

# “OH, WHAT A TANGLED WEB WE WEAVE, WHEN WE FOLLOW SCHOLARS WHO DECEIVE”: Absurd Explanations for the Supposed Abrupt Ending of the Gospel According to Mark

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It is difficult to be surprised any longer at the uncritical alacrity with which evangelical scholars and apologists follow the unsubstantiated claims of liberal scholars that undermine the credibility of the New Testament. From late dating of the Gospel books to literary dependence to Markan priority to extreme late dating of the Gospel According to John and embracing of the error-ridden Nestle-Aland text as the “[closest to the original](#),” evangelical scholars and apologists never seem to meet a liberal paradigm assumption they don’t like[\[1\]](#).

For all that, it is still difficult to understand how they can blithely accept the claim that Mark ended his Gospel book with 16:8. The evidence against that claim is conclusive, as is obvious to anyone who actually looks at it.[\[2\]](#) Unfortunately, very few of our apologists bother to look at the evidence. They *think* that hearing from a professor or reading in a book fatuities such as “the earliest and best manuscripts are missing verses 9-20” and “The style and vocabulary of Mark 16:9-20 are non-Markan” and accepting such fatuities without question is doing due diligence on the matter.

While liberal skeptics happily use the claim that Mark ended his Gospel book at 16:8 to undermine the credibility of the resurrection[\[3\]](#), evangelicals and apologists who accept that calumny have to perform mental contortions trying to explain how the story of Jesus ends with a group of women fleeing the tomb and saying nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. And these mental contortions utterly fail.

Consider, for example, the contribution of Erik Manning, a Chapter Director for William Lane Craig's Reasonable Faith organization[4]. On April 8, 2023, Manning posted an attempt to deal with the problem of the ending of the Gospel According to Mark on his "Is Jesus Alive?" website[5].

Manning begins by quoting a challenge from Bart Ehrman, from his book *Jesus, Interrupted*, viz. "All four Gospels agree that on the third day after Jesus' crucifixion and burial, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and found it empty. But on virtually every detail they disagree ... **do the women tell the disciples what they saw and heard (Matthew 28.8) or do they not tell anyone (Mark 16.8)**"? Now, if the Gospel According to Mark truly ends at 16:8, the answer to that is clear: **they do not tell anyone:**

*So they went out and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. (Mark 16:8)*

*καὶ ἐξελθοῦσαι ἔφυγον ἀπὸ τοῦ μνημείου εἶχε δὲ αὐτὰς τρόμος καὶ ἔκστασις· καὶ οὐδενὶ οὐδὲν εἶπον, ἐφοβοῦντο γὰρ*

As Ehrman indicates, this contradicts Matthew 28:8. Manning's only response is a lengthy quote from one John Fulton Blair (who clearly believed that the Gospel According to Mark ended with 16:8), from pages 379–380 of his 1896 book *The Apostolic Gospel* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co.). Let us consider Blair's offering, quoting his words in bold and interspersing my responses in italics:

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**The reader who insists that Mark means exactly what he says is, no doubt, perfectly reasonable; but the question is, What does Mark say?**

*While we appreciate Blair's allowance that it is reasonable to believe that God's word means what it says, there is no question here about what Mark says. He says, "They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." It is not a mystery.*

**The leper was charged to say nothing to any man; but he was also instructed to go and show himself to the priest, who was presumably a man (Mark i. 44).**

*Blair's argument here is incoherent. The leper was commanded to SAY nothing*

*but to SHOW himself to the priest. What has that to do with the women fleeing from the tomb in Mark 16:8?*

**When the daughter of Jairus was raised from the dead, according to Mark's report, the people in the house were charged much that no man should know this (Mark v. 48); but the people themselves were obviously excluded. They could not be prevented from receiving the testimony of their senses (cf. Mark vii. 86).**

