

“Why Isn’t Pastor Aubrey Preaching Mark 16:9–20?”

Why I believe Mark’s Gospel ends at verse 8—and why this strengthens our confidence in Scripture.

Pastor Aubrey Sequeira

Senior Pastor, Evangelical Community Church of Abu Dhabi

If You Only Have Two Minutes...

Some of you may be surprised that, as we come to the end of Mark’s Gospel, I will not be preaching Mark 16:9–20. In this article, I explain why I believe Mark’s Gospel originally ended at verse 8, and why this conclusion should actually increase—not diminish—our confidence in the Bible.

If you only have a couple of minutes, here are the main points:

- **Our commitment to God’s Word is the very reason for this discussion.** At ECC, we believe the Bible is God’s inspired, inerrant, authoritative, and sufficient Word. Our commitment to expository preaching means that we seek to preach only what God inspired.
- **You can absolutely trust your Bible.** The ending of Mark is not a reason to doubt Scripture. Rather, it shows that God has faithfully preserved His Word and that we can confidently identify the original text from the thousands of manuscripts He has preserved.
- **I believe Mark’s Gospel originally ended at verse 8.** The earliest manuscripts, the testimony of some of the earliest Christian scholars and church leaders, and the language, style, and flow of Mark’s Gospel all point in the same direction.
- **Verses 9–20 were most likely added later by well-meaning Christians** as a summary ending and gradually became part of the later manuscript tradition before finding their way into many English Bibles.
- **Faithful Christians have reached different conclusions on this question.** My goal is not to create division, but to explain why I have come to this conviction and why I believe it best honors God’s Word.

Whether or not you ultimately agree with my conclusion, my prayer is that this article will strengthen your confidence in the reliability of Scripture and deepen your trust in the God who inspired His Word and has faithfully preserved it for His people.

If you’d like to understand the evidence and the reasons behind these conclusions in more detail, I’d encourage you to read on.

ECC's Commitment to Biblical Authority

At Evangelical Community Church of Abu Dhabi (ECC), we believe in the **full verbal inspiration** of all of Scripture: our Triune God, in His sovereign power and amazing grace, worked through the human authors of the Old and New Testaments, and the Holy Spirit ensured that every word the biblical authors wrote corresponds to God's intention. Therefore, Scripture in its entirety—every word—is the Word of God, **inspired by God**, and consequently **without error and true in all that it affirms** (2 Tim 3:15–17; 2 Pet 1:19–21).

As the Word of God, the Bible is **authoritative**: Scripture is our **final authority** in all things and is **wholly sufficient** for faith and godliness (Ps 19:7–11; 2 Tim 3:15–17; 2 Pet 1:3).

These beliefs are clearly articulated in the very first article of our ECC Statement of Faith:

We believe the Bible is the Word of God, inspired by Him and completely accurate in the original manuscripts, and therefore our only authority in all matters of faith and practice (Mark 12:36; Luke 24:44; Romans 15:4; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:21).

Likewise, the first commitment in our church covenant states:

We will live together under the supreme authority of the Triune God, as revealed in the Bible and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We also praise God for His marvelous providence by which He has graciously ensured the transmission and preservation of Scripture. The Hebrew and Greek texts available today substantially and overwhelmingly reflect the original text of Scripture. Modern scholarly editions of the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Scriptures represent the inspired canonical text. Moreover, we are grateful for faithful and accurate translations of the Scriptures that can be rightly read, studied, and preached as the Word of God.

Our rock-solid belief in Scripture's inspiration, inerrancy, authority, and sufficiency is expressed in our cherished commitment to ***expository preaching of God's Word***. Every worship gathering at ECC for over three decades has centered on the proclamation of God's Word, preaching book by book and passage by passage, so that the main point of the sermon is the main point of the passage. When I was installed as the Senior Pastor of ECC, I took a vow before this congregation to "*faithfully preach the whole counsel of God's inerrant Word, in season and out, without apology and without compromise, not shrinking to declare the whole counsel of God.*" I intend by God's grace to always be faithful to this vow.

These convictions make the question before us especially important. *If Scripture is God's inspired and trustworthy Word, why am I not preaching the final twelve verses of Mark?*

The short answer is this: with the overwhelming majority of conservative evangelical pastors and teachers, I don't believe that the Gospel writer Mark wrote these verses, and therefore they are not the inspired Word of God. I believe that the Gospel writer Mark ended his Gospel at chapter 16, verse 8.

