

Gospel Gems from Mark



Chapter 16: The resurrection and great commission

Like the other Gospels, Mark's book ends with the testimony of Jesus' rising from the dead and his command to his followers spread the precious Gospel that he had come to establish.



Gospel Gem #1: The angels' message

Repeatedly in his ministry (Mark 8:31, 10:34) Jesus had predicted his resurrection. In fact, every one of his predictions of his death also contained a promise to rise again. Yet, from what we can tell, how many of his disciples and followers expected this to happen? What can we learn from this?

Angels were allowed to deliver the most joyful messages in Scripture: Jesus' birth (cf. Luke 2:8-14) and his resurrection. What are several great promises for us contained in this awesome truth, "He has risen"?

Why did the angel single out Peter among the disciples who were to be told the message of Jesus' rising?

Not a gospel gem...a question about manuscripts

At this point our NIV Bibles insert a note that seems to raise a lot of doubt about the verses that follow: *"The earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20."*

We know that the Lord in wisdom did not preserve his Word by preserving the original document of any book of the Bible. What we have are copies--far more ancient copies than of any other historical writing. Occasionally the manuscripts have slight differences, but there is hardly ever a substantive change in the meaning of a verse or section. This end of Mark is a rare exception to this in that it involves a variation in a longer set of verses.

However, the NIV maybe exaggerates the problem more than it should. It might be helpful to compare the note of a different translation, the EHV (Evangelical Heritage Version - a translation produced by a group of WELS pastors): *"This translation includes verses 9-20 because they are included in the vast majority of Greek manuscripts that have been handed down to us. Evidence for the existence of this long ending extends back to the 2nd century. In the early centuries of the church, these verses were read in worship services on Easter and Ascension Day. However, a few early manuscripts and early translations omit verses 9-20, and a few manuscripts have a different ending."*

Aside from the manuscript evidence, there are other reasons to believe that these verses are genuine:

- The book would end on a "cliffhanger" if the verses were omitted; it's inconceivable that Mark would end his Gospel without a mention of the appearance of the risen Jesus
- In a 1974 book called *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark*, scholar William Farmer looked at the evidence and proposed a theory of why some early manuscript copyists chose (wrongly) to omit the verses: Because they were being used as part of a "snake handling" group within the early church with unfortunate consequences (see Mark 16:18).

I would encourage you to not be swayed by the NIV note and to regard these verses as genuine. (However, as with the other variant readings, the overall teaching of the Bible is not changed even if these 12 verses were to be omitted.)



Gospel Gem #2: The appearance, command & promise of Jesus (16:9-20)

Where else in Scripture can we read longer versions of the appearances mentioned in verses 9-13?

John tells us that when Jesus appeared to the eleven disciples he told them, "Peace be with you." (John 20:19) However, Mark tells us, what else had to be a part of Jesus' words to his disciples that evening? Does this suggest a reason why he made his appearances in the order that he did?

What vital mission was given to the disciples, and the whole church, in verse 15? Why is it encouraging to see Jesus sum up our message in this way?

What great truth is expressed in verse 16? Why is baptism connected to it?

How were the predictions of Jesus in verses 17-18 fulfilled?

Did the ascension of Jesus occur immediately after the words above were spoken?

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Chapter 16: The resurrection and great commission - *answer page*

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Gospel Gem #1: The angels' message

Repeatedly in his ministry (Mark 8:31, 10:34) Jesus had predicted his resurrection. In fact, every one of his predictions of his death also contained a promise to rise again. Yet, from what we can tell, how many of his disciples and followers expected this to happen? What can we learn from this? ***We aren't told of any of Jesus' followers patently waiting for his resurrection on that third day; all of them expected that his death was his final end. Yet Jesus still showed compassion toward them when he did appear. We should learn from this story to always take Jesus at his word--no matter how amazing his promises may seem to our human reason!***

Angels were allowed to deliver the most joyful messages in Scripture: Jesus' birth (cf. Luke 2:8-14) and his resurrection. What are several great promises for us contained in this awesome truth, "He has risen"? ***Jesus' resurrection shows us that he is exactly who he claimed to be--God's Son and the Christ, the Savior of humanity. It shows that he fully paid for our sins, just as he said--his resurrection was God's stamp of approval on his work. Finally, it assures us that Jesus surely can and will raise us from physical death to life when he appears!***

Why did the angel single out Peter among the disciples who were to be told the message of Jesus' rising? ***Perhaps, by denying Jesus three times, Peter had disqualified himself from being called a "disciple", until Jesus would publicly reinstate him later (cf. John 21:15-17). Or Peter simply needed special personal assurance that Jesus had risen.***

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Gospel Gem #2: The appearance, command & promise of Jesus (16:9-20)

Where else in Scripture can we read longer versions of the appearances mentioned in verses 9-13? ***The appearance to Mary Magdalene is described in John 20:1-18 and the appearance to the two disciples walking home is found in Luke 24:13-35.***

John tells us that when Jesus appeared to the eleven disciples he told them, "Peace be with you." (John 20:19) However, Mark tells us, what else had to be a part of Jesus' words to his disciples that evening? Does this suggest a reason why he made his appearances in the order that he did? ***Mark makes it clear that Jesus' words did include a message of rebuke and warning about their unbelief. It seems that by appearing to Mary and other individuals who would spread the news, Jesus wanted the others to believe based on the promises he had earlier given them.***

What vital mission was given to the disciples, and the whole church, in verse 15? Why is it encouraging to see Jesus sum up our message in this way? ***"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation." Although the Church's message surely includes a call to repent, it is ultimately a good news message--salvation as God's gift of tremendous love for sinners through the work of his Son! Also it is a happy truth that we don't need to limit our mission but can include the entire world in it.***

What great truth is expressed in verse 16? Why is baptism connected to it?

We are saved by faith alone--"whoever believes will be saved." Baptism is connected to faith because it is a true means of grace by which the Spirit works faith and new life (cf. Titus 3:5, Ephesians 5:26 among many other verses). However, it is lack of faith rather than an omission of baptism that condemns.

How were the predictions of Jesus in verses 17-18 fulfilled?

Demons were driven out several times in the book of Acts (cf. Acts 16:16-18 for one example). The speaking in other languages was fulfilled on Pentecost (Acts 2); Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake and was unharmed in Acts 28:3-6. There are no specific examples of drinking poison in the New Testament, but we can be sure that this happened as well, even if it was not recorded for us in Scripture.

However, this does not mean that all of these signs and abilities were always to be evident in every era and place where the church is found.

Did the ascension of Jesus occur immediately after the words above were spoken?

The first chapter of the book of Acts makes it clear that the ascension occurred 40 days after the resurrection. The words spoken by Jesus in vv 15-18 seem to have been spoken on Easter evening, although they may also be a summary of what he taught over the entire period of 40 days.