

A RESPONSE TO BART D. EHRMAN'S *MISQUOTING JESUS*

Introduction

Bart D. Ehrman, Ph.D. is the chairman of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is touted to be one of North America's leading textual critics today. His recent book, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*, is a popular level text that many reviewers take to be an effort to present the field of New Testament textual criticism to a larger, primarily lay, audience. I found it particularly difficult to mount a response to this book.¹ Not because the book is a scholarly presentation, which it certainly is not, and it is not designed to be—this is not a criticism, but a recognition that this is a book written on a popular level, not an academic level. And not because the author makes assertions and claims which are difficult to understand. To the individual with even rudimentary training in textual criticism, church history, philosophy, and logic the multitude of problems with this book are easily identifiable. Rather, I found this book difficult because virtually every assertion and every claim is so fully laden with exaggeration, misrepresentation, selective reporting, and outright falsehoods that almost every line requires a recasting in an accurate light and involves a lengthy response to a series of misrepresentations and half-truths, each built upon the conclusions of the previous. Ehrman has woven a tight web of exaggeration, partial truths, falsehood, and misrepresentation that would take many more pages, and many more hours than we have, to unravel in order to set the record straight. It is truly a DeVinci Code of textual criticism.

When I first began reading the book, I thought the title was inappropriate. Almost all of the reviews I read are very critical of the book. Daniel Wallace says, "The book's very title is a bit too provocative and misleading though: Almost none of the variants that Ehrman discusses involve sayings by Jesus! The book simply doesn't deliver what the title promises. But it sells well!"² But, I soon discovered that the title is very appropriate, if you think of it as a how-to manual. Perhaps the title should have been, "Misquoting Jesus: What it is, and how to do it!"

It is not really surprising to me that when conservatives make claims about the truth of scripture and the historical accuracy of its record, critical scholars will respond with the counter-

¹Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005).

²Daniel B. Wallace, "A Review of Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*," Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts, [Online], available: http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=3452 [5 June 2006].

claim that there is no such thing as objective meaning or absolute truth and that there are no such things as brute facts or objective facts of history—everyone sees through his own perspective, and there is no such thing as a “view from nowhere!” Yet when a critical scholar comes out with a criticism of the Bible or its historical accuracy, his fellow critical scholars point to these claims as if this once for all establishes the objective truth of the issue and has set the historical record straight. This kind practice is not surprising. What is amazing to me, however, is that evangelicals will parrot the denials of objective meaning and knowledge, and will dance around the issue of the historical accuracy with proposals of Midrash, or poetic license, or genre considerations, or one’s preunderstanding, or “it’s not really Moses’ purpose,” and then they are surprised and don’t know what to do with someone like Bart Ehrman takes these same claims to their logical conclusion and uses them against the Bible and against its message. There is an old saying, “If you swim with the sharks, you’re going to get bitten.” But Etienne Gilson said it much more effectively: “every philosophical doctrine is ruled by the intrinsic necessity of its own position and by the consequences which flow from it in virtue of the universal law of reason. . . . The whole question here is whether it is possible to overcome Kantian agnosticism ‘starting from its own principles.’ To this we must answer: no, for Kantian agnosticism is inscribed within the principles from which it flows, which is precisely why they are its principles.”³ Make no mistake. Evangelicals all too often consciously adopt or unwittingly imbibe the popular philosophical and critical principles underlying such disciplines as linguistics, analytic philosophy, and even Postmodernism and employ them as their own presuppositions. If evangelical scholars are going to adopt the philosophical foundations of critical scholarship, then they ought not be surprised when these foundations inevitably lead to a denial of the objective meaning, truth, and inerrancy of the Word of God for those who are not afraid to follow them to their logical conclusions.

Bart Ehrman claims to be a happy agnostic. He claims once to have been a born again Christian. Only God knows his heart, but we ought to know his assumptions. This attack on the integrity of the New Testament documents is a logical extension of his philosophical assumptions. Interestingly, his is the same textual philosophy that is employed by the majority of evangelical textual critics. In his introduction, Ehrman asks, “how does it help us to say that the Bible is the inerrant word of God if in fact we don’t have the words that God inerrantly inspired, but only the words copied by the scribes . . . ?”⁴ Of course this is as absurd a question as, “how does it help me to say that Ehrman said these things since I do not have the words he wrote, but only a copy made by HarperSanFrancisco?” I doubt that Ehrman would tolerate the same standard imposed upon his own writings. Of course it is self-defeating for Ehrman at once to say we do not have the original words and then to claim that the copies we have are incorrect or riddled with errors. How does he know any copies are incorrect if he doesn’t have the original by which to make a comparison? In fact, the only way he could judge that any copies were copied incorrectly is if he assumes that the original is preserved in the copies, which he then uses as a standard of measure by which to measure specific instances of variation.

³Etienne Gilson, *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge*, trans. Mark A. Wauck (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 149-50, 130-31.

⁴Ehrman, 7.

Ehrman asserts that the existing mss⁵ are “error ridden,” and that, “We don’t *have* the originals!”⁶ and yet time and again throughout his book he argues, based on manuscript evidence, that such and such a reading was not in the original. On page 64 Ehrman argues, “As it turns out, it was not originally in the Gospel of John.”⁷ On page 157 he argues that in 1 Tim. 3:16, a scribe “had altered the original reading.” On page 159, concerning a variant in Luke 22, Ehrman dogmatically declares, “‘Today I have begotten you’— is indeed the original.”⁸ A particularly strong assertion about the original text is made by Ehrman concerning one variant: “We have seen one instance already in a variant we considered in chapter 5, Hebrews 2:9, in which Jesus was said, *in the original text of the letter*, to have died ‘apart from God.’”⁹ In this instance he even goes so far as confidently to assert, “most scribes had accepted the variant reading . . . even though that was not the text that the author originally wrote.”¹⁰ If we do not have the originals, then how does he know what is and what is not original? This is only a sample of the kind of exaggeration, selective reporting, and misrepresentation found within the book. It seems more accurate to characterize Ehrman’s book as “error ridden” than it is of the New Testament mss.

Ehrman on Canonicity of the New Testament

The Question of Canonicity

Ehrman presents his readers with an excellent example of how to use the fallacy of selective reporting to make one’s case seem stronger. In his section, “The Formation of the Christian Canon,” Ehrman uses the term “canon” in such a manner as to imply that it was only by virtue of a book being officially identified as part of a list of canonical books that a particular writing was accepted as authoritative or divine.¹¹ Ehrman is confusing canonicity with the recognition that a particular book was the God-breathed Word. J. Oliver Buswell expresses this point well:

Canonicity is not identical with recognition by the church. It is my contention that the books of the Bible were canonical when written, in the true sense of the word—that is, they

⁵Throughout this paper, the initials ‘ms’ will be used to mean ‘manuscript,’ and ‘mss’ will be used to mean ‘manuscripts,’ although the words themselves will often be spelled out.

⁶Ehrman, 64.

⁷Ibid., 7.

⁸Ibid., 159.

⁹Ibid., 171, (emphasis added).

¹⁰Ibid., 171-72.

¹¹Ibid., 29ff.

were the rule of God for our faith and life. These books were recognized by the particular portions of the church of God to which they were written, as canonical at the time when they were written. Recognition by the church as a whole, in some cases, required time. In general the various books of the Bible were recognized by God's people as the Word of God when these books were read and studied.¹²

This position is not peculiar to Buswell. Paul Enns makes basically the same point: "The process of recognition and collection took place in the first centuries of the Christian church. Very early, the New Testament books were being recognized."¹³ Norman Geisler concurs: "a collection of these books was made from the earliest times; even within the New Testament itself this preservation process was put into action."¹⁴ Geisler includes a chart that shows that almost every book of the New Testament was either named as authentic or identified as authentic by citation of allusion before the end of the second century.¹⁵ Although other scholars will dispute this conservative view, what this shows is that Ehrman's presentation is not a balanced presentation. He does not even hint at the possibility that there are other scholarly views.

Jesus and the Old Testament Canon

Ehrman asserts that Jesus' teaching was received by His followers "to be equal in authority to the words of scripture itself."¹⁶ But in his explanation of this he strategically omits important information. Implying a conflict between the teachings of Jesus and the Old Testament scriptures, Ehrman asserts, "On some occasions these authoritative interpretations [by Jesus] of scripture appear, in effect, to countermand the laws of scripture themselves. For example, Jesus says, 'You have heard it said, "Whoever divorces his wife should give her a certificate of divorce" [a command found in Deut. 24:1], but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife for reason other than sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.' It is hard to see how one can follow Moses' command to give a certificate of divorce, if in fact divorce is not an option."¹⁷ Of course he fails to include the qualifying principle that Jesus stated earlier in the text:

¹²J. Oliver Buswell, *Part I: Theism*, vol. 1, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), 194.

¹³Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989), 172.

¹⁴Norman Geisler, *Introduction: Bible*, vol. 1, *Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2002), 535.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 538.

¹⁶Ehrman, 30.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 30-31.

Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?” And He answered and said, “Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? “So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?” He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way” (Matt. 19:3-8).¹⁸

In fact, Moses’ statement is not a “command,” in the way Ehrman presents it. It is rather a permission to divorce, but a command that, if you divorce, you must do it this way. Moses is not commanding the people to put away their wives. Rather, allowing this because of the hardness of their hearts, Moses is attempting to regulate an activity among the people in order to bring it under control. Ehrman says, “It is hard to see how one can follow Moses’ command to give a certificate of divorce, if in fact divorce is not an option.” Once again Ehrman distorts the fact. Jesus did not say “divorce is not an option,” but that it was an option only on the case of “sexual immorality.” But, there is a sense in which Ehrman has inadvertently hit on precisely the point that Jesus is making. The people of God should not be looking for *any* reason to divorce their wives. It is by reason of the hardness of one’s heart that such a practice was permitted in the time of Moses. Rather, what the people of God ought to be doing is working to make their marriages work, not looking for some escape clause. But Jesus is not countermanding an Old Testament command. Rather He is enlightening the people of the truth behind an Old Testament permission and encouraging them to strive for a higher righteousness, a righteousness that would reflect the character of God, Who Himself was unwilling to give His wife, Israel, a bill of divorcement even though she had committed harlotries with the nations (Hosea; Mal. 2:16).

Ehrman on the New Testament Documents

Literacy of the Disciples

Another example of Ehrman’s misrepresentation of the facts by selective reporting is found in his brief discussion of literacy. Ehrman points out that “for the most part, Christians

¹⁸Καὶ προσήλθον αὐτῷ Φαρισαῖοι πειράζοντες αὐτὸν καὶ λέγοντες· εἰ ἕξειστιν ἀνθρώπῳ ἀπολῦσαι τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ κατὰ πάσαν αἰτίαν; ⁴ ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν· οὐκ ἀνέγνωτε ὅτι ὁ κτίσας ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς ἄρσεν καὶ θήλυ ἐποίησεν αὐτούς; ⁵ καὶ εἶπεν· ἕνεκα τούτου καταλείψει ἄνθρωπος τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὴν μητέρα καὶ κολληθήσεται τῇ γυναικὶ αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἔσονται οἱ δύο εἰς σὰρκα μίαν. ⁶ ὥστε οὐκέτι εἰσὶν δύο ἀλλὰ σὰρξ μία. ὁ οὖν ὁ θεὸς συνέζευξεν ἄνθρωπος μὴ χωριζέτω. ⁷ λέγουσιν αὐτῷ· τί οὖν Μωϋσῆς ἐνετείλατο δοῦναι βιβλίον ἀποστασίου καὶ ἀπολῦσαι [αὐτήν]; ⁸ λέγει αὐτοῖς ὅτι Μωϋσῆς πρὸς τὴν σκληροκαρδίαν ὑμῶν ἐπέτρεψεν ὑμῖν ἀπολῦσαι τὰς γυναῖκας ὑμῶν, ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς δὲ οὐ γέγονεν οὕτως (NA27).

came from the ranks of the illiterate.”¹⁹ He then declares, “In the Gospel accounts, we find that most of Jesus’s disciples are simple peasants from Galilee—uneducated fishermen, for example. Two of them, Peter and John, are explicitly said to be ‘illiterate’ in the book of Acts (4:13).”²⁰ In the NASBU the verse reads, “Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.”²¹ The NET Bible translation is slightly different: “When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and discovered that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they were amazed and recognized these men had been with Jesus.” The terms in question are translated as “uneducated” and “untrained” in the NASBU, and as “uneducated” and “ordinary” in the NET. The corresponding Greek words are ἀγράμματος and ἰδιώτης. Although the word ἀγράμματος (“uneducated”) can be used to indicate someone who cannot read or write, it can also be used to indicate someone who appears to be uneducated and inarticulate.²² That is, it is used as a derogatory deprecation of someone’s perceived intellectual abilities, not necessarily an evaluation of the person’s actual literacy. That this is the sense here is supported by the accompanying word ἰδιώτης. BDAG gives the meaning, “a person who is relatively unskilled or inexperienced in some activity or field of knowledge, *layperson, amateur*.”²³ In fact, BDAG specifically cites the Acts 4:13 reference and translates the phrase “ἄνθρωπος ἀγράμματος” as “an untrained person.”²⁴ What is being pointed out here is not that Peter and John were illiterate, but that to the people they seemed to be just ordinary men, not from among the trained professional scribes or priests. In fact, LS gives a possible definition of ἰδιώτης as “an average man, opp. a person of distinction.”²⁵ Ehrman presents the case as if his misrepresentation is the only possible way to understand the statement. Even if he is not willing to accept this explanation as correct, he ought at least to have presented the options to his readers, particularly since his target audience is the uneducated and untrained—just ordinary folk.

Ehrman’s double standard on this point is revealed in his matter-of-fact observation about the literacy of Hermas, a character in the early second century text called *The Shepherd of Hermas*. By simply reading this story Ehrman concludes, “He was obviously literate, and so

¹⁹Ehrman, 39.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Θεωροῦντες δὲ τὴν τοῦ Πέτρου παρρησίαν καὶ Ἰωάννου καὶ καταλαβόμενοι ὅτι ἄνθρωποι ἀγράμματοί εἰσιν καὶ ἰδιῶται ἐθαύμαζον ἐπεγίνωσκόν τε αὐτοὺς ὅτι σὺν τῷ Ἰησοῦ ἦσαν

²²Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (LS), 1968, s.v. “ἀγράμματος.” *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (BDAG), 2000, s.v. “ἀγράμματος.”

²³BDAG, s.v. “ἰδιώτης.”

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1968, s.v. “ἰδιώτης.”

comparatively well educated.”²⁶ Ehrman takes the statements in this text at face value and concludes that Hermas must have been literate and comparatively well educated. However, he is not willing to do the same with the writings of the New Testament even though there is far more historical evidence to support the existence, literacy, and education of men like John and Peter than that such a person as Hermas ever lived. Because the text of *The Shepherd* is attributed to Hermas, Hermas must have been literate. But, even though the texts of the Gospel of John, the Epistles of John, the book of Revelation are attributed to the Apostle John, John is summarily dismissed as “illiterate” on the basis of a single reference in Acts 4:13 that can be interpreted in an entirely different way from the way Ehrman takes it. In fact, Ehrman disqualifies his own interpretation of the text by his own comments made later: “Texts are interpreted, and they are interpreted (just as they were written) by living, breathing human beings, who can make sense of the texts only by explaining them in light of their other knowledge, explicating their meaning, putting the words of the texts ‘in other words.’ Once readers put a text in other words, however, they have changed the words. . . . And so to read a text is, necessarily, to change a text.”²⁷ Taking into consideration what Ehrman says earlier in his book—“the only way to understand what an author wants to say is to know what his words—all his words—actually were”²⁸—how can Ehrman pretend to know what the correct interpretation is? If the only way to know what an author meant is to know his words, and if reading necessarily changes the words, then how can anyone know what the author meant? And, if we cannot know what the author meant, then Ehrman’s interpretation is disqualified, because he can never know that this is what Luke meant in Acts 4:13.

