, and critical texts that assimilate all that information.

That leaves us with translations. What you hold in your hand is a translation. Translations come from these critical versions. The reason for the differences in translations is they have different goals.

The goal of the NASB is to be very close word-for-word when compared to the **Gk** text. But that can get a little awkward sometimes.

The NIV was written so that a person with an 7-8th grade reading level could understand it. Which is what the vast majority of Americans have. As a result, it is very readable.

I like the ESV because it's a good mix between those 2.

Now, while we're here let's go back & talk a little about these manuscripts, these copies. Unbelievers often say that the Bible as we know is like a massive game of telephone. Where the text has been so corrupted over the years that we can't possibly know the original. How do we answer that?

First, the goal of the telephone game is to be silly. You want a silly outcome in telephone. But when copying the Bible the goal is accuracy.

Different scribes worked different ways. But we have to remember there were no copy machines. so they did the best they could & they had to make decisions.

Let me give you a scenario:

What if you were a scribe who happened to have 2 Greek manuscripts and you were charged with making a fresh copy. And one copy had the short version of Mark and one copy had the long version. And that's all you had.

If you were the scribe what would write down? Remember, **Revelation 22:18-19** says that if you add to God's Word, God will add all the plagues in Bible to you. And if you take away from God's Word, you have no share in the tree of life. You go to hell.

So do you add or take away from God's Word? Well most scribes added. They would rather make sure there was more than less because people could always figure out later that there was too much. But if words were missing, there was no way to recover them.

Slide: Manuscript Rules

So when we're looking at 2 manuscripts where there are differences there are 2 basic rules that scholars usually follow to figure out what the original said.

First, we usually give greater weight to the **shorter** text. Scribes tended to add information to a text rather than take it away for the reason I just mentioned. There is at least 1 manuscript of the book of Acts that is 10-20% more material than the original for this reason.

Second, the **harder** reading is preferred. That is, the reading that is more confusing or harder to understand. Our tendency when we copy something is to smooth out difficulties.

For instance, in Greek if there's a section where 2 similar words could work in a situation, we tend to copy the easier word. But in actual fact, the harder reading is usually the original.

Jesus said it's harder for a camel (*kamēlon*) to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter heaven. But a few copies say it's harder for a thread (*kamilon*) to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

It's a difference of 1 letter - which do we use? Scribes tended to favor thread because that seemed to make sense. Eternal life isn't technically impossible. But what is Jesus really trying to convey? The older and better versions say camel. Jesus's point is that salvation on our own is impossible. To which he replies, with God all things are what? Possible.

So when manuscripts disagree, usually the shorter one is preferred and the harder one is preferred.

Now, the Greek NT has 138,00 words. And because we have 5,700 copies there are about 300,000-400,000 variants, or differences. Which sounds really bad, doesn't it?

You know why there are so many differences? Because we have so many copies. The more copies we find the more disagreements we have. But the more reliable we can be.

Remember the copies of Galatians we had? In a group of 100 people, we might have 500 differences. What if I asked another church to do the same thing? Now we have 200 copies and a 1,000 differences. But would that bother you? No, because we have more copies it makes sense that we have more differences. But we can also have more certainty about the original.

Same thing with the Bible. The more copies we have, the more textual variants we have and actually the more certainty we have.

Now, these disagreements, what are we talking about here? What are the disagreements between the copies?

Slide: Textual Variants

Scholars classify the differences into 3 categories.

“Insignificant; Significant but not viable, Significant and viable.” (Excerpt From: Darrell L. Bock and Buist M. Fanning, eds. “Interpreting the New Testament Text: Introduction to the Art and Science of Exegesis.”)

Slide - Insignificant Misspellings

What do we mean by Insignificant? Misspellings are one. About 70% of all differences in the copies are misspellings. An “n” is missing in “John” or an “l” is missing in Paul. They don’t affect the meaning the of anything one bit.

Slide - Insignificant: Word Order

Another common, insignificant variant is word order. In **Gk** word order isn’t super important in terms of meaning. Sometimes word order adds emphasis to the word at the beginning of a sentence, but it doesn’t change the basic meaning.

