

**PROFITABLY UNDERSTANDING TRAGICALLY MISUNDERSTOOD BIBLE PASSAGES**  
**Part V: Understanding The Mark 16:16-18 Words On Handling Serpents And Drinking Poison Unharmmed**  
**(Mark 16:9-20 et al.)**

**I. Introduction**

- A. Often in rural areas, people have tried to heed Mark 16:16-18 to drink poison and handle snakes only to die, and some believe Mark 16:16 means they must believe and be baptized in water to go to heaven!
- B. Such error and tragedy is due to ignorance of textual criticism and the Bible's teaching on spiritual gifts:

**II. Understanding The Mark 16:16-18 Words On Handling Serpents And Drinking Poison Unharmmed.**

- A. Strong textual evidence abounds to indicate that Mark 16:9-20 was not part of Mark's original Gospel:
  - 1. Though Mark 16:9-20 is supported by the Textus Receptus and many other texts, it is **absent** from (a) Codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, the oldest known Greek mss (b) and from other widely-dispersed mss like the Old Latin codex Bezae Cantabrigiae, the Sinaitic Syriac ms, nearly 100 Armenian mss, and the two oldest Georgian mss (A. D. 897 and 913) [Bruce M. Metzger, A Text. Com. on the Grk. N. T., 1971, p. 122-124]. (c) Clement of Alexandria and Origen showed no knowledge of the section, Eusebius and Jerome claimed it was absent from almost all the Greek copies they knew, and (d) scribal notes in various manuscripts show some felt it was "a spurious addition" to Mark's Gospel, *Ibid.*, p. 123.
  - 2. Internally, "the vocabulary and style of verses 9-20 are non-Markan" with the "connection between ver. 8 and verses 9-20" being "so awkward that it is difficult to believe that the evangelist [Mark] intended the section to be a continuation of the Gospel." (*Ibid.*, p. 125, brackets ours)
- B. It is thus widely believed that Mark either intentionally ended his original Gospel at Mark 16:8, or that he was unable to finish his Gospel after writing Mark 16:8 or that he had penned an actual closing that for some reason went missing early in Church History, Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 194
- C. However, "early in the transmission of Mark's Gospel (perhaps shortly after A. D. 100) verses 9-20 were added to verse 8 without any attempt to match Mark's vocabulary and style . . . the material was included early enough . . . to gain recognition and acceptance . . ." (*Ibid.*)
- D. So, I agree with Ryrie that: "The doubtful genuineness of verses 9-20 makes it unwise to build a doctrine or base an experience on them (especially vv. 16-18)." (Ryrie St. Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to Mk. 16:9-20)
- E. However, **WERE Mark 16:9-20 added by Aristion, an early associate of Papias who was in turn a disciple of the Apostle John, and HAD John then SANCTIONED Mark 16:9-20** (But see W. L. Lane, Mark (NICNT), 1974, p. 605, fn. 11 who would question this theory), Mark 16:9-20 would **NOT** call for **TODAY'S** believers to handle serpents or drink poisons nor be baptized to be saved (as follows):
  - 1. If Mark 16:9-20 **WAS** added after Mark 16:8 by Aristion and sanctioned by the John as canonical, the acts of handling serpents and drinking poison unharmmed would be true only of Early Church believers:
    - a. Speaking in tongues, healing and prophecy have **not** been shown to exist today by **Bible standards**: (1) For one to claim to have the Biblical gift of healing or prophecy, he must heal or predict future events with 100% effectiveness and accuracy, cf. Deut. 18:21-22. (2) Then, tongues speaking in Scripture was the supernatural ability without human training to speak God's message in a human language that was naturally foreign to the speaker, Acts 2:1-11 and 1 Cor. 12-14. Such an event has not been proved to have occurred in our era, Joseph Dillow, Speaking in Tongues, p. 1-180.
    - b. Scripture reveals tongues was a temporary gift given to reveal that Israel was to repent concerning Christ in accord with the warning of Deut. 28:49. When Israel rejected Him, history shows the gift ceased to be given like God arranged for Israel's elders to cease prophesying in Num. 11:25 NIV!
    - c. Thus, the abilities to handle deadly serpents (as in Acts 28:3-5) or take lethal poison free of harm would be typical of the temporary sign gifts of tongues, prophecy and healing in the Early Church!
  - 2. Then, Mark 16:16 would not teach water baptism was necessary for salvation, but only that a lack of faith led to damnation, and that water baptism is an accompanying **evidence** of one's faith in Christ!

***Lesson Application:*** (1) ***Though it is BARELY POSSIBLE that Mark 16:9-20 was made canonical early in the Church, it is NOT part of Mark's original Gospel, so we should NOT base any doctrine on it.*** (2) ***Even IF these verses were canonical, they would not teach that salvation was by water baptism, and they would not mean the practices of handling serpents and drinking poison were for our era!***