

6 The Messiah: killed and raised (Mark 15–16)

In the final chapters of Mark's Gospel, Pilate's court condemns this "king of the Jews." Rome's soldiers mock the most absurd "king" they've ever seen. As he is crucified, the Jewish leaders join the mockery of "this Messiah, this king of Israel." Late Friday afternoon, Jesus dies as a condemned criminal. He is buried.

After the Sabbath, some supporters go to the tomb to honour his dead body, but it doesn't work out as they expect. They are deeply disturbed, terrified by news that Jesus is no longer dead. What do they do with this incredible message? Will the world ever hear this good news?

Are you ready for how Mark's account of the Good News of Jesus the Messiah ends?

6.1 Tried by Rome (15:1-15)

Mark 15:1 (NIV)

Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, made their plans. So they bound Jesus, led him away and **handed him over** to Pilate.

Handed over (paradidōmi) is the same word used of Judas *betraying* Jesus (14:10, 11, 18, 21, 41, 42, 44). If Jesus is the God-anointed king, this is treason. The Jerusalem leaders betrayed their king by handing him over to their Roman overlords.

Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin was about his claim to be *the Messiah, the son of the Blessed One* (14:61). For Pilate, that translates to *the king of the Jews*:

Mark 15:2 (NIV)

"Are you **the king of the Jews**?" asked Pilate.

"You have said so," Jesus replied.

Pilate knows royalty when he sees it: the golden chains and majestic robes. He seems to enjoy picturing this pathetic Galilean in dusty garments as the representative of the people for whom Pilate has no respect.

Jesus doesn't try to explain his kingship to Pilate. Jesus has not been going around claiming to be king, so Pilate has nothing but hearsay. "Your word; not mine."

Mark 15:3-5 (NIV)

³ The chief priests accused him of many things.

⁴ So again Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer?"

See how many things they are accusing you of."

⁵ But Jesus still made **no reply**, and Pilate was amazed.

Why offer no defence? Several reasons. First, Pilate's court is not unbiased: it was established to preserve Roman rule. Second, the accusations come from the leaders of his own people who have already made up their minds. There is no defence against

this collusion of Jewish and gentile rulers. Jesus' only hope is for his Father to raise him up after they kill him. But here's a possible escape:

Mark 15:6-8 (NIV)

⁶ Now it was the custom at the festival to release a prisoner whom the people requested. ⁷ A man called **Barabbas** was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. ⁸ The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.

As a gesture of good will, Rome released a prisoner each Passover. It was often a political prisoner, like Barabbas who had fought in an uprising against Roman rule. Barabbas saw himself as a redeemer for the nation that was meant to be under the LORD'S rule. He was doing what the judges had done in fighting off their oppressors, what Joshua had done in evicting the Canaanites. Barabbas saw himself as a freedom fighter, while Rome saw him as a terrorist.

Jesus and Barabbas represent two views of how God would overturn the oppression of his people and restore them as a kingdom of God. Which one do the people want?

Mark 15:9-11 (NIV)

⁹ "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, ¹⁰ knowing it was out of **self-interest** that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. ¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.

This is not about justice, but power. *It was out of self-interest that the chief priests* want Jesus removed. The real issue is the conflict between temple and king. Pilate riles them by referring to Jesus as *the king of the Jews* (verses 2, 9, 12, 26, 18, 32).

Mark 15:12-15 (NIV)

¹² "What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them.

¹³ "Crucify him!" they shouted.

¹⁴ "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!"

