

### The Lord's Appearances After His Resurrection and His Ascension

#### Mark 16:9-20

Mark 16:9-20 - *"Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons. <sup>10</sup> She went and told those who had been with Him, as they mourned and wept. <sup>11</sup> And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe.*

*<sup>12</sup> After that, He appeared in another form to two of them as they walked and went into the country. <sup>13</sup> And they went and told it to the rest, but they did not believe them either.*

*<sup>14</sup> Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. <sup>15</sup> And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. <sup>16</sup> He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. <sup>17</sup> And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; <sup>18</sup> they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."*

*<sup>19</sup> So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.*

*<sup>20</sup> And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen."*

#### Background Notes

There is some question concerning the authenticity of Mark 16:9-20. Are they really a part of the Gospel of Mark, or did Mark end his Gospel at verse 8? Most Bibles will point out this textual problem in a footnote or some form of notation. The reason for this textual question is that some of the manuscripts of Mark do not contain these verses. By manuscripts, we mean the copies of Scripture that were hand-copied, before the invention of the printing press.

As you know, we don't have any of the "autographs" – the original writings of any of the books of the Bible. We only have copies. But we have a *lot* of copies! We have over 5000 New Testament manuscripts in the Greek language alone - handwritten copies of either all the New Testament, or parts of the New Testament.

When we examine all the ancient manuscripts that contain the Gospel of Mark, most of them have verses 9-20 - but some don't. Well, you might think that's no problem - we'll just go with the majority. Since the majority of the manuscripts have verses 9-20, we'll just say that Mark wrote verses 9-20.

That might sound like an easy solution, but it's not necessarily the right solution, because the manuscripts that don't have verses 9-20 are the *earliest* manuscripts. If we assume that the copies that were made closest to the time when the

original text was written are most likely to contain the truer text, then we'll put more weight on the earlier manuscripts and conclude that verses 9-20 of Mark 16 are not authentic - and not part of the Bible.

Furthermore, the literary style of verses 9-20 is definitely different than the style of the rest of Mark. So did Mark purposely end his Gospel at verse 8, even though it doesn't sound like a natural ending? Verse 8: "*So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.*" Is that where Mark ended his Gospel? It certainly doesn't seem like a natural ending, does it? But on the other hand, maybe Mark purposely ended his Gospel with the women amazed and fearful, perhaps as a kind of challenge to the reader: what would we do with the evidence of the resurrection? So maybe verse 8 indeed is the end of Mark.

But not so fast! Why then do most of the manuscripts have verses 9-20, including some of the early manuscripts? Furthermore, even in the manuscripts that don't have verses 9-20, there is some evidence that the scribes who made the early copies recognized that there was an ending to Mark that was either lost, or that they did not have in the particular manuscript that they were copying.

So the textual plot thickens! Did Mark end his gospel at verse 8? Or was the original ending to Mark lost? Or are verses 9-20 the original ending, even though the style is different? I don't think the original ending to Mark was lost. That would mean that part of the Bible was not preserved for us!

Another possibility should be mentioned, and I tend to go with this option at the present time. There is the possibility that verses 9-20 are authentic - that they're really part of the Bible - but they were written some time later by another inspired writer. If this is the case, Mark finished writing at verse 8 by intent or an unexpected reason, and then God used another inspired writer (perhaps one of the New Testament prophets) to write verses 9-20. That would explain for the change in style, as well as the fact that some of the earlier manuscripts don't contain verses 9-20.

Maybe the idea of another inspired writer finishing Mark bothers you, because you think that idea tampers with the doctrine of inspiration, or that inspiration goes up for grabs! No, the doctrine of inspiration is not watered down in any way if God uses another *inspired* writer to finish a book!

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The doctrine of inspiration is not compromised if God chose to use more than one inspired writer for a book.

The doctrine of inspiration holds that God superintended the writers and the writings of Scripture so that the whole Bible is the Word of God, right down to the very words used in the original.

