

THE MUTILATION OF MARK 16:9-20 – FLOYD NOLEN JONES, Th.D., Ph.D.

⁹Now when *Jesus* was risen early the first *day* of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils. ¹⁰And she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept. ¹¹And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not. ¹²After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country. ¹³And they went and told *it* unto the residue: neither believed they them. ¹⁴Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. ¹⁵And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. ¹⁶He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. ¹⁷And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; ¹⁸They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. ¹⁹So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. ²⁰And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen. (King James Bible)

Most modern Bible versions have a footnote to the effect that “these verses are not in the oldest, best, most reliable Greek manuscripts”. In laymen’s terms this means that Mark 16:9–20 are not in the 4th century Greek manuscripts, *Vaticanus B* and *Sinaiticus Aleph* which were derived from Origen’s (AD 185–254) edited New Testament (a 12th century minuscule also omits the verses). These verses are the Great Commission spoken by our Lord as recorded by Mark. It is an apostolic commission delegating great power to the body of Christ that it may continue the ministry of the Lord Jesus.

Of the approximately 3,119 Greek manuscripts of the NT extant today, none is complete. The segment of text bearing Mark 16 has been lost from many, but over 1,800 contain the section and verses 9–20 are present in all but the 3 cited above. The footnote is thus unveiled and laid bare as dishonest and deliberately misleading in intimating that these verses are not the Word of God.

The external evidence is massive. Not only is the Greek manuscript attestation ratio over 600 to 1 in support of the verses (1,800+ to 3 = 99.99%) – all but one of the approximately 8,000 extant Latin mss, all but one of the approximately 1,000 Syriac versions as well as all the over 2,000 known Greek Lectionaries contain the verses. Mark 16:9-20 were cited by Church “Fathers” who lived 150 years or more *before Vaticanus B* or *Sinaiticus Aleph* were written: Papias (c.100), Justin Martyr (c.150), Irenaeus (c.180), Tertullian (c.195), and Hippolytus (c.200). ¹

Vaticanus B is an “uncial” manuscript. This means that all the letters are block capitalized; there are no spaces between the words, and there are no vowels. It is a codex (a book, not a scroll) of 759 leaves (10½ by 10½ inches) with three columns per page, each of which ranges from 40 to 44 lines per column. There are 16 to 18 letters on each line.

Vaticanus B **adds** to the Bible as it includes the Old Testament Apocrypha. Yet God said “don’t add”. It contains the Epistle of Barnabas (part of the Apocalyptic books of New Testament times), which teaches water baptism saves the soul, again adding to the Word of God. However, the Word of God has also been **deleted** as *Vaticanus B* does not include Genesis 1:1–46:28, Psalms 106–138, Matthew 16:2–3, or Romans 16:24. Yet the Lord also said not to subtract. It also lacks Paul’s Pastoral Epistles (1st & 2nd Timothy, Titus and Philemon). In addition, the Book of Revelation as well as Hebrews 9:15 – 13:25 are missing. The latter teaches that the once for all sacrifice of Jesus ended the sacraments forever. There is also a conspicuous blank column where Mark 16:9–20 should be.

¹ John Burgon, *The Revision Revised*, (London: John Murray Pub., 1883), pp. 422–423.

Erasmus was well aware of *Vaticanus B* and its variant readings in 1515 AD at which time he was preparing the New Testament Greek text. Because they read so differently from the vast majority of the approximately 200 mss he had already examined, Erasmus considered such readings spurious. For example, *Vaticanus B* leaves out “Mystery Babylon the Great”, “the seven heads that are the seven mountains upon which the harlot (the apostate religious system that began at Babel of which the Roman church is a part) sits”, and leaves out “the woman which is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth” which has seven mountains. All this may be found in Revelation 17.

Mark 16 of the Vatican MSS has 42 lines in its first column and has only five letters in the 31st line of the second column. Thus there is a blank space left at the end of verse 8 separating Mark from the Gospel of Luke. That it is the only blank column in the entire 759 leaf MSS should alert us that something is very wrong here.