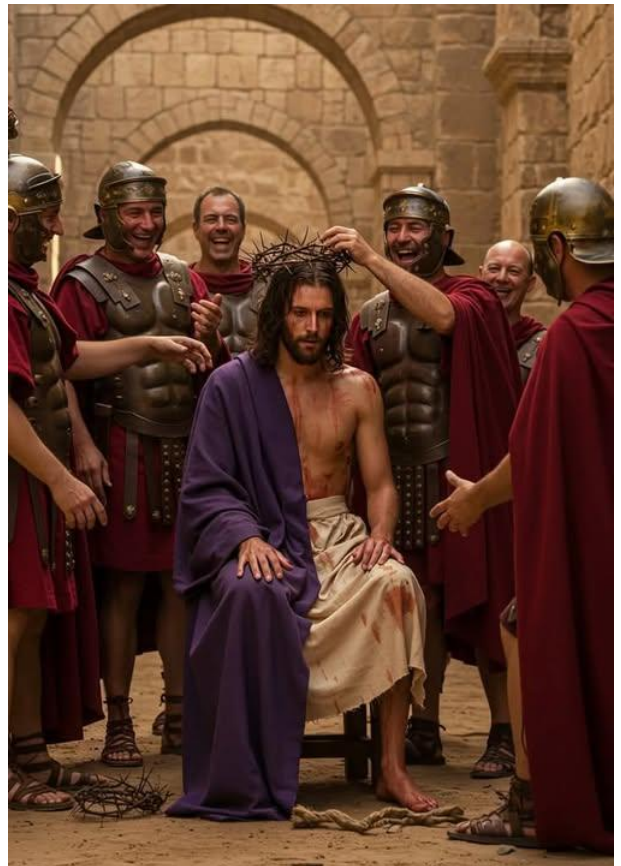
¹⁵ Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

There is no justice here. The crowds that welcomed the king into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday now call for his execution. People can be manipulated so easily. Is there a warning here for the way we're drawn into mob rage in social media?

6.2 Mocked as a king (15:16-20)

Mark 15:16-19 (NIV)

¹⁶ The soldiers led Jesus away into the **palace** (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole **company of soldiers**. ¹⁷ They put a **purple robe** on him, then twisted together a **crown of thorns** and set it on him. ¹⁸ And they began to call out to him, “**Hail, king** of the Jews!” ¹⁹ Again and again they struck him on the head with a **staff** and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid **homage** to him.



The soldiers mock Jesus as the most pathetic king. Their parody highlights what Jesus does not have:

- a) **Palace:** The *Praetorium* was the governor's official residence, the nearest thing Jerusalem had to a palace. This is a mock enthronement ceremony.
- b) **Company of soldiers:** A king needs a force at his command, to enforce his rule.
- c) **Purple robe:** Purple was the royal colour because the colour-fast dye was so costly: “Since approximately eight thousand molluscs were required to produce one gram of purple dye, purple cloth was extremely expensive.” ²⁰
- d) **Crown:** Thorns represent the pain of a world that rejects God's authority (Genesis 3:18). This is only crown the world gave God's Messiah.
- e) “**Hail, king!**”: A king should have the honour of his people recognizing him.
- f) **Staff:** The ruler's staff (sceptre) is used against him, to inflict pain.
- g) **Homage:** Bowing was a posture of recognizing authority. The same word (*proskyneō*) is used for worship, for worship is bowing before his throne.

Jesus has already contrasted his power with the way the rulers of this world exercise their authority (10:42-45). He has not come to force people to serve him, but to serve them and give his life to redeem them—even soldiers like these!

But recognizing God's anointed ruler is not what the forces of this world want to do:

Mark 15:20 (NIV)

And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

²⁰ D. Irvin, “Purple,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, (Eerdmans, 1979–1988), 3:1057.

6.3 Crucified (15:21-25)

Mark 15:21 (NIV)

A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.

Cyrene was in north Africa. *Simon* is a Jewish name. It was unusual for someone else to carry the crosspiece. Normally the prisoner carried the crossbar to the site, where it was attached to a stake already in the ground (the upright part of the cross).

Mark 15:22 (NIV)

They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means “the place of the skull”).

Golgotha is Aramaic for “Skull Place.” It was outside the first century walls of Jerusalem, probably near the Church of the Holy Sepulchre today.

The Latin word *Calvary* comes from Catholicism, not the Greek text of the New Testament. It's better to use *Golgotha*.

Mark 15:23-25 (NIV)

²³ Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.

²⁴ And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

²⁵ It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. ²⁶ The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Wine mixed with myrrh would be regarded as a sedative (drugged wine).

The soldiers divide up the only thing Jesus owns: *his clothes*.

The explanation for Jesus' crucifixion is attached to the cross: he is *the king of the Jews*. The Jewish and gentile rulers together have raised their hand against the LORD and his anointed (Psalm 2:2; Acts 4:27). That's the meaning of the cross of Christ.