Copying Uncial Documents

In characterizing the uncial writing that is found in many early NT documents, Ehrman, once again misrepresents the case. Using the text from the *Shepherd of Hermas*, Ehrman quotes the following statement: “I took it and went away to another part of the field, where I copied the whole thing, letter by letter, for I could not distinguish between the syllables. And then, when I completed the letters of the book, it was suddenly seized from my hand; but I did not see by whom.”²⁹ An important ingredient that Ehrman fails to mention is that there is nothing in the text of that indicates that the language Hermas was translating was written in uncial form. This was, after all, a vision, and there is no reason to assume that Hermas’ vision necessarily indicates any inherent problem on the part of native Greek speakers-readers in understanding a text in their native language.

²⁶Ehrman, 50.

²⁷Ibid., 217.

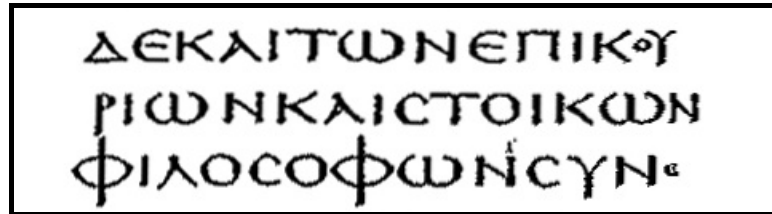
²⁸Ibid., 56.

²⁹Ibid., 48.

Ehrman rightly describes the nature of the uncial type: “One of the problems with ancient Greek texts (which would include all the earliest Christian writings, including those of the New Testament) is that when they were copied, no marks of punctuation were used, no distinction made between lowercase and uppercase letters, and, even more bizarre to modern readers, no spaces used to separate words.”³⁰ This kind of writing has been referred to as Uncial script. This kind of script is illustrated in **Figure 1**. In this example we can see the words, “**ΕΠΙΚΟΥΡΙΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΣΤΟΙΚΩΝ ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΩΝ,**” which can be translated, “of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.”

However, having correctly characterized the documents, he makes the judgment, “This kind of continuous writing . . . obviously could make it difficult at times to read, let alone understand, a text.”³¹ The problem with this characterization is that it is a

Figure 1: Uncial Script



judgment from the perspective of someone for whom this is not his native language. It is simply unreasonable to think that because someone else’s native language is difficult for the non-native speaker, that a native speaker would have the same level of difficulty in reading it. What may be difficult for the modern English reader would not have been a problem for a 1st century Greek reader. A Greek’s language was just as easy for him to read as our language is for us to read. Ehrman then uses the example, “The word *godisnowhere* could mean quite different things to a theist (God is now here) and an atheist (God is nowhere);”³² Although this popular illustration seems illustrative at first, it actually serves to confuse the issue. First of all, since we are dealing with the New Testament, there will never be a situation in which a phrase like this occurs outside of a context in which the phrase has a determinate meaning. This isolated series of letters might be understood one way by an atheist and another by a theist, but this is because there is no context to set the parameters of meaning. If the writing *godisnowhere* were found in the book like the book of Romans in a section talking about God’s continued providential care for His children, then the way to take the writing and its meaning would be obvious. Uncial script of the New Testament documents simply did not occur in isolated bits, but always in contexts.

Secondly, this is not the way English is written. One reason the series of letters can be taken one way or another is because English is not written this way. So, for an English reader, this can be difficult, but the analogy that Ehrman attempts to make thereby fails. The continuous script of the Greek uncial type is the normal way a Greek of that era would write, and his normal mode would be no more difficult for him than our normal mode would be for us. Using a mode contrary to our normal mode of writing does not adequately characterize the ancient situation. It

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid.

would be more accurate to say, either “God is now here” or “God is nowhere” characterizes **ΘΕΟΕΣΤΙΝΑΡΤΙΩΔΕ**, and in a given context the Greek reader would have no trouble knowing what is meant. The native speaker could read his language as easily as we read ours. Simply because Greek uncial script is sometimes difficult for a non-native Greek scholar to decipher does not mean we can assume that a native Greek speaker-reader of that age would have had the same difficulty. The problem today is not so much the mode of writing as it is the fact that this is not our native language.

Does this mean that there were no mistakes of this kind in transcribing the NT documents? Not at all. But, the situation is not as excessive as Ehrman seems to want to make it by such comments as, “We have only error-ridden copies . . .”³³ Misunderstandings were no more likely for the Greek speaker-reader of a Greek document than they are for an English speaker-reader of an English document. Ehrman says, “Obviously, if you don’t know what you’re reading, the possibilities of making mistakes in transcription multiply.”³⁴ But this is in fact not true. An individual who knows what he is reading will often anticipate words that are actually not present, but seem to make sense. Someone who does not understand what he is reading tends to follow the text word for word and letter for letter without anticipation. In such a situation the person cannot rely on what he thinks is being communicated, but relies more heavily on precisely what he finds present before him. It is certainly true that a person who does not understand what he is reading will be less likely to catch an error when one is made, but this does not make him more prone to error. Nor does the opposite hold true. Just because a person does understand what he is reading does not necessarily make him more likely to make errors.

Problems with Copying

Ehrman has perfected the art of arguing from ignorance, innuendo, and exaggeration. In his use of the Gospel of John as an example of problems in copying, he begins by declaring, “John no doubt had sources for his account.”³⁵ But what reason is there to think that John’s account is anything other than eyewitness testimony? Ehrman does not argue for his position, he merely asserts it. But, as Raymond Brown points out, “The stylistic differences among the various sources are not verifiable,” and he approvingly quotes an observation by P. Parker, “It looks as though, if the author of the Fourth Gospel used documentary sources, he wrote them all himself.”³⁶ D. A. Carson asserts, “One of the features of John’s Gospel on which all sides agree is that stylistically it is cut from one cloth. The very feature that raises a difficulty — that John’s comments and Jesus’ speeches can sound so much the same — should also serve as a warning to

³³Ibid., 7.

³⁴Ibid., 48.

³⁵Ibid., 61.

³⁶Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (i-xii)*, 2d ed. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1982), xxxi-xxxii

those who think they can distinguish separate sources buried in the text. The stylistic unity of the book has been demonstrated again and again as concrete evidence against this or that source theory.”³⁷ And Leon Morris states, “Any criticism of this Gospel which rests on the detection of sources must be regarded as suspect.”³⁸ Even Craig S. Keener, who tends toward a critical approach, concludes that this Gospel reflects a “reliable tradition,” and that “one may therefore attribute the Gospel as a whole to an eyewitness.”³⁹ Concerning the kinds of stylistic differences to which Ehrman points as evidence of sources, Keener asserts, “Even stylistic or vocabulary changes from one section to the next—changes which in John are at most minor—need not indicate distinct sources.”⁴⁰ And after quoting an observation by John A. T. Robinson, “On purely stylistic grounds I believe this Gospel must be judged to be a literary unity. Whatever the slight variations from the average word-count in certain passages, I accept the view that the whole is the work of a single hand, including the prologue and the epilogue. The attempt to isolate sources on literary grounds cannot be said to have succeeded,” Keener declares, “Unpersuaded that the Fourth Gospel provides clear evidence of its sources, this commentary will proceed on the assumption of its unity in its present form.”⁴¹

Once again these arguments might not persuade Ehrman, or anyone else who presupposes a critical approach, but the fact that Ehrman does not even allow for the possibility that there are other options demonstrates yet again Ehrman’s techniques of selective reporting and exaggeration.

Reconstructing the Text

In this section, Ehrman refers to two examples which he brings into service to demonstrate how the scribes changed the text. The first section that he addresses is the passage in Jn. 7:53-8:12, the passage usually referred to as “The Woman Taken in Adultery.” After a brief synopsis of the story, Ehrman asserts, “As it turns out, it was not originally in the Gospel of John.”⁴² He makes this claim first of all on the oft stated principle, “the story is not found in our

³⁷D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991), 41.

³⁸Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 58.

³⁹Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 114-15.

⁴⁰Ibid., 114.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid., 64. Of course, if, as Ehrman claimed earlier, and as he will assert in his conclusion, we do not have the original, then how does he know that this pericope is not

oldest and best manuscripts of the Gospel of John.”⁴³ This is one of the standard principles that is employed in the practice of textual criticism, but it is not without its problems, as Maurice Robinson points out.

67. *An exclusive following of the oldest MSS or witnesses is transmissionally flawed.* The oldest manuscript of all would be the autograph, but such is not extant. Given the exigencies affecting early transmissional history and the limited data preserved from early times, it is a methodological error to assume that “oldest is best.” Since the age of a MS does not necessarily reflect the age of its text, and since later MSS may preserve a text more ancient than that found in older witnesses, the “oldest is best” concept is based on a fallacy. While older MSS, versions, and fathers demonstrate a *terminus a quo* for a given reading, their respective dates do not confer authenticity; they only establish the existence of a given reading at a given date. All readings within a variant unit should be considered under *all* aspects of transmission: minority readings which leave no continual trace throughout transmissional history are suspect; they are *not* made more authentic merely by an appearance in one or a few ancient witnesses.⁴⁴

Interestingly, the research of Philip B. Payne on the presence of umlauts marking lines of Codex Vaticanus B has provided new evidence in support of the antiquity of this pericope. The umlauts seem to mark textual variants, places where Vaticanus differs from other manuscripts that a scribe was using to compare readings. Payne says,

These Umlauts offer new light on a host of textual questions such as the two examples just mentioned. The chocolate-brown Umlaut at the end of Ioh. 7,52 is at the point where the account of the woman taken in adultery traditionally occurs. Thus, although Codex Vaticanus does not include this account, this Umlaut, presuming it was traced over an original one, provides the earliest evidence for the presence of this account here in the text of John, even earlier than Jerome’s reference to its occurrence in many Greek codices. Metzger describes the evidence that this pericope is an interpolation as “overwhelming” and the case is indeed strong. Since, however, there are only two extant papyri written prior to Vaticanus that omit this pericope, P66 and P75, the evidence provided by this Umlaut

original?

⁴³Ibid., 65.

⁴⁴Maurice A. Robinson, “New Testament Textual Criticism: The Case for Byzantine Priority,” (TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism, 2001), <http://rosetta.reltech.org/TC/vol06/Robinson2001.html>, §69.

that a manuscript of John written prior to Vaticanus included this pericope here is important evidence for its antiquity.⁴⁵

Ehrman does not even hint at the possibility of other scholarly opinions, and as a text that is supposed to introduce the untrained lay person, it is inexcusably one-sided in its presentation.

External Evidence

Oldest is the Best

In his presentation of the consideration of external evidence, Ehrman floats the principle, “It is far more likely that the oldest form of the text will be found in the oldest surviving manuscripts—on the premise that the text gets changed more frequently with the passing of time.”⁴⁶ As a way of illustrating this principle, Ehrman constructs a hypothetical scenario in which he attempts to illustrate that a majority of manuscripts is not necessarily more likely to preserve an earlier reading.

Suppose that after the original manuscript of a text was produced, two copies were made of it, which we may call *A* and *B*. These two copies, of course, will differ from each other in some ways—possibly major and probably minor. Now suppose that *A* was copied by one other scribe, but *B* was copied by fifty scribes. Then the original manuscript, along with copies *A* and *B*, were lost, so that all that remains in the textual tradition are the fifty-one second-generation copies, one made from *A* and fifty made from *B*. If a reading found in the fifty manuscripts (from *B*) differs from a reading found in the one (from *A*), is the former necessarily more likely to be the original reading? No, not at all—even though by counting noses, it is found in fifty times as many witnesses. In fact, the ultimate difference in support for that reading is not fifty manuscripts to one. It is a difference of one to one (*A*

⁴⁵Philip B. Payne and Paul Canart, “‘Umlauts’ Matching the Original Ink of Codex Vaticanus: Do They Mark the Location of Textual Variants?” (Edmonds, Washington, and Vatican: Payne Loving Trust, 2006), 14.

⁴⁶Ehrman, 129. Of course the qualifying premise, that the text gets changed more frequently with the passing of time, flatly contradicts his earlier assertions about the history of the transmission of the text. For example, on page 74 Ehrman states, “the texts that are closest in form to the originals are, perhaps unexpectedly, the more variable and amateurish copies of earlier times, not the more standardized professional copies of later times,” and on page 75 he asserts, “As I have indicated, the text of the New Testament was copied in a fairly standardized form throughout the centuries of the Middle Ages, both in the East (the Byzantine text) and in the West (the Latin Vulgate). . . . Gone were the days when transcribers would each produce different copies of the same text by means of accidental and intentional alterations.” If the history of transmission shows that with the passage of time the text in fact did not get changed more frequently, this seems to pull the rug out from under the premise that supports this principle.

against *B*). The mere question of numbers of manuscripts supporting one reading over another, therefore, is not particularly germane to the question of which reading in our surviving manuscripts represents the original (or oldest) form of the text.⁴⁷

This thought experiment sounds convincing at first sight, but it does not hold up to scrutiny. If, as Ehrman stipulates, one *knows* that the fifty manuscripts were copied from *B* and that only one was copied from *A*, then the scenario is fairly reasonable. But this is precisely the problem. No one knows whether the fifty manuscripts were copied from *B* or not. The history of transmission does not provide sufficient information to tell us which manuscripts were copied from which. The only criterion for reaching such a conclusion is the analysis of the readings themselves and the judgment of how closely one manuscript compares to another. But, the assumption that the “Identity of reading implies identity of origin,”⁴⁸ is a very subjective principle. What counts as “identity”? How many words must be considered in a passage to count as identical? And since the existing manuscripts are ultimately copies of the autograph, it stands to reason that manuscripts, though copied from a number of intermediate manuscripts, conceivably would have the same text. All the copyists are copying the same text. So, identity of reading implies identity of origin only in the sense that they all derive from the autographs. Ehrman’s scenario suffers from a misrepresentation of the proportions. It is not as if we have one manuscript against fifty. It is rather the case that there is a proportion of one to one thousand. One reason Ehrman represents the situation in the way he does is because, as a follower of the rational eclectic approach,⁴⁹ Ehrman is predisposed to prefer the Alexandrian text. As one author put it, “nearly a century of effort [by reasoned eclectics] has resulted in a critical edition of the NT which agrees in substantially every respect with that produced over 100 years ago by their patron saints Westcott and Hort, whose work was without the benefit of any of the papyri or over four-fifths of the uncials. . . . Yet . . . the eclectic methods result in a hodgepodge text which has never existed as an entity in the history of the transmission of the NT, not only as an intact chapter or book, but in some places not even as a single verse.”⁵⁰

⁴⁷Ibid., 128-29.

⁴⁸Ibid., 124.

⁴⁹Ehrman defines rational eclecticicism as the choice “from among a variety of textual readings the one that best represents the oldest form of the text, using a range of (rational) textual arguments. These arguments are based on evidence that is usually classified as either external or internal in nature.” Ibid., 128.

⁵⁰Stephen W. Frary, “Who Was Manifested in the Flesh? A Consideration of Internal Evidence in Support of a Variant in 1 Tim 3:16a,” *Filologia Neotestamentaria* 16 (Mayo-Noviembre 2003): 3-4.

