

Introduction

Shortly after I became a Christian, I met Karen and we started to go to McKinney Bible Church in Fort Worth, Texas. Paul Young was the pastor, and he preached out of the New American Standard Bible (NASB), so I got a NASB and have used it for the past forty-six years. I did not know much about translations at the time; I used it because that was the version the church was using. In 1996 the Olympics were held in Atlanta, GA, and we agreed to house a single man from Cleveland, OH. He was an evangelist and was moving down to do outreach. As we got to know him, I found out that he was a staunch King James Version (KJV) user. He had been taught that the KJV is the only legitimate translation and that the others were based on corrupt manuscripts. This led me to study how the Bible was translated and to look into some of the charges made against the NASB and other modern translations. In 1997 we planted our first church, and one Sunday we had a visitor that took a strong stand against the NASB that I was using. The visitor believed I was in great error for using something other than the only legitimate translation of the Bible, and would not be back. Again, I did some further investigation of the NASB and KJV, and their source texts.

We are finishing the Gospel of Mark and today we will be looking at a very controversial passage in Mark: Mark 16:9-20. I preached this passage the past couple of weeks and treated it like I would any other passage in our Bible. But this morning, I want to step back from the verse by verse teaching that I normally do, and look at this section of scripture as a whole. Specifically, I want to address the brackets that are found in the NASB and other modern translations, which are not found in the KJV. We will be addressing the question of whether this passage was part of the original Greek texts that God gave us, or whether it was added later on.

(Mark 16:8-20) “They went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. {9} ¶ Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons. {10} She went and reported to those who had been with Him, while they were mourning and weeping...and confirmed the word by the signs that followed. ¶ ¶ And they promptly reported all these instructions to Peter and his companions. And after that, Jesus Himself sent out through them from east to west the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation. ¶

I believe that the Word of God is inspired by God. Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:16 that “All Scripture is inspired by God (God-breathed), and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” The question this morning is whether Mark 16:9-20 is part of the scripture that was inspired by God. I do not believe that the translators or translations are perfect and without error, but I do believe that the Word of God that was given to the various authors in the Old Testament and New Testament was inspired and is without error.

(2 Tim 3:16-17) “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; {17} so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

In our message today, we are going to look at the canonization of scripture, source texts, translations, and our text in Mark 16:9-20.

1. Canonization of Scripture
2. Source Texts
3. Text in Mark 16:9-20

1. Canonization of Scripture

The word canon comes from the Greek word, *kanon*, which means rule or standard. It came from a word which meant cane or measuring rod, and it eventually came to mean a rule or standard of measure. “The Biblical Canon is the standard books which teach orthodox Christian beliefs.”¹ It is a compilation of sixty-six books, thirty-nine in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New Testament.

By the time of Jesus, the Old Testament canon was already established and accepted. The writers of the New Testament frequently cited the Old Testament, and there are not any instances where they quoted other sources than these thirty-nine books. In 90 AD and 118 AD, the Council of Jamnia gave final affirmation to the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament canon.

The canon of the New Testament started in the first century. Peter wrote his second book in 65 AD. In it, he mentioned Paul’s letters and then said, “as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.” The Apostle Peter recognized Paul’s letters as Scripture and this was in the first century.

(2 Peter 3:14-16) “Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, {15} and regard the patience of our Lord *as* salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, {16} as also in all *his* letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.”

Between 140 AD and 150 AD, a man named Marcion, put out a heretical version of the NT, and the church leaders at that time decided that a canon of the NT needed to be established. So, the work of establishing a NT canon began fairly early. Between 303 AD and 310 AD, a man named Lucian put together Greek edition of the NT, and this became a foundation for later Bibles. “The earliest known complete list of the 27 books is found in a letter written by Athanasius, a 4th-century bishop of Alexandria, dated to 367 AD.”² There was not a formal acceptance of what books were considered part of the New Testament canon until the fourth century, when the councils of Hippo in 393 AD and Carthage in 397 AD officially accepted those books as the NT Canon. The Catholic church is said to have approved the same canon in 382 AD under Pope Damasus and again in 405 AD by Pope Innocent I.