6.4 Mocked by rebels and temple leaders (15:27-32)

The cross is not unique to Christ. Many others were also crucified under Roman rule:

Mark 15:27-32 (NIV)

²⁷ They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left.

²⁸ ²⁹ Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, ³⁰ come down from the cross and save yourself!” ³¹ In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can't save himself! ³² Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

The *rebels* were probably insurgents against Roman rule, similar to Barabbas. Since a king was always accompanied by attendants, the executioners give the “king” a rebel servant on each side. It’s all part of the mockery of his kingship.

The Messiah was expected to save his nation, but this “king” can’t even save himself. Some Christians do not understand *Christ* as a reference to Jesus’ kingship. *Christ* (*christos* in Greek) is the most frequently used title for Jesus in the New Testament, occurring more than 500 times! The word literally means “anointed,” and it translates the Hebrew word *messiah* which also means “anointed.” To call Jesus the *Christ* is to recognize him as the God-anointed ruler for the earth, rescuing us from the dominion of evil and death, restoring earth to the reign of his Father in the heavens.

Mark will not let us ignore the kingship of the Christ (*Messiah* in the NIV). *Christ* means *king of Israel* (verse 32). The regal understanding of the Christ is central to Jesus’ entire programme of establishing the kingdom of God. It’s central to how the other NT writers use the word Christ as well.²¹ The cross is the world mocking the kingship of the Christ.

6.5 The king forsaken by God (15:33-39)

Mark 15:33 (NIV)

At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.

This is three hours after Jesus was first crucified (verse 25). It’s the middle of the day. The darkness is not an eclipse, for it holds the land for three hours.

In the closing chapters of Isaiah, God promised to send a *redeemer to Zion*, a *Spirit-anointed leader* to restore *covenant* relationship with God’s people (Isaiah 59:20-21). The kingdom under his leadership would function as the light of God for a dark world:

Isaiah 60:1-3 (NIV)

¹ “Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.

² See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. ³ Nations
will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

But instead of receiving their king and living as his kingdom, Jerusalem chose to join the darkness and extinguish the light of the Messiah’s life. They plunged the whole land into darkness. So, where are God’s promises? Why does God allow the darkness to take over and snuff out the light of his son? That’s Jesus’ question:

Mark 15:34 (NIV)

And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice,
“*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*”
(which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).

²¹ Joshua W. Jipp. *The Messianic Theology of the New Testament*. (Eerdmans, 2020),

I don't know if you've ever felt that level of disconnection from God, as if God has turned away from you, as if God doesn't know or doesn't care what's happening for you. This is what Jesus felt in Gethsemane with his Father not answering his prayers. This is what Jesus is feeling at Golgotha as people mock and murder him. Worse than the physical pain of crucifixion, worse than the rejection of his own people, is the sense of utter isolation—that even God is leaving him here to die.

But Jesus is not the first to feel abandoned like this. The cry of dereliction comes from his ancestors:

Psalm 22:title–8 (NIV)

... A psalm of David.

¹ **My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**

Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?

² My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, but I find no rest. ...

⁷ All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads.

⁸ “He trusts in the LORD,” they say, “let the LORD rescue him.
Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.”

Whose words are these? Why does Jesus re-use David's words to describe his grief?

Something had gone wrong for David in Psalm 22. Perhaps he'd lost a battle where many had died, and the kingdom was blaming the king. If David was the LORD'S anointed, why did they lose? Why didn't God give them the victory?

And now, Jesus, this son of David, this king of the Jews, was crushed by his enemies, feeling the same sense of failure and defeat. David described the enemies who overpowered him as animals that were hunting him to kill him:

Psalm 22:11-18 (NIV)

¹¹ Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

¹² Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.

¹³ Roaring lions that tear their prey open their mouths wide against me.

¹⁴ I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint.

My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me.

¹⁵ My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks
to the roof of my mouth; **you lay me in the dust of death.**

¹⁶ Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me;
they pierce my hands and my feet.

¹⁷ All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me.

¹⁸ They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.