Mark 16:9-20 contains 971 Greek letters. Were 18 letters placed on each line in the void, 967 letters would be placed within it; hence, a scribe need only work in 4 letters over the last 53½ lines. As the lines do not all equally end at the same place on their right margin, this would have been an easy task for any scribe. He certainly would not have placed a few scant letters on a single line in the following column to end Mark, leave the other 41 lines blank and then begin Luke at the top of the next column (a new book was always begun at the top of a column). *Vaticanus* was written on very costly vellum made from antelope hide; thus, great effort would have been taken to avoid such expense.

As the void would faithfully accommodate verses 9-20, the scribe who prepared *Vaticanus B* obviously knew of both the existence of these verses as well as their precise content. The older MSS from which Codex B was copied must have infallibly contained the 12 verses. For whatever reason, the scribe was instructed to leave them out: he obeyed but left a blank in memoriam. Never was silence more eloquent! By leaving a space for the omitted verses, *Vaticanus B* brings to our attention a witness more ancient than itself – the earlier scribe!²

Also an uncial, Codex *Sinaiticus Aleph* (Ⲁ, the first letter in the Hebrew alphabet) has 346½ leaves or 694 pages each measuring 13½ by 15 inches. Made from the finest antelope hides, each page has four columns with 48 lines per column, and there are 12 to 14 letters to a line. The first portion of *Sinaiticus* was discovered in 1844 by Constantine von Tischendorf in the burn pile at the monastery of St. Catharine at the foot of Mount Sinai at which time he procured but 43 leaves of a Greek Old Testament (i.e., a Septuagint). That which is now known as *Sinaiticus Aleph* (Ⲁ) is the codex he brought from Mt. Sinai in 1959.

It is always stated that *Aleph* is a “complete” Greek New Testament, but it is not. It **adds**, for example, the Shepherd of Hermas and Barnabas to the NT. It **omits** John 5:4, 8:1–11; Mat. 16:2–3; Rom. 16:24; Mark 16:9–20; 1 John 5:7; Acts 8:37 and about a dozen other verses.

The most significant fact regarding these fourth-century MSS is that in both *Vaticanus B* and *Sinaiticus Aleph*, John 1:18 reads that Jesus was the only begotten “God” instead of the only begotten “Son”. That is the original Arian heresy! The most widely used Greek text in Bible colleges and seminaries today is Eberhard Nestle’s Greek text. Nestle likewise reads ... only begotten “God”, which means that God had a little god named Jesus who is thus a lesser god than the Father. This means that at first there was big God and He *created* a little “god”. Thus, Jesus comes out to be a created being, a God with a little “g”, but at the incarnation a god was not begotten. Our Lord already was and always had been God – indeed, Christ is Himself the Creator (John 1:1-3; Col. 1:16). At the incarnation God begat *a son* who, insofar as His deity is concerned, is *eternal* (Micah 5:2). This reading renders these MSS as untrustworthy and depraved! Yet these are the two manuscripts most venerated by text critics over the past century.

² John W. Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel According to S. Mark*, (Oxford and London: James Parker & Co. Pub., 1871), p. 165.

These critics have ignored the text in nearly all the extant Greek manuscripts and have taken about 90% of all the words for their so-called “restored” New Testament from *Vaticanus* B. About 7% of the remaining 10% comes from *Sinaiticus* Ⲛ. What makes this all the more confounding is that these two uncials have over 3,000 significant differences between themselves in the four Gospels alone! That B and Ⲛ have come to so dominate the discipline of Textual Criticism is all the more bewildering when we consider that no less than Theodore Cressy Skeat³ believed *Codex Vaticanus* was a “reject” among the 50 copies that Eusebius prepared for the major churches throughout the Empire at the behest of Emperor Constantine⁴.