One of the problems that Robinson identifies with the assumption that the older is the better is that “the age of a MS does not necessarily reflect the age of its text.”⁵¹ In other words, an earlier MS may not have the earliest text, because a later MS may in fact preserve a older text. One of the problems with the task of textual criticism of the New Testament is the lack of information about transmissional practices. There are only a very few colophons that give any substantive information about the history of the transmission of the NT documents in the first three centuries of the church. So, any scenario about how transmission was accomplished is speculation. But, let us engage in a brief thought experiment as a counter-example to Ehrman’s hypothetical scenario above, and for the purposes of elucidating Robinson’s point. Let us suppose, for the sake of the experiment, that some time early in the second century, there existed in Antioch three mss that preserved a first century text of an apostolic letter, the mss themselves being first century copies. Unbeknownst to the fine people at Antioch, one of these copies had an error in the text that crept in when these three mss were copied, while the other two were perfect copies of the original. Let us also suppose that in Alexandria, the churches heard of the existence of this letter, and inquired of the churches of Antioch whether they might obtain a copy. The churches of Antioch decided to send one of their three copies to their brethren in Alexandria, and inadvertently they sent the one copy that had the error. Over the course of years, the mss at Antioch were copied and re-copied. Because there were more Christians in Antioch, because the climate was temperate, and because the mss suffered from more frequent use, the first century mss were destroyed, and so also the second and third century mss. So, the Christians in Antioch now possess two fourth century mss, albeit with a text that exactly preserves the original. In Alexandria, on the other hand, the climate is dryer so the mss tend not to disintegrate so readily. Additionally, there are fewer churches and fewer Christians in Alexandria than in Antioch, so the mss tend not to be used so frequently. As a result, the mss last longer, so that over time, the churches at Alexandria produce fewer copies than do the Christians at Antioch. Ultimately, at the end of the same period of time, whereas the churches at Antioch have 4th century mss, the church at Alexandria has a late 2nd or early 3rd century ms. However, the text that is preserved in the Alexandrian ms is the one that had the error introduced early in the transmissional history. So, according to this scenario, the earlier ms does not actually have the better text, and the later mss actually preserve an older text. Now, there is no historical information indicating that such an event ever occurred in the history of transmission. However, likewise there is no historical information indicating that such a scenario did not or could not have occurred. This kind of event or something like it could very likely have happened in the history of transmission, so one cannot assume that an older ms is the best. That is what Robinson means when he says, “Since the age of a MS does not necessarily reflect the age of its text, and since later MSS may preserve a text more ancient than that found in older witnesses, the ‘oldest is best’ concept is based on a fallacy.”

⁵¹Robinson, “New Testament Textual Criticism,” §67.

The Best is the Oldest

Having examined two passages which he believes were not original, Jn. 7:53-8:12, and the last twelve verses of Mark's Gospel, Ehrman asserts, "The passages discussed above represent just two out of thousands of places in which the manuscripts of the New Testament came to be changed by scribes."⁵² What is deceptive about this comment is that he expresses it in such a manner that one is led to believe that there are thousands of places in the New Testament where there are these kinds of massive changes. As Craig Blomberg points out, Ehrman's comments leave "the uninitiated likely to think there are numerous additional examples of various phenomena he discusses when there are not."⁵³ Blomberg continues, "his first extended examples of textual problems in the New Testament are the woman caught in adultery and the longer ending of Mark. After demonstrating how neither of these is likely to be part of the originals of either Gospel, Ehrman concedes that 'most of the changes are not of this magnitude' (p. 69). But this sounds as if there are at least a few others that are of similar size, when in fact there are no other textual variants anywhere that are even one-fourth as long as these thirteen- and twelve-verse additions."⁵⁴

Ehrman's comments seem purposely crafted to misrepresent the case and to imply things about the New Testament that are simply not true. There are, in fact, over 200,000 variants among the existing manuscripts. But this does not mean that there are over 200,000 places in the New Testament where there are changes in the text. What this means is that among the 6000 or so existing manuscripts, there are over 200,000 instances where these manuscripts differ among themselves. So, for any one variant in the New Testament, there can be hundreds of manuscripts that differ among themselves concerning this one passage. So, there are not thousands of places in the New Testament where there are differences. There are hundreds of places in the New Testament, in fact only about 10 to 15% of the New Testament, in which the manuscripts differ among themselves.

Blomberg makes some helpful corroborating observations on this point:

Ehrman almost gives the impression that 400,000 variants exist and we have no idea what was original and what was not, throwing the entire New Testament into utter obscurity. That is simply misleading. In this regard, Ehrman wants to be able to have his text-critical cake and eat it too. On the one hand, he needs to argue that text-critical methodologies are reliable and can show you what was original and what was not, otherwise he would not be

⁵²Ehrman, 68.

⁵³Craig L. Blomberg, "Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*," Denver Journal: An Online Review of Current Biblical and Theological Studies, ed, Richard S. Hess, [Online], available: <http://www.denverseminary.edu/dj/articles2006/0200/0206.php> [5 June 2006].

⁵⁴Ibid.

able to demonstrate that changes have been made for theological reasons (as he argues in chapter 6). But, on the other hand, he wants the "original" text of the New Testament to remain inaccessible and obscure, forcing him to argue that text-critical methodologies cannot really produce any certain conclusions. Which one is it? This entire method of argumentation is not designed to bring clarity to the issue, but to muddle it, so that the confused reader will succumb to the doubts that have been raised and concede the New Testament cannot be trusted.⁵⁵

What is particularly problematic about Ehrman's reasoning is that it seems to be circular. Ehrman asserts, "Probably the most important external criterion that scholars follow is this: for a reading to be considered 'original,' it normally should be found in the best manuscripts and the best groups of manuscripts."⁵⁶ How do we know which manuscripts are best? Ehrman explains, "it works like this: some manuscripts can be shown, on a variety of grounds, to be superior to others. For example, whenever internal evidence (discussed below) is virtually decisive for a reading, these manuscripts almost always have that reading, whereas other manuscripts (usually, as it turns out, the later manuscripts) have the alternative reading."⁵⁷ But how does one know whether a reading is "virtually decisive"? Ehrman explains, "The principle involved here states that if some manuscripts are known to be superior in readings when the oldest form is obvious . . ."⁵⁸ When would an "oldest form" be obvious? When they "preserve the oldest and best of our surviving witnesses, and when tested, are shown to provide superior readings."⁵⁹ But, this sounds like, "A manuscript is best if it is oldest, and it is oldest if it has superior readings, and we know it has superior readings because it preserves the oldest witnesses, and is found in the best manuscripts." But, this is sounds circular, and, as we have seen, the oldest manuscript may not have the oldest reading, because a later manuscript may in fact preserve an older reading.

Ehrman asserts that it was principally due to the conversion of Constantine that altered the status of Christianity in the empire. As more and more educated and trained professionals joined the church, according to Ehrman, those who were enlisted to copy the NT mss were more likely to be professionals: "Starting with the fourth century, then, copies of scripture began to be made by professionals; this naturally curtailed significantly the number of errors that crept into

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ehrman, 130.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid., 130-31.

the text.”⁶⁰ That being the case, we ought to be able to compare the earlier texts with the later texts and thereby chronicle the “error-riddenness” of the text.

Testing the Reliability of New Testament Manuscripts

Maurice A. Robinson, Senior Professor of Greek and New Testament at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, did a detailed study comparing manuscripts. His explanation of this study, though lengthy, is necessary in order to grasp the significance of the findings.

More than a century ago, in the pre-papyrus era, Westcott and Hort stated that, in their estimation, at least seven-eighths of the NT text (87.5%) was secure and required no application of textual criticism whatever. For that massively high percentage of accepted common text, the implication was clear: in *those* portions of text, the autographs are represented in *total* purity. Only in the remaining 12.5% of the text does textual criticism play any role whatever. The current issue is whether Westcott and Hort were correct in their estimation, or whether the actual amount of unquestioned “autograph originality” might have changed in light of the papyrus discoveries, particularly if early and late MSS that represent widely varying textual traditions are compared. No such study yet appears to have been done in order to test the earlier claim of Westcott and Hort. The current essay serves as a sample expedition toward the establishment of the correctness or incorrectness of the original claim in light of the papyri discovered since 1881.

In order to accomplish this test, some 30 randomly selected early MSS of the second and third centuries are collated against the Byzantine Textform (Robinson-Pierpont edition). Such a collation is particularly appropriate, since it is well known that none of those early documents — indeed no extant Greek NT manuscript prior to the mid-fourth century — yet reflects a thoroughly Byzantine type of text. Thus, the amount of textual diversity and divergence should be maximized in such a test.⁶¹

The test that Dr. Robinson conducted he identified as the WID test (the “Words in Dispute” test):

To perform the WID test, one must tabulate the deviations of a particular edition or manuscript from a different standard of comparison (which for comparative purposes could be either a printed TR edition, the Byzantine Textform, or the WH/UBS⁴/NA²⁷ text). All deviations are tabulated under the four heads of textual variation: (1) additions; (2) omissions; (3) transpositions; and (3) substitutions. The amount of per-word deviation is

⁶⁰Ibid., 73.

⁶¹Maurice A. Robinson, “The Integrity of the Early New Testament Text: A Collation-Based Comparison Utilizing the Papyri of the Second and Third Centuries” (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: *Evangelical Theological Society: 57th Annual Meeting*, 2005), 3-4.

divided by the total number of words in the sample portion of text examined, corresponding to the respective textbase used for comparison (e.g., the Rich Man and Lazarus narrative contains 251 words in the Byzantine Textform and 244 words in the WH/NA²⁷/UBS⁴ text). The resultant percentage represents the amount of deviation from the standard of comparison. This then is subtracted from 100 percent, in order to display the overall relative “stability” of the text between both examined entities.⁶²

Applying this text to the 30 or so randomly selected manuscripts involving five passages, the following results were reported by Robinson.

1. Matthew 13

Marking individual word counts:

Byz longer	28	individual words
Byz shorter	4	individual words
Byz substitutes	22	individual words
Byz transposes	2	individual words
<i>Subtotal</i> =	56	individual words
Total words in Byz =	1098	
Total words in WH =	1072	(1076 in NA ²⁷ /UBS ⁴)
Percent of common text vis-à-vis Byz = 94.9%; vis-à-vis WH = 94.8%		

2. Acts 13

Marking individual word counts:

Byz longer	28	individual words
Byz shorter	12	individual words
Byz substitutes	26	individual words
Byz transposes	8	individual words
<i>Subtotal</i> =	74	individual words
Total words in Byz =	948	
Total words in WH =	931	(933 in NA ²⁷ /UBS ⁴)
Percent of common text vis-à-vis Byz = 92.2%; vis-à-vis = 92.1%		

3. Romans 13

Marking individual word counts:

Byz longer	7	individual words
Byz shorter	2	individual words
Byz substitutes	7	individual words
Byz transposes	0	individual words
<i>Subtotal</i> =	16	individual words

⁶²Ibid., 6.

Total words in Byz = 276
 Total words in = 271 (270 in NA²⁷/UBS⁴)
 Percent of common text vis-à-vis Byz = 94.2%; vis-à-vis WH = 94.1%

4. Hebrews 13

Marking individual word counts:

Byz longer	4	individual words
Byz shorter	2	individual words
Byz substitutes	6	individual words
Byz transposes	0	individual words
Subtotal =	12	individual words
Total words in Byz =	380	
Total words in =	377	(378 in NA ²⁷ /UBS ⁴)
Percent of common text vis-à-vis Byz = 96.8%; vis-à-vis WH = 96.8%		

5. Revelation 13

Marking individual word counts:

Byz longer	4	individual words
Byz shorter	6	individual words
Byz substitutes	26	individual words
Byz transposes	2	individual words
Subtotal =	38	individual words
Total words in Byz =	452	
Total words in WH =	456	(454 in NA ²⁷ /UBS ⁴)
Percent of common text vis-à-vis Byz = 91.6%; vis-à-vis WH = 91.7% ⁶³		

Robinson's study shows that there is, on average, a 92.2% average stability in the text during the very period that Ehrman asserts the greatest number of variants were introduced into the manuscripts. There is much more to Robinson's study than we can present (a chart produced by Robinson that summarizes his findings is included in Appendix 3), but his conclusions are particularly important as a response to Ehrman's claim that the mss of the New Testament are "error-ridden." As Robinson asserts, "The present experiment has shown that the text as a whole remains remarkably consistent — not merely between the early papyri and the text of the fourth century manuscripts, but between the early papyri and the text found in manuscripts dating more than 1,000 years later. Indeed, the base form of the autograph text has been substantially preserved, tending to differ only in minor details among the manuscripts. The primary base text otherwise clearly represents that which originally had been given by the sacred writers in the first century."⁶⁴

⁶³Ibid., 8-9.

⁶⁴Ibid., 20.

Theologically Motivated Alterations

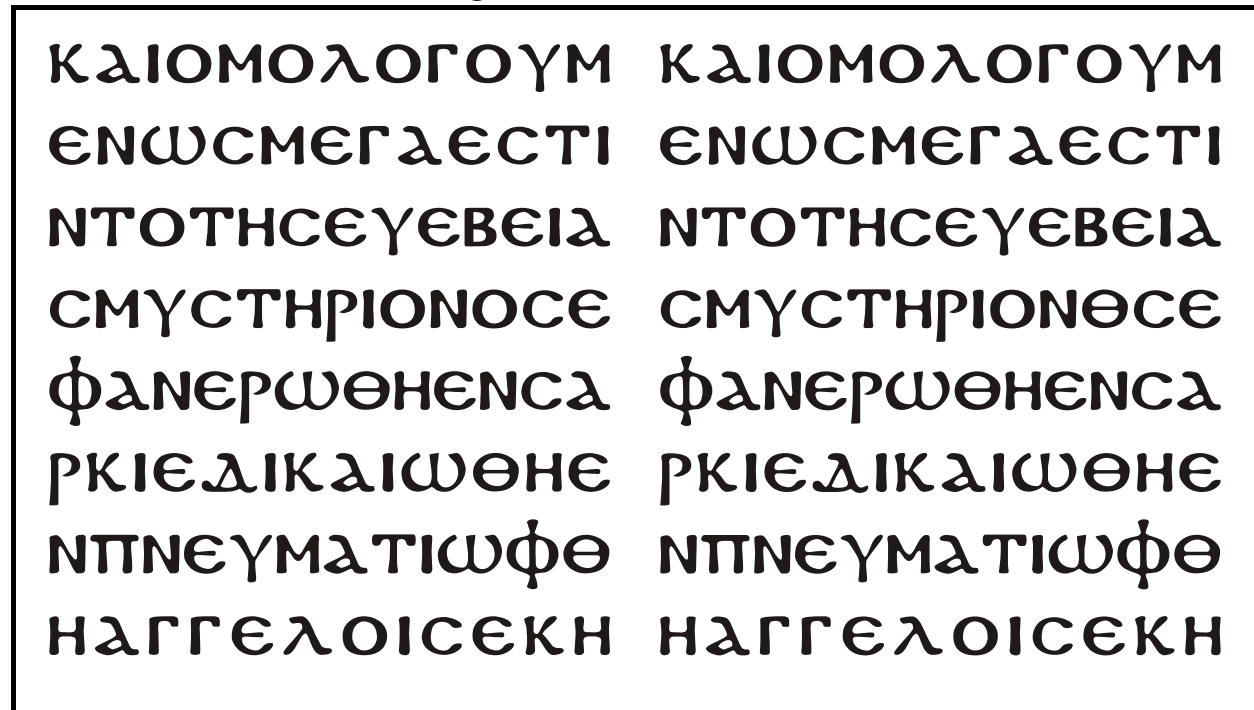
In his effort to demonstrate the supposed error-riddenness of the manuscripts of the NT, Ehrman remarks on a quest that includes chapters 6 and 7 of his book. He considers various passages and attempts to argue that these are examples of theologically and socially motivated, intentional changes—not merely copyist errors—that call into question the reliability and integrity of the New Testament documents. We will attempt to address each example to which Ehrman appeals.

Antiadoptionist Changes

1 Tim. 3:16

Ehrman employs the variant in 1 Tim. 3:16 as an example of theologically motivated changes in the text (see **Figure 2**). He attributes this change to a scribe who “had altered the original reading, so that it no longer read ‘who’ but ‘God’ (made manifest in the flesh). In other words, this later corrector changed the text in such a way as to stress Christ’s divinity.”⁶⁵

Figure 2: 1 Tim. 3:16 Uncials



⁶⁵Ehrman, 157.

Ehrman does not allow for the possibility that the change could be an unintentional error. In his *Textual Commentary*, Metzger asserts that the deliberate change is less probable: “The reading θεός arose either (a) accidentally, through the misreading of **OC** as **ΘC**, or (b) deliberately, either to supply a substantive for the following six verbs, or, with less probability, to provide greater dogmatic precision.”⁶⁶ What is particularly problematic about this claim is that if it is possible for Ehrman to identify this as a deliberate change, then why does he say we do not have the original? For an individual who repeatedly declares that the text is “riddled with errors,” he can be extremely dogmatic about what is and what is not a deliberate change of the text.