The Holy Spirit gave David words to describe his pain, and those words seem even more applicable to the sufferings of Messiah who came to restore the fallen kingdom:

- At Skull Place, Jesus is surrounded by the beasts who want to kill him.
- Suspended by crucified hands, his bones are literally *out of joint* (verse 14).
- Gasping for breath, *his mouth is dried up like a potsherd*. (verse 15).
- His Father has handed him over to be laid in the dust of death (verse 15).
- His executioners have pierced *his hands and his feet* (verse 16).
- Crowds stare at him and mock him as their king (verse 17).
- They divide his clothes by lot (verse 18).

As David prayed for the LORD to save him from death, he said:

Psalm 22:22-31 (NIV)

²² I will declare your name to my people;
in the assembly I will praise you. ...

²⁷ All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations will bow down before him,

²⁸ for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations. ...

³⁰ Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the
Lord. ³¹ They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it!

David survived the defeat of Psalm 22, but the Davidic kingship died when Babylon invaded Jerusalem. Jesus entered into the death of the kingdom for his people. He suffered rejection by his own people and defeat at the hands of the beasts who ruled them. And just as David survived the cry of dereliction in Psalm 22:1, Jesus survived being laid in the dust of death. He rose to declare the authority of God's name in the assembly that gathers around the king (verse 22),²² restoring God's reign to Israel and the nations (verse 28). Truly, David's words were for a future generation who would see God doing right for a people yet unborn (verse 31).

All that anguish and hope is implied by Jesus seeing himself following in the steps of his father David, restoring the kingdom of God after his death, when his Father raised him up.²³

But the people watching the crucifixion have no idea what Jesus is talking about. They mistake his cry for *Eloi* ("My God" in Aramaic) as a call for Elijah to help him:

Mark 15:35-37 (NIV)

³⁵ When some of those standing near heard this, they said,
"Listen, he's calling Elijah."

²² The word *assembly* (in Psalm 22:22 and 25) is the word for "church" in the New Testament (*ekklesiā* in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament). The church is the assembly of people from all over the world that gathers around King Jesus. See <https://allenbrowne.blog/2019/09/06/why-church/>

²³ See <https://allenbrowne.blog/2024/08/07/psalm-22-davids-defeat/>

³⁶ Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down,” he said.

³⁷ With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

Death is so final. We’ve just witnessed the ultimate injustice. Here’s God’s response:

Mark 15:38 (NIV)

The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

The *curtain of the temple* is the veil that separated the Most Holy Place from the rest of the room where the priests were allowed (Exodus 26:33). The Most Holy Place was a private chamber where God sat *enthroned between the cherubim* (1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Samuel 6:3; 2 Kings 19:15; 1 Chronicles 13:6; Psalms 80:1; 99:1; Isaiah 37:16).

If this curtain was ripped *from the top*, the tear comes from heaven’s side. God has rejected this house as no longer suitable for him to inhabit.

There was a previous time when God had moved out because “*the sin of the people of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great; the land is full of bloodshed and the city is full of injustice*” (Ezekiel 9:9). Slowly, *the glory of the LORD* moved out of the temple (Ezekiel 9:3; 10:4; 10:18; 11:23), leaving it vulnerable to destruction by Babylon.

Now it’s happened again. The house meant to bear God’s name has become a den of robbers who would kill the Messiah to take his authority (Mark 11:17-18). God will evict the tenants in his vineyard who kill his son, and make his son the foundation stone for what God is building (12:9-12). So once again, the temple in Jerusalem would be torn down leaving not one stone on another (13:2).

This temple is no longer fit for purpose. God has torn the veil, and left the house because his servants killed his Son.

There is another temple! In the body of the Messiah, God was “tabernacled” among his people (John 1:14). They destroyed this temple, but in three days God will raise him up (John 2:19-21). The resurrected body of the Messiah is the foundation stone for a global temple made of people (living stones) who recognize God in his Messiah (1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:21; 1 Peter 2:4-10).

And that recognition of the Messiah begins here at the cross:

Mark 15:39 (NIV)

And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”

How’s that for an unexpected source? The Roman officer overseeing the execution of the king of the Jews declares Jesus’ innocence. Justice has not been done. This man really was appointed by God as the ruler of his people.