The resulting corrupt Greek text has replaced the traditional *Textus Receptus* Greek New Testament which the believing Church has always accepted as the inerrant God-inspired word. Moreover, its readings have recently been verified as going back at least as far as AD 66. Indeed, until 1904 the Greek Church had guaranteed the Byzantine text of the *Textus Receptus*, but even it finally succumbed to the continual onslaught from so-called modern scholarship. Although they still hold fast to the readings found only in the Byzantine manuscripts, the Greek Church has departed from its centuries held declaration that the *Textus Receptus* reflected precisely the NT it had hand copied all the way back to the time of the Apostles and has instead adopted a “majority Byzantine text” mindset. The result is, that even though nearly all are of a very minor nature, the 1904 (as well as their 1960 “upgrade”) text departs from the *Textus Receptus* almost 2,000 times (their estimation).

Sinaiticus is not a bound codex. Thus, any given folio (a sheet of paper folded in half to form four pages) can easily be pulled free and later replaced. Tischendorf himself noted that the folio containing Mark 14:54 to 16:8 and Luke 1:1 to 1:56 had not been written by the scribe which he designated as “A”. He said that *Sinaiticus* exhibited a different handwriting and ink on this folio. Tischendorf goes on to add that scribe A wrote all of the New Testament in Ⲛ except six leaves (plus part of a seventh) and that these six (which included Mark 16) were written by A’s colleague, Scribe D. He stated that D wrote part of the Old Testament and also acted as *diorthota* or corrector of the New Testament. Tischendorf also identified Scribe D as the man who years earlier had penned *Vaticanus* B and left out Mark 16:9-20 resulting in the third column being left blank! Dr. F.H.A. Scrivener, as well as Hort, likewise concluded D was the scribe of *Vaticanus*.⁵

But there is more. Tischendorf further observed that there is a change in spacing and size of the individual letters. This was done by scribe D in an attempt to place some words in the void left by his removal of verses 9-20 that scribe A had originally placed in the codex. This is seen in that the first three columns on page 228 have 14 Greek letters per line; however, the letters in the fourth column are somewhat wider such that each line has only 12 letters. Coming to page 229 of the folio, we find that the first column has but 11.6 letters to the line, the second column has only three and one third lines with a letter spacing of 10.7. Having accomplished his goal of placing some words in the heretofore blank second column, the situation returns to normal and the third column, which begins with Luke 1:1, has 14.1 letters per line and the fourth column 13.9.

Taken together, these circumstances undeniably testify that the sheet is a forgery. For whatever reason, scribe D, who years before had left the blank column in *Vaticanus* B, simply slipped the folio out that scribe A originally prepared, then rewrote and replaced it. He was obviously determined not to leave another column blank; a circumstance which for years he undoubtedly had to explain to various associates and authorities many times over.

³ Skeat (1907-2003) was a librarian at the British Museum. He was Assistant Keeper, Deputy Keeper, Keeper of Manuscripts and Egerton Librarian after his studies in Cambridge and a brief time at the British School of Archaeology in Athens. He co-authored *Scribes and Correctors of Codex Sinaiticus*, (London, Trustees of the British Museum Pub., 1938.)

⁴ Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 3rd ed., (Oxford Uni. Press, 1992), pp. 47-48.

⁵ F.H.A. Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, 4th ed., Edward Miller ed., (London: George Bell and Sons Pub., 1894), Vol. 2, p. 337, fn. 1.

Thus, the blank column in B and *Aleph* are the work of a single scribe and thereby does not constitute the voice of two witnesses against the inclusion of Mark 16:9-20. The scandalous omission (or disappearance) is due to only one and the same person – the scribe who wrote B and then revised S – or perhaps to an editor under whose directions he acted. But either way, it is *not* the independent voice of two different authorities working decades apart from one another as we have been told for some 150 years! It is this supposed double authority that text critics have scandalously promulgated and perpetuated against the *Textus Receptus* to this very day. Furthermore, we have seen that the blank space Scribe D left in *Vaticanus* B proves that he knew of the passage. As he is the copyist of that folio in *Aleph*, rather than being witnesses against the last twelve verses of Mark 16, both B and S must be seen as actually bearing testimony to their existence in antiquity.⁶

Yet even this is not all. Although not well publicized and generally unknown is the fact that Codex *Alexandrinus* A – one of the text critics favored three of their “old uncials” – actually includes Mark 19:9-20! This Codex was sent to England in 1627 and now resides in the British Museum (thus beyond the reach of the Jesuits as well as the Vatican). Though having heretical readings as well as many other detractions, *Alexandrinus* has value – especially since it reads as the *Textus Receptus* in the gospels.

