How Mark's Gospel ends: student handout

Module 18: Textual Criticism and Major Variant Passages.

Name: _____ **Date:** _____ **Class:** _____

Central question: Why do some of the oldest copies of Mark end at 16:8, while most later copies include verses 9 to 20, and how do historians decide which ending is earlier?

Read the source note of each document before its content. Fill in the organizer with your partner, with names and dates. Documents B and D quote ancient texts; Documents A and C summarize the evidence as ExtantBible presents it.

Document A: Which copies end where

Source: The Mark 16:9-20 page on ExtantBible: its list of manuscripts and its section on other endings and copies, drawn from the standard Greek text (NA28, 2012) and Bruce Metzger's commentary (1994); the dates of the oldest copies are those Raymond Brown (1997) and Metzger give.

A summary by ExtantBible (2026) of the manuscript evidence: copies made between the 4th and the 9th centuries.

Copy	What it is and when it was made	How it ends Mark
Codex Vaticanus (B, 03)	A Greek copy of the Bible, from about the middle of the 4th century	At 16:8
Codex Sinaiticus (Aleph, 01)	A Greek copy of the Bible, from about the middle of the 4th century	At 16:8
Codex Alexandrinus (A, 02)	A Greek copy of the Bible, from the early 5th century	With verses 9 to 20
Codex Bobiensis (k)	A copy of an early Latin translation of the Gospels	With the Shorter Ending only
L (019)	A Greek copy of the four Gospels in Paris; Metzger places it among Greek copies of the 7th to 9th centuries	With the Shorter Ending, then verses 9 to 20
Most later Greek copies (the Byzantine text)	Greek copies made in the Byzantine (Eastern Roman) Empire, most from the 9th century on	With verses 9 to 20

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- Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus are two of the oldest complete copies of the New Testament.
- L puts a note before each ending: before the Shorter Ending, that these words are also found in some places; before verses 9 to 20, that these words too are found after "for they were afraid", the last words of 16:8.

On ExtantBible: Other endings, copies and early writers (on the page for the longer ending of Mark)

Document B: Early writers

Source: The same page: Irenaeus in its list, and Eusebius's To Marinus and Jerome's Letter 120 in its section on early writers. Irenaeus is quoted in the public-domain English translation of 1885; Eusebius and Jerome are summarized as Bruce Metzger reports them (1994).

Primary source (Irenaeus, Against Heresies, written about 175 to 185 CE) and summaries by ExtantBible of two letters: by Eusebius, a church historian of the early 4th century, and by Jerome, who made the Latin Vulgate (382 to 405 CE).

“Also, towards the conclusion of his Gospel, Mark says: "So then, after the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God""

Irenaeus, Against Heresies 3.10.5 (quoting Mark 16:19), trans. Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1 (1885).

- Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon in Gaul, quotes verse 19 of the longer ending in a work written about 175 to 185 CE.
- Eusebius of Caesarea wrote that almost all the Greek copies he knew ended with the women afraid (16:8), as Metzger reports.
- Jerome wrote that almost all Greek copies lacked this section. Metzger reports both letters this way, and adds that the Eusebian sections, an early numbering of the passages of the Gospels, stop at 16:8.

On ExtantBible: Other endings, copies and early writers (on the page for the longer ending of Mark)

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Document C: In today's editions and Bibles

Source: The "In today's Bibles" section and the verdict on the same page, with the timeline's entry for the Robinson-Pierpont edition, and what Raymond Brown (1997), Bruce Metzger (1994) and Tommy Wasserman and Peter Gurry (2017) report.

A summary by ExtantBible (2026) of printed editions and translations from 1611 to 2012, and of how scholars judge the passage.

- The standard Greek text (NA28, published 2012) prints the passage inside double brackets, as a later addition, because the editors judge it was added after Mark was first written but is old and was widely copied.
- ExtantBible labels the judgment that the text without verses 9 to 20 is earlier "Nearly all scholars agree". The label says how widely a judgment is held among scholars: few or no serious specialists dispute it. It is not a verdict on faith.
- Other views: Brown reports that some scholars argue strongly that Mark's own ending was lost. The Byzantine text of most later copies has the passage, and an edition of that text by Robinson and Pierpont (2005) prints it; the timeline notes that favoring that text is a minority view among textual critics.
- The King James Version (1611), Metzger notes, made the passage familiar. The ESV and the NRSVue print verses 9 to 20 in brackets.

