

## Book Review

*Perspectives on the Ending of Mark: 4 Views* edited by David Alan Black, Nashville, TN; Broadman & Holman Academic, 2008, 145 pp., ISBN: 978-0-8054-4762-0. \$19.99.

David Alan Black is professor of New Testament and Greek at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forrest, North Carolina. He holds the B.A. from Biola University, the M. Div. from Talbot School of Theology, and the D. Theol. from the University of Basel. His published works include *Learn to Read New Testament Greek* and *New Testament Textual Criticism*.

*Perspectives* is the result of papers submitted for a conference entitled, “The Last Twelve Verses of Mark: Original or Not,” held April 13-14, 2007, at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forrest, North Carolina. Papers were submitted by J. K. Elliott of Leeds (a thoroughgoing eclecticist), Daniel B. Wallace of Dallas Theological Seminary (known for reasoned eclecticist), and Maurice A. Robinson of Southeastern Seminary (who holds a Byzantine-priority viewpoint). David Alan Black also submitted a paper. Elliott argues that Mark’s ending was lost. Wallace argues that Mark intended his Gospel to end at 16:8. Robinson argues that Mark 16:9-20 is original. Black affirms that Mark 16:9-20 was added by Mark to round off Peter’s lectures. A closing chapter was written by Darrel L. Block. Block rejects the long ending of Mark arguing that the gospel concludes at 16:8.

The book contains a brief synopsis of the contributors, a list of abbreviations, a preface, five chapters and a name index.

Chapter one was written by Daniel B. Wallace who argues that Mark 16:8 is the true ending of the Gospel. Wallace begins by addressing presuppositions. He has two that he presents as starting points. The first is that Mark wrote first and John wrote last. The second is that he holds to the Doddian school that John was not at all dependent on the Synoptic Gospels. This means that both Mark and John were writing a new literary genre (p. 2). Wallace adds other presuppositions to the list: one’s view of *source criticism*, for example, whether or not one accepts “the independent texttype theory” advanced by Harry Sturz (p. 4), *the whole field of textual criticism, bibliology* including one’s view of preservation. Wallace admits that he does not hold to the doctrine of preservation (p. 7). Wallace held to the *majority text view* for 17 years and, then, after personal study in the pursuit of his doctorate at Dallas Theological Seminary, he changed to *reasoned eclecticist* (p. 8). Wallace then proceeds to discuss the external and internal evidence for the long ending of Mark (16:9-20). While at least 95 percent of all Greek MSS and ancient versions have the long ending, Wallace still rejects it. The long ending of Mark is found in all texttypes—Western, Caesarean, Byzantine, and even the secondary Alexandrian. It has broad geographical evidence. It is witnessed by several church fathers beginning in the late second century with Irenaeus. In short, the external evidence is weighty. Wallace focuses on the question, “why would the scribes do what they do with this text?” (pp. 10,13). He rejects that they omitted it and accepts that they added it. Wallace argues that the omission of Resurrection appearances accounts for why scribes would add vv. 9-20 to chapter 16.

Wallace pursues the evidence for the short ending. There are only two manuscripts—the Sinaiticus and the Vaticanus that end Mark’s gospel at 16:8. Wallace holds that manuscripts should be weighed not counted (a guideline in textual criticism) (p. 14). These two manuscripts represent the Alexandrian texttype. Wallace correctly informs the reader that there is a large gap at the end of the Vaticanus manuscript which seems to indicate that the scribe knew something

was missing, but Wallace rejects this and states that he believes the gap is too small for the long ending of Mark (p. 16). Wallace mentions one other manuscript, Codex 304, a twelfth-century Byzantine MS, that ends with Mark 16:8. He also lists a few ancient versions that lack 16:9-20 (p. 19). Finally, he lists some of the early patristic writers who witness to the shorter ending (p. 20).

Wallace takes up the internal evidence of the problem by examining whether or not Mark would have written verses 9-20 of chapter 16. The typical points raised are vocabulary, syntax, style, and context. Wallace argues that the cumulative effect of all of these points is against the authenticity of the long ending of Mark. He affirms, “there is not a single passage in Mark 1:1-16:8 comparable to the stylistic, grammatical, and lexical anomalies in 16:9-20” (p. 30).