You might notice that in most of your English Bibles these verses are bracketed off, separated from the main text with the notification, for example, "SOME OF THE EARLIEST MANUSCRIPTS DO NOT INCLUDE 16:9–20" (as in the English Standard Version). This note reflects the overwhelming consensus of faithful, Bible-believing evangelical scholars, Bible translation committees, and pastors that the verses that follow likely do not belong to the original text of the Gospel of Mark.

Both my predecessors who served as Senior Pastors of ECC, Pastor Cam Arensen (1990–2015) and Pastor Jeramie Rinne (2016–2020), did not teach that Mark 16:9–20 was original. Both Pastor Cam (in 2006) and Pastor Jeramie (in 2016) preached Mark's Gospel as ending at chapter 16, verse 8. In agreement with them, and with the large majority of conservative, Bible-believing evangelical scholars, I read the Gospel of Mark as ending at Mark 16:8.

This view might be unsurprising to some of you, but to others, it may come as a surprise. It's possible that, as a member of ECC, you might arrive at a different conclusion about where the Gospel of Mark ends. That's okay. Sincere, Bible-believing Christians may disagree on this matter. However, we should honestly examine the evidence and the arguments and understand the reasons for the beliefs that we hold. We should strive to be Christians who think biblically and carefully and use our minds in the service of God, for His glory.

Perhaps you're asking: *"If Pastor Aubrey is saying that Mark 16:9–20 probably wasn't part of the original Gospel, does that mean our Bible has been changed? Can we still trust Scripture?"*

Before giving a longer answer as to why I believe the Gospel of Mark ends at Mark 16:8, I want to answer that question first.

The Reliability of Scripture (Can I Trust My Bible?)

Question 1: If the ending of the Gospel of Mark is not original, then does that mean that the Bible has been changed? Can I trust my Bible? ¹

The answer is a resounding yes! You can absolutely trust your Bible. *The fact that we can clearly discern that the Gospel of Mark ends at Mark 16:8 is actually a strong argument in favor of the Bible's reliability.* This should increase our confidence in Scripture all the more.

We don't have the original "autographs" of any book of the Bible—that is, the first copies that the biblical authors themselves wrote. These have been lost in history. However, *the inspired text* they wrote has been **transmitted** to us by numerous carefully preserved copies (manuscripts). In God's grace and providence, faithful Christian scribes copied and preserved the text of Scripture. Through their labor, God ensured the transmission of the biblical text to us in the form of **manuscripts**.

As evangelical Christians, we shouldn't be anxious or nervous about passages like the end of Mark's Gospel, where there is a question about the text. Instead, we can think and speak honestly and clearly about the evidence and come to clear conclusions. We can confidently and accurately reconstruct the original text of the Bible from the manuscript copies through which the text was transmitted.

In the science of manuscript studies and textual criticism, which is the established method for reconstructing the original text of documents from the ancient world, two factors are the most significant: (1) the number of manuscript copies available, and (2) the length of time between the original writing and the first available manuscript. The more manuscripts we have, the more reliably we can reconstruct the original text. The shorter the time period between the original and the first copies, the more confident we can be in the text's reliability.

¹ I want to acknowledge my indebtedness in this section to the excellent book by Greg Gilbert, *Why Trust the Bible?* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015. The data and the examples have been adapted from Gilbert.

With that in mind, look at this comparison between the text of the New Testament and other ancient documents:

Author	Approximate Time Span Between Original & Copy	Number of Copies
Plato	1200 yrs	7
Herodotus	1300 yrs	8
Caesar	1000 yrs	10
Tacitus	1000 yrs	20
Aristotle	1400 yrs	49
Homer (Iliad)	500 yrs	643
New Testament	Within decades to about a century for the earliest fragments	5800+ Greek manuscripts

When ancient translations and quotations by the Church Fathers are included, the textual witnesses to the New Testament text number well over *20,000*.

Truly, the Bible has ***no parallel*** in the ancient world in terms of the number of witnesses and the wealth of manuscript evidence for its text.

At times, I've illustrated it this way: If you stacked the surviving manuscripts of most classical authors, you'd have only a modest pile, in many cases no more than knee-high. But if you stacked the surviving manuscripts attesting to the text of the New Testament, you'd have a tower as high as the Burj Khalifa. No ancient book is even close in terms of textual attestation.