*Yes, the people themselves already knew it through the testimony of their senses. Blair does not seem to realize that, while in English, we would be required to say "no one ELSE," it is not so in Greek (see, for example, 1 Corinthians 15:27). Again, what this to do with the women fleeing from the tomb?*

**In Mark vii. 24 the statement is made that Jesus entered into a house, and would have no man know it; but the disciples were with Him, and from them the fact could not be hid.**

*Again, see 1 Corinthians 15:27.*

**And, finally, when Mark reports that Peter and James and John were instructed to tell no man what things they had seen at the transfiguration of their Master (Mark ix. 9), he does not intend to suggest that the secret was to be kept from the rest of the twelve (cf. Mark viii. 30; ix. 30).**

*Whether He does or not is not stated but only assumed by Blair. Yet again, what has this to do with the women fleeing from the tomb?*

**These parallel passages prove conclusively that the statement regarding the women is not incompatible with the supposition that they delivered their message to the disciples.**

*Ah, now we see what Blair is getting at; these are supposedly "parallel passages." Yet by no means are they parallel. In each of these passages, the word of God says that Jesus gave a command or had a desire, and inerrancy demands that He actually gave those commands and had those desires; that is what inerrancy means, viz. that if the Bible says something happened, it really did happen as the Bible says.*

*In the case of the women fleeing from the tomb, they ignored the command given*

*them by the young man in the tomb, and in Mark 16:8, the word of God explicitly says that “they said nothing to anyone.” Inerrancy requires that they indeed said nothing to anyone.*

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So Blair’s “solution” to the problem of ending Mark with 16:8 is to say that, although the word of God explicitly says that the women said nothing to anyone, we should suppose that they really did say something to someone. The fact that this “solution” contradicts the word of God and denies inerrancy does not seem to bother Blair. One wonders how Manning overlooked this.

Manning (via Blair) is not the only apologist to make a completely absurd attempt to explain a problem that is not really in the text[6], since the authentic Gospel According to Mark ends at 16:20, not 16:8[7]. Consider Daniel Wallace’s risible explanation for the supposed ending of Mark with 16:8, as he is interviewed by Lee Strobel:

*There are two basic views, but each agrees that the verses [Mark 16:9-20] aren’t authentic. One group say that Mark wrote an ending to his Gospel but it was lost ... I think a far better view is that Mark was writing about the Most unique individual who has ever lived, and he wanted to format the ending of his Gospel in a unique way, in which he leaves it open ended. He’s essentially saying to readers, “So what are you going to do with Jesus?” [8]*

**That is not a tough one; without post-resurrection bodily appearances of Jesus, any rational person would “do with Jesus” what the apostles did; conclude that He was not the Messiah, but a failed fraud.** Any rational person would conclude, as did the followers of fifty or so other failed Messianic candidates[9], that their candidate, by dying and staying dead, proved himself *not* to be the Messiah and it was time to “look for another” (Matthew 11:3). They would accept the truth of Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians:

<sup>14</sup> *And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty ...* <sup>17</sup> *And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!* <sup>18</sup> *Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.* <sup>19</sup> *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most*

*pitiable.* (1 Corinthians 15:14,17-19)

If there is no resurrection—and without the post-resurrection appearances, even Jesus' own apostles and friends did not believe He had risen—then Jesus is not the Messiah and can save no one. The idea that Mark ended his book about “the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” with women fleeing in fear and saying nothing to anyone and no post-resurrection appearances is frankly deranged[10].