After a lengthy discussion of the claims and counter-claims made by textual critics over this variant, Stephen W. Frary concludes,

Having considered the possibilities of accidental or intentional changes and the congruence of the possible variants with the hymn genre and Paul’s way of quoting them, what are we left to conclude about 1 Tim. 3:16a particularly, and the value of internal evidence in general? Clearly, the easy way in which most text critics dismiss the internal evidence (Fee, Metzger) or assume its attestation for ὁς (Elliott) is unfounded. There are far more data to consider, and their verdict is not unanimous. If we consider the possibility of accidental corruption, though ὁς at first seems more likely to have given rise to the other readings, it must be recognized that an exemplar in poor condition, where specific letters are easy to confuse, as in the case of MSS F and G, can also explain the confusion of **ΘC** and **OC**.

While accidental changes seem to be the least subjective and the easiest to identify, determining which changes are easier as scribal creations can in no way be described as an objective process. One can construct scenarios for nearly any variant by merely presupposing the attitude and aptitude of a scribe. A most conscientious scribe, faithfully copying what is before him will be prone only to accidental errors. The theologian may fall to the temptation to “clarify” a text with θεός in a way that a grammarian would not, while the Greek-speaking scribe may not believe that sacred writ could contain a pronoun disagreeing with its antecedent’s gender. It is not always possible, therefore, to decide this variant on the grounds of “most difficult reading” without unwarranted and improvable speculations. Determining the most appropriate reading for the style of the author or the genre of the text seems to have more promise. From the data presented, it is obvious that neither the Christ hymn as a form, nor Paul’s use of it in his texts is adequately described by saying of the relative pronoun “It is a typical way to introduce a hymn . . . and it is not necessary to locate an antecedent in the text.” Hymns were introduced in a variety of ways, and it is indeed tenuous to dogmatically state that any Pauline use of a Christ hymn must be

⁶⁶Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2d ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2001), 574. The construction **ΘC**, and other similar constructions, are referred to as *nomina sacra*. These are abbreviations that scribes used for certain words found in the uncial mss. This particular construction is the abbreviation for θεός.

introduced with a relative pronoun. There is more than sufficient evidence that θεός would have been appropriate here.⁶⁷

In other words, the debate of this reading is not even close to being decided among the various textual critics of the various schools of thought, and for Ehrman to discuss it as if his own speculations have certainly resolved the issue is a misrepresentation of the textual situation and is misleading for his readers. Additionally, if, as Ehrman claims, we do not have the original, then how does he know that this was a deliberate change. What if, rather, this was a deliberate change to make an orthodox assertion support an adoptionist agenda? Isn't this just as likely? Yet he does not allow his readers to be introduced to these possibilities. In fact, it seems more likely that Ehrman has made a deliberate theological change in the text critical and historical facts to support his anti-Christian agenda.

Lk. 2:33

But he goes beyond simple selective reporting when he attempts to demonstrate that Lk. 2:33 is an instance of a deliberate antiadoptionist alteration. He says,

Other antiadoptionistic changes took place in the manuscripts that record Jesus's early life in the Gospel of Luke. In one place we are told that when Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the Temple and the holy man Simeon blessed him, "his father and mother were marveling at what was said to him" (Luke 2:33). His Father? How could the text call Joseph Jesus's father if Jesus had been born of a virgin? Not surprisingly, a large number of scribes changed the text to eliminate the potential problem, by saying "Joseph and his mother were marveling. . . ." Now the text could not be used by an adoptionist Christian in support of the claim that Joseph was the child's father.

A similar phenomenon happens a few verses later in the account of Jesus as a twelve-year-old in the Temple. The story line is familiar: Joseph, Mary, and Jesus attend a festival in Jerusalem, but then when the rest of the family heads home in the caravan, Jesus remains behind, unbeknownst to them. As the text says, "his parents did not know about it." But why does the text speak of his parents when Joseph is not really his father? A number of textual witnesses "correct" the problem by having the text read, "Joseph and his mother did not know it." And again, some verses later, after they return to Jerusalem to hunt high and low for Jesus, Mary finds him, three days later, in the Temple. She upbraids him: "Your father and I have been looking for you!" Once again, some scribes solved the problem—this time by simply altering the text to read "We have been looking for you!"⁶⁸

Once again Ehrman has misrepresented the case in order to further his agenda. If the variant in Lk. 2:33 had been a deliberate change to avoid an antiadoptionist interpretation, why

⁶⁷Frery, "Who Was Manifested in the Flesh," 17-18.

⁶⁸Ehrman, 158.

did not the same scribe of scribes also change Lk. 2:48: “When they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, ‘Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father [ὁ πατήρ σου] and I have been anxiously looking for You.’”⁶⁹ Reuben Swanson shows that there are no variants among the most important New Testament mss with respect to the presence of the word “father in verse 48:⁷⁰

Figure 3: πατήρ in Lk. 2:48

τί ἐποίησας ἡμῖν οὕτως; ἰδοὺ ὁ πατήρ σου	κάγω	ὀδυνώμενοι	B ut tell
τί ἐποίησας ἡμῖν οὕτως; ἰδοὺ ὁ πατήρ σου	κάγω	ὀδυνώμενοι	καὶ λυπούμενοι D
τί ἐποίησεν ἡμῖν οὕτως; ἰδοὺ ὁ πατήρ σου	κάγω	ὀδυνώμενοι	Δ*
τί ἐποίησας ἡμῖν οὕτως; ἰδοὺ ὁ πατήρ σου καὶ ὁ συγγενής σου	κάγω	ὀδυνώμενοι	579
τί ἐποίησας ἡμῖν οὕτως; ἰδοὺ ὁ πατήρ σου	καὶ ἐγώ	ὀδυνώμενοι	C* L N Θ f ¹ f ¹³ 33 1071* 1424 w

Also, the fact is that these kinds of terms are not always indicative of a strict biological relation. Consider Jn. 19:27 in which Jesus says, “Then He said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother [ἡ μήτηρ σου]!’”⁷¹ Here Jesus uses the term “mother (μήτηρ) with reference to “the disciple” who is certainly not her biological son. Just as we do today, in the time of Jesus’ earthly ministry the terms ‘father’ and ‘mother’ could be used figuratively or in ways to indicate other kinds of relations than strictly biological relations. One such use is a legal relation. It seems to be the height of arrogance to claim that just because he does not know how the text could call Joseph Jesus’ father, it cannot be explained any other way. Is it reasonable to think that Dr. Ehrman is unaware of these kinds of uses? This sounds more like a deliberate attempt to mislead the reader.

With reference to the use of the term “parents” (γονεῖς), Ehrman faces the same problem. If the variant in verse 43 was an attempt to alter the text toward an antiadoptionist perspective, then why did the scribe(s) let stand the other 5 instances in Luke’s gospel where this term is used of Joseph and Mary with relation to Jesus.⁷² This is particularly problematic since the word is

⁶⁹καὶ ἰδόντες αὐτὸν ἐξεπλάγησαν, καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτὸν ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ· τέκνον, τί ἐποίησας ἡμῖν οὕτως; ἰδοὺ ὁ πατήρ σου κάγω ὀδυνώμενοι ἐζητοῦμέν σε.

⁷⁰Reuben Swanson, ed., *Luke*, in *New Testament Greek Manuscripts* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 43.

⁷¹εἶτα λέγει τῷ μαθητῇ· ἴδε ἡ μήτηρ σου. καὶ ἀπ’ ἐκείνης τῆς ὥρας ἔλαβεν ὁ μαθητὴς αὐτὴν εἰς τὰ ἴδια.

⁷²Lk. 2:27 καὶ ἦλθεν ἐν τῷ πνεύματι εἰς τὸ ἱερόν· καὶ ἐν τῷ εἰσαγαγεῖν τοὺς γονεῖς τὸ παιδίον Ἰησοῦν τοῦ ποιῆσαι αὐτοὺς κατὰ τὸ εἰθισμένον τοῦ νόμου περὶ αὐτοῦ; 2:41 Καὶ ἐπορεύοντο οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ κατ’ ἔτος εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ τῇ ἑορτῇ τοῦ πάσχα; 2:43 καὶ τελειωσάντων τὰς ἡμέρας, ἐν τῷ ὑποστρέφειν αὐτοὺς ὑπέμεινεν Ἰησοῦς ὁ παῖς ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ, καὶ οὐκ ἔγνωσαν οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ.; 8:56 καὶ ἐξέστησαν οἱ γονεῖς αὐτῆς· ὁ δὲ παρήγγειλεν

used only two verses earlier, in 2:41: “Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.” There are other explanations that are just as reasonable, and perhaps more reasonable, than Ehrman’s. His conclusion is based on his text critical assumption that **ℵ** is necessarily the best ms. It is just as reasonable, and perhaps more reasonable, once one sets aside the assumption that the Alexandrian text is necessarily the best, that this passage could have been changed from “Joseph and his mother” to “the parents” in order to make it harmonize with the other instances in which ‘parents’ is used. Might this not explain why this one passage is different? The point is not necessarily to convince anyone of one reason over another, but to demonstrate that Ehrman presents the case as if there is no question that his interpretation is the only one that exists, or the only one that is possible. He does not present a balanced view, nor does he allow his readers to know that there are options and contrary opinions.

Lk. 3:22

In his further efforts to show intentional theologically motivated changes, Ehrman examines the statement by Luke in 3:22.⁷³ In his discussion he matter-of-factly declares, “As we have seen, scribes typically try to harmonize texts rather than take them out of harmony; it is therefore the form of the text that *differs* from Mark that is more likely to be original in Luke.”⁷⁴ This assertion is particularly strange for several reasons. First, Ehrman strategically neglected to employ or even refer to this “canon” of criticism when examining the variant in Lk. 2:43. Since the expression “Joseph and his mother” is so much out of harmony with the frequent uses of “parents,” why isn’t this reading “more likely to be original in Luke” since it is different? It seems that the so-called canons of criticism are more likely convenient justifications that the textual critic, or at least Ehrman, can call upon in order to justify his a priori assumptions.

Secondly, again Ehrman presents a one-sided view of the facts. It is not at all generally accepted among textual critics that any one so-called canon of criticism is as unproblematic as Ehrman seems to present them. As James Royse points out, even when it comes to stating what the principles are or even what one particular canon is claiming, “the statements [among critics] vary more or less from one another and often lead to conflicts in practice. . . . While one can hardly hope that scholars might agree on all such issues, the varying statements and the conflicts lead one to wonder what the evidence is (or might be) for such claims about the tendencies of

αὐτοῖς μηδενὶ εἰπεῖν τὸ γεγονός.; 18:29 ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐδεὶς ἐστὶν ὃς ἀφῆκεν οἰκίαν ἢ γυναῖκα ἢ ἀδελφοὺς ἢ γονεῖς ἢ τέκνα ἕνεκεν τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ.; 21:16 παραδοθήσεσθε δὲ καὶ ὑπὸ γονέων καὶ ἀδελφῶν καὶ συγγενῶν καὶ φίλων, καὶ θανατώσουσιν ἐξ ὑμῶν.

⁷³On page 159 Ehrman gives the reference as Lk. 3:23, but he is actually discussing the text of verse 22: “You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased” (σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα.).

⁷⁴Ehrman, 159.

scribes, especially for such specific tendencies . . .”⁷⁵ Royse goes on to point out that, “such discussions [about the canons of criticism] show that the application of these principles may vary, and that the evidence underlying them is far from clear. Indeed, evidence for these principles is usually not cited, and one may wonder whether it is possible to know what scribal tendencies were, either for a particular scribe or for scribes in general.”⁷⁶

In his discussion of the statement in Lk. 3:22, Ehrman refers the reader to the fact that earlier in his text he has shown the reader that the tendency of scribes is to harmonize the text. He is referring to his assertions on page 97 where he says, “The scribal tendency to ‘harmonize’ passages in the Gospels is ubiquitous.” Contrary to this supposed tendency, however, Robinson points out, “The apparatuses demonstrate that most of the numerous cases of harmonization or assimilation did *not* perpetuate in any great quantity. While scribes *did* harmonize at various places, and that frequently enough, the vast majority of scribes did not accept or perpetuate such alterations to any significant degree. Even if parallel locations were known from personal familiarity with scripture, most scribes would *not* adopt or add to the text that which was not in the exemplar before them. Harmonization simply did not occur on the grand scale.”⁷⁷ Far from being “ubiquitous” harmonization may have in fact been minimal, at least in the sense that harmonizations did not survive in the tradition. And just as Royse pointed out, Ehrman strategically omits any evidence for the so-called principle of harmonization. What he presents is rather a dubious instance of the influence of oral tradition. This is hardly a case of harmonization such as the one he is claiming in Lk. 3:22, and it is certainly a safe assertion for Ehrman to make since oral tradition, by its very nature, does not survive, and Ehrman’s claim thereby becomes, to some degree, unfalsifiable.

Ehrman concludes that the “less-attested reading—‘Today I have begotten you’— is indeed the original.”⁷⁸ But what happened to the principle of the “best and earliest manuscripts”? Ehrman claims that, “In one early Greek manuscript and several Latin ones, however, the voice says something strikingly different: ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you.’”⁷⁹ As is his *modus operandi*, Ehrman strategically neglects to tell his readers which “early manuscript” this is. The “early manuscript” to which Ehrman refers is D, Codex Bezae, also known as Cantabrigiensis, which is classified as Western text-type and dates from the fifth or sixth century. Interestingly, according to Bruce Metzger, “No known manuscript has so many and such remarkable variations from what is usually taken to be the normal New Testament text. Codex

⁷⁵James R. Royse, “Scribal Tendencies in the Transmission of the Text of the New Testament,” in *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research*, ed. Bart D. Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 241.

⁷⁶Ibid., 244.

⁷⁷Robinson, “New Testament Textual Criticism,” §33.

⁷⁸Ehrman, 159.

⁷⁹Ibid., 159.

Bezae's special characteristic is the free addition (and occasional omission) of words, sentences, and even incidents."⁸⁰ Whereas Ehrman confidently asserts that this reading is indeed original, Metzger points out that, among critical scholars, "There is still no unanimity of opinion regarding the many problems which the manuscript raises."⁸¹ In fact, in his textual commentary on this variant, Metzger says, "The Western reading, 'This day I have begotten thee,' which was widely current during the first three centuries, appears to be secondary, derived from Ps. 2:7."⁸² Once again it is not a case of trying to convince anyone of which reading is original, but to demonstrate how Ehrman selectively reports the data and does not allow his readers to have a fair and accurate picture of the text or of the text critical situation. For some strange reason, in his emphasis on the scribal tendencies to harmonize, Ehrman conveniently omits the possibility that this text could have been changed to bring it into harmony with Ps. 2:7. It seems that Ehrman's tendencies are more readily identifiable than the tendencies of the scribes.⁸³

Jn. 1:18

Concluding his section on the antiadoptionistic alterations of the text, Ehrman deals with the statement in Jn. 1:18 that, in the critical text, reads, "No one has seen God at any time; the

⁸⁰Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 3d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 50.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 51.

⁸²Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 112-13.

⁸³Ehrman's appeals on page 160 to Acts 10:37-38 and Acts 2:38 are patently absurd. He claims that in Acts 10:37-38 Luke asserts that Jesus became Christ at His baptism. Of course the text says nothing of the sort: "yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. *You know of* Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and *how* He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him." Nowhere in this text does Luke claim that Jesus became the Christ at His baptism. Concerning Acts 2:38 Ehrman asserts, "Luke states that Jesus became the Christ at his resurrection (Acts 2:38)." The text of Acts 2:38 states, "Peter *said* to them, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" It is likely that Ehrman's reference is a misprint, and he is referring to statements made earlier in the passage. Going through the earlier verses, there is no statement that asserts that Jesus became the Christ at His resurrection. The closest to this is verse 36 which says, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified." But here there is no assertion that Jesus "became the Christ" at his resurrection. The statement is simply that God made Jesus Lord and Christ. There is no indication here as to when this appointment took place. Conveniently, Ehrman does not quote these verses nor present any argument or evidence that his understanding of them is accurate or even reasonable.

only begotten God [μονογενὴς θεός] who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*.⁸⁴ The alternate reading to which Ehrman refers is, “the only begotten Son [ὁ μονογενὴς υἱός] who is in the bosom of the Father . . .”⁸⁵ The difference here is between the use of the word ‘God’ or ‘Son.’ Ehrman asserts, “Could it be a textual variant created by a scribe in Alexandria and popularized there? If so, that would explain why the vast majority of manuscripts from everywhere else have the other reading, in which Jesus is not called the unique God, but the unique Son.”⁸⁶ There is a bit of irony and humor in this assertion. Basically, what Ehrman is saying is that the earliest reading is more likely to be found in the great majority of mss. An Alexandrian scribe supposedly changed υἱός to θεός at some early stage, and that is why υἱός appears, as Ehrman phrases, in “the vast majority of manuscripts from everywhere else . . .” In other words, because υἱός is early, it appears in the vast majority of mss. But this is the very kind of argument that is one of the primary principles behind the Byzantine-Majority text, a text that Ehrman consistently rejects as having any significance.