Sometimes, Bible skeptics or non-Christians make the misleading claim that there are over 400,000 variants between the various copies of the New Testament. Four points may be made in response:

- First, if we consider the fact that these 400,000 variants are spread out across over 25,000 manuscripts, ancient translations, and ancient quotations of the Bible, it only amounts to about 16 variants per manuscript.
- Second, the way these "400,000 variants" are counted is as follows: if one manuscript says "the Lord Jesus" and ten others say "the Lord Jesus Christ" in the same place, then all eleven count as "variants."
- Third, most variants are concentrated and clustered in the same places, rather than being spread throughout the New Testament.

- Fourth, more than 99% of all variants are insignificant and do not affect the meaning of the text. In most cases, we can quickly explain how a variant arose during copying and easily reconstruct the original text. For example, consider these modern “scribal errors” (i.e., typos) and see if you can figure out the original text:
 - letters that looked similar might be switched for another;
 - one word might be substituted for another word that sounded the same;
 - words might be skipped
 - words or letters might be doubled
 - spelling conventions may vary – color / colour, check / cheque.
- The remaining 1% of variants *are* significant, but they don’t affect any key doctrine of the Christian faith!

Among these 1% of “significant” variants are the ending of the Gospel of Mark (Mark 16:9–20) and the story of the woman caught in adultery in John’s Gospel (John 7:53–8:11). In both these cases, by applying the principles of textual criticism and contextual and linguistic analysis, we can ascertain with a high degree of certainty that these portions of text were added later to the Gospel.

With that confidence in the reliability of Scripture in mind, now let’s proceed to the second question.

Why Mark’s Gospel Ends at Mark 16:8

Question 2: Why do you think that Mark’s Gospel ends at Mark 16:8 and that verses 9–20 are not original?

The three arguments that most strongly persuade me that the Gospel of Mark ends at verse 8 are as follows:

1. Manuscript Evidence

Our earliest and best manuscripts of the New Testament do not contain Mark 16:9–20. This includes Codex Sinaiticus, which is the earliest complete copy of the New Testament that we have, dating back to the mid-4th century (AD 325–360). Codex Sinaiticus ends the Gospel of Mark clearly at verse 8, with a clear line, an end notation giving the Gospel’s name (“The Gospel According to Mark”), and a blank column after it.²

² You can view a digitized version of this manuscript, Codex Sinaiticus, online for free at: www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/manuscript.aspx

Codex Vaticanus, another highly important, very early manuscript containing the Gospel of Mark, also does not contain verses 9–20. In this crucial manuscript as well, the Gospel ends at verse 8, with an end notation giving the Gospel’s name and a blank column after it.³

In addition to these crucial early manuscripts, **the earliest manuscripts of translations of the Gospel of Mark into other languages also end at verse 8 and do not contain verses 9–20.** This includes translations of Mark’s Gospel into Latin, Syriac, Sahidic, Palestinian Aramaic, Armenian, and Georgian, all of which do not contain verses 9–20.

It is true that the longer ending (vv. 9–20) is present in the majority of manuscripts (~95%). However, in determining what the original text is, we shouldn’t just count the number of manuscripts, but also examine the *quality* and *date* of the manuscripts being considered. The larger number of manuscripts agreeing could simply indicate that they all came from the same (later) copy. It doesn’t mean that they tell us what the original is.

We should also note that many of the copies that include verses 9–20 also include notations that indicate uncertainty about whether the passage is original. For example, several of the copies that include verses 9–20 also have a note after verse 8 that says, “The End. In some copies the Gospel writer ended here, but in many this also was found,” before including verses 9–20 (this is similar to the notation and brackets we see in our English Bible text for this passage).

When this evidence is considered cumulatively, it means that the shorter ending of Mark’s Gospel, which ends at verse 8, has the strongest support in the earliest and best manuscripts and versions with a wide geographic spread, most likely indicating that it is original.

Moreover, when Bible scholars do the work of textual criticism to reconstruct the original text based on manuscript copies, a key aspect in determining the original is asking which reading is easier to explain logically.

For a simple example, consider the following two versions of a sentence that might be found in two different copies of a handwritten note:

We gathered for worship at the church today.

We gathered for for worship at the church today.