6.6 Buried (15:40-47)

Jesus is dead. Those who believed he was the Saviour of his people can't comprehend what this means. Once again, the leader appointed by God is killed by their enemies. Everything they've hoped for has died with him:

Mark 15:40-47 (NIV)

⁴⁰ Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. ⁴¹ In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

⁴² It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, ⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. ⁴⁴ Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. ⁴⁵ When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. ⁴⁶ So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. ⁴⁷ Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.

Preparation Day is the name for Friday. The Sabbath would begin at sundown. They don't want to leave Jesus' corpse hanging there, so they must move him quickly. Now we learn there is at least one member of the Jerusalem Council who was *waiting for the kingdom of God* to be restored, and watching to see if Jesus might be that king.

Joseph from Arimathea provides the tomb where Jesus' body can be laid to rest.

6.7 Raised up by heaven's decree (16:1-8)

The final chapter of Mark's Gospel is a brief one: just eight verses. The ending feels unsatisfying, a cliffhanger with no sequel. Later writers added more detail and an explanation of how we're meant to respond to what God has done in Christ.

Let's cover the first eight verses first, and then we can look at the verses that are not found in the oldest copies of Mark's Gospel.

Mark 16:1-8 (NIV)

¹ When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. ² Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb ³ and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

⁴ But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. ⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

⁶ “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. **He has risen!** He is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is **going ahead** of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’ ”

⁸ Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

The resurrection is at the heart of these verses: “*He has risen!*” (verse 6). It’s what Jesus has been telling them all along, that he would be killed and raised to life (8:31; 9:10 -31; 10:34).

The women who’ve been supporting Jesus from Galilee days are the recipients of this good news. The sun is barely up on Sunday morning when they take their spices to pay their respects to Jesus’ corpse. They’re not prepared for what they see. The stone door to the tomb has been rolled open. There is no corpse inside. Instead there’s someone sitting beside where the body had been. They’re shocked. And terrified.

The young man in the white robe knows they’re looking for Jesus, and he knows Jesus was crucified. He insists, “*He has been raised! He is not here. See the place where they laid him*” (verse 6). He instructs them to tell the disciples, including the one who denied Jesus. They will see the risen Messiah again, just as he told them. He would *go ahead of them* the way a shepherd leads a flock (verse 7).

For the women who saw Jesus’ dead body being taken from the cross and placed in this tomb on Friday, this makes no sense. How would you cope if you heard someone was alive after you saw them die a horrific death?

They’re *alarmed* (verse 5). They’re *bewildered and trembling* (verse 8). They flee from the empty tomb, without comprehending its significance. Mark’s final sentence is this: *They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.*

Seriously, Mark, you can’t end there! Did they tell Peter and the others? Did they return to Galilee? Did they meet with the resurrected Jesus as he promised?

After all the Old Testament narrative that Mark said Jesus was fulfilling, after the disciples walked with Jesus for three years and started to see him as the Messiah, after all that God did through him—including raising him from the dead—*they said nothing to anyone because they were afraid?*

Surely the proclamation of the gospel of the Messiah who died at the hands of injustice and was raised to restore the peoples of the earth to heaven’s reign—surely that good news needs to be proclaimed for the rescue of the world? How can it end with saying nothing to anyone because of fear?

Before we're too hard on these women, remember the men had already fallen away the night of Jesus' trial (14:27). The women kept following (15:40), saw where Jesus was laid (15:47), and came to the tomb to honour him (16:2).

But what happens if the followers of Jesus do not proclaim the good news that God has raised up his Son as the Saviour who rescues the earth from the dominion of sin and death, restoring us with his resurrection life? Wouldn't that be the ultimate tragedy if God had done all this, but we said nothing to anyone because we're afraid?

Maybe that's the point. Is Mark's cliffhanger the ultimate challenge to the followers of Jesus to share the good news? What do you think?

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6.8 How does the story end? (16:9-20)

Most copies of Mark's Gospel from the fifth century onwards include verses 9-20. A few copies have a shorter ending that you can read in the NRSV.

What are we to make of how Mark's Gospel ends?

- a) Did Mark write the longer or shorter ending?
- b) Did Mark write an ending that's been lost?
- c) Did Mark intend his book to end with verse 8?