On ExtantBible: The longer ending of Mark (manuscript difference page)

Document D: What the endings say, and what a copyist was likely to do

Source: Mark 16 in the Berean Standard Bible (public domain), as shown on ExtantBible, the Shorter Ending in Bruce Metzger's translation, and Metzger's reasons (1994), summarized.

Primary source: the Bible text, in a modern public-domain translation and in Metzger's translation (1994); then a summary by ExtantBible of the reasoning in Metzger's commentary.

“So the women left the tomb and ran away, trembling and bewildered. And in their fear they did not say a word to anyone.”

Mark 16:8, Berean Standard Bible (public domain): where the oldest complete copies end.

“But they reported briefly to Peter and those with him all that they had been told. And after these things Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.”

The Shorter Ending, trans. Bruce M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, 2nd ed. (1994), p. 103.

“Early on the first day of the week, after Jesus had risen, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had driven out seven demons.”

Mark 16:9, the first verse of the longer ending, Berean Standard Bible (public domain).

- The longer ending goes on to tell of appearances of the risen Jesus, a commission to the disciples and the ascension.

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- Historians ask which wording best explains how the other arose. A copyist with a Gospel that stops at the women's fear had a reason to add an ending; it is hard to see why anyone would remove twelve verses about the risen Jesus.
- Metzger adds that the words and style of verses 9 to 20 are unlike the rest of Mark, that verse 9 does not follow smoothly from verse 8 (the subject changes from the women to Jesus, and Mary Magdalene is introduced as if she were new), and that no one who had verses 9 to 20 would have swapped them for the Shorter Ending.

On ExtantBible: Accounts compared: the resurrection

Evidence organizer

	Question	Your notes and evidence (names and dates)
1.	Where do the two oldest complete copies of the New Testament end Mark? Name both and say when they were made.	
2.	What does the Shorter Ending say, and which copy has it without verses 9 to 20?	
3.	Which early writer shows the longer ending was known by the late 2nd century, and when did he write?	
4.	What did Eusebius and Jerome report about the Greek copies of Mark they knew, and when did they write?	

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	Question	Your notes and evidence (names and dates)
5.	What label does ExtantBible give the judgment that the text without verses 9 to 20 is earlier, and what does the label mean?	
6.	How does the standard Greek text (NA28, 2012) print the passage, and how do the ESV and the NRSVue print it?	
7.	Why is a copyist more likely to have added an ending after 16:8 than to have removed verses 9 to 20? Give one more internal reason Metzger names.	
8.	Where do the documents agree, and where does the evidence pull in different directions? Name one piece of evidence on each side.	

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Your written answer

In one or two paragraphs, answer the central question. Cite at least three documents by letter, say what each piece of evidence is and when it comes from, explain both the outside evidence (copies and writers) and what a copyist was likely to do, and name one piece of evidence on the other side.

Homework: Students who need more time finish the second paragraph (the evidence on the other side, and how much weight it deserves) at home, using the handout and the organizer.

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Check your work: the single-point rubric

The middle column is the target. Note where the work falls short on the left and where it goes beyond on the right.

Concerns	Target	Going beyond
	Sourcing: Says what each piece of evidence is (a manuscript, a writer, a printed edition, a modern Bible), roughly when it comes from, and which document it is in.	
	Corroboration: Compares at least two pieces of evidence, saying where they agree and where they differ, and uses the comparison to support the answer.	
	Weighing the evidence: Explains why some evidence counts for more (age, a writer's date, agreement among early copies, what a copyist was likely to do) and names one piece of evidence on the other side.	
	Descriptive, qualified language: Uses descriptive statements attributed to their source ("most scholars judge", "Codex Vaticanus ends") rather than claims about what everyone believes or what is true in faith.	

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