³ You can view a digitized version of Codex Vaticanus online for free at: digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.gr.1209

By looking at these, we might deduce that the first version of the sentence is original and that the second version arose from a copyist's error ("typo") by copying the word "for" twice.

Similarly, scholars of textual criticism use a number of logical rules to determine which version represents the original text. In the case of Mark's Gospel, it is highly unlikely, and nearly impossible, that a scribe copying the text would look at verses 9–20 in the original before him and decide to omit them, ending the Gospel at verse 8. It is hard to imagine any reason why a scribe would make such an omission.

On the other hand, it is quite easy to imagine that later Christians, looking at the surprising and unresolved way that the Gospel ends at verse 8, decided to add some material by summarizing details from the other Gospels and the book of Acts to give the Gospel of Mark what they felt would be a more fitting conclusion.

This idea is further supported by the fact that a few other manuscripts also add a couple of other endings, different from verses 9–20, to the Gospel of Mark.

Therefore, logical analysis of the manuscript evidence also strongly points in the direction of the shorter ending being the original ending that Mark wrote. The longer ending (vv. 9–20) was added much later by well-meaning Christians in an attempt to round off Mark's surprising ending.

Perhaps you're wondering how these verses, if they were not original to Mark, made their way into our Bibles. The answer is that somewhere around the fifth century, the longer ending began to gain greater favor in the manuscript tradition. Although verses 9–20 were already in circulation before that, their authenticity was disputed. Around the fifth century, Victor of Antioch published a highly influential commentary on Mark. Victor acknowledged that "very many copies" of Mark ended at verse 8, but concluded that the manuscripts containing verses 9–20 were more accurate. Probably through this commentary's influence, verses 9–20 became more firmly established in the later manuscript tradition.⁴ These later manuscripts formed the basis for many printed editions of the Greek New Testament and thus found their way into our modern Bibles. However, with the discovery of more ancient manuscripts over the past two hundred years, it has become clear that verses 9–20 do not belong to the original text of Mark.

⁴ Daniel B. Wallace, "Mark 16:8 as the Conclusion of the Second Gospel," in *Perspectives on the Ending of Mark: Four Views*, ed. David Alan Black (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 30–31.

2. Testimony of the Early Church Fathers

In addition to the manuscript evidence, it's also important for us to consider the testimony of the early Church Fathers. Two of the most important and significant Church Fathers with respect to the text of the Bible, **Eusebius of Caesarea** (ca. AD 260–339) and **Jerome** (ca. AD 342–420), both **attest to the shorter ending of Mark as being original**.

Eusebius was a historian of the early church. His testimony is enormously significant because he was commissioned by the Emperor Constantine and had great access to manuscripts of Scripture in the East, including a massive and critically important library in Caesarea that housed numerous manuscripts. Concerning the ending of Mark, Eusebius wrote:

“The accurate copies conclude the story according to Mark in the words ... ‘they were afraid,’ because in this way the Gospel according to Mark is ended in nearly all the copies” (*Quaestiones ad Marinum* I.1).

Jerome was one of the most important textual scholars in the ancient world. Not only was he a keen student of the text, but he was also responsible for the Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible. Jerome therefore had access to scores of manuscripts in the West because he was commissioned by the Bishop of Rome to create the Latin Vulgate translation. Jerome says concerning the ending of Mark:

[The longer ending is found in] “scarcely any copies of the Gospel—almost all the Greek codices being without this passage.” (*Epistle* 120.3 [To Hedibia]).

These testimonies are extremely important because they come from two of the most significant scholars of the biblical text in the early church. They had access to more biblical manuscripts than almost anyone else in their day. Moreover, they operated in two different centers of Christianity, representing a wide geographical spread across East and West.

3. Internal Evidence

The internal evidence of the Gospel of Mark also strongly supports the shorter ending at verse 8. Over the past two years I have carefully translated and studied the Gospel of Mark in Greek in preparation for preaching through it. Moreover, this is not my first time reading through this Gospel in Greek. I did so carefully in a class on the Gospel of Mark as a seminary student, and I have done so on multiple occasions since then.

I have grown familiar with the style, language, and vocabulary of this beloved Gospel writer. As I read verses 9–20 in the original language, it is very clear to me that these verses come from a different author than the man who wrote the rest of the Gospel.

