

## The Apostles Did Not Believe: Mark 16:14-20

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### Introduction:

With the exception of **Acts 2:38**, I probably quote **Mark 16:16** more than any other Bible passage. We have heard this verse in sermons and Bible classes. We know what **Mark 16:16** means. Regrettably, we rarely look at the surrounding verses, which contain great lessons for us as well.

### Discussion:

- I. What happened in **Mark 16:14-20**?
  - A. By this point, Jesus had risen from the dead (**Mark 16:6**). Between the time Jesus was resurrected and actually appeared to the apostles themselves, Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene and two other disciples. When these three witnesses reported to the apostles, they did not believe them (**Mark 16:11, 13**). Five things happen in **Mark 16:14-20** revolving around the apostles' unbelief.
  - B. In **Mark 16:14**, Jesus rebuked the apostles for their lack of belief when they received testimony from credible witnesses. These men had seen Jesus walk on water (**Mark 6:45-52**), feed five thousand with five loaves and two fish (**Mark 6:33-44**) and even raise others from the dead (**Mark 5:35-43**). Additionally, Jesus had told his disciples this would happen (**Mark 9:31**). No wonder Jesus reproached them for unbelief and hardness of heart. Keep this in mind.
  - C. The second thing that happened in these verses is the great commission. Despite the fact that these men had not believed eyewitness testimony, Jesus was still going to offer them a great role in the kingdom. He commissioned them to preach His Gospel to all mankind (**Mark 16:15**). As part of this commission, Jesus explained whom this Gospel would save. "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved" (**Mark 16:16**).
  - D. Thirdly, along with the commission for the apostles, Jesus made a promise to the apostles. If they believed Him, implying obedience to the commission, they would perform great signs. Some have difficulty at this point, believing these signs are promised to follow "he who believes" from **Mark 16:16**. However, that is not the case. Notice the pronouns used. While giving the commission, Jesus spoke of "he" who has believed and has been baptized. However, when Jesus speaks of accompanying signs He now speaks of a different group: "those" who believe. The different pronouns demonstrate a shift. **Mark 16:17-18** is not part of the great commission. It is a promise to the apostles of help in obeying the commission. In fact, continue noticing what happens in these verses and we will see the fulfillment of this promise in a few verses.
  - E. Fourthly, the apostles believed and obeyed the commission of Jesus. Instead of hiding, afraid they might suffer their Master's fate, they boldly followed the great commission. Of course, according to history, it seems all but one of them followed in their Master's footsteps as martyrs.
  - F. Finally, we see Christ's promise fulfilled. Jesus had promised that great signs would follow those who believed. Now, as the book closes out, we actually see the signs and who they followed. They did not follow those who believed the teaching of the apostles. Instead, they followed the belief and obedience of the apostles to the commission and were used to confirm the word of the apostles so others would believe the apostles' teaching.
  - G. To sum up, when we study the context of these verses, we find out that we were not the subject of these verses. No doubt, the application regarding salvation applies to us. But the message in these verses was about the sin of the apostles, the rebuke they received and their repentance and obedience to the Lord. Considering this, we can learn some lessons from these verses.
- II. The apostles were not greater than we are.
  - A. A common misunderstanding today is that the apostles were greater than we are and were therefore more blessed than we are. However, they were just like we are. They had weaknesses also. The apostles are our examples, not because they had some superhuman strength or faith. Rather they are our examples because they had the same difficulties we have, but they overcame them and served Christ. So can we.
  - B. I want to remind you of something. It is often the case when someone speaks of the weakness of the apostles' faith at this point, that some well meaning brother (and I have been this brother before) will try to bring some reality to this situation and ask who of us would have believed?

Let's consider their situation, they had seen Jesus do amazing things (see above). Yet, when given credible testimony, they didn't believe. We today, haven't seen any of this. We simply have the credible testimony. No wonder Jesus says to Thomas in **John 20:29** that those who believed but didn't see are blessed. That includes us. Every single believer today has demonstrated a greater faith than the apostles had following the resurrection.

- C. Please, don't take that to mean that the apostles should not be respected. They should, but not because they are greater in stature or faith. Rather, because of the role they were given as the first to give testimony of Jesus and as those through whom the doctrine of Christ came to us.

### III. Jesus is merciful.

- A. Jesus had spent three years with these men. He had taught them. He had shown them amazing miracles. He had allowed them to perform miracles. He had even told them what was going to happen. Yet, when He was risen, He found them in unbelief. Can you imagine the frustration, irritation and even anger that you and I would have with these men? But not Jesus.
- B. Despite their immediate unbelief, Jesus extended grace and mercy. Not just that these might be some of the saved, but that they would have one of the greatest roles among the saved. They would be the apostles, those who bore witness of Him to the remotest part of the earth (**Acts 1:8**). On top of this, He was going to give them great power to help them fulfill their roles.
- C. It doesn't matter what kind of person you were before you became a Christian or what kind of Christian you have been. If you will submit to Jesus now, He will bestow mercy upon you. You will be saved and used for great things. Granted, we are not promised the miraculous powers. But we can do great things for God. Don't wallow in self-pity thinking God cannot love or use you. If He could use these men, despite their weaknesses. He can use you, despite yours.

### IV. Jesus' promises come true.

- A. Despite their unbelief, Jesus still made some amazing promises to the apostles. They would be able to cast out demons. They would speak with new tongues. They would be poisoned but without harm, whether from snakes or deadly poisons. They would heal the sick.
- B. Not only do we read Mark's testimony that the Lord worked with them with accompanying signs, but we also see the fulfillment of these things in **Acts 2:4**, where the apostles spoke in new tongues. Peter healed the lame man in **Acts 3:6**. **Acts 2:43** describes the power displayed, not by all Christians, but by the apostles. Jesus' promise to the apostles came true.
- C. Jesus' promises for us will also come true. But note that the apostles had to believe Jesus for the promise to come true. We too, must believe Jesus' promises acting on them in accord to His commandments in order to receive what He has promised us. This leads us to our final point.

### V. We can be saved by believing and obeying the teaching of the apostles.

- A. **Mark 16:16** was spoken to the apostles so they could understand their place in God's plan. But in saying this to them, Jesus secondarily speaks a promise to us about salvation. That promise is this, the apostles were going to teach about Jesus. Whoever believed the testimony of the apostles and obeyed in baptism would be saved.
- B. The apostles had to believe to receive Jesus' promise. We too must believe. Reread that statement. "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved." For some reason the second half of this verse confuses people. Take note that the two halves make two promises to two different people. One is a promise of salvation and the other is a promise of condemnation. Keeping that in mind, allow me to advise you. If you want the promised condemnation, then focus on the second half of the verse. On the other hand, if you want the promised salvation, then obey the first half of the verse. Believe and be baptized and God will save you.

### Conclusion:

Amazing how much is contained in just a few verses. Even more amazing is how we might have missed these lessons if all we ever focused on was just the one verse, **Mark 16:16**. As we conclude, allow me to invite you to consider these lessons and where they led us. Jesus keeps His promises. If you don't believe and obey His word, Jesus has promised you condemnation. But, despite your disbelief to this point, Jesus is giving you opportunity now to believe and receive His promise of salvation. Why not believe and be baptized right now?