Ehrman demonstrates a complete lack of understanding of the Trinity, or else he is presenting this argument in hopes that those who do not understand the Trinity might be persuaded to accept his agenda. He says, “The term *unique* in Greek means ‘one of a kind.’ There can be only one who is one of a kind. The term *unique God* must refer to God the Father himself—otherwise he is not unique. But if the term refers to the Father, how can it be used of the Son?”⁸⁷ Of course the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are the *unique*, one-of-a-kind God. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God—three Persons, one *unique* God.

Notice that there is no consideration of the “arguments based on evidence” in which Ehrman asserts, “It is far more likely that the oldest form of the text will be found in the oldest surviving manuscripts—on the premise that the text gets changed more frequently with the passing of time.”⁸⁸ What about the predominating principle in the previous section in which Ehrman dealt with Lk. 3:22: ““As we have seen, scribes typically try to harmonize texts rather than take them out of harmony; it is therefore the form of the text that *differs* from Mark that is more likely to be original in Luke,”⁸⁹ or the internal evidence that “the ‘more difficult’ reading is more likely to be original.”⁹⁰ Ehrman offers no reasoning why these canons of textual criticism

⁸⁴Θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε· μονογενὴς θεὸς ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο.

⁸⁵ὁ μονογενὴς υἱός, ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο.

⁸⁶Ehrman, 162.

⁸⁷Ibid., 164.

⁸⁸Ibid., 129.

⁸⁹Ibid., 159.

⁹⁰Ibid., 131.

are not persuasive in his argument. He merely floats the extremely speculative assertion, “Could it be a textual variant created by a scribe in Alexandria and popularized there?”⁹¹

Apparently Ehrman recognized the implications of an early antiadoptionist theological alteration to his thesis that orthodoxy is merely the result of the fact that Christianity, as we now have it, won the socio-political struggle. To have such an orthodox alteration before there was orthodoxy presents a counter-example to his thesis, so it becomes necessary for him to mediate the impact to his own argument by referring to this as “an antiadoptionistic change of the text made by proto-orthodox scribes of the second century.”⁹² But, if this is some kind of proto-orthodoxy, how then do we explain its popularity? Its popularity would be predicated on the fact that many people had an understanding of what was and was not orthodox. Additionally, Ehrman does not even make the case concerning how this variant could be antiadoptionistically motivated. In the literature, the Jn. 1:18 passage does not seem to have played much of a part, if any, in the Adoptionistic-Monarchian controversy.

Antidocetic Changes

Lk. 22:17-20

Interestingly, in attempting to demonstrate the existence of antidocetic changes, Ehrman again appeals to D, Codex Bezae, as “one of our oldest Greek manuscripts.”⁹³ He is very cunning in the way he presents the problem. After quoting the section following the D manuscript, he asserts, “In most of our manuscripts, however, there is an addition to the text, an addition that will sound familiar to many readers of the English Bible, since it has made its way into most modern translations.”⁹⁴ Metzger points out that there is an “overwhelming preponderance of external evidence supporting the longer form . . .”⁹⁵ (see **Figure 4** below, also see Appendix, page 44, for some information on the witnesses for each reading and the dates associated with these witnesses). In the way Ehrman states the case he prejudices the reader to think of the material in question as an “addition” to the original text that has “made its way,” somehow, into our English translations. But, if this material is original, it is not an “addition,” and the reason it is in our English translations is because it is original. Ehrman attempts to poison the well with his wording.

The material in question includes the latter part of verse 19 and verse 20: “‘This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ And in the same way *He took* the

⁹¹Ibid., 162.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Ibid., 165.

⁹⁴Ibid., 166.

⁹⁵Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 150.

cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.’”⁹⁶ In support of his claim that these verses are not part of the original text of Luke, Ehrman says, “For one thing, it is hard to explain why a scribe would have *omitted* the verses if they were original to Luke (there is no homoeoteleuton, for example, that would explain an omission), especially since they make such clear and smooth sense when they are added.”⁹⁷

What is “difficult” for Ehrman is apparently not difficult for other textual critics who have at least equal competency in the field. Metzger asserts, “The rise of the shorter version can be accounted for in terms of the theory of *disciplina arcana*, i.e., in order to protect the Eucharist from profanation, one or more copies of the Gospel according to Luke, prepared for circulation among non-Christian readers, omitted the sacramental formula after the beginning words.”⁹⁸ In other words, this was not an antidocetic alteration, but an adaptation for public use. It is very unlikely that Ehrman is unfamiliar with either of these explanations, but he does not bother to provide this information to his reader, implying that there is no reasonable explanation for the rise of the shorter version. Ehrman argues that the material was added, “to stress Jesus’s (sic) real body and flesh, which he really sacrificed for the sake of others.”⁹⁹ Citing an apologetic argument from Tertullian, Ehrman seems to argue that just because the passage was used against Marcion, that this is sufficient to prove that it was added, whereas, it is much more likely that Tertullian referred to this material because it was authentic.

Figure 4: Apparatus for Lk. 22:17-20

<p>² 17-20 {B} verses 17, 18, 19, 20 ϩ⁷⁵ ⚭ A B C L T^{vid} W Δ Θ Ψ f¹ f¹³ 157 180 205 565 579 597 700 892 1006 1010 1071 1241 1243 1292 1342 1424 1505 Byz [E G H N] Lect it^{aur, c, f, q, r¹} vg syr^{h, pal} cop^{sa, bo} arm eth geo slav Eusebian Canons (Basil); Augustine // verses 17, 18, 19a (omitting 19b, 20: τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ... ἐκχυννόμενον) D it^{a, d, ff², i, 1} // verses 19, 17, 18 (it^{b, e} only 19a καὶ λαβῶν ... σῶμά μου) syr^c // verses 19, add μετὰ τὸ δειπνήσαι (20a), 17, add τοῦτό μου τὸ αἷμα ἢ καινὴ διαθήκη (20b), 18 (see Mt 26.26-29; Mk 14.22-25; 1 Cor 11.23-26) syr^s // verses 19, 20 only syr^p cop^{booms}</p>
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⁹⁶τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ σῶμά μου τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν διδόμενον· τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν. καὶ τὸ ποτήριον ὡσαύτως μετὰ τὸ δειπνήσαι, λέγων· τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἢ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐν τῷ αἵματί μου τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἐκχυννόμενον.

⁹⁷Ehrman, 166. Homoioteleuton means, “same ending.” It occurs when two words, phrases, or lines end with the same sequence of letters. The scribe, having finished copying the first, skips to the second, omitting all intervening words.

⁹⁸Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 149-50. Metzger also quotes G. Kenyon and S. C. E. Legg’s explanation of the rise of the shorter version (see Appendix 1, page 44).

⁹⁹Ehrman, 167.

Lk. 24:12

Ehrman takes the same strategy with yet another passage in Luke’s Gospel. He calls into question the authenticity of verse 12 of chapter 24: “But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings only; and he went away to his home, marveling at what had happened.”¹⁰⁰ First, he argues that the passage “contains a large number of stylistic features found nowhere else in Luke, including most of the key words of the text, for example, ‘stooping down’ and ‘linen clothes’ (a different word was used for Jesus’s burial clothes earlier in the account).”¹⁰¹ However, arguments based on stylistics are always highly subjective. One very good reason why the words ‘stooping down’ (παρακύψας) and ‘linen clothes’ (ὀθόνια) are not found anywhere else in Luke’s Gospel may be because a similar event does not occur in Luke’s Gospel that would give rise to the use of these terms.

Again Ehrman appeals to a variant without identifying any of the evidence supporting the reading he prefers. As before, this is a case of choosing D and the Old Latin over an overwhelming amount of external evidence.¹⁰² It seems increasingly unlikely that Ehrman is actually attempting to demonstrate the practice of textual criticism. Rather, he seems to be attempting to persuade his audience to doubt the authenticity of the NT documents by a slanted and calculated presentation of the situation.

Lk. 24:51-52

Ehrman’s last variant in the section on antidocetic changes is Lk. 24:51-52: “While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they, after worshiping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy.”¹⁰³ The variant in question is the material contained at the end of verse 51, “and was carried up into heaven” (καὶ ἀνεφέρετο εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν). Ehrman’s entire criticism of this phrase is based on his assumption that this account of Christ’s ascension and the account in Acts 1 are at odds. Ehrman asserts, “surely he [Luke]

¹⁰⁰ Ὁ δὲ Πέτρος ἀναστὰς ἔδραμεν ἐπὶ τὸ μνημεῖον καὶ παρακύψας βλέπει τὰ ὀθόνια μόνα, καὶ ἀπῆλθεν πρὸς ἑαυτὸν θαυμάζων τὸ γεγονός.

¹⁰¹Ehrman, 168.

¹⁰²This is almost identical to the situation with Lk. 22:17-20. The external evidence for the authenticity of verse 12 includes Ϝ⁷⁵ Ⲛ A B L W Δ Θ Ψ, many of the same minuscules and the Byz. The evidence for its exclusion is limited to D and the Old Latin, it^{a, b, e, l, r1}. Metzger explains the similarity with John 20 as “due to the likelihood that both evangelists had drawn upon a common tradition.” Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 158. Of course it is also likely that Luke obtained his account from an eyewitness, and John, being an eyewitness, recorded the same event in the same manner.

¹⁰³καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ εὐλογεῖν αὐτὸν αὐτοὺς διέστη ἀπ’ αὐτῶν καὶ ἀνεφέρετο εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν. Καὶ αὐτοὶ προσκυνήσαντες αὐτὸν ὑπέστρεψαν εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ μετὰ χαρᾶς μεγάλης.

would not think Jesus ascended to heaven on the day of his resurrection if he indicates at the beginning of his second volume that he ascended forty days later.”¹⁰⁴ Ehrman’s assumption that the ascension as recorded in Luke took place on the same day as the resurrection is contradicted by the text of Luke itself. In 24:13-29, the account of Jesus’ confrontation with the two men on the road to Emmaus, the two men encourage Jesus to stay with them: “Stay with us, for it is *getting* toward evening, and the day is now nearly over” (24:29). From this point, there are temporal markers that connect the following events right through to verse 43. But, beginning with verse 44, the temporal markers are absent, and there is no indication as to precisely when the events in verses 44-49 occurred. In fact, these verses could be a summary statement of teaching that took place over several days. So, by the time we reach verse 50 and the opening statement, “And He led them out as far as Bethany . . .” in relation to the previously recorded events, there is no indication as to when this occurred.

William Hendriksen understands verse 49 to be parallel to Acts 1:4 (see below). Coupled with the statement in Acts 1:5, “for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now,” the ascension account, as Hendriksen points out, “follows very naturally.”¹⁰⁵

Lk. 24:49	Acts 1:4
“And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”	Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, “Which,” <i>He said</i> , “you heard of from Me;”

Unless one assumes a conflict, there is no reason to conclude that the ascension in Luke 24 is not the same event that Luke records in Acts 1. Without the least hint that there are contrary views that harmonize the two accounts, and without the least evidence to support his assertion, Ehrman employs his assumption, against overwhelming external evidence, as the basis for claiming that this is another instance of antidocetic changes in the text. Thus far, not one of his arguments is convincing.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴Ehrman, 169.

¹⁰⁵William Hindriksen, *An Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 1076.

¹⁰⁶In each of Ehrman’s arguments thus far, the weight of his conclusion rests upon internal rather than external criteria—I hesitate to say evidence. One begins to wonder whether he is in fact a reasoned eclectic, or a thoroughgoing eclectic. This suspicion seems to be fortified by the fact that in his arguments concerning variants in Lk. 22:17-20, 24:12, and 24:51-52 he completely ignores the overwhelming external evidence, he does not offer any reasons for not weighing the external evidence, and his arguments are based on purely internal considerations—mostly speculation.

Antiseparationist Changes

Heb. 2:9

Ehrman's first example of an antiseparationist change is Heb. 2:9, which he dealt with at some length in chapter 5. In chapter 5 Ehrman argued, "Although almost all the surviving manuscripts state that Jesus died for all people 'by the grace of God' (CHARITI THEOU [χάριτι θεοῦ]), a couple of others state, instead, that he died 'apart from God' (CHŌRIS THEOU [χωρίς θεοῦ]). There are good reasons for thinking that the latter, however, was the original reading of the Epistle of the Hebrews."¹⁰⁷ Apart from the obvious contradiction to his own thesis that "we don't have the original," and the implication that we cannot know the original, there are serious problems, not unlike all of his previous attempts, for opting for the second reading, "apart from God."

First of all, the only support for the second reading, "apart from God," includes a 10th century Uncial, 0243, a 12th or 13th century minuscule, 424^{cvid}, 1739^{xt}, the Latin, and some fathers. The 'c' in the superscript letters following 424 indicates the reading is the result of a corrector, and the superscript 'vid' indicates that the reading is such that complete verification of the reading is impossible. By contrast, the first reading, "by the grace of God," is supported by \mathfrak{P}^{46} , part of the Chester Beatty Papyrus concerning which Philip Comfort says, "On the whole, the text of \mathfrak{P}^{46} is fairly reliable. The scribe who produced this manuscript used an early, excellent exemplar."¹⁰⁸ Also, the support for this reading is similar to the overwhelming support for the readings Ehrman rejects in the other Luke passages he discusses. Metzger points out that the first reading "is very strongly supported by good representatives of both the Alexandrian and the Western types of text (\mathfrak{P}^{46} \aleph A B C D 33 81 330 614 it vg cop^{sa, bo, fay} al), a rather large number of Fathers, both Eastern and Western, as well as 0121b 424^c 1739* vg^{ms} syr^{pmss}, read *χωρίς θεοῦ*."¹⁰⁹ Metzger also claims that the second reading, "apart from God," arose "either through a scribal lapse, misreading *χάριτι* as *χωρίς*, or, more probably, as a marginal gloss (suggested by 1 Cor 15.27) to explain that 'everything' in verse. 8 does not include God: this gloss, being erroneously regarded by a later transcriber as a correction of *χάριτι θεοῦ*, was introduced into the text of ver. 9."¹¹⁰ Yet Metzger does not propose that this is an intentional, theologically motivated alteration.

Ehrman asserts that one of the documents that supports the second reading "(Ms. 1739) is known to have been produced from a copy that was at least as ancient as our earliest

¹⁰⁷Ehrman, 145.

¹⁰⁸Philip Comfort, *Encountering the Manuscripts: An Introduction to New Testament Paleography & Textual Criticism* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 67.

¹⁰⁹Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 594.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

manuscripts.”¹¹¹ Ehrman is referring to the fact that Gunther Zuntz demonstrated a textual affinity with P^{46} and, according to Philip Comfort, “was copied from a fourth-century manuscript of excellent quality.” However, Comfort also qualifies these assertions by noting that this applies to the Pauline epistles only: “According to a colophon, the scribe of 1739 for the Pauline epistles followed a manuscript which came from Caesarea in the library of Pamphilus and which contained an Origenian text.”¹¹² Once again Ehrman has engaged in selective reporting.

