


Preface

The papers in this volume originated from a conference entitled “The Last Twelve Verses of Mark: Original or Not,” held April 13–14, 2007, at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina. The conference was a sequel to an earlier symposium held on the same campus in April, 2000. At that event, five papers on New Testament textual criticism were presented and later published under the title *Rethinking New Testament Textual Criticism* (David Alan Black, ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002). Not long after the publication of that book it occurred to me that eventually a follow-up conference might be of benefit to students and scholars.

In the spring of 2006 I approached Southeastern’s President, Dr. Danny Akin, with the idea of inviting to campus some of the world’s leading textual scholars to discuss one of the best known and most problematic textual variants in the Greek New Testament, the famous ending of Mark’s Gospel. I suggested that papers be read by Professor J. K. Elliott of Leeds (a thoroughgoing eclecticist), Professor Daniel B. Wallace of Dallas Theological Seminary (known for his advocacy of reasoned eclecticist), and Professor Maurice A. Robinson of Southeastern Seminary (who espouses a Byzantine-priority viewpoint). Dr. Akin’s enthusiastic response to my request led to the conference eventually being held in 2007 and, ultimately, to the book you now hold in your hands. Originally I did not include myself as a speaker at the symposium. However, upon President Akin’s request my

name was included in the final program. Hence there are four, not three, main papers, in addition to the able response provided by Professor Darrell L. Bock of Dallas Theological Seminary.

Thus it was that more than 150 students and scholars of the New Testament journeyed from many parts of North America and Europe to the campus of Southeastern Seminary to hear a formal discussion on the question of the originality of Mark 16:9–20. Looking upon the crowd gathered in the Eitel Auditorium (some of whom were live-blogging the event), one could not help reflecting that an interesting and provocative topic had indeed been chosen. The papers here presented speak for themselves. In the first, Daniel B. Wallace argues that Mark intended his Gospel to end at 16:8; in the second Maurice A. Robinson argues that Mark 16:9–20 is original; in the third J. K. Elliott argues that the original ending of Mark was lost; and finally, the present writer argues that Mark 16:9–20 was added by Mark to round off Peter's lectures. In his response Darrell L. Bock summarizes the many issues raised by the conference for the interpretation of the Gospel of Mark as a whole.

The reader will note that while the great majority of variants in the New Testament are of absolutely no account, students and scholars can hardly afford to neglect the one under discussion in this book. We must always ask ourselves the question: How can we best resolve textual difficulties, taking into account all of the evidence that is available to us today? The art and science of textual criticism remains one of the most interesting—and challenging—aspects of New Testament studies today. It is my hope that this volume will help a new generation of students to sift through the evidence—through the claims and counterclaims—and to establish a responsible historical basis for the answer to the question: Are the last twelve verses of Mark original or not?

The editor expresses his deep appreciation to all who participated in the conference program, to those who attended the sessions, to the editors at Broadman and Holman (especially Ray Clendenen) for accepting the papers for publication, and above all to his fellow presenters. The arduous preparation for and implementation of the conference were largely the tireless achieve-

ments of Professor David Nelson, Dean of Southeastern, and his able assistants. To all of them, as well as to President Akin, profound gratitude is due.

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CHAPTER 1

Mark 16:8 as the Conclusion to the Second Gospel

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Comedian George Burns once pontificated on the key to homiletical success: “The secret of a good sermon is to have a good beginning and a good ending, then having the two as close together as possible.” This essay will abysmally fail at least that third criterion, but I suspect that Mark’s Gospel might have succeeded on all three fronts.

The question we are entertaining at this symposium is this: When does Mark’s Gospel end? For those who have studied the issue at all, there is an ancillary, though equally relevant question: When does the *debate* over the ending of Mark’s Gospel end? This particular debate will be over tomorrow, but that won’t be the end of the story. This conference, in fact, is intended to stimulate your thinking about the issues, getting you to wrestle with the questions far beyond tomorrow. Perhaps that is what Mark intended for his Gospel, too.

Introduction: Presuppositions

Before I get into the details of this notorious textual problem, I need to address the issue of presuppositions for a few minutes.

Two of mine are that, of the four Gospels, Mark wrote first and John wrote last. As well, I hold to the Doddian school that John was not at all dependent on the Synoptic Gospels; in fact, he was most likely unaware of their specific contents, possibly even of their existence. This means that *both* Mark *and* John were writing, in a sense, a new literary genre that would later be called *Gospel*. Yet, they are radically different.