Wallace actually tries to convince us that the resurrection is in the Gospel According to Mark even without the post resurrection appearances, saying,

*There's still a resurrection in Mark. It's prophesied, the angel attests to it, and the tomb is empty.[11]*

Now, according to God's own standards, a prophet is only vindicated if his prophecies come true (Deuteronomy 18:22), so it would not matter how many times the resurrection was “**prophesied**” in the Gospel According to Mark if there were no post-resurrection appearances. They would simply be bald assertions proving nothing but that the prophet was not a true prophet. It is a young man who attests that Jesus rose, but I do not know of any rational person who would believe in a resurrection just because a heretofore unknown young man said so. And in Mark 16:1-8, there is not even a statement that the tomb is empty![12] **No, Wallace, without the post-resurrection appearances in Mark 16:9-20, there is no resurrection in Mark.**

In sum, we have seen two attempts to explain away why Mark ended his Gospel book at 16:8, with the women running away from the tomb in fear and saying nothing to anyone, and with no post-resurrection appearances. They are farragos, and **they are completely unnecessary since the Gospel According to Mark ends at 16:20, not 16:8.** But our scholars are in complete unreasoning thrall to the liberal paradigm assumptions that have done so much to undermine the credibility of the Gospel books. This needs to stop; evangelical scholars and apologists must stop following the liberal paradigm assumptions of scholars who deceive.

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## Endnotes

[1] See Tors, John, "The Three-Headed Monster and the Evangelical Betrayal of the Bible: Exposing the Major Weapons Levied against the Trustworthiness of the Bible." Posted at <https://truthinmydays.com/the-three-headed-monster-and-the-evangelical-betrayal-of-the-bible-exposing-the-major-weapons-levied-against-the-trustworthiness-of-the-bible> for copious details and documentation.

[2] See "Is the Ending of Mark Authentic? By John Tors" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aMy7EaPOlOU> for a detailed discussion.

[3] See "'False Teachers Among You': How Cutting-edge Scholarship is Undermining the Truth of the Resurrection" in "Resurrection Challenge - Easter Conference by Truth In My Days Ministry" (2:34:50-3:26:15), posted at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SWrg0HMFj6s>

[4] <https://isjesusalive.com/author/admin/>

[5] Manning, Erik, "On the Strange Ending of Mark." Posted at *ibid*.

[6] This is not the only case in which evangelical apologists offer absurd and unworkable "solutions" to problems that are not actually in the text but have been introduced by liberal scholars. See Tors, John. "Why There is an Error in Mark 1:2 in your Bible: Another Example of the Evangelical Betrayal of the Bible." Posted at <https://truthinmydays.com/why-there-is-an-error-in-mark-1-2-in-your-bible-another-example-of-the-evangelical-betrayal-of-the-bible/>.

[7] For an explanation for the statement that the women "said nothing to anyone" in the midst of the resurrection story, see Tors, John. "The Resurrection Accounts: 'Incompatible Contradictions' or Coherent History?" Posted at <https://truthinmydays.com/the-resurrection-accounts-incompatible-contradictions-or-coherent-history/>.

[8] Daniel Wallace interviewed in Strobel, Lee. *The Case for the Real Jesus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007, p. 93

[9] Rabow, Jerry. *50 Jewish Messiahs*. Jerusalem and New York: Gefen Publishing House, 2002.

[10] Another example of Wallace's careless thinking is his avowal that he does not believe that Mark wrote an ending to his Gospel book that was subsequently lost, because this "presupposes that Mark was written on a codex rather than a scroll. A page could be lost fairly easily from a codex, because the binding is like a book but the ending of the Gospel would have been secure on a scroll. The codex, however, wasn't invented until forty or so years after Mark was written" (Wallace, *op.cit.*) Seriously? Does he think Mark's original ending had to have been lost from his own handwritten copy? The only two manuscripts missing the last twelve verses of Mark (and very suspiciously so) come from the *fourth* century. All that was needed was for a copy to have lost its last page sometime before the *fourth* century—long after Christians had switched to using codices.

[11] *ibid.*

[12] In Mark 16:5-6, the women enter the tomb—which is not stipulated to be empty—and see a young man who tells that that "He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him." What was he pointing to? The shelf or spot on the floor where the body of Jesus had been laid? How large was the tomb? It was certainly dark in there; could the body have been moved to the back? And if the tomb *were* empty, should we not think, as Mary Magdalene did, that the body had simply been moved?