Of course Metzger’s explanation of the rise of the second reading is the very explanation that Ehrman rejects. Yet Ehrman’s question, “Is a negligent or absentminded scribe likely to have changed his text by writing a word used *less* frequently in the New Testament (‘apart from’) or one used *more* frequently (‘grace,’ four times as common)?”¹¹³ is patently ridiculous. The very notion that the scribe is “negligent” and “absentminded,” or in Metzger’s term “a scribal lapse” and a “misreading,” precludes the possibility that the scribe is thinking about which word is more or less frequently used in the New Testament? If the scribe is involved in thinking about what is or is not more frequently used, then he is not really being “negligent” or “absentminded.” The term “absentminded,” by definition means “absent of mind,” or “not thinking.” But, an absentminded misreading is not a misreading that absentmindedly selects a word which is more frequent. Rather, an absentminded misreading is a misreading of the letters of the word without thinking about it.

Second of all, Ehrman asserts, “In sum, it is extremely difficult to account for the phrase *apart from God* if the phrase *by the grace of God* was the original reading of Heb. 2:9.”¹¹⁴ Again, besides the fact that this is an extremely subjective characterization—just because it is difficult for Ehrman does not mean it is difficult in itself or to everyone else—that it is difficult for Ehrman may be because he cannot see past his *a priori* assumptions and bias against the integrity of the NT mss.

Ehrman begins his discussion of the supposed antiseperationist alterations by tying the separationist Christology with the Gnostics: “This separationist Christology was most commonly advocated by groups of Christians that scholars have called Gnostic.”¹¹⁵ But the rise of the second reading, “apart from God,” post-dates the Gnostic controversies by several hundred years. Most historians of Christian doctrine, such as Jaroslav Pelikan and Eirc Osborn, relegate the Gnostic controversy to the early church fathers. In fact, Osborn talks about “The defeat of

¹¹¹Ehrman, 145.

¹¹²Comfort, 89.

¹¹³Ehrman, 146.

¹¹⁴Ibid., 147 (emphasis in original).

¹¹⁵Ibid., 170.

Gnosticism”¹¹⁶ by the early church fathers, and Montanism, which is usually treated as associated with the Gnostic controversy, is said to have disappeared by the sixth century.¹¹⁷ Consequently, it seems strange that if this passage were an important point in favor of gnostic doctrine, that the scribes would not have made efforts to change the reading much earlier than the 10th century—and we have no evidence that the variant in the existing documents dates to this time—or at least some time during the actual controversy. Why would the scribes wait until the 10th century, and why not make more expansive changes. The so-called theologically altered text is confined to an extremely small number of late mss.

It is interesting that the Syriac Bible printed by the United Bible Societies in 1979 reads, ܐܘ ܕܥܘܠܘ ܕܥܘܠܘܐ, “by the grace of God.” As the textual apparatus of the UBS⁴ shows, the fifth century Peshitta (syr^p), as well as three other Syriac versions from the fifth and sixth centuries, had the reading “by the grace of God.” Sebastian Brock points out that the Peshitta tradition seems divided between east and west on this reading. But he attributes this to the Christological controversies of the fifth century, not, as Ehrman does, to the Gnostic controversy that took place much earlier. “Evidently, then, the reading ‘apart from God’ (already known to Narsai in the late 5th century) was introduced into the Peshitta tradition of the Church of the East under the influence of Theodore of Mopsuestia [350-426 AD]—the ‘exegete’ par excellence of that tradition.”¹¹⁸ In his enthusiasm to evoke in his readers a mistrust of the New Testament, Ehrman has constructed a scenario that does not coincide with the historical facts. It is very unlikely that this is an antiseperationist alteration. The facts seem to indicate that if this was an intentional change at all, and there is no evidence even for this possibility, it would more likely have been a change in the later manuscripts to support a separationist Christology in these later controversies.

Mk. 15:34

Ehrman next refers to a variant in Mk. 15:34 as another antiseperationist alteration: “A second intriguing example of the phenomenon occurs almost exactly where one might expect to find it, in a Gospel account of Jesus’s crucifixion. . . . The soldiers crucify him, the passers-by and Jewish leaders mock him, as do the two criminals who are crucified with him; and he says not a word—until the very end, when death is near, and Jesus cries out the words taken from Psalm 22: ‘Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachtani,’ which translated means ‘My God, my God, why have

¹¹⁶Eric Osborn, “The Greco-Roman World: Challenge and Response,” in *The Patristic Period*, vol. 1, *History of Theology*, ed. Angelo Di Berardino and Basil Studer, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1997), 107.

¹¹⁷Reinhold Seeberg, *History of Doctrines in the Ancient Church*, vol. 1, *Text-Book of the History of Doctrines* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1964), 108.

¹¹⁸Sebastian P. Brock, “The Use of the Syriac Fathers for New Testament Textual Criticism,” in *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 230.

you forsaken me?’ (Mark 15:34).”¹¹⁹ Ehrman then argues that the Gnostics referred to this verse as evidence of their separationist theology. Because of this, according to Ehrman, “It is perhaps no great surprise, then, that the text of Mark’s Gospel was changed by some scribes in a way that would have circumvented this Gnostic explanation.”¹²⁰ Interestingly, the variant to which Ehrman is referring reads, “λαμια ζαφθαλι,” and appears in Codex D, which heretofore has been the codex of choice for Ehrman. Suddenly now, he acknowledges that the evidence does support this D reading because, “nearly all our oldest and best witnesses (including those of the Alexandrian text) . . .”¹²¹ Of course this is a strikingly similar situation to the supposedly antiadoptionist and antidocetist alterations which likewise appeared only in D against the overwhelming support of the so-called “oldest and best witnesses (including those of the Alexandrian text).” Yet in those earlier instances Ehrman took a completely different position.

Why discuss this variant? Because, as do the other discussions, it supposedly serves Ehrman’s purpose of demonstrating the tendency of scribes to alter the text for theological purposes. But in fact his plan seems to backfire in this case. Because the variant is so obviously not original, it actually serves to demonstrate that even when there seems to be a reasonable case for acknowledging a theologically motivated alteration, the alteration is so obviously unoriginal, and so completely overwhelmed by the unchanged witnesses, that it is easy enough to spot, and the original reading is not difficult to identify. As Maurice Robinson observes,

an error or deliberate alteration made in a single MS or a few MSS is unlikely to be perpetuated in quantity. The many singular and quasi-singular readings which exist demonstrate the unlikelihood of a transcriptionally-based scribal creation extending much beyond any MS or MSS which first produced it. The chances that any sensible alteration subsequent to the autograph would extend beyond a small group of localized witnesses would be slim. Indeed, such readings as characterize minority texttype witnesses generally remain small and localized. That any deliberate alteration or transcriptional error would gain the cooperation of scribes so as to dominate the entire stream of transmission is a null proposition: scribes demonstrably did not engage in such a practice on the grand scale. Earlier exemplars would serve to nullify the growth and widespread dissemination of most scribal alterations, thus holding in check the unbridled mass of minority variants.¹²²

In other words, intentional changes motivated by a theological agenda, if there are such, would not be propagated through the stream of transmission of the NT mss, and should not become the basis upon which to challenge the authenticity of the text. This variant is a case in point. The variant does not go beyond this localized area and is not propagated throughout the

¹¹⁹Ibid., 172.

¹²⁰Ibid., 173.

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²Robinson, “New Testament Textual Criticism,” §40.

stream of transmission. In other words, this variant was not reproduced by subsequent scribes, and it did not influence the continuing transmission of the text. Ehrman asserts that intentional changes “had a profound effect on the text.”¹²³ Contrary to what Ehrman claims, such changes, even if there are some, are few and did not have a profound influence on the text. This is evident from their exiguous representation in the manuscripts themselves. Consequently, they do not affect the overall authenticity of the manuscripts, and there is no basis upon which they should become the grounds for doubting the reliability of the mass of NT documents.

1 Jn. 4:2-3

The last variant Ehrman considers in the section on antiseperationist alterations is 1 Jn. 4:2-3, which reads, “By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the *spirit* of the anti-Christ, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.”¹²⁴ Ehrman points out that the variant is in fact only a marginal note and not a variant of the text itself. Yet, even after this acknowledgement, Ehrman continues to refer to it as a variant. This would be like saying that the notes someone writes in the margin of his Bible are textual variants. In fact, Ehrman asserts that a scribe may have written this in the margin “to provide a ‘biblical’ attack on separationist Christologies . . .”¹²⁵ But, is this in fact a *biblical* attack? The fact that Ehrman puts this word in quotation marks indicates that he is not using the word in the strict sense of being an attack that comes from the text of the Bible itself. Yet, only a few lines later he declares, “Anyone who supports such a view, the textual variant suggests, is not from God . . .”¹²⁶ But didn’t we already establish that this is not a textual variant? The he says, “Once again, then, we have a variant that was generated in the context of the christological disputes of the second and third centuries.”¹²⁷ Ignoring for a moment that fact that the Heb. 2:9 variant was most probably not a second or third century variant, as we have seen, it is simply false to imply that this instance is like all the others. This is not a textual variant, and among the variants that Ehrman has discussed, this is not like any of the others. It is simply misleading to say, “Once again . . .” as if this marginal note is just another example like all the others.

¹²³Ehrman, 178.

¹²⁴ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκετε τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ· πᾶν πνεῦμα ὃ ὁμολογεῖ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν, καὶ πᾶν πνεῦμα ὃ μὴ ὁμολογεῖ τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν· καὶ τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου, ὃ ἀκηκόατε ὅτι ἔρχεται, καὶ νῦν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἐστὶν ἤδη.

¹²⁵Ehrman, 174.

¹²⁶Ibid., 175.

¹²⁷Ibid.

The UBS⁴ includes this passage in the textual apparatus, and in his textual commentary Metzger points out that, “The origin of λῶει [he looses] is probably to be sought in second century polemic against Gnostics who made a distinction between the earthly Jesus and the heavenly Christ.”¹²⁸ What is interesting about this is, if this was, as Ehrman says, a marginal note in 1739, why did it not end up in the text? If Ehrman’s thesis is correct, that scribes tended to change the text for theological purposes, why did not a single scribe put this marginal note into the text of some manuscript? This seems to be evidence that Ehrman’s thesis is questionable at best.

Conclusion About Theologically Motivated Alterations

Contrary to what Ehrman proposes, every one of his so-called theologically motivated alterations is subject to contrary evaluations, and for almost every one, the evidence just does not support Ehrman’s conclusions. As one evaluator of Ehrman’s book observes, Ehrman’s propensity to exaggerate, and his strategic wording, leave “the uninitiated likely to think there are numerous additional examples of various phenomena he discusses when there are not.”¹²⁹ And as Daniel Wallace points out in his evaluation of Ehrman’s book, “the idea that the variants in the NT manuscripts alter the theology of the NT is overstated at best. Unfortunately, as careful a scholar as Ehrman is, his treatment of major theological changes in the text of the NT tends to fall under one of two criticisms: Either his textual decisions are wrong, or his interpretation is wrong.”¹³⁰

The Social Worlds of the Text

In this chapter Ehrman plans to examine the social impact upon the transmission of the text of the New Testament, examining certain textual variants that reflect this impact. He begins by providing a brief survey of his understanding of the role of women in the church, and he moves toward considering the impact of Paul’s view on the transmission of the NT mss. What is particularly amazing about this brief survey is how matter-of-factly Ehrman presents the historical situation. He speaks as if he had never said we cannot know the original text. He refers to Paul’s writings as if he believes they are historically accurate. And where is he getting this historically accurate information?—from the very New Testament documents concerning which he has said, “we don’t have the originals.” Ehrman writes as if he believes our NT in its present form presents accurate historical information, which is, in fact, the very point he is trying to deny.

¹²⁸Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 645.

¹²⁹Blomberg, “Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*.”

¹³⁰Wallace, “A Review of Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*.”

Textual Alteration Involving Women

1 Cor. 14:34-35

The first text with which Ehrman is concerned occurs in 1 Corinthians chapter 14. Ehrman observes, “No one doubts, however, that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. But there *are* doubts about this passage. For as it turns out, the verses in question (34-35) are shuffled around in some of our important textual witnesses. In three Greek manuscripts and a couple of Latin witnesses, they are found not here, after verse 33, but later, after verse 40.”¹³¹ Once again Ehrman has selected a variant for which the evidence is almost completely one-sided—that is, one-sided against his view. Supporting the traditional location, after verse 33, are almost all of the Alexandrian mss including \mathfrak{P}^{46} \aleph A B Υ 0150 0243, several minuscules and *Byz*. So, not only are there a vast majority of witnesses that support the traditional placement, but the witnesses are widespread over the geographical spectrum. The witnesses supporting the placement after verse 40 include, not unexpectedly, D, Codex Bezae, as well as F and G Greek mss, and several Latin versions. F Codex Augiensis is a ninth century ms, which, like D, is classified as Western, as is G Codex Boernerianus, another ninth century manuscript. As Metzger points out, this may have been an intentional effort on the part of a scribe “to find a more appropriate location in the context for Paul’s directive concerning women.”¹³² It is worth noting that Metzger attributes these verses to Paul, not to some other author. Once again, as Robinson has shown, such intentional alterations do not last and do not have a significant impact on the transmissional history.

On the strength of his own opinion, Ehrman declares, “The note was then inserted in different places of the text by various scribes—some placing the note after verse 33 and others inserting it after verse 40.”¹³³ As Ehrman has pointed out on at least two occasions, the words communicate the meaning, and different words produce a different meaning, and Ehrman’s meaning is designed to mislead the reader into thinking that verses 34-35 following verse 22 were “inserted” by a scribe into this location. Notice how he makes his claim: “some placing the note after verse 33.” This is misleading, because if the text is original, the scribe(s) did not “place” or “insert” it there, and Ehrman has certainly not shown that these verses are not original. Of course Ehrman thinks that they are not original to Paul, and one reason he thinks this is because he thinks, “they do not fit will into their immediate context.”¹³⁴ But, as Daniel Wallace has pointed out, “Either his textual decisions are wrong, or his interpretation is wrong.”¹³⁵ In this

¹³¹Ehrman, 183.

¹³²Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 499.

¹³³Ehrman, 183.

¹³⁴*Ibid*.

¹³⁵Wallace, “A Review of Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*.”

instance, he assumes that because he does not understand how they fit, they must not fit. C. K. Barrett, for example, argues that Paul is dealing with a specifically Corinthian phenomenon:

(b)-Paul had been informed of feminist pressure (possibly of feminine chatter) which was contributing seriously to the disorder of the Christian assembly in Corinth, and took energetic measures to stamp it out. He cannot have disapproved on principle of contributions made by women to Christian worship and discussion or he would not have allowed *xi. 5* to stand in his epistle, but in the interests of peace and good order he could command the women to be silent, precisely as he could give orders for a male prophet to be silent if his continued speech was likely to prove unedifying (verse 30). Sevenster (*Seneca*, p. 198) may be right in saying that ‘Paul is probably alluding in the first place to a passion for discussion which could give rise to heated argument between a wife and husband.’¹³⁶

Other scholars have argued for the continuity of these verses in their traditional location. The point is not necessarily to convince anyone that an explanation such as is given by Barrett is the best, but that Ehrman does not allow his readers to know that any other opinion or interpretation exists. Contrary to Ehrman’s assertion, one does not “have to assume” that these verses “are a scribal alteration of the text . . .”¹³⁷ One is compelled to ask, “What about the most difficult reading that was so much a part of Ehrman’s argument concerning the passage in Lk. 3:23?” Conveniently, Ehrman does not entertain this question. Selective reporting allows the author to consider only those principles of textual criticism that promote his agenda.

Rom. 16:7

Ehrman believes that the variant occurring here is problematic, but it is problematic only if one makes assumptions that are not warranted or necessary. The text: “Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.”¹³⁸ It is problematic, according to Ehrman, because “Paul speaks of a woman, Junia, and a man who was presumably her husband, Andronicus, both of whom he calls ‘foremost among the apostles’ (v. 7). This is a significant verse, because it is the only place in the New Testament in which a woman is referred to as an apostle.”¹³⁹ Interestingly, Ehrman has not demonstrated that his interpretation is necessarily or even likely the case. Some have proposed that the word “apostles” (ἀποστόλοις) be understood in a more general way of a messenger of the

¹³⁶C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1968), 332.

¹³⁷Ehrman, 184.