There are several ironies here: If Mark wrote first, he *created* a genre¹ that would be followed by Matthew and Luke, thus giving some vindication to what he had done—since mimicry is a high form of flattery. Yet, Mark's Gospel was the least copied of the four, perhaps because it was almost entirely swallowed up by Matthew, with only the less appetizing parts left out. John, on the other hand, had no real literary followers, yet his is by far the most copied of the Gospels in early Christianity. The irony doesn't stop there. If Mark *intended* to end his Gospel at 16:8, as I will argue, it's a Gospel that leaves the reader hanging, wanting more. John, on the other hand, not only finishes his Gospel, he keeps on writing *after* he finished it. He finishes his Gospel *twice!* After his conclusion in chapter 20, he

1. Robert H. Gundry ("Recent Investigations into the Literary Genre 'Gospel,'" in *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker and Merrill C. Tenney [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974]), after examining several attempts at locating the Gospels within a literary trajectory, notes the failure of all such attempts: "Supernaturalism in the gospels presents the biggest bugaboo . . . if aretalogists did not yet apotheosize human beings by attribution of miracles and if study of folklore discovers conservatism on the part of communities, the problem of the shortness of time between the ministry of Jesus and the evangelists' narrations of the supernatural becomes more acute than ever. . . . The more we deny or doubt the historicity of the materials . . . in the gospels, the more the questions become difficult to answer. We leave the gospels' literary uniqueness without an adequate historical cause" (112). He then adds, "On the other hand, high estimation of historicity would supply the missing cause. We could then say that the configurations and particulars of Jesus' career shattered literary conventions. . . . The greater the disparity between literary contents and historical actualities, the greater the likelihood of conformity to established conventions of writing. Conversely, the less conformity to established conventions of writing, the greater the likelihood of agreement between literary contents and historical actualities. The unsuccessfully denied uniqueness of the gospels' literary form therefore derives from the uniqueness of Jesus' life and ministry" (112–13). Gundry only slightly modified his views of the genre of Gospel in his commentary on Mark. See *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 1049–52. More recently, R. T. France has argued that Mark's Gospel belongs to the genre of biography. Yet he cautiously adds, "Just as there is a wide variety among Graeco-Roman 'biographies,' so Mark is his own master, not bound to follow a pattern laid down by someone else. His book represents something distinctive within the field of biographical writing, in terms of its subject, its origin, and the use for which it was intended" (R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], 6).

goes on with an appendix. It's almost as if John is a Baptist preacher who wants to add one more chorus of "Just As I Am" before he can conclude the service. Mark is rather more like a Methodist preacher who cuts his sermon short—giving a sermonette that contains deep thoughts, to be sure, but leaves his congregation with as many questions as answers.

Now, back to presuppositions. All of us have come with a set of them. Some have such strong presuppositions in one area that, regardless of the evidence in another, they are unwilling, or unable, to allow the second realm to cast doubt on the first. I want to bring to the conscious level some of the presuppositions that may be driving your view of this lengthy and difficult textual problem. I hope that you will think through these related disciplines as you wrestle with the question about Mark's ending. There are at least three important presuppositions to address.

First, one's view on *source criticism* plays a large role in deciding this particular issue. Let me put this plainly: If you hold to the Griesbach Hypothesis, or Matthean priority, you may have some trouble believing that Mark's Gospel ended at 16:8. The reason is not that the textual evidence is compelling for the Long Ending (LE), but a prior commitment about the synoptic problem is. If Matthew wrote first and Mark wrote last, would Mark really reject the rich material in Matthew 28 or Luke 24, and write a truncated Gospel that has no resurrection *appearances* by Jesus? It's much easier to believe that *if* Mark is last, he combined snippets from the other Gospels and wrote 16:9–20 than that he decided to excise the post-Resurrection narratives that were in Matthew and Luke.²

Perhaps the most scholarly defense of the LE of Mark was written by William Farmer, a man who was already committed to

2. For example, George Salmon "did not accept Markan priority[;] therefore, he thought it inconceivable that Mark's Gospel could have ended with ἐφοβούντο γάρ" (Steven Lynn Cox, *A History and Critique of Scholarship concerning the Markan Endings* [Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1993], 78). Not all Matthean prioritists, of course, think that Mark ended at 16:8 (cp., e.g., C. S. Mann, *Mark: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1986], 672–76; on p. vii he says that he follows the Griesbach Hypothesis), but they have greater difficulty explaining the lacuna in Mark than Markan prioritists do. As David Parker succinctly notes, the adherent of the Griesbach Hypothesis "has some difficulty with the idea that Mark should have ended at 16:8. For it requires him to have rejected all the material contained in Matthew 28 and Luke 24, and to have decided to go against the tradition of recording resurrection appearances" (D. C. Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], 132).

