

Question:

Does [Mark 16:9-20](#) really belong in our Bibles?

Answer:

The following is an excellent review of the question. I also placed some interesting quotes from various reference works at the end. For details on the question, see [The Authenticity of Mark 16:9-20](#) by Jim Snapp.

Is Mark 16:9-20 Spurious or Genuine?

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In a recent, late-night television interview of a snake handling preacher from East Tennessee, the text of [Mark 16:9-20](#) was attacked as being spurious. This was an effort to try to offset the teaching in [Mark 16:18](#), "They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them" The attack on the genuineness of the passage is reminiscent of sectarian arguments in an effort to offset the teaching on baptism being essential to salvation in verse 16. Even if it could be shown that this portion of Mark's Gospel is spurious, it would help neither those who want to offset [Mark 16:18](#) nor those who wish to offset [Mark 16:16](#). There are other passages that teach that signs and miracles followed the early Christians to confirm the word, just as there are other passages which teach that baptism is essential to salvation. Neither is it necessary to claim that [Mark 16:9-20](#) is spurious in an effort to offset the practice of handling snakes, drinking poison, etc., as applying to Christians today. There are other passages which teach that the miraculous gifts of the spirit were to cease, fail and vanish away (cf. [1 Cor. 13:8](#)). History also confirms that the miraculous signs did cease. It was interesting to note that when a caller pointed out that these miraculous signs were to cease, fail and vanish away, that the host of the show did not give the preacher an opportunity to make a reply.

In regard to the inspiration of [Mark 16:9-20](#), it needs to be first pointed out that the authenticity of this passage (i.e. the historical accuracy and correctness of its teaching) has never been questioned by scholars. The only question that has been raised as to its genuineness pertains to whether or not it was written by Mark and whether it should be considered a part of Mark's original manuscript. Since the accuracy and correctness of the teaching cannot be successfully denied, for the passage to be attached to the close of Mark's Gospel does not render it any less valuable even though some other Apostle or inspired writer should have been its author.

The basis of the spurious argument is twofold. First, it is claimed to be spurious because the passage is omitted from the Vatican and the Sinaitic Manuscripts. These being two of the older known manuscripts (the Sinaitic dating in the fourth century, around 340 A.D.; the Vatican manuscript also dating in the fourth century, probably around 350 A.D., some think as early as 325 A.D.) and since [Mark 16:9-20](#) is omitted, it is argued that the passage was not a part of Mark's Gospel. Jerome and some fourth century writers are also quoted to say that the passage was absent in some of the Greek copies of their day. Second, it is said that there are words and phrases found in [Mark 16:9-20](#) that are not found in the rest of Mark's Gospel. From this it is concluded by some that this passage was written by someone other than Mark. A thorough examination of these arguments, however, will not only show that the passage is authentic in all its details, but will also show that there is no real reason to doubt that it was also written by Mark.

The genuineness of [Mark 16:9-20](#) may be seen from the following:

1. The facts stated in [Mark 16:9-20](#) are mentioned in the Gospels (cf. [Luke 8:2](#); [John 20:1-8](#), etc.) and the promise concerning the signs was fully verified by miracles practiced by the Apostles and Christians as listed in the book of Acts. [Hebrews 2:4](#) and other passages further confirm that such signs did follow the believers.
2. [Mark 16:9-20](#) is found in nearly all of the other Ancient Manuscripts. These include the Alexandrian (dated around 450 A.D.) which is next to the Vatican in accuracy and importance.
3. Justin Martyr quoted from [Mark 16:9-20](#) about A. D. 160. Among other second century writers quoting this passage are Irenaeus and Tatian. It was also quoted by Hippolytus and Dionysius of Alexandria in the third century. All of these lived and wrote from one hundred to two hundred years earlier than the earliest existing manuscript was written or before Jerome indicated that the passage was not found in some of the Greek manuscripts of his day. The words of Irenaeus indicate that the passage was part of the Gospel of Mark in the second century and that Mark was regarded as its author. He stated, "But Mark, in the end of his Gospel, says; and the Lord Jesus, after that he had spoken to them was received up into heaven, and sat at the right hand of God." It is therefore apparent that this passage was a part of the Gospel of Mark and was written by Mark.
4. It is interesting to note that all of the ancient versions of the New Testament contain [Mark 16:9-20](#). This of necessity emphasizes that the passage was a part of the Greek text from which these translations were made. Among these versions are the Peshito Syriac, the Old Italic, the Sahidic and the Coptic. All of these existed long before the Vatican and the Sinaitic Manuscripts and long before Jerome. It is altogether unreasonable to argue that since it was omitted from these two manuscripts that it is spurious since all of the Ancient Versions, including those that existed long before these two manuscripts, included it as a part of the text of Mark's Gospel.
5. Further it seems highly improbable that Mark would have so abruptly closed his Gospel at the end of verse 8. The first eight verses of Mark 16 discuss the resurrection of Christ. Verses 9-11 discuss the appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene after his resurrection. Verses 12-13 discuss the Lord's appearance to two disciples on the way to Emmaus (cf. [Luke 24:13-35](#)). Verses 14-18 discuss the appearance of Jesus to the eleven, state the commission which Jesus gave the disciples to preach the gospel state the conditions of salvation, and promise signs for confirming the Word as being the truth

of God. Verses 19-20 of Mark 16 speak of the ascension of Christ and affirm that the Lord confirmed their word with signs as he had promised. What more logical way would there have been for Mark to have brought his Gospel to a close.