In the 17th century Cyril Lucar (1572-1638 AD), then patriarch of the Eastern Orthodox See in Alexandria, brought the codex to his new See at Constantinople. Like *Vaticanus* (c.350 AD) and *Sinaiticus* (c.380 AD), *Alexandrinus* was originally dated as a 4th century codex. However, today it is dated 5th century – even though there is an Arabic note in the first volume of the manuscript stating it was written by the hand of Thecla, the martyr. At that time, Lucar added that she was a notable lady of Egypt and had written Codex A shortly *after* the AD 325 Council of Nicea – thus, possibly as old or even older than Codex *Vaticanus* B!⁷ That Lucar reported Thecla’s name was also originally at the end of the manuscript carries no force to the critics for a 4th century date – they reject it by claiming the end of the codex had been lost long before Cyril’s time. Critics propose other theories which enable them to reject so early a date; nevertheless, there remains a convinced minority who hold it may in truth belong to the fourth century.

As to how and why verses 9-20 of Mark 16 came to be omitted in B and *Aleph* (S), we do not know with certainty – we were not there. Still, as already shown, we do know that the passage as well as its precise content was well known when these highly vaunted codices were prepared. However, a likely, logical explanation which is borne out by ecclesiastical usage does exist.

It is a historical fact that, at least as early as the 4th century, lessons from the NT were publicly read in the assemblies according to a definite scheme. Moreover, there is no sign of Mark 16:9-20 being omitted until the 4th century AD. Cyril of Jerusalem, Chrysostom at Constantinople and Antioch, and Augustine in North Africa all expressly bear witness that, at least by their time, a Lectionary was fully established in the churches throughout Christendom. The lections consisted of portions of Scripture that were read aloud in public church services, very much like the responsive readings that are given in many of today’s assemblies⁸.

Just when the Lectionary first took the form of a separate book is not known, but before the Church started producing Lectionaries, the start and end of the lections were indicated by inserting the

⁶ John Burgon, *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels Vindicated and Established*, Edward Miller ed., (London: George Bell and Sons, 1896), pp. 298-301.

⁷ Sir Frederick Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, 5th ed. (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1958), p. 198; Caspar R. Gregory, *Cannon and Text of the New Testament*, (Edinburgh: 1907), p. 341; Ira M. Price, *The Ancestry of our English Bible*, 3rd ed., rev., (New York: Harper & Bros., 1956), pp. 58-59. Later in 1628, Lucar sent Codex A as a gift to James the first, king of England. In the 19th century, S. P. Tregelles explained away the Arabic inscription by remarking that the text of the New Testament in A begins with Matthew 25:6 and that Matthew 25:1-13 was the lesson appointed by the Greek Church for the festival of St. Thecla, and thus he imagined her name became associated with the codex.

⁸ Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel According to S. Mark*, op. cit., pp. 287-320)

Greek word αρχη (beginning) and το τέλος (the end) in the margin. Often, the latter was placed within the text itself. These words were normally written in red ink so as to disassociate them from the actual Scriptures they were marking off. The twelve verses in dispute are found in every known copy of the Lectionary of the East, and they constitute one lection of the highest possible distinction. From the very first, Mark 16:9-20 has everywhere and by all branches of the Church been used for two of its greatest Festivals — Easter and the Ascension. To suppose that a portion of Scripture singled out for such extraordinary honor by the Church universal is a spurious addition to the Gospel of Mark must be recognized as absolutely irrational.