Matthean priority when he wrote *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark* in 1974.³ In that monograph, he mentions with approbation the text-critical work of Harry Sturz in a lengthy footnote. Sturz considered the major texttypes to have all originated in the second century, and all independently of one another. His view is known as “the independent texttypes theory.” His method was to determine the archetypal reading of each texttype by examining the best witnesses and determine the wording of the original based on a majority of texttypes—or, more exactly, a majority of the reconstructed *archetypes* of those texttypes. So, for Sturz, it wasn’t a majority of manuscripts that had priority, but a majority of archetypes. Practically, though not theoretically, his views looked very much like the majority text theory. That is why he was one of the editors of the first published *Majority Text*.⁴

Farmer does not say that he is following Sturz’s method in his book, but one gets the distinct impression that he was heavily influenced by it. And in the draft for the second edition of *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark*,⁵ in his conclusion of the external evidence Farmer explicitly speaks against the “text critical tradition of . . . Westcott and Hort.”⁶ In short, Farmer started with the Griesbach Hypothesis—in fact, he was the world’s leading Matthean prioritist of the twentieth century—but he recognized that the Short Ending of Mark was a roadblock. So he sought out a text-critical method that would allow him to continue to maintain Matthean priority. At first, this method was most likely not clearly formulated in his mind, but twenty-six years later, he had more consciously and ex-

3. William R. Farmer, *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark*, SNTS 25 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

4. *The Greek New Testament according to the Majority Text*, 2nd ed., ed. Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad; assistant editor, William C. Dunkin; consulting editors, Jakob van Bruggen, Alfred Martin, Wilbur N. Pickering, and Harry A. Sturz (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985). Of all the editors, only Sturz and van Bruggen were not Dallas Seminary graduates and thus not directly influenced by Zane Hodges. Sturz was the only non-MT editor of the seven.

5. The second edition was never published. Dr. Farmer gave me the draft of the external evidence section in 2000, asking for my critique, shortly before his death that year (December 31, 2000). In his cover letter, he also noted that it was already at the publisher’s. Why it was not published I do not know.

6. P. 50 of the prepublication draft. The statement reads, “Our examination of the external evidence, and in particular the manuscript evidence, leads us to the conclusion that scholars working in the text critical tradition of Griesbach, Lachmann, Westcott and Hort, and Streeter, who advocate the theory that Mark 16:9–20 is a later addition to the text of Mark, have an unfinished task that lies before them.”

PLICITLY rejected reasoned eclecticism. Does this mean he had fully embraced Sturz's views? Ironically, the answer is no, because if he had, it would weaken his argument for the LE of Mark.⁷ In short, Farmer's source-critical views seemed to drive his text-critical decisions.

A second presupposition that may influence your view of Mark's ending is *the whole field of textual criticism*. Some of you have already become convinced of a particular text-critical theory, even though you may be uncertain about source criticism. If your views of the text are settled, you may be here simply to get more arguments for your conclusions about this textual problem. The proposed solutions to Mark's ending will probably not alter your theory, but your theory may dictate—or at least heavily influence—your solution to this textual conundrum.

Third, one's presuppositions about *bibliology* could have a large impact on how he or she views this particular problem. For example, if you believe in the doctrine of preservation—that God has preserved the Scriptures so that there must always be manuscript testimony to the original text—then you will not be open to the view that the original ending of Mark was lost. Now, it is possible that you would be open to the Gospel *intentionally* ending at v. 8,

