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CHAPTER 05

The Ending of Mark: A Response to the Essays

DARRELL L. BOCK

The essays in this book reveal the variety of views on the ending of Mark along with a few additional topics, showing the complexity of the issue. My simple responsibility is to interact with all of these options, to sort through them in reaction. My response has five sections: (1) observations about method, (2) external evidence, (3) internal evidence, (4) other raised issues, and (5) conclusion. You deserve to know that my view on this issue is that I hold to the shorter ending of Mark as original, and that the next most likely option is that the original end went missing very early on. Thus I see the longer ending as original as being unlikely, as I do also the idea that Mark added that ending later. My response will lay out the reasons for these conclusions, but first I want to note what all the essays agree on, because that is an important starting point. Then I will turn to make some crucial observations about methods, claims, and rhetoric in debating views.

Each of the contributors agrees on these points:

1. The variants we possess for the short and longer ending of Mark are both very old. This is one of the reasons we have the discussion that we do.

2. What is taught in the longer ending *for the most part* is taught elsewhere in the New Testament. This observation is important because it means the presence or absence of this text does not impact the core of Christian teaching at all. The best I can tell, only the issue of snake handling and drinking poison is at stake and that could be inferred from other texts as well (such as the incident with Paul in Acts 28).
3. Everyone desires to work with hard evidence. Maurice Robinson's paper opens with a quotation from Kenneth Kitchen that argues for working with evidence, not theories. Kitchen says, "Priority must always be given tangible, objective data, and to external evidence, over subjective theory or speculative opinions. Facts must control theory, not vice versa." I think all of the presenters would affirm this. The only question might be whether internal evidence also can be tangible, a point important to Mark 16 because each side appeals to a degree to internal evidence by either pointing out the unsatisfactory nature of the short ending or by asking if one can explain the shorter ending's appearance as secondary if the long one originally existed. Alas, here is one of our forks in the road and it is internal, not external in nature. This leads to the issue of method and some opening observations that such a debate and difference requires.

Observations about Method

It is here we need to begin our response in substance because sometimes we are not clear about where the evidence starts and stops (forming the dots), and where "connecting the dots" (i.e., interpreting and making judgments) begins. Sometimes we differ on what are dots and what are dot connectors. In addition, sometimes the evidence brings us to forks in the road. Depending on which route we take, our resulting view may well change. The decision about those forks almost always involves judgments about how to best put the evidence together (thus they are dot connectors, not dots), but they themselves are often confused with the hard facts. Three such potential forks in this discussion on Mark's ending are

one's view of the Byzantine family of texts, one's take on the synoptic problem, and how one weighs internal versus external evidence (in fact, if internal evidence is really hard evidence at all). These key forks impact the approach to this question at a macro-level and involve factors pulled in from evidence outside of what we deal with in thinking only about Mark's ending. The point of this macro-observation is that we all reconstruct. Everyone is in the business of connecting the dots. Different views result from people who with all sincerity connect the dots in different ways leading to different views.

This leads to method and rhetoric. Here a quotation from Wilbur Pickering that appears in Dan Wallace's paper offers a warning about how to have such discussions and how not to proceed:

Are we to say that God was unable to protect the text of Mark or that He just couldn't be bothered? I see no alternative—either He didn't care or He was helpless. And either option is fatal to the claim that Mark's Gospel is "God-breathed" . . . if God was powerless to protect His Word then He wouldn't really be God and it wouldn't make all that much difference what He said. . . . If God permitted the original ending of Mark to be lost then in fact we do not have an inspired text.¹

Statements like this are unfair to the discussion by prejudging it with *a priori* rhetoric. I have a way I must conceive of God as acting and anything else is an affront to one's understanding of God, representing a denial of the deity. Note the oppositional choice. One is either for God, inspiration, and a God-breathed book conceived of as presented or else one has a view that God does not care, is helpless, is unable to protect the text, is powerless, is not God and what he or she says does not matter. It is this kind of unnuanced, oppositional thinking about such issues that does not advance discussion. Fortunately that tone is not found in these essays, but I mention it because all too often in looking at such a question this type of opposition is the approach.