The councils in Hippo and Carthage did not randomly select the twenty-seven books in the New Testament. Many had been recognized by the church for several centuries. They had seen the power of those scriptures in peoples’ lives. These councils developed a strict set of criteria, and then evaluated each book in light of the criteria. Some sources say their were four main criteria, and others state three criteria. The most commonly accepted criteria are: apostolicity, orthodoxy, and catholicity.

¹ What Is The Biblical Canon, Paul Gibson, <https://biblequestions.info/2019/07/20/what-is-the-biblical-canon/>

² Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Testament

Apostolicity: Was the book closely connected with one of the apostles, and/or approved by the apostles. Because of this criteria, many in the church today believe and teach that the primary purpose of apostles was the writing of Scripture. Therefore, since the canon of the NT is complete, the gift of apostle went away in the 1st century. The fact is that there are many apostles of the Lamb and other apostles that did not write any of the scriptures. That is not the work of an apostle. But, the early church understood the stamp of approval by the apostles on the letters of Paul and the other books in our NT was critically important. The councils in Hippo and Carthage just applied what was already an accepted part of the criteria.

Orthodoxy: The books needed to fit within the established standard doctrine of the early church, as handed down by the apostles. If there were contradictions in a book being considered, it was removed from consideration. Some of these books provide great historical understanding and have excellent teaching, but they were not considered as part of the canon of the NT. Barnabas was an apostle that was well respected, and yet his letter, which is in the apocrypha, was not accepted. He talks about fasting among other things, and he has some good insights. But, there are some things in his letter that do not match up with the standard of orthodoxy.

Catholicity: The term catholicity does not mean the “Catholic” church or its doctrines. The definition of catholic means “comprehensive or universal.”³ In the Apostles’ Creed, the word catholic is used. “*I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.*” This is not referring to the Catholic church, but to the universal church. When these councils looked at catholicity, they evaluated a book to see if it was universally accepted by the church.

2. Source Texts

The NT was written between 45 AD and 85 AD. We do not have any Paul’s letters or other original manuscripts; we only have copies of copies. The Gutenberg press began printing Bibles in 1455 AD, so all of our source manuscripts are hand-written copies. This is important to understand because we believe that the original manuscripts given to the various authors were inspired by God, but we do not believe that all the copies are without error. Even though the people that copied the manuscripts were careful, there were common errors of adding a word, or leaving out a word. There are also translational differences. The NT was originally written in Greek.

There are a total of 25,000 manuscripts of the NT, more than any other literature. Because there are so many manuscripts, we can reconstruct the original books with virtually complete accuracy. There are about 5,600 Greek manuscripts that contain some or all of the New Testament, and these date back to the second century. There are fifty-two papyrus manuscripts that contain parts of John, and these date back to 100 AD to 150 AD. There is the Bodmer Papyri that contains Luke and John, and it dates back to 175 AD to 225 AD. There is the Chester Beatty Papyri that contains the gospels and the Acts, and this dates back to the 200’s. There are three hundred and fifty copies of the Syriac Bible. Syriac is a dialect of the Aramaic language, which is very close to the language that Jesus spoke. These copies date back to the 200’s. In 325 AD Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. That same year the Council of Nicea met, and they had a lot of source documents to use to create an accurate copy.

³ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/catholic>

A version called the Codex Vaticanus was put together at that time, and it contained the OT and the NT. Since the church was no longer being persecuted, the number of copies began to increase significantly. Around 350 AD, some of the earliest and most important biblical texts were discovered on Mount Sinai. In 400 AD, Jerome translated the Bible into Latin, and that “vulgate” became a standard in the church. The first English version of the Bible was created in the fourteenth century by John Wycliffe. He did not translate it from Greek, the original language, but used the Latin Vulgate, which was the most widely used version at that time.

In 1526 AD, Tyndale published a NT and portions of the OT. Tyndale’s version was significant because he translated from a newly published Greek NT rather than the Latin Vulgate. Tyndale used the Greek New Testament that Erasmus, a Dutch scholar, published. Tyndale did not have a complete set of Greek, so he used the Latin Vulgate for the portions that were missing. He met some resistance because there were some verses that he had translated from the Greek that were different than the Latin Vulgate. For example, he left out 1 John 5:7 because it was not found in any of the Greek manuscripts. The last six verses of Revelations was also not included because none of the Greek manuscripts included it.

(1 John 5:7 NASB) “For there are three that testify:”

(1 John 5:7 KJV) “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.”