7. In particular, Farmer has altered some of the language from the first edition of *Last Twelve Verses* regarding the archetype of the Alexandrian witnesses. Whereas before he said that such an archetype reached back to the late second century, now he says that it goes no further than the late third century (p. 20 and *passim*). There is no new evidence that convinced Farmer to change his stance, nor is there any new text-critical theory that pushed him in that direction. Indeed, his dependence on Sturz's method seems to be greater in the second edition than the first. Yet Sturz believed that all three major text-types originated in the second century. Further, Sturz considered the major and earliest witnesses to have priority in determining the archetype's reading. Yet, when Farmer examines the various witnesses for the Alexandrian, Western, and even Caesarean texts, he explicitly disregards this basic approach and appeals to numbers: in *Last Twelve Verses*, 50–51, Farmer enlists B. H. Streeter's approach of determining the text on the basis of regional archetypes (a view similar, in this point at least, to Sturz's). Streeter, like Sturz, thought in terms of primary witnesses, secondary witnesses, tertiary witnesses, and so on, to each text-form. But as Farmer discusses the external data, he recognizes that the *primary* witnesses to most of these text-forms support the omission. Significantly, the *only* region in which there was unanimous support for either reading was that of Italy-Gaul. Here, as Farmer notes, "[t]he primary authority . . . witnesses for inclusion, as do all the secondary, tertiary, supplementary and patristic witnesses" (50). To put this another way, in the majority of Streeter's regions, the primary witnesses ended Mark at 16:8, while the majority of secondary and tertiary witnesses supported the LE. And the western region unanimously supported the LE (according to Farmer). Yet Farmer would not allow this evidence to suggest either that (a) the LE was a later reading, or that (b) it originated in the West. But the evidence he presented and even the method he ostensibly followed argued against his case.

but *if* that interpretation is not rock solid, you just might opt for the LE because it puts you on safer bibliological ground.

Note, for example, what Dr. Wilbur Pickering said, when he was the president of the Majority Text Society, concerning the possibility that the ending of Mark was lost:

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 other 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.⁸

Nearly a century before Pickering made his statement, John Burgon, the famous antagonist to Westcott and Hort, wrote: "I am utterly *unable* to believe . . . that God's promise has so entirely *failed*. . . ." ⁹ He articulated two presuppositions in this one sentence that are relevant for the ending of Mark. First, his belief in divine preservation—and of a peculiar kind¹⁰—prevented him from even

8. Wilbur N. Pickering, "Mark 16:9–20 and the Doctrine of Inspiration," 1 (a paper circulated to members of the Majority Text Society, September, 1988). Pickering added that he was unaware of anyone who thought that Mark's Gospel intentionally ended at v. 8. Perhaps if he had realized that this was, in fact, the predominant view at the time he wrote, he might have been a bit less dogmatic in his declarations. Pickering's view is, in a sense, just the flip side of Dean John W. Burgon's about the doctrine of preservation. He said, "I am utterly disinclined to believe—so grossly improbable does it seem—that at the end of 1800 years 995 copies out of every thousand, suppose, will prove untrustworthy; and that the one, two, three, four or five, which remain, whose contents were till yesterday as good as unknown, will be found to have retained the secret of what the Holy Spirit originally inspired. I am utterly unable to believe, in short, that God's promise has so entirely failed, that at the end of 1800 years much of the text of the Gospel had in point of fact to be picked by a German critic out of a waste-paper basket in the convent of St. Catherine; and that the entire text had to be remodeled after the pattern set by a couple of copies which had remained in neglect during fifteen centuries, and had probably owed their survival to that neglect; whilst hundreds of others had been thumbed to pieces, and had bequeathed their witness to copies made from them" (*The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels*, ed. E. Miller [London: George Bell & Sons, 1896], 12). I say this is the 'flip side' of Pickering's point because Burgon was not arguing for the preservation of the Long Ending in this diatribe as much as arguing that the critically-reconstructed text of Westcott and Hort was based on manuscripts that had been unknown and unused. Nevertheless, both were speaking about preservation as a doctrinal presupposition.

9. Burgon, *The Traditional Text*, 12. Italics added. See full context of quotation in note 8.

10. Burgon linked inspiration to preservation and preservation to accessibility. Thus, for him, as for many if not most majority text advocates, it necessarily follows from in-

entertaining the possibility that the LE was not authentic. Second, he assumed that there actually are explicit promises in the Bible about its preservation—in spite of the likelihood that none of the texts that are so used are speaking about the preservation of the *written* word.¹¹

If, however, the doctrine of preservation is not part of your credo, you would be more open to all the textual options. I, for one, do not think that the real ending to Mark was lost, but I have no theological agenda in *this* matter because I don't hold to the doctrine of preservation. That doctrine, first formulated in the Westminster Confession (1646), has a poor biblical base. I do not think that the doctrine is defensible—either exegetically or empirically.¹² As Bruce Metzger was fond of saying, it's neither wise nor safe to hold to doctrines that are not taught in Scripture. I may be wrong in my view of preservation, but this presupposition at least keeps an open door for me for all the options in Mark 16.