Such statements also have a real danger of creating a brittle fundamentalism, where if one view changes on an issue like this an entire paradigm so shatters that one is likely to adopt a view

1. W. Pickering, "Mark 16:9–20 and the Doctrine of Inspiration" (a paper circulated to the Majority Text Society, September, 1988 and noted in Dan Wallace's essay).

that radically opposes Christianity. One need only look at the opening chapter of Craig Evans' *Fabricating Jesus* to see the impact of people who were given a narrow set of options and were not given room to explore with nuance such questions.

One more point needs to be made as prolegomena. Although our various presenters have perspectives on these issues, they hold them not as raw presuppositions, but as tested presuppositions. The question under discussion is which set of tested presuppositions along with the evidence tied to this particular problem forms the most coherent whole. Each view will probably score points here and there; a problem as complex as this one is not easily resolved. If it were straightforward, then it would not likely be a problem! So the issue is trying to resolve who has the most comprehensive solution to our problem, and even that solution may well not be problem free. Any solution to a difficult problem like this one is likely to leave loose ends untied.

Now readers may also have presuppositions, even tested ones. A question all of us must ask is this: If our presuppositions come under enough pressure will we be open enough to the evidence and the variety of ways people have connected it to be willing to change? In addition, one other question might also be worth asking. If I will not change my view because of what I hear or see, will I at least be open to acknowledge the issues are more complex than I might have previously appreciated? The second question may well be as important as the first.

I have started here to issue a warning of sorts, not to make more of this problem than is present. This warning has two requirements:

1. We must be open to the text and its history while avoiding prejudgments about what the outcome should be. This is why we discuss external and internal evidence to try to understand what has happened that has created a situation where two readings so old have emerged.
2. We should beware of a brittle fundamentalism that sets up this kind of a question in such a way that when it breaks, it shatters into a thousand pieces like a broken windshield. "Either/or" thinking often plagues both conservatives and liberals in a question like this, leaving out some "both/and options" that also could well be in play. It is crucial

to remind ourselves that the way we think the text should work is not necessarily the way it is. So what we think inspiration requires may not equal the way inspiration works. To see how it works, we must also consider and assess the phenomena of the text, all the while noting that everyone reconstructs to connect the dots.

External Evidence

There is an adage when it comes to textual criticism that manuscripts are not to be counted but weighed. Put in clearer terms, the issue is not how many manuscripts we have but where and especially when we have them. This is because fully 85% of the manuscripts we have come from the eleventh century and beyond.² So we need to pay attention to when manuscripts appear with evidence. The other essays have detailed that evidence, but the idea that discussion for the shorter ending is hypnotized by Aleph and B is misleading. There exists significant corroborative evidence that not only were both endings old, but that a significant variety of witnesses show that the shorter ending was widespread in the earliest period.

A second key point is that in this case the manuscript evidence must move beyond Greek manuscripts to other versions and to the church fathers. This textual problem is unlike most textual issues where words, word order, or phrases are in view. Here we have whole sets of verses missing. This means that we do not have the usual problems of dealing with translation philosophy or paraphrasing that come with those other types of textual problems. Evidence for the presence or absence of units containing many verses is easier to find. So in this case, the evidence of the fathers is less ambiguous and, as a result, much more significant.

So the external evidence is that when it comes to Greek manuscripts we have the two major Alexandrian full manuscripts (Aleph, B) attesting to the shorter ending. We also have 304.

Geographic distribution is important when we turn to the versional evidence. There is yet another ending present, which gives evidence that vv. 9–20 was lacking. It is known as the *Intermediate Ending* and reads, “but they reported briefly to Peter and those with

2. David Trobisch, *Paul's Letter Collection* (Bolivar, MS: Quiet Waters Publications, 2001), 4.

him all they had been told. And after this Jesus himself sent out by means of them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.” The short reading (ending at v. 8) is present in the Armenian (Caesarean or early Byzantine) and Georgian (a translation of the Armenian) versions, as well as one wing of the Syriac, the Old Syriac Sinaitic (Western). Robinson argues that this is offset by its presence in the Syriac Curetonian. This version is especially difficult to treat because its early history is mediated through the Diatessaron. The Curetonian, however, is probably a later edition.³ The old Latin *k* also lacks the ending, offering the intermediate addition to the short ending, noted above. In addition, the earliest Byzantine lectionaries lack the longer ending, as Elliott has pointed out, noting the longer ending starts to appear in the eighth century. So we are dealing with more than Aleph and B. Now it is true the longer ending also has evidence in this period, even dominating evidence as we get into later periods, but that evidence is more evenly divided as we get earlier.

