



Where does the gospel of Mark end? Modern
day snake handlers derive their practice
from **Mark 16:17-18 (KJV)**

Where does the gospel of Mark end?

“I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book”—Revelation 22:18 NKJV

Promoters and believers in faith healing often use **Mark 16:17-18** as Biblical support for their healing practices:

“They will lay their hands on the sick and they will recover” (Mark 16:18 NKJV).

SNAKE HANDLING AND DRINKING POISON

These last few verses of Mark are very important to snake handling “Christians” because

they say: **“They will take up serpents” (Mark 16:18 NKJV)**. The **Weymouth** translation reads, **“They shall take up venomous snakes”**.

“If they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them” (Mark 16:18 LSB).

Are such deliberate actions on the part of Christians a genuine feature of spreading the gospel (Mark 13:10), or are they a violation of the Bible principle, **“You shall not put Yahweh your God to the test” (Matthew 4:7 LSB margin; Deuteronomy 6:16 LSB)?**

Those who insist confirmation a Christian’s **“anointing is real, not counterfeit” (1 John 2:27 NIV)** is done by ‘speaking in tongues’, are being arbitrarily selective. Why is such confirmation not also by handling poisonous snakes and drinking poison?

RELIANCE UPON THE KING JAMES VERSION (KJV) TRANSLATION

Those who believe ritual snake handling is something that is for Christians to do often use the **King James Version (KJV)** Bible translation, without any explanatory footnotes to the text. They often believe that the **KJV** is the only Bible translation to use. These Christians are often referred to as “KJV only”. The NT KJV was translated from Erasmus’ Greek text, was not based on any Greek manuscripts earlier than the 10th century. Newer translations are based on Greek Texts composed by using many Greek manuscripts hundreds of years closer to the original writings, and therefore, have a higher degree of accuracy.

HOW DO WE KNOW MARK ENDS AT 16:8?

How do we know **Mark 16** ends at verse 8 and not 20? The footnote to **Mark 16:20** in the **NKJV** reads: **“Verses 9-20 are bracketed in the NU-Text as not original. They are lacking in the Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, although nearly all other manuscripts of Mark contain them”**. The two best available Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, do not have anything after **Mark**

16:8. They have neither the usual 12 verse ending, or the less common shorter ending. Neither does manuscript 304, the Sinaitic Old Syriac, some manuscripts of the Sahadic Coptic version, manuscripts of the Armenian translation, and some versions of the Georgian translation. It is significant that verses after **Mark 16:8** do not appear in any manuscript prior to the fifth century. This passage is included in a number of other, later manuscripts, but with critical marks, such as asterisks or obeli (marks to indicate that a passage is spurious, doubtful or corrupt), which tell us that the scribe knew of the questionable nature of these verses. The shorter ending is found in some less important manuscripts. In some other manuscripts, this shorter ending is combined with the longer ending. Codex W, an important early Greek manuscript, adds an entire paragraph between verses **14** and **15**. All of this together is strong proof that **Mark 16:9-20** was not originally part of Mark's Gospel. Bible scholar and translator Jerome, around 400 CE, said "Almost all the Greek codices (are) without this passage".

The ancient manuscripts of Mark testify the end of Mark is at **Mark 16:8**.

VARIETY OF ENDINGS OF MARK

Possibly, even a bigger problem for the end of Mark coming 12 verses after **Mark 16:8** than the manuscript evidence, is the variety of different endings. These make no sense if verses **9-20** were part of the original Gospel of Mark. If **Mark 16:9-20** was authentic, then there would not be all these various endings. The variety of endings is extremely strong proof that Mark originally ended at 16:8. These endings were obviously added later, so they could not be genuine.

VOCABULARY, SYNTAX AND THEOLOGICAL CONTENT

Additional evidence against verses **9-20** is that the vocabulary, syntax and theological content are radically different from the genuine part of Mark's gospel. The natural reading of these verses strongly implies that whoever wrote them originally wasn't completely familiar

with the entire book of Mark and the other gospels, and was using apocryphal (false) and extraneous sources. **Verse 9** introduces Mary Magdalene as though she is being introduced to the reader for the first time, although she was mentioned just 8 verses previously, in **Mark 16:1**, as well as in **Mark 15:40,47**. She is also mentioned in **Matthew 27:57,61**, which was probably written some years before Mark's gospel, possibly 20 years prior to Mark, and in **Luke 8:1**, which was probably written a few years prior to Mark, mentions the **"seven demons"** Jesus drove out of her.

INFLUENCE OF APOCRYPHAL WRITINGS

Verses 17 and 18 have Jesus promising: **"These signs will follow those who believe (implying ALL who believe): In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick; and they will recover"** (NKJV). NLT says: **"They will be able to handle snakes with safety"**. These verses are similar to many apocryphal (false) writings that were circulating in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. The NT records no Christian drinking deadly poison, much less recovering. While **1 Corinthians 12:29-30** notes that some early Christians spoke in tongues, and had other miraculous gifts, it impresses the point that not all did so. **1 Corinthians 12:31-13:3** emphasizes that these were not the greatest gifts, but love is. **1 Corinthians 13:8-13** stresses that these miraculous, but lesser, gifts would pass away once "completeness comes" (NIV), or **"perfection comes"** (NAB), apparently the complete NT. The point is that the spurious promises of **Mark 16:17-18** are contradicted by other scriptures, those which are actually inspired by God.

CONCLUSION

Where does the gospel of Mark end? **Deuteronomy 4:2; Proverbs 30:5,6** and **Revelation 22:18,19** warn about the seriousness of 'adding to' God's word. **Mark 16:9-20** et al is a notable example of such 'adding to'. Therefore, we would do well not to use these verses as

though they were “the word of God”, since they are **“a human word”** (**1 Thessalonians 2:13 NIV**). This is especially true if we take to heart the serious warning at **Revelation 22:15** about those who ‘like and carry on falsehood’ (**NIV**), which **Mark 16:9-20** is!