Daniel Wallace, who serves as Professor of New Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary and founder of the Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts, is one of the most respected conservative evangelical scholars of Greek grammar and New Testament textual criticism today. He notes concerning the longer ending of Mark's Gospel:

“There is not a single passage in Mark 1:1–16:8 comparable to the stylistic, grammatical, and lexical anomalies that we find clustered in vv. 9–20.”⁵

Although reading the passage in English tends to smooth out these differences, the original Greek text makes them very clear.

Not only are the language and style of verses 9–20 uncharacteristic of Mark the Gospel writer, but there are also some unusual contextual features that indicate that these verses come from another source. For example:

- Mark 16:2 already gives a time marker at the beginning of the chapter, “very early on the first day of the week.” This fits with the time markers that have preceded it throughout the previous chapters (14:1; 14:12; 14:17; 15:1; 15:25; 15:33; 15:42). In none of these do we have the same time marker repeated twice. But Mark 16:9 has an additional time marker giving the same time already recorded in 16:2, a deviation from Mark's style indicating that this section most likely was added later.
- Mary Magdalene, who was already introduced in 15:40, 15:47, and 16:1, is again introduced in 16:9, this time as if she is being introduced for the first time.
- Mark 14:28 and Mark 16:7 predict a meeting with the risen Jesus in Galilee, but no such Galilean rendezvous takes place in Mark 16:9–20.
- The content of verses 9–20 seems to be a summary of Jesus's resurrection appearances and the story of the early church drawn from the other Gospels and the book of Acts.

One of the common arguments in favor of the longer ending (vv. 9–20) is that it is highly unusual for Mark to end his Gospel with the Greek word *gar* (“for”), and especially for it to end in such an abrupt and open-ended way at verse 8. This is a fair observation. However, scholars have observed that although such an ending is

⁵ Daniel B. Wallace, “Mark 16:8 as the Conclusion of the Second Gospel,” in *Perspectives on the Ending of Mark: Four Views*, ed. David Alan Black (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 30–31.

unusual, it is not unprecedented—other works of Classical Greek and Jewish literature end in an open-ended way, and we also have an example of a significant Classical Greek philosophical treatise that ends with the word *gar*.⁶ Moreover, we have a biblical example of such an ending in the Old Testament: the book of Jonah ends on a cliffhanger with God’s question to Jonah! Therefore, while Mark’s ending at verse 8 is surprising, it is certainly not so unusual that we should conclude that the original Gospel continued beyond verse 8. In fact, **this ending fits perfectly with Mark’s themes of irony, fearful and failing disciples, and the call to faith.**

Conclusion

Each of these arguments by itself is weighty, but cumulatively, ***the evidence is overwhelming***. For these reasons, it is the widespread consensus view among most Bible-believing conservative evangelical scholars and pastors that Mark 16:9–20 is not original to the Gospel writer Mark.

Instead, Mark ended his Gospel at verse 8 with a surprising and ironic ending, in which the theme of irony and failed disciples gripped by fear is repeated one more time. Verses 9–20 were added much later by well-meaning Christians as a summary ending to round out the abrupt and surprising ending written by Mark himself. Hence, **verses 9–20 are not the inspired Word of God and should not be treated as such.** Rather, we should treat these verses like any other non-inspired writing from early church history. They give us a helpful historical glimpse into how early Christians summarized the resurrection appearances of Jesus and the early advance of the gospel. But these words are not inspired, and therefore not authoritative and certainly not “without error.”

Beloved brothers and sisters, our ability to accurately and confidently reconstruct the original text of Scripture should bolster our confidence in the reliability and trustworthiness of the Word of God. You can trust your Bible, and you can trust the sovereign, majestic, and gracious God who has revealed Himself to us in the Bible and has providentially preserved His Word for us!

*“The words of the LORD are pure words,
like silver refined in a furnace on the ground,
purified seven times.” (Psalm 12:6)*

⁶ Daniel B. Wallace provides a helpful discussion in “Mark 16:8 as the Conclusion of the Second Gospel,” in *Perspectives on the Ending of Mark: Four Views*, ed. David Alan Black (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 38–42.

Questions?

If you have questions about anything in this article, we would love to discuss them with you. Please email us at pastors@eccad.org.

Recommended Resources on the Reliability of the Bible:

To listen to Pastor Aubrey's class on the Reliability of the Bible see the following link:

go.eccad.org/reliabilityofthebible



For further reading, we also highly recommend:

Greg Gilbert, *Why Trust the Bible?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), available in our church bookstore.