The fathers, in my judgment, are extremely important for this case. Perhaps the two fathers most concerned to give the “state of the discussion” in their time when it came to manuscripts were Eusebius and Jerome. Both note that the bulk of Greek manuscripts they were aware of did not possess the longer ending, as both Wallace and Robinson note. This is important evidence dating back to the fourth and early fifth centuries. The window back to this period is not tendentious, as there was no clear reason for Eusebius to make such a point if the longer ending were there, so appeals to rhetoric or to exposure to a part of the actual evidence, though worth noting and possible, do not really explain the point. One has to explain why Eusebius and Jerome would cast doubt on an ending that supplies what many sense the short ending lacks, adequate testimony to the Resurrection.⁴ Irenaeus was the first to give clear evidence for the

3. Kurt and Barbara Aland, *Der Text des Neuen Testaments* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1982), 202. Wallace cites Metzger-Ehrman for the same point. The English translation of this edition is a revised version from 1989. Its point is also the same.

4. Surely this omission would be of far more concern than whether the longer ending refers to a charismatic dimension of signs, which the NT is comfortable attesting to elsewhere or in the mention of snake handling, which Acts 28 shows was seen as taking place at least in the apostolic period. As for the remarks about the incomplete textual pool, this point is true but does not cancel out the fact that Eusebius and Jerome seem to indicate that the textual evidence they have (and they are outside of Egypt) indicates that most texts lack such a reading. Even if rhetoric or hyperbole are present, they still express

longer reading among the fathers and ten fathers from the second to fifth centuries cited the text, at least from portions of vv. 15–20. The fifth- to sixth-century father Victor of Antioch notes the division among manuscripts at that time giving the same description of “very many manuscripts” to each reading.

This evidence, as broad as it is, has a corollary. It challenges efforts to dismiss the short reading by arguing there are other locales where Aleph and B are rejected as giving the original reading. This claim ends up ignoring the versional and patristic evidence that clearly indicates this omission is early.⁵

Our point is not to claim that the longer ending lacks support—it clearly also has ancient support, as Robinson’s contribution to this volume shows. Nonetheless, our point is that external evidence is divided here and the farther backward we travel the weaker the evidence is for the longer ending.

One other point about the external evidence also needs noting. It is that the gap in B at the end of Mark cannot be said to leave space for the longer ending even as this manuscript attests to the short ending. Vaticanus (B) leaves no text critical umlauts in the margin to point to a textual variant here. This is the scribe’s normal way to signal such a point. Elliott’s appeal to the impact of the Western order on the question, namely that the fourfold Gospel collection ended in this collection with Mark and that a non-Resurrection declaration at the end of such a unit might have led to an ending being supplied is also possible for some of these texts. So not much can be made of this, especially the claim that the space gives room for

that the evidence Eusebius and Jerome were aware of points to the preponderance of the short reading. It is not clear to me why Jerome is merely seen as repeating Eusebius. He seems to have been very aware of the manuscript status of the time. Wallace’s essay cites the Eusebian text. He also notes that Jerome makes points Eusebius does not; namely, he speaks only of Greek manuscripts largely lacking the longer ending. He also notes that Jerome knows of the Freer Logion ending at the end of v. 14 as shown in W, indicating he had worked with manuscripts at the end of Mark.

5. I have not noted the lack of citation of this material from many of the earliest fathers and apologists, especially Origen and Clement of Alexandria, because it is hard to know what to make of such silence. However, I need to express my doubts about the claim that Justin Martyr cites Mark 16:20 in *Apology* 1.45. That section of Justin is summarizing vast amounts of material and the three word phrase appealed to as evidence is in a distinct word order and the most unusual term used, πανταχοῦ, is more common in Luke than in Mark, where 16:20 is the only place it is used. Given that Acts shows the gospel as going out everywhere, this looks like a summary of information from readily available material using a term common to Luke and Acts. Justin is also quite clear when citing the Gospels, often calling them apostolic memoirs when he does so.

such. At the best such an ending would have to have been squeezed in, which makes this not the most likely suggestion. Even more, there are no other gaps in B that indicate textual variation. Three other such gaps do not indicate this conclusion so why argue that is the point here?