My point in this preliminary treatment is to underscore the fact that we all bring a lot of presuppositions to the table that influence how we hear the evidence being presented; indeed, such presuppositions may even keep us from hearing the evidence.

Let me illustrate this point with a personal anecdote. I've mentioned Harry Sturz already. He was my first Greek professor at Biola University. At the time, he was teaching the only year-long college-level course on NT textual criticism offered in the country. As a young impressionable student, I came to embrace his views heartily. And I took several courses from him. When I came to Dallas Seminary, I studied under Harold Hoehner. He taught the Griesbach Hypothesis—that Matthew had written first. That view fit into my preunderstanding of textual criticism well. I also studied with

inspiration that the original text *must* be found in the majority of manuscripts at all times. I have dealt with the internal contradictions of this view elsewhere. See Daniel B. Wallace, "The Majority Text Theory: History, Methods, and Critique," in *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis*, ed. Bart D. Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 308–10; in particular, it is noted that "the Majority text position is based on a corollary (accessibility) of a corollary (preservation) of a particular dogmatic stance (verbal inspiration)," 308.

11. More recently, and in a significant scholarly journal, Matthew D. McGill asked the question, "Could a part of God's Word, inspired by the Holy Spirit, be lost?" (in "A Textual and Structural Analysis of Mark 16:9–20," *Filologia Neotestamentaria* 17 [2004]: 27–43; quotation from 35). The belief in some sort of doctrine of preservation continues to persist, even when it has been demonstrated to be indefensible exegetically and empirically.

12. See Daniel B. Wallace, "Inspiration, Preservation, and New Testament Textual Criticism," *GTTJ* 12 (1992): 21–51.

Zane Hodges and learned the majority text position from him. In practice, I was a majority text man, though in theory I held to the independent texttypes view.

I joined the Dallas Seminary faculty and taught both Matthean priority and the independent texttypes theory. I went on to teach at another seminary, and I continued to teach both views. I studied the literature, and saw it only through a particular lens. I read some essays that were devastating to my theories, but I was able to brush them aside. And I *thought* that my arguments against them were decent.

A few years later, I returned to Dallas for my doctorate.¹³ While in the program, I wanted to take the course on textual criticism. Unfortunately, there was no one on faculty who could teach it since Zane Hodges had retired. So, I was asked to lead a doctoral seminar in textual criticism. Thus, when I asked if a class was going to be offered, I was told that it *would* be as long as *I* offered it! In retrospect, it's a good thing I didn't ask about a course in Egyptian hieroglyphics!

I had my work cut out for me, because I knew I could no longer give glib answers. I started by reading over 10,000 pages of text-critical material—to quickly get up to speed. I had to think through the entire paradigm. The more I studied, the more I came to the conclusion that Sturz's views were faulty—that the Byzantine text was not equal to the Alexandrian and Western. In short, I became a reasoned eclectic.¹⁴ It was an enormously painful methodological shift for me, since I had held to Sturz's view for seventeen years. Nevertheless, I did not completely reject the Byzantine text, but felt that it still had a place at the table.

Two months after my text-critical foundation had crumbled, I abandoned Matthean priority. In my mind, the two were not con-

13. In 1982, when I was considering doctoral programs, I visited Bruce Metzger at Princeton Seminary. He told me that he was not allowed to take any more doctoral students because Princeton had a mandatory retirement age. Because studying with him was no longer an option, I looked elsewhere for my doctorate. If I couldn't study with Metzger, I reasoned, I should most likely concentrate on Greek grammar. I knew of Buist Fanning's reputation, having studied with him in my master's program at Dallas Seminary; that decided the direction of my studies. Ironically, here I am, debating a point about textual criticism when I am the least qualified person in this volume!

