

Mark is considered to be the oldest Gospel of the 4 canonical gospels and is the basis for Luke and John. The last chapter of Mark describes Mary Magdalene, Mary Mother of James, and Salome coming to Jesus' tomb to anoint him, but it concludes with them finding it almost empty. The only thing in the tomb was a figure in a glowing white robe who tells them that Jesus has risen. This figure instructs them to tell Jesus' disciples about the miracle of him rising from the dead after the third day. The gospel concludes rather abruptly with Mary Magdalene, Mary Mother of James, and Salome being afraid to share this story with others. In this swagalicious essay; I will describe how I interpret the original ending of Mark, why this ending is impactful, how I describe this ending, and why readers may have felt uncomfortable with the original ending and want to add more to the gospel.

I interpret the original ending of Mark at 16:8 as showing early Christians that it is okay for them to be afraid to spread the word of the Lord, while emphasizing how important it is to still attempt to spread the word. In this ending, although Mary Magdalene, Mary Mother of James, and Salome see the tomb empty, and are explicitly told to tell others about this miracle, they do not because they are afraid. The cutoff after this line serves to show that nothing necessarily bad happened, if it did there would be a narrative about the negative effects of their silence. However, the lack of continued narrative implies that nothing good came from them not sharing the news either. The fact that Mary Magdalene, Mary Mother of James, and Salome were scared of sharing this news with others is not presented as something that has a vastly negative effect on the spread of Christianity. The overall neutrality of this action can be better understood when a contemporary reader considers the state of the church today. Still, the phrasing of this passage makes it seem negative that Mary Magdalene, Mary Mother of James, and Salome did not spread this word, and it is easy for a reader to imagine how sharing this news with others

could help to increase faith. People sharing the story of Jesus may have been especially important in the early years of Christianity when it may have been more difficult to gain more members.

I think this ending is more impactful when the reader considers that Mary Magdalene was one of Jesus' most loyal followers. She followed him through his crucifixion and came to his tomb after his death to anoint him with spices, and she helps readers to understand that even a loyal follower can be fearful of what could happen to them if they speak up about their religion. Mary Magdalene has her own noncanonical Gospel and is the only woman who is described by her own title, and not by her relation to any man. Mary Magdalene's fear of sharing the story of Jesus shows that she is as human as the reader and makes her more relatable to the people who hold this gospel with great importance. A reader may be able to relate to the feeling of being very passionate about a cause, and still being afraid to share the news of the cause with other people. The reader could feel both comfort in the fact that they are not alone in being afraid to spread the word of the lord or information about any cause they are passionate about, but still pushed to spread the word of the lord or their cause because they feel uncomfortable with how Mark ended.

I consider the ending of Mark at 16:8 to be a cliffhanger to the story, and believe that it was left this way to be intentionally unsatisfactory to early readers. I think part of the intention is to be relatable to early christian readers who may be afraid to spread the word of Jesus, and I think part of the intention is to push readers into enough uncomfortability with the ending to act differently than Mary Magdalene, Mary Mother of James, and Salome acted. This ending is also symmetrical with Jesus' requests throughout his life to not talk about him, specifically to not spread word of his miracles. Repeatedly throughout the gospel of Mark, Jesus performs miracles

and asks his disciples and the people who have seen the miracles to not tell other people what they saw. By not refraining from telling others of this miracle; Mary Magdalene, Mary Mother of James, and Salome were acting in accordance with Jesus' previous requests to not speak about his miracles.

The original ending to Mark leads to another question of how the author of Mark was able to know that Jesus had risen from the dead and that there was a figure in the tomb to talk to Mary Magdalene, Mary Mother of James, and Salome. As written, they would not have told anyone about Jesus Christ rising from the dead, and it seems like they would be apprehensive to write it down. The additional endings of Mark that are provided give additional context into situations in which Mary Magdalene, Mary Mother of James, and or Salome may have felt more comfortable to tell the story. In these additional endings, Jesus visits other people and tells his story to them.

I think early readers may have felt sufficiently uncomfortable with Mark's abrupt conclusion to create new endings because the original text leaves them with the impression that the gospel is "unfinished." The sudden stop, paired with the fear and silence of the people who looked in the tomb, could easily have struck early audiences as an improper or unsatisfying way to conclude such a profound narrative. The later additions to Mark's ending help resolve these tensions by offering a more sense of closure. These extended endings provide context, such as Jesus appearing to his disciples, which collectively restore balance and clarity. With only the original ending, readers are left with the impression that something essential remains unwritten, as though the story pauses in mid-movement. Given this atmosphere of ambiguity and incompleteness, it becomes understandable that later authors or scribes might have felt compelled to complete a story they perceived as incomplete. In doing so, they transformed the

narrative from what seemed like an abrupt fragment into a more traditionally structured and emotionally satisfying conclusion.

The fact that the original ending includes Mary Magdalene, Mary Mother of James, and Salome not following the command of the figure in the temple leads to additional uncomfortability in the ending. It is not clear who the figure is in the tomb; however, the description of the figure being in white and sitting on the right side evokes Christ-like imagery. This leads me, and possibly many other readers, to believe that this figure is divine in nature and is giving Mary Magdalene, Mary Mother of James, and Salome a command directly from the Lord. This added uncomfortable feeling of disobeying a direct order from the Lord may have led to more push to create an ending where the characters who saw that Jesus was no longer there go to tell others that Jesus had risen. The alternative endings both complete the narrative in a way that feels satisfying, and portray the word of Jesus being spread to other people.

Additionally, it may not have been all that difficult to make a reader feel unsettled or dissatisfied enough with Mark's abrupt ending that they would be motivated to create an alternative conclusion. Throughout history, portions of biblical texts have been added, removed, or revised for various theological, liturgical, or interpretive purposes. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke, for instance, are widely understood to draw on the Gospel of Mark as a narrative foundation, supplementing it with material from other sources such as the "Sayings" Gospels, which are collections of sayings from Jesus. This longstanding tradition of modifying, expanding, or harmonizing earlier works demonstrates that early Christian writers often felt both the freedom and the responsibility to adjust narratives to better suit the needs of their communities. Within such a cultural and literary environment, it becomes easier for a contemporary reader to understand why the author responsible for the longer ending of Mark

may have felt justified to reshape the story. The impulse to create a more complete or reassuring resolution would have fit naturally within the broader pattern of textual development that characterized the formation of the New Testament.

The New Oxford Annotated Bible used in this class includes a footnote that explains that the additional endings to Mark are dated to around the second century, and include parts from the endings of the other Bibles. This leads me to believe that the author of the other endings may have been attempting to make the gospels more uniform. The only issue that this idea may have is that the other parts of Mark do not seem to have any aspects that were added to the original text in this way. Perhaps the ending was in the only modified aspect because it was the easiest part to modify or because it was the most jarring difference between Mark and the other gospels.

Overall, the ending of Mark is intentionally jarring and something that made readers so uncomfortable that they wanted to create alternative endings. There are several reasons that the author of the additional ending may have wanted to write an addendum to Mark, but the best way to think about these reasons is to consider the interpretation of the text from the early readers of the Bible. Regardless of the reason for the added endings, the inclusion of these texts in Mark has been influential to centuries of biblical readers.