A man by the name of Robert Estienne used Erasmus’ Greek text and divided the text into verses. Another scholar, Theodore Beza, built on Estienne’s work and his Greek text became one of the foundations for the King James Bible. The Textus Receptus (Received Text) came from a Greek text produced in the 17th century by the Elzevir brothers.

There are four different text families. The manuscripts used to produce the Textus Receptus (KJV) were of the Byzantine family. The other three text families are the Alexandrian, the Caesarean, and the Western.

The Byzantine text was the dominant Greek text from the eighth century to the end of the nineteenth century. In 1881, two scholars named Westcott and Hort published a new Greek NT which relied more on other text families than on the Byzantine text. Their Greek text became the basis for the NT portion of modern Bible translations. Westcott and Hort evaluated the Greek manuscripts according to principles of textual criticism. Based on their studies, they thought the Byzantine text was not the most accurate, or the closest to the original writings. They thought that there were comments added in the Byzantine to give clarity and understanding, but were not part of the original manuscripts.

1 John 5:7 is a good example of that. The older Greek manuscripts did not mention the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost. We have no problem from a theological basis of the addition, but from their perspective, the comments should not be included as part of the text; it should be a footnote.

Luke 11 is another example where the texts differ. In the Westcott and Hort, Luke 11 is shorter than the one in Matthew 6 because in the earlier manuscripts the passages were different. In the KJV, the passages are nearly identical. Most scholars believe that some translators added some of the text in Matthew 6 to reconcile the differences.

King James Version (Textus Receptus)	New American Standard Bible (W&H)
(Luke 11:2-4) “And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. {3} Give us day by day our daily bread. {4} And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. ”	(Luke 11:2-4) “And He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. {3} 'Give us each day our daily bread. {4} 'And forgive us our sins, For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.”
(Matthew 6:9-13) “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. {10} Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as <i>it is</i> in heaven. {11} Give us this day our daily bread. {12} And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. {13} And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.”	(Matthew 6:9-13) “Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. {10} 'Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. {11} 'Give us this day our daily bread. {12} 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. {13} 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]

Their work brought a lot of strong words against them by the supporters of the KJV. They said that naturalistic or human methods of textual criticism should not be used. They also said that the majority of texts supported the Textus Receptus. While it is true that there are more copies of the manuscripts used for the Textus Receptus, most of them come from later sources. Today, there are staunch KJV supporters, and I have personally met a number of them. While some are critical of the Westcott and Hort work, A.T. Robertson, a scholar said this, “The vast array of manuscripts has enabled textual scholars to accurately reconstruct the original text with more than a 99.9 percent accuracy.”⁴

3. Text in Mark 16:9-20

Having discussed the canon of Scripture and the various sources of text, we can now discuss our passage in Mark 16:9-20. In the hand-written manuscripts there are a number of variations or variants. Our passage in Mark 16 is a textual variant. The NASB and other modern translations have verses nine through twenty in brackets. There is an additional bracket and a short variant in italics at the end of verse twenty. The brackets tell us that these verses are not found in the original Greek manuscripts. These verses also do not appear in the oldest manuscripts, Sinaiticus and Vaticanus. The Greek manuscripts that Eusibus and Jerome wrote in the fourth century end with verse eight. There were some various endings to Mark 16 that began appearing in the second century, but there was not a widespread acceptance of any of the endings. From a textual criticism standpoint, Mark 16 should end at verse eight.

Besides the evidence we have from source texts, there are additional reasons to believe that these verses should not be included. The flow of the passage, the words used, and the style are different from the rest of Mark.

⁴ Confidence in God’s Word, John MacArthur, Mark 16:9-20 SC12-1, Mar 7, 2012

Let's look at the flow and the transition. In verse one, the Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome had brought spices to the tomb. In verses five through seven, they had an encounter with an angel, who told them to go tell Jesus' disciples and Peter that Jesus had risen and would meet them in Galilee. In verse eight, they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them. They were afraid and said nothing to anyone. Verse nine begins with, "Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons." The "now" does not pick up where verse eight ends. Now indicates the next thing that happens. The second thing in the flow that does not match is the appearance of Jesus with Mary Magdalene. Jesus' appearance with Mary comes on her next trip to the tomb, when she came with Peter and John. The third thing in the flow that does not match is the introduction of Mary Magdalene. Mark had mentioned her in Mark 15:40, 15:47, and in 16:1. She really does not need an introduction again.

