

IN DEFENSE OF MARK 16: 9-20 AND JOHN 7:53-8:11

by Gary T. Panell

Many of us have enjoyed reading several of the modern English versions of the Bible. As you read, though, sometimes you notice in the margins such comments as “some of the oldest manuscripts omit from verse 9 through 20”. This is the very comment at the end of Mark 16 in the New American Standard Bible.

These comments do not set well with me because they leave some doubt in the reader’s mind without backing up their statement with proof, nor is there an argument given on the other side showing why the men responsible for the King James Version (KJV), included these verses.

The (KJV), was so named because of the part King James of England played in the Bible’s production into English. It was brought about in 1611 by six panels of translators (47 men in all). Most of these men were leading Biblical scholars in England. (1)

These men used as their basis what is called the Byzantine text (or Syrian text), which dates back to 347-407 A.D. This Byzantine text, from which we get our (KJV), does have Mark 16: 9-20, but the Alexandrian text from which the Revised Standard, New American Standard, and New International Version relied heavily upon, does not have these verses. Since the Alexandrian text is considered by “some Bible scholars” to be more reliable than the Byzantine text, and since the Mark passage is not included in the Alexandrian text it is assumed by “some Christians” that this passage is not Scripture. (2)

Also, the Codex Sinaiticus (350 A.D.) and the Codex Vaticanus (325-350 A.D.) do not have Mark 16: 9-20, nor do they have John 7: 53-8:11. For these reasons, some are ready to omit these same passages today from Holy Scripture.

However, these same Bible scholars that want to omit the above verses from Scripture, do not go on to tell you what else they know about Mark 16: 9-20. Dr. C. I. Scofield in the Scofield Bible does tell us, “The passage is quoted by Irenaeus and Hippolytus in the second or third century.” Hippolytus in the years from 170-236 A.D. had these passages in his works. (3) Also Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons in 180 A.D., had these verses in his writings. He was a student of Polycarp (Bishop of Smyrna, Revelation 2). Polycarp was martyred in 156 A.D., he had been a Christian for 86 years, and was a disciple of John the Apostle.

Even though Irenaeus did not leave us a complete manuscript of the Bible, he does quote much of it in his own commentary, which does include the Mark 16: 9-20 passage. It would seem strange for him to quote this part along with other Scripture unless he knew it was truly part of Scripture. Also, being a disciple of John the Beloved, he must have known what was considered Scripture and what was not!

Think about some other arguments: Would God allow us to believe and teach this passage for at least 1600 years and then let us discover it is not Scripture? Then too, the book of Mark is not complete at verse 8. No doubt, as today, some people did not like these two passages, and so in their translations omitted them. Also everything that is mentioned in Mark 16: 9-20 agrees with the rest of Scripture.

Let's also talk about the John 7: 53-8:11 passage, since it too has been left out of some manuscripts. Let me quote Dr. H. A. Ironside, Litt. D. and his research here: "We should recognize at the very beginning that in the minds of many people, many Bible critics, many Christian scholars, this entire passage is considered questionable because in some of the older manuscripts you will not find these eleven verses. On the other hand, it is rather an interesting fact that in a number of very ancient manuscripts, while these verses are omitted, there is a blank space left on the page, showing evidently the scribe meant to indicate that in some other manuscripts that something came in between verse 52 of chapter seven and verse 12 of Chapter eight. In other manuscripts this section is omitted altogether. Others again give us the passage, but do not place it here. They put it at the end of John's Gospel as a kind of postscript.

"On the other hand, we have very good authority for regarding it as genuine, for it is found in many old Greek manuscripts, and it seems very evident that it is part of this Gospel. The reason that it is omitted in many instances, I take it, is because some of the early Christians apparently felt that a story such as this, which seemed to suggest a lenient attitude toward immoral behavior, might be misunderstood, and particularly by a people just emerging from heathenism, with all its vile and impure practices, which were often connected even with the worship of their gods." (4)

Though we believe people can make mistakes as they copy Scripture, or even deliberately change it, still God has been behind the scenes protecting His Word and has brought it down to us as it was given. I personally believe that the best we have today is the King James Version, and the New King James Version Bible (NKJV). The NKJV helps people because it is written in contemporary English without departing from the original text. The reason so many of the other translations have done so well is because they were written in the everyday language of the average person. Many of these translations were done before the King James Bible was revised into the up to date English as it is now in the New King James Version. I believe this version is growing in popularity, and will continue to grow in popularity as long as other versions leave out part of the Holy Scriptures. I know some Christians hold to the old King James Bible only, but in doing so they hinder many of the young readers from understanding the Bible, and defeat their purpose. Language is always changing and so revisions have to be made, but God's Word remains!

I do believe God uses other versions of the Bible, in spite of their errors. You say, "Why say anything then if you believe God can still use Versions that have errors in them?" The reason it is still an issue is because both the Alexandrian text and the Byzantine text cannot be correct when they have many differences. I have only shown the longer passages that have been left out by the Alexandrian text, but there are also more than 200 other verses or parts of verses that have been left out. If you want the whole Bible, then you need to purchase the King James, or the New King James Bible!

In the preface of the New King James Version it says: "The manuscript preferences cited in many contemporary translations of the New testament are due to recent reliance on a relatively few manuscripts discovered in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Dependence on these manuscripts, especially two, the Sinaitic and Vatican manuscripts, is due to the greater age of these documents. However, in spite of the age of the materials, some scholars have shown reasons to doubt the faithfulness of these manuscripts to the original text, since they often disagree with one another and show other signs of unreliability. The Greek text obtained by using this minority of sources and related papyri is known as the Alexandrian Text.

On the other hand, the great majority of existing manuscripts are in substantial agreement. Even though many are later, and none is earlier than the fifth century, most of their readings are verified by ancient papyri,

ancient versions, and quotations in the writings of the early church fathers. This large body of manuscripts is the source of the Greek text underlying the King James Bible. It is the Greek text used by Greek-speaking churches for many centuries, presently known as the Textus Receptus, or Received Text, of the New Testament. (5)

William Tyndale, a wonderful reformer, and Christian martyr, said of his part in the translation of the Bible into English: "I call God to record against the day we shall appear before our Lord Jesus, that I never altered one syllable of God's Word against my conscience, nor would do this day, if all that is in earth, whether it be honor, pleasure, or riches, might be given me." (6) Jesus said of the Bible in Matthew 24: 35, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away."

References:

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