Dick France explains the consensus:

The almost unanimous conclusion of modern scholarship is that both the Shorter and Longer Endings, in their different ways, represent well-meaning attempts, probably sometime in the second century, to fill the perceived gap left by the 'unfinished' ending at 16:8.²⁴

Tom Wright explains why most believe Mark did not write the longer ending:

The longer ending looks very much like a compilation of bits and pieces from the resurrection narratives of Matthew and Luke, with some extra parts added. If, as most believe, Matthew and Luke were written later than Mark, this alone should arouse our suspicions. The passage starts, too, as though beginning the chapter again, introducing Mary Magdalene as though she hasn't already been mentioned several times in the preceding two paragraphs. We can't say for certain that nothing in this passage comes from the original Mark, but it doesn't seem to me likely.²⁵

Robert Gundry thinks there must have been a lost ending, similar to how Matthew's Gospel ends:

²⁴ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Eerdmans, 2002), 687.

²⁵ Tom Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (SPCK, 2004), 226.

To reconstruct the lost ending of Mark, we should use Matt 28:9–10, 16–20 ... Presumably, the lost ending of Mark contained a version of the Great Commission ... It would probably be foolhardy to speculate any further.²⁶

The United Bible Societies advises translators to indicate the ending is not from Mark:

Most modern translations continue to print it [verses 9-20] as part of Mark. Some, however, indicate its non-Markan nature. ASV adds a footnote ... RSV prints the whole section in the margin ...

Any modern translation should indicate, by such means as these, that the Longer Ending is not part of the Gospel of Mark.²⁷

Whether verses 9-20 belong in the text or not makes little practical difference, since the content is supported elsewhere in Scripture. One possible exception is verse 18: *they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison it will not hurt them at all*. This verse has been misused, e.g.:

- Snake-handling churches in the United States base their practice on this verse.
- Cult leader Jim Jones killed his followers with a drink laced with cyanide.

So, did Mark intend to end his book at verse 8? Is this a satisfactory ending?

Mark 16:8 (NIV)

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb.
They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Here are some of the ways scholars today have understood Mark's intention to end his Gospel at verse 8. Robert Stein summarizes:

Mark was now seen as intending to end his Gospel at 16:8, and many offered explanations for why Mark chose to end his Gospel this way.

Mark was seen as seeking to ...:

- force the readers "to think out for [themselves] the Gospel's challenge" (Best 1983: 132);
- encourage readers to persevere despite the disobedience and failure of the disciples (Lincoln 1989: 283–300);
- challenge the reader to become "the perfect disciple" and fulfill what the disciples and women failed to do (Tolbert 1989: 297–99);
- have the readers "make their [own] decision" of obedience (Geddert 1989: 172);
- "leave his readers to make the crucial step of faith for themselves, without presenting them with less ambiguous evidence for the resurrection" (Hooker 1991: 392);

²⁶ Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Eerdmans, 2000), 1021.

²⁷ Robert Bratcher and Eugene Nida, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Mark*, (United Bible Societies, 1993), 507.

- elicit “a call for deeper commitment ... from its hearers” (Danove 1993: 222); and so on.²⁸

If we can’t be certain of how the Gospel of Mark originally ended, are you okay living with the uncertainty?

6.9 Conclusion

Jesus is *the Christ*, the anointed ruler who restores earth as a kingdom of heaven. That’s *the gospel* according to Mark (1:1-14).

Once people began to recognize him as the Christ, Jesus told them how he would become king. Those in power would kill him, but his Father would raise him up. All who live under his leadership must also take the way of the cross (8:29–9:1).

That’s the path Mark follows in these chapters:

Mark 9	Jesus defines his mission.
Mark 10	The king leads his people to the capital.
Mark 11	The crowds welcome their Messiah, but the temple rejects his authority.
Mark 12	Jesus warns the leaders they’ll lose everything if they murder the Son.
Mark 13	The temple and city fall, but the Son of Man receives the kingship.
Mark 14	Jesus is betrayed, arrested, condemned, and abandoned.
Mark 15	Jesus is mocked and condemned. He dies alone, and is buried in a tomb.
Mark 16	On the third day, his body is no longer in the tomb. Heaven’s messenger says he’s alive and ready to lead them. Do they follow?

What has transformed your faith and actions most from these chapters?

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²⁸ Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, BECNT (Baker Academic, 2008), 733–734.