Yesterday I posted the most recent developments in the scandalous “first-century Mark” affair. Readers of the blog who are not familiar with or invested much in the study of ancient manuscripts may have shrugged their shoulders and not seen what the big deal was. I completely get that. But anyone involved in New Testament textual criticism, the history of the Bible, and the ethics of modern biblical scholarship would have seen that this is a very, very big deal. A blockbuster development.

For years now conservative evangelical scholars have been declaring that they have solid proof to support their views about the New Testament, against crazy liberal types (like me): we NOW have, they claimed, reliable *first* century evidence that the Gospels were both written earlier than the skeptics claim *and* that it was being reliably copied. Their evidence? A portion of the Gospel of Mark that had been dated by one of the world’s experts to the first century itself. Amazing!

And where was this manuscript of Mark? No one would say. How much of Mark’s Gospel was contained in it? No one would say. How do we know it dates to the first century? No one would say. Has the date been collaborated by other experts? No one would say. And so it goes….

When the piece was published in 2018, it turns out that it was a tiny scrap with a few verses on it (definitely from Mark’s Gospel), that dates to the end of the second or the beginning of the third century. Uh, so, well, in fact it is *not* evidence (or even close to being evidence) for the claims so many people were making about it (none of whom, I might point out, had actually investigated the fragment!) I talk about the fragment and its real significance here in an older post, made once the publication appeared:


It is important to provide some of the scintillating details that emerged two days ago, that you might not know about.

It’s a little bit complicated, but it involves the retail chain, Hobby Lobby. Really. Those who …

Hey, it gets even more interesting. To see the rest of the post, you will need to be a blog member. It won’t cost much, and you’ll get tons of intriguing information, in five posts a week. All the money goes to charity. So why not?