Normally God used one writer per book, but sometimes God used more than one inspired writer for a book. The part of Deuteronomy that records Moses' death was most likely not written by Moses, but by another inspired writer, probably

Joshua. Most likely the last five verses of Joshua that record Joshua's death were not written by Joshua, but by another inspired writer. At the end of Jeremiah 51 we read, "*Thus far are the words of Jeremiah.*" Jeremiah 52 is like a historical appendix showing how Jeremiah's prophecies were fulfilled, and it was probably written by another inspired writer.

So in these examples (and there are others), we wouldn't say that only the parts of the book that were written by the main author are inspired, or those sections written by another author as part of the book, are "less inspired." No! It's all part of the Bible, the inspired Word of God! The doctrine of inspiration is not compromised if God chose to use more than one inspired writer for a book of Scripture.

So that's a possibility with the last verses in the gospel of Mark. Verses 9-20 may indeed be part of the Bible, but not necessarily written by Mark.

## **2. It is unwise to make doctrinal points from Mark 16:9-20 unless the doctrine is supported by the rest of Scripture.**

Because there are textual questions about these verses, we need to be careful about building a doctrine from these verses – ***unless the rest of Scripture supports the doctrine.*** For example, in verse 18 we read that two of the signs that would follow the spreading of the gospel would be "taking up snakes" and "drinking poison" without being harmed. Building a doctrine about Christian snake-handling or poison-drinking is very unwise, because neither of these activities is supported by the rest of Scripture.

This verse certainly does not justify the so-called "snake handling cults." Assuming that this verse is Scripture, verse 18 is only saying that Christians would not be harmed if their persecutors compelled them to pick up snakes or drink poison. This was perhaps one of the confirming signs for early Christians as the gospel spread.

Verse 16 is another example of why it is unwise to make doctrinal points from Mark 16:9-20, unless supported by the rest of Scripture. "*He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*" It sounds like verse 16 is saying that baptism is necessary for salvation - and that's the way some people have interpreted this verse. But such a doctrine cannot be supported by the rest of Scripture.

Once again, assuming that verses 9-20 are Scripture, verse 16 does not say that baptism is necessary for salvation. Look at the last part of the verse: "*but he who does not believe will be condemned.*" It doesn't say "but he who does not believe and is not baptized will be condemned." The basis for judgment is unbelief. Baptism is the desired and logical step to follow salvation. Thus, we have "*He who believes and is baptized will be saved.*" Notice that the verse does **not** say, "He who believes **MUST** be baptized in order to be saved." The logical progression for the believer is, "*He who believes and is baptized will be saved*"

In any case, if you're going to make any doctrinal point from these verses, be very sure that you interpret these verses in the light of the rest of Scripture. Then you are on safe ground.

## Practical Application

### Let's not be unbelieving believers!

The eleven disciples were believers, but the Lord had to rebuke them for their unbelief (v14). They did not believe Mary Magdalene when she told them that she had seen the Lord: *"And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe" (v11).*

Then the eleven did not believe the two believers of verse 12, who were likely the two disciples to whom the Lord appeared on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24). *"And they returned and told it to the rest, but they did not believe them either" (v13).*

So the Lord had to rebuke the eleven. *"Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen."* The Lord had to rebuke them for their unbelief.

Let's not be unbelieving believers! So often we sing and pray about the great things we know God can do in our lives, and in our families, and in our churches - but then we get up from our knees or walk away from our singing in unbelief. We don't **really** believe what we say we believe! Or perhaps we hear reports from fellow believers or missionaries about what God is doing in their lives, and instead of rejoicing with them, we're skeptical.

Let's not be unbelieving believers. We're not to be gullible, but neither are we to be skeptics when good evidence is presented. The disciples were rebuked because they did not believe the eyewitness accounts of the resurrection.

Let's not be unbelieving believers!