6. The same two manuscripts that omit [Mark 16:9-20](#) also omit other passages of scripture. Notably among these are [John 7:53-8:11](#). These same verses are omitted in both manuscripts. Yet those who argue that [Mark 16:9-20](#) is spurious because both manuscripts omit these verses, never argue that [John 7:53-8:11](#) is spurious. When it is remembered that the Monks were using the pages of the Sinaitic Manuscript to light the Monastery fires when Dr. Constantine Tischendorf found them in the "Monastery of St. Catherine at Mt. Sinai" in 1844, there seems to be a rather rational explanation as to why this and other passages were not found to be a part of the Manuscript.
7. The forty-seven translators of the Authorized Version, or the King James translation put [Mark 16:9-20](#) in the text. Further the one hundred and one translators of the American Standard Version put [Mark 16:9-20](#) in the text. Dr. Phillip Schaff, who served as president of the American Revision Committee said of [Mark 16:9-20](#), "The section is found in most of the Uncial and in all the existing Greek and Syriac lectionaries as far as examined; and Irenaeus, who is a much older witness than any of our existing Manuscripts, quotes verse 19 as a part of the Gospel of Mark. A strong intrinsic argument for the genuineness is also derived from the extreme improbability (we may say impossibility) that the evangelist should have intentionally closed his Gospel with 'for they were afraid' " (Companion to the Greek New Testament, page 190). Alexander Roberts, also an imminent member of the American Revision Committee said, with emphasis, that the author of [Mark 16:9-20](#) was surely "one who belonged to the circle of apostles," and that it "is inserted, without the least misgiving, as an appendix to that gospel in the Revised Version" (Companion to the English New Testament, page 63).

We have noted that some attempt to argue that [Mark 16:9-20](#) is spurious and was not written by Mark since there are words and phrases found in these last twelve verses of Mark 16 that are not found in the rest of Mark's Gospel. It has been observed that there are no less than seventeen words and phrases in this passage that are not used elsewhere by Mark. In response to this argument, J. W. McGarvey observed that Prof. John A. Broadus, a Baptist of Greenville, S.C., published in an article in the Baptist Quarterly for 1869, a list of exactly seventeen words and phrases used by Mark in the twelve verses immediately preceding [Mark 16:9-20](#) that are used nowhere else by Mark. Yet critics of [Mark 16:9-20](#) never question the authorship or genuineness of these twelve verses. McGarvey emphasized that the fact that the same argument could be made against the preceding twelve verses "is at once a surprising fact and a startling exposure of the fragile foundation on which this famous critical structure has been erected. It shows that the same use of the Greek Concordance which led to the origin of this criticism, if pushed a little farther, would have smothered it in its birth, and would have saved some distinguished critics from being detected in a flimsy though pretentious fallacy" (Commentary on Mark, page 380). McGarvey applied the same test to the last twelve verses of the Gospel of Luke and found that there are nine words found in these verses which are used by Luke nowhere else in his gospel. Not only so, but four of these words are found nowhere else in the New Testament. However, none of the critics of [Mark 16:9-20](#) ever question the authorship or genuineness of authorship of [Luke 24:42-53](#). Other examples of this kind could probably be found in the New Testament. These are

sufficient however, to show that this reasoning on the part of the critics is shallow sophistry. That which is spurious is their argument, not the text of [Mark 16:9-20](#). It is evident, therefore, that the voice of scholarship negates the spurious claim. There is absolutely no reasonable basis to claim that [Mark 16:9-20](#) is anything other than the inspired word of God and that it was written by Mark as a part of his Gospel.

Some Bible scholars doubt the authenticity of 16:9-20, insisting that Mark did not write this portion. These verses are not found in two early manuscripts, the Vatican Codex and the Sinaitic Codex. However, they are found in the overwhelming majority of early manuscripts. Those who reject verses 9-20 have attempted to support their opinion by a process called hapax legomena, the citing of some terms found here and not elsewhere in the Gospel. It is one of the least scientific or scholarly methods used to criticize authorship. The futility of such a process may be seen easily by applying it to an equal part of the writings of most any erudite scholar. Some of the same ones who reject these verses also say that Paul did not write Ephesians because they have found 36 words in that epistle, not found elsewhere in Paul's writings.

The authenticity of these verses (16:9-20) should not be doubted: (1) They are found in nearly all Greek manuscripts and have been accepted in the church from the Second Century A.D. (2) Nothing in these verses contradicts anything in the rest of the Scriptures

The Complete Biblical Library Study Bible, Mark, Ralph W. Harris Executive editor, 1986,

While *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* takes the view that the ending of Mark is doubtful, it is interesting to note that they have this to say, "They are certainly very early, perhaps as early as 100 AD, and have the support of ACDXrdz, all late unicals, all cursives, most VSS and Fathers, and were known to the scribes of (aleph) and B, who, however, do not accept them."

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