In the final section of chapter one, Wallace gives his reasons for accepting Mark 16:8 as the intentional ending of Mark’s Gospel. He engages three arguments of those who object to Mark’s gospel ending at 16:8. The first is that an open-ended book is a modern convention, not an ancient one. The second is that it is likely that the last leaf of the Gospel was simply lost before copies were made of it. The third is that books don’t end in *gar* (the last Greek word in Mark 16:8).

Chapter two was written by Maurice Robinson who accepts the long ending of Mark’s Gospel as authentic. Robinson begins his chapter with a quotation from K. A. Kitchen, “Priority must always be given tangible, objective data, and to external evidence, over subjective theory or speculative opinions. Facts must control theory, not vice versa” (p. 40). Robinson proceeds to give the external evidence for: (1) the short ending at 16:8 which has only three manuscripts supporting it (Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, and 304); (2) the intermediate ending following 16:8; (3) the long ending at 16:20 (the majority of manuscript evidence supports the longer ending); and the long ending with a lengthy expansion following 16:14 (the Freer Logion, Washingtonian Manuscript housed in the Freer Gallery at the Smithsonian Institute). The author notes that very little new evidence of significance has been discovered since the known endings were debated by Burgon, Scrivener, and Westcott-Hort in the nineteenth century (p. 44). No papyri yet exist for this passage. Robinson supports the authenticity of the passage on the overwhelming external evidence which also includes a wide range of MSS that represents the Byzantine, Western, Caesarean, and even the Alexandrian texttype (of which Vaticanus and Sinaiticus are representative). If the two later manuscripts had included the long ending of Mark the controversy would be over.

Robinson examines further external evidence from the patristic writers Justin Martyr and Irenaeus. He proceeds to look at the internal evidence and interacts with Elliott quite well showing from examination of vocabulary and style that the longer ending could have been written by Mark. One particularly strong feature of internal evidence presented by Robinson concerns related parallels between Mark 1 and 16 (p. 68). These parallels number thirteen in all and concern Jesus public ministry. Further parallels are drawn between Mark 3, Mark 6, Mark 7-8 and Mark 16. The examples given by Robinson concern the first commissioning of the disciples and the final commissioning of them. The author concludes with fifteen points of summary in which he includes the basic evidence for the authenticity of Mark 16:9-20. This chapter provides one of the most concise defenses of these verses that exists in print.

Chapter three develops the view of J. K. Elliott in which the long ending is viewed as canonical along with the other endings of Mark. Elliott does not equate canonical with inerrancy (p. 100). He too examines the external and internal evidences and concludes that the text of the New Testament is fluid enough to allow for the acceptance of all three endings to Mark’s gospel

as canonical. Please consider some quotations from the author of this chapter as illustrative of his position. “The textual problems at the end of Mark and indeed the fluid text in much of the New Testament as a whole make talk of inerrancy, as narrowly defined by some, indefensible. Realistically applied to the New Testament the term must allow for errors in the transmission of the text. Unfortunately, the misuses of this word are bandied around rather like the use of “infallibility” when applied to *ex cathedra* pronouncements by the Pope” (p. 99). “We may argue that the original authors of the biblical texts were themselves inspired but to pretend that their words were transmitted unchanged is stretching credulity to its breaking point” (p. 99). “Further, to argue that a particular strand of the MS tradition, typically the text represented by the Textus Receptus, or the Majority text, uniquely preserves, through “providential care,” those inspired words in their entirety ignores the scientific results of textual criticism as practiced in the past century or more, and such preconceived conclusions alienate academic discussion that depends on open and free inquiry” (p. 99). “Inerrancy is not coterminous with canonicity. When the fathers promoted certain texts as authoritative for Christians to read, they would accept, e.g., the Gospel of Mark or the Epistle to the Romans. They did not require a particular form of Mark or Romans” (p. 100). “The Mark accepted as canonical was the form of the text the person, individual church, or monastery happened to possess” (p. 100). “The word “canonical” does not imply “original” and it certainly does not involve appeals to divine protectionism, inerrancy, or inspiration (whatever those words are said to mean)” (p. 100). “The sooner that the language of inerrancy is dropped in the context of textual criticism the better it will be for scholarship” (p. 101). The previous quotes expose some of the underlying assumptions of Elliott. A final quotation from the author should suffice to represent his position. “Moreover, we cannot nowadays forget that for most of its history the Gospel of Mark was interpreted and used by those who assumed (wrongly, we might say) that vv. 9-20 were part of Mark’s original composition” (p. 100). Elliott believes that the verses in question are canonical but not original or inspired.