So that is a summary response on external evidence. It shows that early on both readings existed—on that everyone agrees. In fact, the farther back one goes into the manuscript evidence we possess, the stronger the case is for the short reading. But this leaves us with a dilemma. Where do we go from that point? If we do not think internal evidence can take us anywhere concrete, then we are stuck because of the division of the external evidence, which itself is hardly decisive or “objective” in that we have the mix of issues already noted that does not lead to a clear conclusion.

On the other hand, most textual critics see internal evidence as a factor to weigh along with the other evidence. Admittedly such factors require more judgment and belong in the “connect the dots” category versus some of the harder (“dot”) data external evidence gives us, but we should not think that external evidence is free of judgment that involves connecting the dots. We need to consider internal evidence in this case carefully because the external evidence is divided and because internal issues sometimes can clarify the discussion.⁶

Internal Evidence

Internal evidence is crucial not because it is more subjective, but because it raises excellent questions about how we respond to Mark, the best evidence of which is the very need to discuss whether Mark 16:8 gives an adequate ending to this Gospel. Two key questions dominate this section. First, why would someone create an ending at 16:8, if vv. 9–20 were original? In addition, why does external evidence persist, if we had vv. 9–20 at the start? Or to ask it

6. In saying this, I may be seen as identifying with reasoned eclecticism as a text critical method—and I do generally work this way on a case by case basis giving weight to what appears to be the most compelling combination of evidence and likelihood (recognizing I am connecting dots like everyone else). However, in this case I would argue that all of us are brought to this point because of the divided nature of our early external evidence.

another way, why do we have multiple versions of the ending of Mark?

One idea that has been popular over time is to argue that we simply have lost the original ending. This is Elliott's position—and I believe it is the second most likely solution to our question. However, the best I can tell, this view requires several corollaries. First, this ending would have become lost very early on, leaving no traces behind in our extant manuscript tradition. Is that likely? We are not probably speaking then of a loss because of repeated use, but a loss that happened so early no trace of it was left. One can also note that in a roll, which is likely to have been used by original Mark, normally the ending is protected because the outside portion is at the start, much like a VHS tape is rolled back to the start of a movie.⁷ It would almost require that no copies of Mark were made before the ending was lost. Second, given that there is no hard evidence for such an explanation, it is hard to know what to do with something that is certainly possible, but is it likely? The real reason one resorts to such an explanation is that those who hold it find it hard to really believe that Mark ended his Gospel without any Resurrection appearances. So we are back to the very tension that may well be responsible for our situation.

Robinson's essay in good, solid fashion takes on my question directly about how did we get to v. 8, if we had 9–20 originally. The explanation is that a variety of issues might have led to the longer ending being dropped by some, namely, the surface contradictions the text possesses and theological emphases that raise questions, such as the emphasis on signs and on snake handling. However, it must be noted that this explanation is not entirely satisfying. This is because usually when we get such problems it is not entire units that are altered, but the objectionable features are simply corrected in a direction that harmonizes or else the objectionable features only are omitted. Neither of those approaches appears here.

I also find the setup to this discussion in Robinson's piece not very persuasive at all. In the examples appealed to from the later move to a shorter reading at Southeastern's library, we are not dealing at all with a parallel as the custom of using short titles produced

7. The codex became the popular means of transmitting highly regarded Christian texts, but this emerged later than the first century. See Larry Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 43–93.

the short (and humorous) reading leaving a book in Hades. The appeal to a shortened form of poetry is even less apropos, as here we are dealing with the same author handling his own work and engaging in a form of literary play.

Robinson's explanation of a liturgical need to keep the text short is also not convincing. The liturgical unit of Mark 15:43—16:8 is not long (13 verses). So why cut it off at v. 8? Robinson notes another reading involving Luke 24:36–53 with Acts 1:1–12 that runs to almost 30 verses. So length is not an issue here in explaining a cutoff at v. 8. It also is not clear that the original Eusebian canons included the longer ending.

