

MARK 16

Mark 16:1–8. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

The following is adapted from Julie M. Smith, The Gospel according to Mark (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2019).

Those who were crucified were usually viewed as cursed and so were not given the dignities of a burial or anointing. That these women made such efforts speaks to their love of and devotion to Jesus despite social norms to do otherwise. It was a common practice to anoint dead bodies with various spices in order to counter the smell of decomposition. “When the sabbath was past” can denote any time after sundown on Saturday.

Jesus was removed from the cross and buried prior to Friday’s sunset (which marked the beginning of the Sabbath). He was resurrected prior to sunrise on Sunday morning. Consequently, He was in the tomb for portions of three days: Friday early evening (before sunset), the whole Sabbath day (sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday), and the following “day” (from Saturday sunset into Sunday morning). The women wondered who would roll away the stone blocking the entrance to the tomb, and this can call attention to the fact that the male disciples had scattered and were not present in fulfillment of Jesus’s prophecy in Mark 14:27 (compare Zechariah 13:7).

The detail that the young man found inside the sepulcher was sitting on the right side is somewhat vague as no clear referent is provided (the right side of what?). It may have been intended to convey authority or power since sitting or being on someone’s right side can denote such.¹ Because Matthew 28:5 mentions that the personage inside the sepulcher was an angel and the Greek word translated “young man” here has been rendered “angel” in other contemporary sources, commentators often assume that is what is meant; however, Mark typically uses a different word when speaking of angels (Greek *angelos*), so his use of “young man” here may be a purposeful allusion to the enigmatic young man that fled Gethsemane (see Mark 14:51–52). The young man’s naked body in Gethsemane was adorned in nothing but a “linen cloth”—the same word used for the burial cloth in Mark 15:46, in which Joseph of Arimathea cloaked the

naked body of Jesus. This connection can suggest to Mark's readers that the young man had come to Gethsemane with the intent of dying with Christ, if need be, but when the authorities came and grabbed him, he slipped out of his garment and fled naked rather than submit himself to possible death—an act and condition of shame. That Jesus was soon thereafter divested of His garments and crucified naked could suggest to Mark's readers that Jesus is taking this young man's shame upon Himself (see Mark 15:24). Now, in contrast, the young man in the tomb was wearing a “white stole” that is typical of the upper classes and associated with honor, reflecting the symbolically white clothing of Jesus's Transfiguration (the only other place in Mark where clothing is described as white [see Mark 9:3]). The totality of these allusions can suggest that the young man had cast off his initial glory and descended into nakedness and shame, but through Christ (who also descended in like manner), the young man could be in a place of honor (sitting on the right side) and with garments of glory. Perhaps Mark is trying to tell his readers that such can be the destiny of any who repent and follow Jesus, even if in moments of weakness they find themselves, like Adam and Eve, fallen, naked, and ashamed.

Regardless of who this young man might have been, he was acting in the capacity of a heavenly messenger: he began with the command to be not afraid, echoing the usual initial words of angelic messengers (see, for example, Judges 6:23; Daniel 10:12), and he delivered a message about Jesus's resurrected status and where to meet Him. Peter and the other disciples who seemed to have scattered in fear were being invited to return and follow Christ again—a testament to His mercy and long-suffering. Additionally, they would need to overcome any cultural prejudice of hearkening to the women's message since women were typically not permitted to be witnesses under Jewish law.

It is not clear whether the fleeing of the women should be read as negatively (fleeing for fear) or positively (fleeing to quickly fulfill the young man's commands). Since the Greek behind “fleeing” here is the same word used to describe the disciples who scattered when Jesus was arrested (Mark 14:50) and since the text indicates that contrary to the command they were given, they did not say anything to anyone because of fear, it is understandable that some might conclude fear was the cause of their flight. Such could cause the reader to feel a need for undaunted disciples who follow Jesus without trepidation. Because the disciples do gather later in the text and are instructed by the Savior, it appears the women did complete their task. Consequently, the text could be read as explaining that the women departed quickly to do as they were commanded but did not give their witness to anyone publicly for fear of repercussions from those who were not Jesus's followers.

Mark 16:9–20. The Long Ending of Mark

The following is adapted from Julie M. Smith, The Gospel according to Mark (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2019).