¹³⁸ἀσπάσασθε Ἰουλιανὸν καὶ Ἰουνιανὸν τοὺς συγγενεῖς μου καὶ συναιχμαλώτους μου, οἵτινες εἰσὶν ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις, οἳ καὶ πρὸ ἐμοῦ γέγοναν ἐν Χριστῷ.

¹³⁹Ehrman, 185.

Gospel, but John Murray has pointed out, “Since, however, the term has usually in Paul the more restricted sense, it is more probable that the sense is that these persons were well known to the apostles and were distinguished for their faith and service.”¹⁴⁰ Murray points to two other Pauline passages, 2 Cor. 8:23 and Phil. 2:25, where the word ‘apostle’ (ἀπόστολος) could be understood in a general sense. Apparently John Chrysostom (*ca.* 347-407) had no problem in understanding this as a general rather than a technical use of the term. Commenting on this passage, Chrysostom says,

It was the greatest of honors to be counted a fellow prisoner of Paul’s. . . . Think what great praise it was to be considered of note among the apostles. These two were of note because of their works and achievements. Think how great the devotion of this woman Junia must have been, that she should be worthy to be called an apostle! But even here Paul does not stop his praise, for they were Christians before he was.¹⁴¹

Once again Ehrman seems unwilling to allow his readers to know that there are other views that are held by scholars. The remaining examples to which Ehrman appeals suffer from the same problems. The Acts 17:4 variant that Ehrman translates, “wives of prominent men”¹⁴² is a remarkable stretch. The wording, “γυναικῶν τε τῶν πρώτων οὐκ ὀλίγαι,” does not even contain the word ‘men.’ This is an insertion into the text because of the genitive plural form of the word πρώτων, which is the same form whether it is masculine, feminine, or neuter. Metzger argues that the change is probably the result of a copyist changing the less usual syntactical arrangement, “γυναικῶν τε” (lit. “of women and”) with the more common construction “καὶ γυνᾶϊκες” (lit. “and women”). Additionally, the former reading is overwhelmingly supported by the manuscript witnesses, and, not surprisingly, the latter reading is supported by Codex D and several Latin versions.

Ehrman’s claim that the alteration of the order of the names “Aquila and Priscilla” is a result of the “umbrage” of certain scribes, is a stretch even for Ehrman. Ehrman asserts, “Not surprisingly, scribes occasionally took umbrage at this sequence [Priscilla first and Aquila second] and reversed it.”¹⁴³ Of the six instances in the new Testament in which these two names

¹⁴⁰John Murray, *Chapters 9 to 16*, vol. 2, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965; reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 230 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

¹⁴¹John Chrysostom, *Homilies of Romans*, 31; cited in Gerald Bray, ed. *Romans*, vol. 6, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 372. That Chrysostom is taking this word in a general sense of “messenger of the Gospel” is indicated by the fact that in his *Homily on St. Ignatius*, translated by Steophens-Brandram, he refers to St. Ignatius as an apostle: “The martyr or the bishop or the apostle.” §2.

¹⁴²Ehrman, 186.

¹⁴³*Ibid.*, 186.

occur, five of them have the construction, “name and name.” Acts 18:2 says, “And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla,”¹⁴⁴ so it really does not figure into the question. Of the remaining five, only one, 1 Cor. 16:19, has the order “Aquila and Prica,” (Ἀκύλας καὶ Πρίσκα). Since it is the case that there is only one instance of the alteration of the order, how does Ehrman justify saying that scribes “occasionally took umbrage at this sequence and reversed it”? As Swanson’s text shows (see Appendix 2, **Figure 6**, page 47), among the top 45 manuscripts there is a single instance in 1 Cor. 16:19 in which the order was reversed, but the reversal is not from “Priscilla and Aquila” to “Aquila and Precilla” as Ehrman would have it. Rather, the reversal is the reverse. In fact, when comparing all the instances of the occurrence of the construction that are provided by Swanson,¹⁴⁵ we discover that the distribution is fairly equal—54% have the F-M arrangement, and 46% have the M-F arrangement (see Table #1 below). But, even this does not give the truest picture. In those individual passages in which there are variants, of which there are only two of the five (Acts 18:26 and 1 Cor. 16:19; there is no textual variant listed for 2 Tim. 4:19), that are set out in comparative lines by Swanson, the change always seems toward placing “Pricilla” first. In other words, if these are intentional changes, then the intent seems to be toward reversing the order from M-F to F-M. Contrary to Ehrman’s proposal, the evidence does not support the contention that scribes tended to change the order from F-M to M-F because of some supposed scribal “umbrage.” Rather, this seems to be a misrepresentation of the facts as a result of the author’s own umbrage.

Table #1: Arrangement of the Names Pricilla and Aquila

Passages	Numbers of Mss	Fem-Mas Arrangement	Mas-Fem Arrangement
Acts 18:19	45 mss	45 with F-M	
Acts 18:26	45 mss	6 with F-M	39 with M-F
1 Cor. 16:19	45 mss	1 with F-M	44 with M-F
Rom. 16:3	45 mss	45 with F-M	
2 Tim. 4:19	Not in Swanson	1 with F-M	
Totals		97 with F-M - 54%	83 with M-F - 46%

¹⁴⁴καὶ εὐρών γινα Ἰουδαῖον ὀνόματι Ἀκύλαν, Ποντικὸν τῷ γένει προσφάτως ἐλληλοῦτα ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰταλίας καὶ Πρίσκιλλαν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ.

¹⁴⁵2 Tim. 4:19 is not figured into the calculation because Swanson has not yet provided a text on this NT book. However, it must be pointed out that neither of the standard critical apparatuses of NA²⁷ and UBS⁴ indicate a textual variant here. The order in this text is “Priscilla and Aquila.”

Anti-Jewish Alterations

Lk. 23:34

Ehrman begins this section by calling attention to the variant in Lk. 23:34. In this instance Ehrman seems to present the evidence fairly, and to argue his point cogently. The manuscript testimony for and against the reading is such that the textual critic's ultimate decision will most probably be made on the basis of his text critical philosophy. Those who espouse reasoned eclecticism are divided on this variant, as Ehrman points out,¹⁴⁶ that is, on whether or not it is original. Those who espouse a majority view include the text because it is supported not only by the vast majority of mss, indicated by *Byz*, but because it is also supported by significant Alexandrian witnesses as well. Here there seems to be a legitimate case for discussion, and Ehrman's arguments ought to be given due weight. But this is precisely the point. The evidence is such that it does not seem to justify the confidence that Ehrman places in his conclusion, and the fact that there are other reasonable and equally convincing arguments for the opposing view held by equally competent scholars means that Ehrman's conclusion, that this is necessarily some anti-Jewish alteration, is not as certain as he would have his readers think.

Matt. 27:26

The variant with which Erman is concerned here is the presence or absence of the personal pronoun "them" in Matt. 27:26: "but after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified."¹⁴⁷ The alternate reading has the personal pronoun: "But after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to *them* [αὐτοῖς] to be crucified." Ehrman argues, "Pilate is said to have flogged Jesus and then 'handed him over to be crucified.' Anyone reading the text would naturally assume that he handed Jesus over to his own (Roman) soldiers for crucifixion. That makes it all the more striking that in some early witnesses—including one of the scribal corrections in Codex Sinaiticus—the text is changed to heighten even further the Jewish culpability in Jesus's death."¹⁴⁸ But this proposal falls flat with the statement in the very next verse: "Then the soldiers of the governor [οἱ στρατιῶται τοῦ ἡγεμόνος] took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole *Roman* cohort around Him" (Matt. 27:27). The presence of this personal pronoun could not persuade any intelligent reader to think that Pilate was handing Jesus over to the Jews when the very next verse states that it was the soldiers of Pilate, the governor, who took Jesus away! It seems as if Ehrman is really having to stretch the boundaries of credulity to find passages to support his claim of anti-Jewish alterations.

¹⁴⁶Ehrman, 191, "Scholarly opinion has long been divided on the question."

¹⁴⁷τὸν δὲ Ἰησοῦν φραγελλώσας παρέδωκεν ἵνα σταυρωθῇ.

¹⁴⁸Ehrman, 194.

Other Supposed Anti-Jewish Alterations

Ehrman says, “Sometimes anti-Jewish variants are rather slight and do not catch one’s attention until some thought is give to the matter.”¹⁴⁹ To try to prove his point, Ehrman refers to a reading found in one ancient Syriac version, but the way he words this observation is misleading. He says, “It is striking that in one manuscript preserved in Syriac tradition, the text instead says ‘because he will save *the world* from its sins.’”¹⁵⁰ The way he says this implies that there is in fact a textual variant in the New Testament that the Syriac has somehow preserved. But there is no extant evidence that this is the case. In fact, the Peshitta does not read “the world” [ܡܢ ܗܘܢܐ] but “his people [ܡܢ ܗܘܢܐ]” where the Lāmādh (ܐ) serves as the indicator of the object. Ehrman goes on to say, “Here again it appears that a scribe was uncomfortable with the notion that the Jewish people would ever be saved.”¹⁵¹ But this has nothing to do with the “scribes” as Ehrman has been using that term throughout his book to refer to the transcribers of New Testament manuscripts, and the expression “here again” implies that this is a situation like the others he has discussed. These kinds of expressions seem to be calculated to lead the reader astray. Ehrman then goes off on another Syriac manuscript which has nothing to do with manuscript variants in the New Testament, at least not without extensive explanation and clarification of the relationship between the Syriac versions and the history and transmission of the New Testament documents. Without these kinds of clarifications, the reader is left with the impression that these Syriac readings say something definitive about some supposed intentional, anti-Jewish changes in the New Testament manuscripts. In these instances it seems that the variant does not catch one’s attention until someone’s thought is imposed upon the text and a particular spin is spun.

Ehrman’s final example by which he hopes to show anti-Jewish alterations is a lengthy insertion into the text of Luke chapter 6 that is found in D Codex Bezae—again. We have already been made aware of the character of this manuscript, that, according to Metzger, “No known manuscript has so many and such remarkable variations from what is usually taken to be the normal New Testament text. Codex Bezae’s special characteristic is the free addition (and occasional omission) of words, sentences, and even incidents.”¹⁵² The inserted portion reads, “On the same day he [Jesus] saw a man working on the Sabbath, and he said to him, ‘O man, if you know what you are doing, you are blessed, but if you do not know, you are cursed, and a transgressor of the Law.’”¹⁵³ Ehrman’s interpretation is not a necessary perspective either. He

¹⁴⁹Ibid.

¹⁵⁰Ibid.

¹⁵¹Ibid.

¹⁵²Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 3d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 50.

¹⁵³μόνοις τοῖς ἱερεῦσιν Τῇ αὐτῇ ἡμέρᾳ θεασάμενός τινα ἐργαζόμενον τῷ σαββάτῳ εἶπεν αὐτῷ ᾧ ἄνθρωπε, εἰ μὲν οἶδας τί ποιεῖς, μακάριος εἶ· εἰ δὲ μὴ οἶδας, ἐπικατάρατος καὶ

asserts that in this text, “Jesus plainly states that anyone who knows why it is legitimate to violate Sabbath is blessed for doing so.” But this is nonsensical. If it is legitimate to work on the Sabbath, then how can it at the same time be illegitimate, that is, a violation of the Sabbath. But Jesus nowhere says it is legitimate to violate the Sabbath if you know what you are doing. This statement can be understood in a completely different way. The problem here is not the text, but Ehrman’s lack of understanding. The Sabbath was instituted in order to demonstrate the fact that salvation, that is, entering into God’s rest, was not on the basis of one’s works, but by resting in the completed work of God. If an individual does not understand the real significance of the Sabbath, and knows that the law says that one should not work on the Sabbath, and yet that individual works anyway, he is cursed. But, if a person understands that the Sabbath was designed by God to illustrate that entrance into God’s Sabbath rest was not on the basis of one’s own works, but on the completed work of God, and that person works on the basis of that truth, then he is blessed. In other words, if you know you are saved by grace, and you work from that position, you are blessed. But if you are under the law because you do not know that salvation is by grace, and you break the law, you are cursed. That this variant is motivated by anti-Jewish sentiment is not a necessary conclusion. A correct understanding of the passage drains this variant of any supposed anti-Jewish implications. But apart from the fact that Ehrman has completely misunderstood the passage, the evidence against it as original is, once again, overwhelming.

Apologetic Alterations

Mk. 1:41

In an attempt to demonstrate intentional alterations in the text as a result of the struggle with pagan culture, Ehrman points to the variant in Mk. 1:41. This passage recounts Jesus healing a leper. The traditional text reads, “Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’” The variant to which Ehrman appeals is found in the very beginning of the verse. In one manuscript—you guessed it—D Codex Bezae—and it is literally one manuscript—the word translated ‘compassion’ (σπλαγχνισθείς) is replaced by the word ‘became angry’ (ὀργισθείς). Ehrman dealt at length with this variant back in chapter 5. There he asserts, “The simple pathos and unproblematic emotion of the scene may well account for translators and interpreters, as a rule, not considering the alternative text found in some of our manuscripts.”¹⁵⁴ Indeed, the fact that it is supported by the overwhelming majority of extant manuscripts, versions, lectionaries, and church fathers might also have something to do with it. As we have seen throughout Ehrman’s examples so far, he argues for his reconstruction of the context and his interpretation of the text in preference to the objective evidence of the manuscripts. For all of what may on the surface seem to be a reasonable argument, there is simply no good, or even mediocre, reason to think that ὀργισθείς was the

παραβάτης εἰ τοῦ νόμου.

¹⁵⁴Ehrman, 133.

original reading. Much of Ehrman's argument rests on the assumption of the priority of Mark's Gospel and that Matthew and Luke used Mark's account, but this hypothesis is by no means as secure as it once was, and many scholars simply reject the hypothesis altogether.¹⁵⁵ It stretches the imagination to accept the notion that all the other thousands of mss have perpetuated a single alteration of this text by this one scribe, and only D has retained the original reading. As Robinson points out,

*49. A reading preserved in only a single MS, version or father is suspect. As with conjecture, it remains transmissionally unlikely that all MSS, versions, and fathers save one should have strayed from the original reading. Even if some witnesses are considered "best" within a given portion of text, it remains unlikely that any such witness standing alone would have preserved the original text against all other witnesses.*¹⁵⁶

Mk. 6:3

One wonders why Ehrman even considers this variant. Mk. 6:3 states, "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?"¹⁵⁷ The variant is found in $\mathfrak{P}^{45\text{vid}}$ and some few other mss. Ehrman says, "In our earliest manuscript of Mark's Gospel, called P⁴⁵, which dates to the early third century (the time of Origen), and in several later witnesses, the verse reads differently."¹⁵⁸ But Ehrman does not alert the reader to the presence of the qualification in the manuscript evidence. The 'vid,' as we have seen indicates that the manuscript is in such a state that, although this is probably the reading, it is impossible to be certain. Consequently, Ehrman's speculations about why these few mss have this reading are just that—uncertain speculations.

Lk. 23:32

Ehrman appeals to Lk. 23:32, which says, "Two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him," and he asserts, "the way the verse is worded in the Greek, it could also be translated, 'Two others, who were also criminals, were led away to be put to death with him.'"¹⁵⁹ He then proposes that some scribes "found it necessary, for apologetic

¹⁵⁵For example, Mark Goodacre and Nicholas Perrin, ed., *Questioning Q: A Multidimensional Critique* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

¹⁵⁶Robinson, "New Testament Textual Criticism," §49.

¹⁵⁷οὐχ οὗτός ὁ τοῦ τέκτονος υἱός; οὐχ ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ λέγεται Μαριάμ καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτοῦ Ἰάκωβος καὶ Ἰωσήφ καὶ Σίμων καὶ Ἰούδας;

¹⁵⁸Ehrman, 203.

¹⁵⁹Ibid.

reasons, to rearrange the word order, so that it unambiguously reports that it was the two others, not Jesus as well, who were criminals.”¹⁶⁰ The “rearranging” to which Ehrman refers is the transposition of two words. This is shown in the following chart.

Traditional text	Ἦγοντο δὲ καὶ ἕτεροι κακοῦργοι δύο σὺν αὐτῷ ἀναιρεθῆναι.
Rearrangement	Ἦγοντο δὲ καὶ ἕτεροι δύο κακοῦργοι σὺν αὐτῷ ἀναιρεθῆναι.