Finally, Robinson's appeal to Markan terminology appearing in the longer ending is also not quite to the point being made in the claim that the longer ending reflects a non-Markan style. Here it is the combination of lexical terms, grammar, and style, especially used in repeated ways in a short space that is the point. This is a quite powerful argument, since cumulative features are the point. This is why additional appeals to structures across the space of the book or supposed chiasms also do not work, especially when the beginning of Jesus' public ministry is said to start in Mark 1:32, not 1:21.

To Robinson's credit, he understands the importance of this issue of being able to explain how the short ending emerged if vv. 9–20 were original and his explanations have a plausibility to them, but in the end, they do not seem as likely as that the reason we have an ending at v. 8 (as well as other alternatives) is that vv. 9–20 were not originally there.

So what are we to make of vv. 9–20? First, Elliott has noted the stylistic, grammatical, lexical issues these verses display that makes one question whether Mark is responsible for these verses. These stylistic points work against the suggestion of Black that Mark was responsible for both the short and longer endings. To that we wish to add, that the section at a macro-level looks like it is mostly made up of a combination of elements from the other Gospel endings plus facts known from Acts. Here is how the elements potentially connect:

Vv. 9–11 Mary Magdalene's role: Matthew 28:9 and John 20
Vv. 12–13: Luke 24:13–35

- V. 14 Role of the Eleven: in all Gospels but closest to Luke 24:36–37
- V. 15 Preach and baptize in the same order as Matthew 28:19
- V. 17 Signs: Acts 2, 10, 19 and Hebrews 2:3–4
- V. 18 Surviving snakes: Acts 28:1–6
- V. 19 Ascension: Luke 24:49–53; Acts 1:9–11
- V. 20 Signs: See also v. 17

The truly new features⁸ include: (1) weeping and mourning over Jesus' death in v. 10, which was common Jewish practice; (2) the idea of the two walking "into a field" or, perhaps better, "into the open country" (The term in question here is ἀγρός, which BDAG notes often means into the countryside as opposed to a city or village, which is exactly what a walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus would involve.⁹); (3) the report of the two being disbelieved; and (4) five sign gifts being specified. So there is not much here that is really unique to this text and all the key teaching themes do appear elsewhere in other canonical books.

All of this raises questions about the alternative explanations, but there still remains the need to explain if it is at all likely for Mark to end in such an open ended manner. If one cannot really explain how v. 8 works at a literary level, then these other options (either the longer ending or a missing text), despite their problems, become more likely. Does a short ending cohere with Mark's setting and purpose? Is it really credible to believe that Mark would leave out Resurrection appearances and have the women silent and fearing at the end of his story, especially when he often states and makes a point of fulfillment as Robinson correctly notes? Moreover, is it the case that a grammatical ending with γάρ is problematic or that such an ending reads Mark more like a postmodern than an ancient?

Fortunately, there is a solid monograph that tackles this question in full. It is J. Lee Magness's *Marking the End: Sense and Absence in*

8. Most of Robinson's claims about the unique features of Mark 16:9–20 are exaggerated. For example, the disciples disbelieve the report of the women in Luke 24:10–12, so that is not unique. Neither is the idea that Mary had a unique encounter with Jesus. Jesus appearing "in another form" is a variation on their not being able to identify him physically at first, for their eyes surely saw something initially. Jesus rebukes the lack of faith in Luke, which is why he opens up the Scripture in 24:44–47. The combination of Jesus' ascension and right hand session is found in Acts 2. The disciples' confirming Jesus' Resurrection summarizes Acts.

9. BDAG, 15. This means that even this point may not be new.

the Gospel of Mark.¹⁰ Magness's volume as well as a few key periodical articles tackle all three of the common objections to an ending at v. 8. The idea of endings of sentences to works with γάρ is tackled by two essays: P. W. van der Horst, "Can a Book End with a ΓΑΡ? A Note on Mark XVI.8"¹¹ and Kelly R. Iverson, "A Further Word on Final Γάρ (Mark 16:8)."¹² Magness's work clearly shows that open-ended accounts are not rare in the ancient world, so that the claim that such readings are modernist or postmodern lacks acquaintance with such ancient examples. Magness's work proceeds from ancient works to the Old Testament then to the New Testament before looking at how Mark works with the motif. Examples of narrative ending with an open ending in the New Testament include how Israel is handled at the end of Acts (if not Paul's fate) and the story of the Prodigal Son.