The fourth chapter of *Perspectives* was written by David Alan Black who accepts the long ending of Mark’s Gospel as original. Black does not claim to be a text critic. He accepts the longer ending based on the external evidence. He does not believe that the internal evidence offers a satisfactory solution to the problem. Black advances the idea that Mark originally ended his Gospel at 16:8 and then later supplied the last twelve verses himself as a suitable conclusion (p. 104). He believes that all of the texttypes are equal in value. He does not believe that Vaticanus or Sinaiticus are infallible texts. He rejects internal evidence for consideration due largely to its highly subjective nature (p. 105). The bulk of the chapter consists of Black’s development of the four phases of the development of the Gospels as an explanation for how Mark added the last twelve verses to his Gospel. The four phases are: (1) the Jerusalem Phase (Acts 1-12) under the leadership of Peter; (2) the Gentile Mission Phase (Acts 13-28) under the leadership of Paul; (3) the Roman Phase requiring joint action by Peter and Paul; and (4) the Johannine Supplement (p. 108). This discussion culminates in Black’s explanation for how the last twelve verse of Mark came to be written (p. 120). According to Black, Mark’s Gospel began circulating with its culmination at 16:8. Then, Peter was martyred. As an act of piety to Peter, Mark decided to publish an edition of the text that would include the necessary sequel to the passion and death of the Master. He wrote the long ending to the Gospel and the completed Gospel began to circulate among the churches. However, the Gospel of Mark with the shorter ending was also in circulation. Consequently, the existence of both the short ending and the long ending of Mark’s Gospel form the textual problem we have today.

The final chapter of the book consists of a response to the other essays which is written by Darrell L. Bock. Bock rejects the long ending of the Gospel of Mark. He holds to the shorter ending as original (p. 124). Bock summarizes the points of agreement between the contributors in the following material: (1) The variants we possess for the short and longer ending of Mark are both very old; (2) What is taught in the longer ending for the most part is taught elsewhere in the New Testament. “This observation is important because it means the presence or absence of this text does not impact the core of Christian teaching at all” (p. 125). Does this mean that the twelve verses in question are dispensable rather than indispensable? What about the doctrine of inspiration? and (3) Everyone desires hard evidence. Bock states, “The only question might be whether internal evidence also can be tangible...” (p. 125). How could subjective judgments be “tangible” proof?

Bock investigates the external and internal evidence for both the inclusion of Mark 16:9-20 and exclusion of these verses. He clearly favors weighting the two major Alexandrian manuscripts over the majority of manuscripts that exist. Consequently, he favors the short ending of Mark due in large part to Aleph and B. Bock interacts with Elliott and Robinson concerning the internal evidence. He also cites a work that has influenced his thinking on the issues involved in accepting the shorter ending. It is J. Lee Magness’s *Marking the End: Sense and Absence in the Gospel of Mark*. Magness shows that open-ended accounts are not rare in the ancient world (p. 135). Bock concludes that the internal evidence is key to deciding the question about the ending of Mark’s Gospel. He states, “It is more likely that the original existence of the short reading explains why we have the longer reading and the other variant endings of Mark than the other way around” (p. 137).

In one hundred and forty-one pages of text, the reader will get a good idea of the various positions that exist regarding an important textual question in the New Testament. Ultimately, the reader must decide for himself which evidence and arguments he favors.