(Mark 16:8-11) "They went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. {9} [Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons. {10} She went and reported to those who had been with Him, while they were mourning and weeping. {11} When they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they refused to believe it."

In regard to the words used in this section, John MacArthur said there are eighteen words not found anywhere else in the book. I looked at every Greek word in the passage, and I could not verify his statement. However, in verse nineteen, Jesus is referred to as the Lord Jesus, which is the only time in the book that Jesus is referred to in this manner.

Most of the contents of the passage can be found elsewhere in Scripture. But, there are two that do not fit with the rest of scripture. The first is about the requirements of salvation. In verse sixteen it says that those who have believed and have been baptized shall be saved. The rest of the New Testament is clear that we are saved by grace through faith, and not as a result of works. The act of baptism, circumcision or any other work is not required. We must believe receive Christ. Baptism is a picture of our being buried with Christ and being raised up to a new life, but it is not something that is a requirement for being saved.

(Mark 16:16) "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned."

(Eph 2:8-9) "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; {9} not as a result of works, so that no one may boast."

The other controversial statement is about picking up serpents and drinking poison. It is not found anywhere else, and it was not something that would be universally embraced by the church. We do not advocate Christians picking up serpents or drinking poison. I mentioned that the Apostle Paul picked up a viper on Malta and suffered no ill effects, but other than that we do not have any examples. The rest of the contents of the passage appear to be copied from other places in the NT.

(Mark 16:18) "they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly *poison*, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

In regard to the style, Mark is very concise and to the point, and it is the shortest of the gospels. Mark uses the word immediately forty-one times, and it is only used eighteen other times in the NT. That word characterizes his style. If we look at the italicized script after verse twenty, we see that Jesus sent them out to “the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.” This style does not match up with the rest of Mark’s writing. “This has been universally rejected as having no connection to Mark.”⁵

(Mark 16:20) “And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed.] [*And they promptly reported all these instructions to Peter and his companions. And after that, Jesus Himself sent out through them from east to west the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.*.]”

Conclusion and Applications

In two previous messages I covered the verses in this controversial passage. I preached it as part of the gospel message and gospel presentation. Most of this material is in line with the rest of the scriptures, and in many cases the verses are duplicates of other verses. My personal belief is that these verses were not in the original scripture that was given to Mark under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. I believe they were added by others later on who were trying to bring clarity and understanding. When Mark recorded that Mary did not say anything to anyone, the added text clarifies that she went to Peter and John. This probably came from John’s account. While it may not have been in the original manuscripts, it certainly poses no theological problems for me.

(John 20:2) “So she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.”

We can have confidence in the Word of God that we have. The King James is a good translation and I study with it. But, the ESV, NASB and other modern translations are excellent translations. We do not speak 16th century English today, so the modern translations are easier for us to understand. Additionally, many more earlier source texts were found after the Textus Receptus. The majority of these texts line up perfectly. We can have 100% confidence that the Word of God we have is inspired by God. We do not believe that the translations are without error, for there are some errors in all of them. Since we do not have the original manuscript from each of the authors, we have copies of copies. Because there are 25,000 source texts, far more than any other published ancient literature, the textual criticism has proven that our scriptures are reliable. Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 that “all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” Our issue today is not the inspiration or reliability of Scripture; it is to encourage God’s people to use it for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and training in righteousness. Our goal is to use God’s holy word to equip and prepare the church for every good work.

(2 Tim 3:16-17) “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; {17} so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

⁵ John MacArthur, Confidence in God’s Word, Mark 16:9-20, Mar 7, 2012

Introduction (Mark 16:8-20, 2 Tim 3:16-17)

1. Canonization of Scripture (2 Peter 3:14-16)

- Three Criteria for NT Canon: Apostolicity, Orthodoxy, Catholicity

2. Source Texts (1 John 5:7, Luke 11:2-4, Matt 6:9-13,

- Four text families: Byzantine, Alexandrian, Caesarean, and Western.

3. Text in Mark 16:9-20 (Mark 16:8-20, 15:40, 15:47, 16:1, Eph 2:8-9)

Conclusion and Applications (John 20:2, 2 Tim 3:16-17)