There was an ancient Church-lection for Easter (and other occasions) which ended at the 8th verse of Mark 16, and the Ascension-Day lection began at verse nine. Now Eusebius tells us that το τέλος (the end) is written in almost all the copies of the Gospel of Mark immediately after verse 8.⁹ Thus, it must be seen as most reasonable that at some remote period an uninformed copyist penning Mark came across “the end” after the final words of verse eight — εφοβουντο-γαρ (“for they were afraid”). Upon seeing εφοβουντο-γαρ το τέλος, the scribe could well have misunderstood the significance of the liturgical note “το τέλος” (or even only τελος) and concluded that it meant to bring Mark’s Gospel to an end there.

Such would account for the mutilation of the last chapter of Mark. This would even be more likely should Mark 16:8 occasionally happen to fall at the bottom of the left hand page of a manuscript and the next leaf was damaged or missing (which is true of one of the codices at Moscow). Once the mistake was made, any copies would obviously spread the omission. Of course, it is well known today that “το τέλος” (or τελος) indicates the close of an ecclesiastical lection – not the close of a book.

Writing around 325 AD, Eusebius certainly knew of the so-called “long ending” of Mark 16. In a fragment of a lost work addressed “to Marinus” which was written at least two decades before Vaticanus B saw the light of day, Marinus asks Eusebius: “How is it that according to Matthew (27:1) the Savior appears to have risen ‘in the end of the Sabbath;’ but, according to Mark, ‘early the first day of the week?’” Now this last citation is from Mark 16:9; thus, the verse already existed!

In his answer, Eusebius replied that someone who wished to get rid of the entire passage (i.e., Mark 16:9-20, fnj) would offer that “... it is not met with in *all* the copies of Mark’s Gospel”. Eusebius goes on to say that a man of such persuasion would add that they were not in “the accurate copies” – that the passage is “met with seldom” and that it was absent from “almost all” copies.¹⁰ Here the issue is not whether Eusebius supports the verses, the point is he testifies that Mark 16:9-20 was clearly known – and its validity debated – in his day. Obviously, if the “long ending” existed in Eusebius’ day, how can the text critics insist that it was inserted *after* B and *Aleph* but *before* the time of Erasmus?

Finally, do we really believe that God would have the greatest story ever told end at verse 8: “And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulcher; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid”. Would God allow the good news of the Gospel of His Son end with his disciples cringing in fear? Is it really logical or even reasonable that Mark would conclude his Gospel without any reference to the appearance of the risen Christ to His disciples? I think not! Our reader should feel a deep sense of righteous indignation upon learning of the unscrupulous manner in which these verses have been presented by nearly all Bible publishers. To τέλος.

⁹ Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel According to S. Mark*, *op. cit.*, p. 315.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 120-123.



Mk 15:16

12 per line

ΟΙΚΟΝ ΑΥΤΗΣ ΤΗ
ΛΕΞΙΣ ΑΒΕΤΕΙΝΙ
ΣΟ ΗΟΧΡΟΝΟΣ ΤΩ
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14 letters/line in 1st 3 columns

Mk 16:1

48 lines per column

Mk 16:2

Mk 16:8

Lk 1:1

Lk 1:18

ΕΝ ΤΗ ΚΑΡΙΑ
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11.6 per line

10.7 per line

14.1 per line

13.9 per line

ΑΝΔΡΕΙ ΑΝΤΟΣΤΟΥ ΗΛΙΟΥ κλιελε
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 ΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ ΠΑΣ ΤΗ ΚΤΙΣΙ ΕΙ ΟΠΙ
 ΣΤΕΥΣΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΒΑΠΤΙΣΘΕΙΣ ΣΩΘΗ
 ΣΕΤΑΙ Ο ΔΕ ΑΠΙΣΤΗΣΑΣ ΚΑΤΑΚΡΙΘΗΝΑΤ

16:9

ΣΗΜΕΙΛΛΕΤΟΙΣ ΠΙΣΤΕΥΣΑΣΙΝ
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 ΛΟΥΣΙΝ ΓΛΩΣΣΑΙΣ ΑΛΛΗΛΟΥΣΙ
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ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ
 ΚΑΤΑ
 ΜΑΡ
 ΚΟΝ

Mark 16:9-20
 Codex Alexandrinus A
 (facsimile)