

manuscripts of Mark that have yet come to light do not contain this passage but simply leave a space between Mark 16:8 and the beginning of Luke. I certainly do not believe that Mark ended with the words, "for they were afraid." There must have been an original ending, which may have been lost at an early time. Various endings occur in some of the early manuscripts. Actually the question whether these verses were contained in the Gospel of Mark does not affect our faith at all, since almost everything stated in them is also found in the Gospel of Luke and is certainly true.

Some readers are a bit afraid of these verses because of one statement in them that is not found in Luke. It reads: "They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them."

This statement is a good illustration of how easy it is to misunderstand a verse. Some have taken it as meaning that any Christian should be able to take up poisonous snakes and not be injured, and have given exhibitions to try to prove this. (Some who have done so have even lost their lives.) While this would be a possible interpretation of the verse it is certainly not required. It is equally possible and far better to take it as simply a prediction that there will be occasions on which God will protect from injury a Christian who takes up a poisonous serpent. That prediction was definitely fulfilled by Paul at Malta, as told in Acts 28:3-6. There have doubtless been other cases in which this promise was fulfilled. We do not know whether it was in the original gospel or not, but, rightly interpreted, it is certainly true.

Thus I do not think it is extremely important whether the few verses about which questions have been raised were in the original Scripture or not. None of them present anything that is not clearly taught elsewhere in the Scripture. It may be wise to put less stress on them than on other passages, but it should always be remembered that God does not want us to build too much on any one verse but to consider Scripture as a whole....