Magness's case for Mark is that the evangelist has developed themes involving the concepts of fear and silence.¹³ In Mark, silence is not necessarily the function of ignorance or misunderstanding, but of knowledge and awe (see exorcism accounts and remarks about confessing Jesus as Messiah in public). More than that, fear is an appropriate response to the display of divine power. So Magness argues that the silence of the women is not to be seen as absolute and the fear reflects a response to something divine, made clear by observation and instruction. To this I would add that scenes where fear arises because of God's power call for a choice, to either keep one's distance from God or have faith. Mark 5:15 shows a community that asked Jesus to leave their midst after displaying his authority and power in the healing of the demoniac. Mark 4:41 records the fearful disciples asking themselves who Jesus could be after they have witnessed him calming the seas. In Mark 5:36, he tells Jairus not to fear but to believe. In Mark 6:19–20 Herod fails to act against John for a time because the ruler knows John is righteous. In Mark 9:32, Jesus predicts his death and Resurrection, an important point to note in Mark as he does teach the Resurrection in these promises.

10. I cite the Wipf and Stock 2002 edition, published out of Eugene, Oregon. This is a re-release of the 1986 monograph that had the title, *Marking the End: Structure and Suspension in the Ending of Mark's Gospel*.

11. P. W. van der Horst, "Can a Book End with a ΓΑΡ? A Note on Mark XVI.8," *JTS* 23 (1972): 121–24.

12. K. R. Iverson, "A Further Word on Final ΓΑΡ (Mark 16:8)," *CBQ* 68 (2006): 79–94. Iverson argues that sentences ending in γάρ though rare are not as uncommon as one might think and even involve narrative, which had been claimed as lacking such constructions.

13. Magness, *Marking the End*, 98–102.

As a result of this prediction, the disciples fear and fail to ask Jesus any questions. In Mark 10:32, there is fear as the group approaches Jerusalem for the final time. In Mark 11:18, the Jewish leaders fear Jesus and are unable to act against him also being wary of the multitude's attitude toward him (11:32–12:12). So in Mark fear can paralyze or lead into faith. The choice is with the one who fears.

It is here that Mark ends. Mark presents the fact of resurrection on its own. He has affirmed it as promised by God's Word and Jesus' own teaching. So Mark leaves the reader with a choice. The women's initial response was a fear that stunned them—how will today's reader then respond to the evidence? Of course, by the time Mark writes it is clear what the women decided. They believed and proclaimed, or else the church would have never had its gospel message. Here is Mark's point powerfully made. God's act and Word are enough. When one fears at the possibility of resurrection one should not be paralyzed into doubt and inaction, but belief and proclamation. The ending fits with Mark's readers. For Jesus is no longer appearing to people physically. The message calls for faith without a direct sign from beyond.

Mark is not alone in this message. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19–31 has very much the same point. When the now deceased rich man asks for someone to be sent from the dead to his brothers to warn them of how they should respond, the point is made in reply that they have Moses (i.e., the Scripture). When the rich man insists, the reply comes that if one does not believe the Word even a resurrection will not convince someone. The Word and recognition of God's power and promise should be good enough. That also is Mark's powerful close. The reader confronted with resurrection is left with a choice—and has for support the knowledge that ultimately the women and the church after them had faith and proclaimed the truth that Jesus had risen.

There is a powerful corollary in this that should not be missed and was not raised in any of the essays but arises from an issue I want to challenge in David Parker's work, *The Living Text of the Gospels*.¹⁴ He wishes to suggest that Mark's Short Ending may be a more radical ending, lacking appearances because he or others may well have held to a Christianity that did not insist on a physical resurrection. Three key remarks make the point: "Does the tone of the