Many scholars assume that the original text of Mark ended at Mark 16:8. Reasons given include the facts that (1) the earliest extant manuscripts of Mark's Gospel (all from Alexandria, Egypt) end at this verse

(but the final word is the Greek *gar*, “for,” which seems like an awkward way to end a manuscript); (2) Matthew’s and Luke’s Gospels are different from Mark’s narrative after this verse; (3) the text of Mark 16:9–20 appears in later manuscripts but is marked uncertain by the ancient scribes; (4) the style and vocabulary in verses 9–20 are arguably different from those in the rest of the Gospel; and (5) some ancient manuscripts of the Gospel of Mark even have different endings after verse 8. These facts could be an indicator that the original ending of Mark was lost, that Mark was unable to complete his work for some reason, or that Mark originally ended his Gospel at verse 8 and the concluding Greek *gar*, “for,” was a purposeful literary device (used elsewhere in ancient literature) to compel the reader to anticipate more. If this is true, verses 9–20 may have been added later to bring closure to Jesus’s prophecy that He would meet His disciples in Galilee after He was risen or to make His Resurrection more vivid (Mark 14:28).

Some of the Jesus’s teachings recorded in Mark 16:9–20 also appear in the Book of Mormon. The Savior presumably spoke these words to the Book of Mormon peoples during His visit to them, but if these words were not original to Mark and were only later additions, this is problematic. However, other scholars have gathered internal and external evidence that points to Mark 16:9–20 being original to the Gospel; thus the earliest extant manuscripts are simply missing the ending for some unknown reason.²

Mark 16:9–15. Witnesses of the Resurrected Christ

This group of verses appears to detail a collection of appearances made by Jesus Christ to His disciples after His Resurrection. The appearances are to Mary Magdalene (verses 9–11), two others (verses 12–13), and the Apostles (verses 14–20). This is the first and only time the detail about Mary Magdalene having seven devils cast out of her by Jesus is mentioned in Mark’s Gospel even though she had been mentioned previously.³ The seven devils could be literal or figurative, especially since seven is a symbolic number that could suggest simply that she was completely or fully overwhelmed. Her witness of the Resurrection to the other disciples was not believed. This was almost certainly the case not only because resurrections had never occurred before but also because Mary was a woman, whose witnesses were not culturally permissible. However, many of the disciples had themselves seen Jesus raising people from the dead and performing other miracles, and they had also heard Him say many times that He would die and rise again.⁴ This might explain Jesus’s need to chastise them for their unbelief in the following verses.

That two other disciples saw the resurrected Christ and provided their witness to “the residue” but were also not believed affirms the general lack of faith and understanding among Christ’s followers. Because they dismissed Mary Magdalene and the two others, Jesus upbraided the eleven for *apistia*, “no faith, or unbelief” and *sklērokardia*, “hard-heartedness”—harsh terms He had not used to describe His disciples before. But His mercy and long-suffering were also on display as He immediately called them and sent them into the world to preach the gospel to every creature. The experience of these disciples first having to hear and potentially believe the testimony of others before seeing the risen

Christ would certainly prepare them to have compassion as they went into the world expecting listeners to believe them.

Mark 16:15–20. Go Ye into All the World

The gospel message the disciples were sent to declare is simple and clear: believe in Christ and be baptized in order to be saved. Latter-day Saints understand this to mean that belief alone does not grant the full salvation that Jesus offers. One must also enter into a covenant relationship with Him (baptism inaugurates this covenant relationship), binding themselves to His way of life as a prerequisite to full salvation.

The signs outlined would be found among those who believe, not just among those whom Jesus was sending. Snake handling and drinking poison may be symbolic rather than literal, suggesting one is given power over such enemies as chaos, evil, and corruption. Iconography in the ancient world included depictions of gods holding or standing on serpents, scorpions, lions, and other dangerous creatures as a symbol of their power over chaos and harm (compare Luke 10:19).

That Jesus ascended to heaven and sits at the right hand of God were fundamental claims and beliefs taught by the early Church members as they went into all the world.⁵

Note

1 See Mark 10:37; 12:35–37; 14:62.

2 One of the most thorough studies defending the traditional ending of Mark as it appears in the King James Version is Nicholas P. Lunn, *The Original Ending of Mark: A New Case for the Authenticity of Mark 16:9–20* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014). See also Jeff Lindsay, “The Book of Mormon Versus the Consensus of Scholars: Surprises from the Disputed Longer Ending of Mark,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 25 (2017): 283–365.

3 See Mark 15:40, 47; 16:1.

4 See, for example, Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34; 14:27–28.

5 See Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9; 2:33–35; 7:56; Romans 8:34; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Peter 3:22.

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