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Dear Friend:

Are the last twelve verses of Mark's Gospel inspired?

One of the most controversial points of Scripture is whether Mark 16:9-20 is actually a part of Scripture. Although it appears in the King James Version, many other translations either label this section as an appendix or leave it in the footnotes as in the controversial Revised Standard Version of the Bible. The Moffatt Translation, together with the Goodspeed and others, not only has the long ending found in the King James Version, but it also has another shorter ending.

Since the Bible is a revelation from God about those essential facts which we need to know, but which we have no other way of obtaining, it is very important that we know what constitutes the Bible. If this last portion of Mark's Gospel is spurious, it is time we learned of the fact. If it is genuine, it is vital that we believe what it contains.

Let us briefly understand the facts behind the controversy. The eighth verse of Mark, chapter 16, ends abruptly -- seemingly at a place where it would be natural to have the thought continue. Why? There have been two reasons generally postulated. (1) That Mark originally wrote an ending that has been totally lost, the present endings being merely additions by later copyists. (2) That for some yet unknown reason Mark was not permitted to finish his Gospel, and that probably another person wrote an ending. The scholars are, of course, in confusion as to whether this ending was inspired, or whether it was merely the addition of another copyist. It might be important to bring in at this point the fact that almost all scholars dismiss the secondary short ending found in the translations of Moffatt, Goodspeed, and others. In Hasting's Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels it is plainly stated that this short addition is not found in any of the early Church writers. We can therefore consider it as merely the addition of a copyist.

The longer ending to Mark's Gospel, is however, quoted extremely early. Mark 16:19 is quoted as a part of Mark's account by Irenaeus in Against Heresies (Bk. 111,10,6) between 182 and 188 A.D. There are allusions to it in even earlier writings, although not as a true quotation. Not only did Irenaeus accept it as a part of Mark's Gospel when arguing with "heretics," but, says Hastings: "No writer before Eusebius is known to have rejected them, and their presence in all later MSS (manuscripts) shows that the successors of Eusebius, in spite of his great authority, did not follow his judgment in the matter." (Eusebius was the court favorite and the church historian in the days of Emperor Constantine.)

These facts point plainly to the great antiquity of the longer ending as preserved in the common English versions. But were they inspired?

Let us consider now the common idea that the real ending of Mark was lost. Since the Bible explains that the Word of the Lord endures forever, are we to assume that so important a matter as the resurrection was allowed to perish? Notice chapter 36 of Jeremiah, verse 23. Here one of the scrolls containing the inspired words of the Lord was cut with a penknife and cast into a fire and totally destroyed. Did God leave it to some copyist to guess what it might have contained? No! Baruch, the scribe of Jeremiah, was ordered to write in a new scroll "all the former words that were in the first roll" (verse 28). So one of the basic principles is that God's inspired Word can not perish.

Now turn to Mark 16. Since God does not allow His Word to perish, it is logical that there never were added verses now lost.

The answer is definitely that it is an INSPIRED ending.

If these last verses of Mark's Gospel are left out, the book does not come to an orderly conclusion as does every other book in the Bible. Human writings are filled with error, but the Bible is foolproof, complete, inspired, and wholly preserved through the power of God. These verses are an inspired part of the Word of God.

LETTER ANSWERING DEPARTMENT