14. D. Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 145–47.

Long Ending, with its censure of unbelief, even suggest that the lack of resurrection appearances in Mark had led to a claim that belief in them was not necessary to the Christian faith?”¹⁵ He sees Mark as having an ambivalent ending, which is not the case at all, if we have read these themes and their context correctly. For Parker, the Short Ending of Mark provides “no such security” in validating the Resurrection. In fact it does the “reverse, for the women’s *silence* means that, within the story, we have no means of knowing that any of it happened.”¹⁶ Now this is a postmodern reading of Mark, because it makes Mark’s Gospel function without any historical context at all as a kind of free floating literary piece, when in fact it was used (and not rejected) by a church that obviously proclaimed a risen Jesus. Parker’s other remark is about the new book Mark becomes without the Longer Ending: “This new book offers radical theological interpretations which had been wholly stifled by the ecclesiastical pieties of the Intermediate and Longer Endings.” In fact, there is no reason to suggest a book with Mark’s Short Ending opens such doors to alternative readings of Christianity, or especially this Gospel. To do so is to ignore everything about the history of its use in the church, not to mention Jesus’ predictions that Mark sets forth which would be unfulfilled if Parker’s explanation were to hold. So there is no evidence Mark’s reading is as radical as Parker wishes to make it.

In sum, I take the internal evidence to be key. It is more likely that the original existence of the short reading explains why we have the longer reading and the other variant endings of Mark than the other way around. More importantly, a close look at this question caused us to take a close look at Mark and to appreciate the Short Ending for what it was attempting to do, to call people who might fear a claim of resurrection and not embrace it in faith—to take a properly generated fear at the possibility of God’s power and then to do the right thing with it.

Other Issues Raised in the Essays

The essays in this volume have raised many other key points that it would be wrong to ignore. This section is a little like the “matters arising” on a board agenda. These points are not so central

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, 146.

to the particular issue in most cases, but are important enough to note. So I comment on them in turn.

One of the issues we deal with in treating the ending of Mark is that Mark was the least utilized of the four Gospels in the early church. Elliott's treatment of this complicating factor is on target. A primary reason for this is relatively simple—most of Mark is found in Matthew or Luke.¹⁷

The key “matter arising” comes from the outline of canonical development that Black's essay raises. There are numerous key elements here that need interaction.

Black is correct to note that the strongest piece of evidence for Matthew being our first Gospel is the unanimous testimony of the early church. This normally is powerful evidence especially when numerous options exist and the word is as unanimous as this testimony is. Nonetheless, there are features in this remark that give us pause. The key one is that the testimony is fairly consistent that the Matthew being discussed was a Hebrew version. Black suggests that what is present here is a reference to Hebraic style, not language, but that is not how Eusebius sees the situation when he speaks of Hebrew in discussing the tradition (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.16; 5.10.3; 6.25.4). The normal way to translate the terms in question is as Hebrew language. The moment we note we are discussing something in Hebrew, then we are not discussing the Greek Matthew that is in our canonical texts. This feature compromises the deductions made from the Fathers' claims.¹⁸

17. In an aside, I would note, however, that the idea that Mark 1:1–3 is also not original to Mark is one I do not find likely. The different handling of John the Baptist has all the looks of a Q Mark overlap where Luke chose to use Q because of the way Luke introduces his Gospel with the infancy material. The claim that Luke emphasizes Jesus before introducing John the Baptist is a little complex, since Luke starts with John the Baptist but does so to set up Jesus' superiority to John. I also find unlikely the Mary versus Peter Resurrection priority that Elliott posits in the Resurrection tradition, a view he correctly called speculative. I would appeal here to the fact that normally women were not witnesses in the period, so that the cultural likelihood is that there is the historical list and a culturally relevant list of witnesses. The women head the first, and Peter leads the second. I also note that although Peter is a key lead figure for Matthew, his Gospel also has the appearances to the women. This undercuts the idea that there was a contest for who the Lord appeared to first. Elliott does ask a good question when he wonders why we have no detailed account of an appearance to Peter. This is a curious feature about our tradition, but it also is evidence of how conservative the canonical tradition is since no such account was “invented,” something one might expect if invention were as prevalent as some argue.

18. One could also note that the earliest tradition does not attach the name *gospel* to what Matthew wrote in these Hebrew texts. Papias refers to *λόγια* (or sayings).

More significant is the impression of Black's entire model that the Gospels are widespread and consistently being used by other key players as the canon is being developed. This view seems quite questionable for a number of reasons.