Here we have 16 legitimate ways to write “Jesus loves Paul.” This isn’t an actual verse in the Bible, but this is given so you get an idea. If the word order were changed the meaning wouldn’t be changed at all.

Sometimes the copies mix up the word order a little. Sometimes a different word is used. Instead of “Jesus” it could be “Lord” or “he”- “The Lord loves Paul” or “he loves Paul.” Well, we know that’s essentially the same thing as Jesus - so there’s another 32 ways it could be accidentally written.

In Mark’s gospel there’s a stretch of 89 verses between **Mark 6:31–8:26** where Jesus’ name is never used. Only pronouns are used - “he,” “him.” But a few manuscripts add “Jesus” or “teacher” or “Lord” instead of “him.” Does that change the meaning? No, the scribe likely made a simple error.

Word order errors are about 20% of all differences. So between word order and misspellings that’s 90% of differences between the manuscript copies.

Slide - Significant but Not Viable

What does that mean? It means that there’s a larger difference, but there’s no possible way that’s what the author meant to say.

These differences could really change our theology a lot but are so absurd they are not possible. So in one manuscript Mark’s gospel opens with this gem. “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of the Son of God.”

Well, that’s interesting. The Son of God had a son? No. The scribe accidentally repeated the “son of” in Greek. So you get how this could be very significant in our theology, but there’s no chance it’s viable.

Significant but not viable make up about 9% of the differences in the Greek NT. So misspellings, word order, and significant but not viable are 99% of the differences.

The last category are Significant And Viable.

This means that 2 copies disagree but both could feasibly be true.

We saw that earlier with camel and thread - both are significant because they change the meaning of a word. And both are viable - both make sense in the context.

Here’s an example in Romans 5.

Slide: Romans 5:1

In **Rom. 5:1** several manuscripts say “we have peace with God.” That is, a believer for sure has peace with God through Christ. And in many others it says “let us have peace” - the idea being that Paul is exhorting his readers to repent and trust in Christ.

The difference is exactly 1 letter in the Greek. So which is it? Well, we’re not 100% sure - it really could go either way. Most translations say “we have peace.” Why? Because that fits the context. Paul seems to be encouraging believers that our justification through Jesus has actually secured our peace with God.

Now, could both be true? Yes. Does this affect any major doctrines? No. These differences account for 1% of the differences in copies.

Now, why did this happen? Why did the scribes make errors? Well, sometimes scribes didn’t know Greek and so their copying skill was limited to simply transferring letters. It would be the difference between copying Galatians in English and Spanish.

If we were copying in Spanish we couldn’t double check ourselves by reading and understanding it as we went. Well, if a Latin scribe didn’t know Greek they couldn’t check to see if it made sense either.

Slide: Run On Sentence

Also, this is what many manuscripts looked like. This is actually a copy of John’s Gospel called P66 from about 200AD. There was no punctuation, no spaces between letters, and after a while they can kind of blend together.

Now, it’s readable - just like the sentence below is readable -
But to copy it would take a toll and sometimes scribes missed something. And just like any person doing homework - sometimes we just get tired and make mistakes.

But we know how to detect the mistakes & can usually figure out what the original said.

Slide: Percentages

So the next time someone comes up and says the Bible is a big game of telephone you can say that’s a bunch of baloney.

First, ask them to show just one example. They won’t be able to.

But what you can say is we know there are scribal errors. But 70% are spelling errors, 20% are a mix up of word order that don’t affect the meaning, 9% are ridiculous readings that are easy to explain and the 1% that’s left has no impact on any significant doctrine.

And the manuscripts are almost 97% identical from the earliest days of the church to the 1300s. Scribes are human like you and me - they make mistakes, the mistakes are documented and we need to be honest with those mistakes.

What we believe is infallible and without error are the original documents, the autographs. The actual piece of paper that Jeremiah & Isaiah wrote on - those are without error.

But what we also believe is that we have so much evidence - an embarrassment of riches as Daniel Wallace says - that we can know with 99.99% surety exactly what the original said.

Can you trust the Word of God? Absolutely.

Prov. 18:30: This God—his way is perfect; the word of the LORD proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him.

Pray