14. Credit needs to go to Darrell Bock as one who was instrumental in my shift. He simply made a quick comment, in passing, about how any text-critical theory has to be grounded in history if it is to be viable. It was indeed the historical question that Sturz's view, along with the majority text theory, did not seem capable of answering.

nected so much by their interdisciplinary nature as by their *similar method of investigation*.¹⁵ Both my text-critical and source-critical views had put a premium on the external data—and frankly, on a very mechanical approach to them. But, as Günther Zuntz noted, “At every stage the critic has to use his brains. Were it different, we could put the critical slide-rule into the hands of any fool and leave it to him to settle the problems of the New Testament text.”¹⁶

I began to read the *same* journal articles, monographs, and *Festschriften* in a different light. What had appeared to me to be dangerous and subjective viewpoints because they depended so much on the scholar’s ability to get into the head of the scribe or evangelist, now looked like compelling arguments. What changed were not the arguments, but my presuppositions. I came to the deep conviction that evangelical scholars *must* be in the business of pursuing truth, regardless of where it takes us, rather than protecting our presuppositions. That has been the most liberating conclusion I’ve drawn in my academic career.

We each have various convictions about interlocking disciplines that affect our take on the last twelve verses of Mark. This means that this symposium will not really settle the issue for most of you. But it also means that it’s good to take a step back and reflect on source criticism, your overall text-critical views, and how your bibliography impacts your view of the text. And I want to challenge you to wrestle with these interlocking presuppositions, and to be open to approaches that may be outside your comfort zone.

I don’t doubt the integrity or scholarship of any of my colleagues, and I hope they don’t doubt mine. But even though we are all looking at the same evidence, we are not all coming to the same conclusion. In part, we certainly do read the evidence differently. In part, we also each bring certain presuppositions to the discussion that impact our view of this textual problem.

With that introduction, I now turn to an investigation of the ending of Mark’s Gospel. The overall objective will be to determine

15. See Gordon D. Fee, “A Text-Critical Look at the Synoptic Problem,” *NovT* 22 (1980): 12–28.

16. G. Zuntz, *The Text of the Epistles: A Disquisition upon the Corpus Paulinum* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 12.

It should be noted that I did not simply replace one set of presuppositions with another, but had accumulated several unresolved issues over the years that I did not have satisfactory answers for when I held to Matthean priority and the independent texttypes theory.

the reading that best explains the rise of the others. I will limit my examination to two aspects to the problem. First, I want to consider the external evidence—Greek manuscripts, ancient translations, and patristic writings. I will not only look at the hard data, but try to construct some reasons for why it looks the way it does. There are curiosities concerning Mark’s ending that simply cannot be ignored. Second, I will look at internal evidence—though much more briefly. In particular, the focus will be on what the author was likely to have written.¹⁷ Internal evidence is not nearly as subjective as it may at first appear; likewise, external evidence is not nearly as objective as some might think.

The End of Mark’s Gospel—External Evidence

As for the external evidence, the raw data can be quite deceiving: at least 95 percent of all Greek MSS and ancient versions have the LE. In fact, that number may be too low. I used to be impressed by the sheer volume of MSS on one side of a textual problem, but our investigation must take us deeper than that. In particular, the major question we need to answer is this: Which is more likely—that scribes would intentionally omit vv. 9–20 or that they would add these verses?

The Long Ending

The LE of Mark is not found in the oldest MSS, but it is found in the majority of MSS. And it is found in all the major texttypes—Western, Caesarean, Byzantine, and even the secondary Alexandrian.¹⁸ Thus, there is a broad geographical spread for these verses.

As well, it is witnessed to by several church fathers, most likely beginning in the late second century with Irenaeus.¹⁹ But there is a

17. Technically, internal evidence includes an examination of both the intrinsic probability (what the author is likely to have written) and transcriptional probability (what the scribes were likely to have done with the text they copied from). But in larger portions of text, intrinsic evidence becomes much more important and decisive; consequently, we will examine only that aspect under internal evidence. Further, since the transcriptional evidence is strongly related to patristic data for this problem, we will subsume the transcriptional under external.

18. Today, the Caesarean text-form is strongly disputed, but for convenience’ sake we will consider it to be a legitimate texttype.

19. It is possible also that Justin Martyr (d. AD 165) alludes to Mark 16:20 in *Apol* 1.45 (compare his ἐξεληθόντες πανταχοῦ ἐκήρυξαν with Mark 16:20—ἐξεληθόντες ἐκήρυξαν πανταχοῦ). But he does not mention Mark in this reference. Nevertheless, since he is