1. The fact is we have very little citation of the Gospels or of Jesus' teaching in the rest of the canon. Interestingly the one citation we get in the Pastorals is from Luke, not from Matthew, which is the dominant Gospel in his outline.
2. The situation is even more interesting in the apostolic fathers. Although some like Massaux have argued for widespread use of Matthew, other studies ranging over a century suggest that it is very difficult to prove direct citation of much of the Gospel in the fathers, when the possibility of oral tradition is kept in view and when actual wording is carefully checked.¹⁹
3. This leaves us with little hard evidence either that Paul used Matthew or "commissioned" Luke, as Black presents. Especially unlikely is that Mark checked what he did against Matthew or that he even used it at all, especially given what Mark lacks. The explanation that Peter only shared events in which he was involved in Mark does not adequately explain why teaching he surely was present at is not included.

These observations are important because all too often we have simply assumed that the central role of the Bible in many Christian communities today is the same role it has had from the beginning (with the added proviso that as soon as such works were written in the first century they spread quickly and instantly through the church). However, the evidence appears to indicate that the process of thinking in terms of a unified Scripture operating like a canon took some time to develop. Only by the end of the second century do we see it really beginning to set in. It is one thing to argue some

19. Edouard Massaux, *Influence of the Gospel of Saint Matthew on Christian Literature Before Saint Irenaeus: The First Ecclesiastical Writers* (Mercer, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1991). This is a massive three volume study. However, his results are challenged by a pair of studies a century apart: The Oxford Society of History's 1905 study, *The New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers* (now available through Kessinger Press) and Andrew Gregory and C. K. Tuckett's edited survey, *The Reception of the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Both of these detailed studies show how difficult it is on the basis of wording to know which Gospel is being cited or even if a Gospel versus oral tradition is being used.

works were written and quickly became authoritative and another to see the collection of works beginning to function as a more unified canon. These are somewhat distinct steps and issues. The evidence suggests that given regions may well have had access to particular books (many a Gospel or two and perhaps some letters of Paul) early on, but a more widespread collection in a specific locale looks to be a later development. Only when the apologists begin to write in the middle of the second century do we begin to see specific works named and cited and considered to be functioning as a unit. Our understanding of the earliest church period has to deal with a tradition and theology that was being passed on in an oral fashion for the most part, with some writings that became seen as Scripture also working alongside.²⁰

In sum, the kind of model that stands underneath Black's claims about Mark writing and then reissuing his Gospel in a longer form later so he is responsible for both the short and the longer ending is not convincing, given evidence already noted about the lack of Marcan style in the Long Ending, the compiled feel of that section and the unlikelihood that the relationship between Matthew, Mark, and Peter was as close as he suggests.

Conclusion

Our response has tried to work through the forks in the road. As is obvious, there are judgments here. The problem of Mark's ending is complex. All the elements of textual criticism are in play: external evidence, internal evidence, the views of the versions and fathers, and what Mark himself was trying to do. We have argued that given the nature of our external evidence that points to both endings as old, internal factors indicate that Mark ended at 16:8 with an open-ended attempt to say to listeners that once the message is heard, it becomes the hour of decision. Mark's ending matches the circumstances of his readers: the Resurrection is proclaimed and the only remaining issue is what will the one who hears about the Resurrection do with a risen Jesus. Mark's ending assumes that the women did emerge from their silence and fear to believe and proclaim. That is precisely where Mark wants his readers to go, even in a context

20. This is a model I have developed and presented evidence for in *The Missing Gospels* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006) as I have challenged the claims of alternative Christianities and the model of Walter Bauer and his followers.

like Mark's where suffering for such a decision can be anticipated. Behind this call stands the promise embodied in the Word and the action of God. We can embrace them.

These essays, all of them, have been a fine way into this discussion. They guide us through the evidence and the various takes that are possible from it. One final point needs to be made. Whatever view one has on this issue, there is no central teaching of the Christian faith at stake in which view is chosen. Obviously, if the Long Ending is taken as original, then everything presented there is taught. The choice of the Short Ending poses more problems in that the possibility is that part of the Word may go missing. Yes, that is a possibility, but the other side of the coin is that much of what goes missing is asserted elsewhere in texts in which originality is not in dispute. As instructive and interesting as this problem is, we should not make more out of the debate than what it deserves. The long and the short of it is this: whatever choice we make, it should not significantly alter our faith.