To illustrate the difference, the two versions will be put in interlinear format.

Traditional text	Ἦγοντο δὲ καὶ ἕτεροι κακοῦργοι δύο σὺν αὐτῷ ἀναιρεθῆναι.
	being led and also others criminals two together Him to be put to death away with
Rearrangement	Ἦγοντο δὲ καὶ ἕτεροι δύο κακοῦργοι σὺν αὐτῷ ἀναιρεθῆναι.
	being led and also others two criminals together Him to be put to death away with

It is simply amazing, first of all, that Ehrman could get his translation from this text. The word that is translated “also” is the adjunctive καὶ. This word is classified as a conjunction and is usually translated “and.” Ehrman implies that the arrangement of the words is such that the word καὶ is modifying the word “criminals” (κακοῦργοι) resulting in the translation, “who were *also criminals*.” However, neither the original wording nor the rearrangement allow that possibility. This is simply a misrepresentation of the syntax.

Also, the word translated “others” (ἕτεροι) is frequently, though certainly not always, used to indicate another of a different kind. The English prefix hetero- for words like heterogeneous, which indicates elements that are not of the same kind or nature, comes from this Greek word. There is another word that would more likely have been used to indicate others not necessarily different in kind, namely, ἄλλος. Luke uses this word in 22:59 to refer to “another man.” Luke uses both of these words, and he frequently uses both words to indicate another of the same kind. But, in his Gospel, Luke does not use ἄλλος to indicate something of a different kind, yet he does use ἕτερος in this way in 9:29: “And while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different [ἕτερον]. . .” It is also likely that in Lk. 17:34 and 35 in which the same phrase is used, “one will be taken and the other [ἕτερος] will be left,” that ἕτερος is used to distinguish between these two kinds of people, the righteous and the unrighteous. Although this does not prove that the use of ἕτερος in 23:32 must be taken in the sense of “a different kind,” this certainly seems likely, and it at least calls into question the likelihood that it should be translated as Ehrman has it. Nevertheless, Ehrman presents his speculation as if it is a demonstrable fact, which it is not.

¹⁶⁰Ibid.

Robinson points out that haplography, the change of word order, is almost always simply a transcriptional error.

41. *Transcriptional error is more likely to be the ultimate source of many sensible variants rather than deliberate alteration.* Many variant readings have their root in transcriptional causes. While this principle includes all cases which produce pure “nonsense,” it also includes many in which the end result in some way “makes sense.” Sensible readings may arise from the simple omission of a letter, syllable, or word; so too readings produced by haplography, dittography, homoioteleuton or other forms of transcriptional error.⁶¹ Even an error that produced a nonsense reading may result later in other sensible variants, created in an attempt to correct the earlier error.¹⁶¹

The idea that this is some deliberate rearrangement of the words for some apologetic reasons is unlikely in the extreme.

Other Variants

Ehrman refers to a variant in Matt. 27:34 in which a few mss have “vinegar” rather than “wine,” and he speculates, “It is interesting to note that at the Last Supper, in Matt. 26:29, after distributing the cup of wine to his disciples, Jesus explicitly states that he will not drink wine again until he does so in the kingdom of the Father. Was the change of 27:34 from wine to vinegar meant to safeguard that prediction, so that he in fact did not taste wine after claiming that he would not?”¹⁶² Of course, this proposal is ludicrous. In 26:29 Jesus says, “I will not drink [πίνω] of this fruit of the vine.”¹⁶³ In 27:34 the text say Jesus tasted (γευσόμενος), but, “He was unwilling to drink [πίνω].” Jesus never said He would not taste (γεύομαι). He said He would not drink (πίνω). Some might say this is splitting hairs, but Ehrman has already stressed the fact that different words have different meanings, and “the only way to understand what an author wants to say is to know what his words—all his words—actually were.”¹⁶⁴ That must have slipped his mind when considering this verse.

His appeal to the use of “you” in Mk. 14:62 with reference to the high priest is, once again, absurd. When Jesus says, “you will see [ὄψεσθε] the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” there is no reason to take this as a specific reference to the high priest, especially since the “you” is plural, not singular. Here the term “you” is simply a generic reference. English speaking people do this quite frequently: “When Jesus comes back you’re going to see Him in the sky.” In such expressions the “you” is a generic

¹⁶¹Robinson, “New Testament Textual Criticism,” §41.

¹⁶²Ehrman, 204.

¹⁶³οὐ μὴ πίω ἀπ’ ὄρτι ἐκ τούτου τοῦ γενήματος τῆς ἀμπέλου

¹⁶⁴Ibid., 56.

reference used to refer to anyone who happens to do what is predicted. The speaker does not necessarily mean “you” in the strict sense, but you, whoever will be there at the time. In fact, on page 208 Ehrman says, “It would be wrong, however, to say—as some do—that the changes in our text have no real bearing . . .” Does Ehrman’s use of the word “our” mean that he thinks the text belongs to him? or that he is one of the ones who produced the text? Of course not. Similarly, the word “you” can be used in an indefinite sense. Contrary to his conclusion, Ehrman has not successfully demonstrated that any one of the variants he discusses must be seen, and in most cases even can be seen, as an intentional, apologetic alteration.

Conclusion: Changing Scripture

Ehrman begins his final chapter by recalling the personal testimony he presented in the “Introduction.” He states, “The more I studied the manuscript tradition of the New Testament, the more I realized just how radically the text had been altered over the years at the hands of scribes, who were not only conserving scripture but also changing it.”¹⁶⁵ A 92% average stability of the text does not seem to support the idea that the text has been “radically altered.” There is no question that the manuscripts differ from each other, but Ehrman asserts, “It would be wrong, however, to say—as some do—that the changes in our text have no real bearing on what the texts mean or on the theological conclusions that one draws from them.”¹⁶⁶ This is true, as far as it goes, but there is a big difference between saying that the variants make a difference in the theological conclusions we draw from these particular texts, and to claim that the multitude of variants call into question the validity of our theology. As Daniel Wallace declares, “the idea that the variants in the NT manuscripts alter the theology of the NT is overstated at best.”¹⁶⁷ Similarly Craig Blomberg asserts, “No central tenet of Christianity hangs on any textually uncertain passage; this observation alone means that Christian textual critics may examine the variants that do exist dispassionately and without worrying that their faith is somehow threatened in the ways that Ehrman came to believe.”¹⁶⁸

Ehrman says that the more he studied the more he realized that the Scripture had been changed. This is a very odd assertion in light of the fact that he goes on to say, “we don’t have the original words.”¹⁶⁹ How does Ehrman know we don’t have the original words? The fact that there are over 200,000 variants among the existing mss does not mean that we do not have the original words. That is a non sequitur—it does not follow. Even though there are over 200,000 variants among the existing mss, it is still possible that the original words are there in those

¹⁶⁵Ehrman, 207.

¹⁶⁶Ibid., 208.

¹⁶⁷Wallace, “A Review of Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*.”

¹⁶⁸Blomberg, “Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*.”

¹⁶⁹Ehrman, 211.

manuscripts, and textual criticism is the way to find them. Remember, Robinson has shown that textual criticism is dealing with less than 8% of the entire New Testament. But, if we do not have the original words, as Ehrman claims, then there is no basis for Ehrman's claim to know that "the words God reputedly inspired had been changed . . ." ¹⁷⁰ The only way to identify a change is to know what has been changed. For Ehrman to know that the words God inspired have changed, he would have to know what those words were and be able to compare them with the words we have in order to identify the changes. But, if Ehrman knows those inspired words, then it is simply not true that we don't have the original words. And if we don't have the original words, then we have no basis upon which to make a comparison. This is the fallacy of the lost distinction. It is like saying, "The entire universe doubled in size last night." Against what are you measuring? Or it is like saying, "You're taking the universe out of context!" It is a nonsensical assertion.

At first I could not grasp how an accomplished scholar like Ehrman could actually claim that the text has been radically changed, but then he explained what he meant. Apparently, when he talks about the text being changed, he is not necessarily making reference to the actual orthographic alterations in the letters and words of the documents. As he goes on to explain, "For the more I studied, the more I saw that reading a text necessarily involves interpreting a text. . . . Texts are interpreted, and they are interpreted (just as they were written) by living, breathing human beings, who can make sense of the texts only by explaining them in light of their other knowledge, explicating their meaning, putting the words of the texts 'in other words.' Once readers put a text in other words, however, they have changed the words. . . . And so to read a text is, necessarily, to change a text. That's what the scribes of the New Testament did. They read the texts available to them and they put them in *other* words." ¹⁷¹ So, when Ehrman says the text has been radically changed, he means that the text has been completely changed because of the fact that scribes read the text and put the text into *other* words.

This claim certainly sounds contemporary, but it is nevertheless self-defeating. If it is true, as Ehrman asserts, that reading a text necessarily changes it, then this can never be known to be true. As soon as one reads a text, it has changed, so one could never know what the original text actually said, because the reader does not have the original text by which to make a comparison in order to know that what he has read and what the original text said are in fact different. Also, since the act of reading changed the text, according to Ehrman, to change the text is to change the meaning, since different words have different meanings: "the only way to understand what an author wants to say is to know what his words—all his words—actually were." ¹⁷² But, according to Ehrman, "to read a text is, necessarily, to change a text." ¹⁷³ Although

¹⁷⁰Ibid.

¹⁷¹Ibid., 216-17.

¹⁷²Ibid., 56.

¹⁷³Ibid., 217.

the scribes changed the actual “physical words on the page,”¹⁷⁴ we do not, but, according to Ehrman, “we all change scripture, every time we read it.”¹⁷⁵ There can be no doubt that Ehrman has not only departed from his early commitments to Christianity, but he has also imbibed the Postmodern relativism so prevalent in the humanities departments. In the beginning of this paper I made the comment that only God knows Ehrman’s heart, but we ought to know his assumptions. Here is one of his foundational assumptions—Postmodern relativism.

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Professor of Bible and Biblical Languages
Southern Evangelical Seminary
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¹⁷⁴Ibid., 218.

¹⁷⁵Ibid.

APPENDIX 1

Textual Apparatus for Lk. 22:17-20

Figure 5: Lk. 22:17-20

² 17-20 {B} verses 17, 18, 19, 20 ϣ⁷⁵ ⳨ A B C L T^{vid} W Δ Θ Ψ f¹ f¹³ 157 180
205 565 579 597 700 892 1006 1010 1071 1241 1243 1292 1342 1424 1505 Byz [E G
H N] Lect it^{aur, c, f, q, r¹} vg syr^{h, pal} cop^{sa, bo} arm eth geo slav Eusebian Canons (Basil);
Augustine // verses 17, 18, 19a (omitting 19b, 20: τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ... ἐκχυννόμενον) D
it^{a, d, ff², i, 1} // verses 19, 17, 18 (it^{b, e} only 19a καὶ λαβῶν ... σῶμά μου) syr^c // verses 19,
add μετὰ τὸ δειπνήσαι (20a), 17, add τοῦτό μου τὸ αἷμα ἢ καινὴ διαθήκη (20b),
18 (see Mt 26.26-29; Mk 14.22-25; 1 Cor 11.23-26) syr^s // verses 19, 20 only syr^p
cop^{bo^{ms}}

Some of the Witnesses Supporting the Longer Reading

Papyrus MSS

ϣ⁷⁵ Bodmer Papyrus XIV-XV, late second century - contains most of Luke, chapters 3 through 24, and John, chapters 1 through 15. Classified as Alexandrian.

Uncial MSS

⳨ Codex Sinaiticus, fourth century. The only known complete New Testament in uncial script. Classified as Alexandrian.

A Codex Alexandrinus, fifth century. Classified as Byzantine in the Gospels.

B Codex Vaticanus, fourth century. Contains both the Old and New Testaments. Classified as Alexandrian.

C Codex Ephraemi, fifth century. Classified as Byzantine.

L Codex Regius, eighth century. Contains the Gospels. Classified as Alexandrian.

T^{vid} Codex Borgianus, fifth century. Classified as Alexandrian. The superscript “vid” indicates “The *most probable* reading of a manuscript where the state of its preservation makes complete verification impossible.”¹⁷⁶

W Codex of the four Gospels, fourth or early fifth century. The Gospel of Luke is classified as Byzantine.

Δ Codex Sangallensis, ninth century, Greek and Latin text contains the four Gospels. Classified as Byzantine

Θ Codex Koridethi, ninth century, contains the Gospels. The Gospel of Luke is classified as Byzantine.

Ψ Codex Athous Laurae, eighth or ninth century. The Gospels are classified as Byzantine.

Minuscule MSS

*f*¹ Family 1, a family of mss all of which date from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries. Classified as mixed with some Byzantine some Caesarean.

*f*¹³ Family 13, a family of mss all of which date from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries. Classified as mixed with some Byzantine and some Caesarean.

157 . . . The numbered mss are minuscules, variously classified and variously dated.

Byz This siglum stands for the Byzantine mss which include the vast majority dating from the fourth century.

The Witnesses Supporting the Shorter Reading

Uncial MS

D Codex Bezae, also known as Cantabrigiensis. Includes Greek and Latin on facing pages. Dates from about the fourth century. Classified as Western.

Versions

it Old Latin versions:

it^a - Fourth century

it^d - Fifth to Sixth century

it^{ft2} - Fifth century

itⁱ - Fifth to Sixth century

it^l - Eighth century

Explanation of the Rise of the Shorter Version

Kenyon and Legg, who prefer the longer form of text, explain the origin of the other readings as follows: “The whole difficulty arose, in our opinion, from a misunderstanding of the longer version. The first cup given to the disciples to divide among themselves should be taken in connection with the previous verse (ver. 16) as referring to the eating of the Passover with them at the reunion in Heaven. This is followed by the institution of the

¹⁷⁶UBS⁴ “Introduction,” 19.

Sacrament, to be repeated continually on earth in memory of Him. This gives an intelligible meaning to the whole, while at the same time it is easy to see that it would occasion difficulties of interpretation, which would give rise to the attempts at revision that appear in various forms of the shorter version” (Sir Frederick G. Kenyon and S. C. E. Legg in *The Ministry and the Sacraments*, ed. by Roderic Dunkerley [London, 1937], pp. 285 f.)¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 150, n2.

APPENDIX 2

The following chart is from Reuben Swanson, *New Testament Manuscripts*.¹⁷⁸

Figure 6: 1 Cor. 16:19

ἀσπάζονται	ὑμᾶς ἐν κ̄ω̄	πολλά	Ἀκύλας	καὶ	Πρίσκα	B 1175*
ἀσπάζονται	ὑμᾶς ἐν κ̄ω̄	πολλά	Ἀκύλας	καὶ	<u>Πρείσκας</u>	ϑ ⁴⁶
ἀσπάζονται	ὑμᾶς	πολλά	Ἀκύλας	καὶ	Πρίσκα	1881
<u>ἀσπάζεταιται</u>	ὑμᾶς ἐν κυρίῳ	πολλά	Ἀκύλας	καὶ	Πρίσκα	u w
<u>ἀσπάζεταιται</u>	ὑμᾶς ἐν κ̄ω̄	πολλά	Ἀκύλας	καὶ	Πρίσκα	κ P
ἀσπάζονται	ὑμᾶς <u>πολλά</u>	ἐν κ̄ω̄	Ἀκύλας	καὶ	Πρίσκα	1739
ἀσπάζονται	ὑμᾶς <u>πολλά</u>	ἐν κ̄ω̄	<u>Ἀκύλα</u>	καὶ	Πρίσκα	33
ἀσπάζονται	ὑμᾶς <u>πολλά</u>	ἐν κ̄ω̄	Ἀκύλας	καὶ	<u>Πρίσκιλλα</u>	056 326 629 630
ἀσπάζονται	ὑμᾶς <u>πολλά</u>	ἐν κ̄ω̄	Ἀκύλας	καὶ	<u>Πρίσκιλλα</u>	1837
<u>ἀσπάζετε</u>	ὑμᾶς <u>πολλά</u>	ἐν κ̄ω̄	Ἀκύλας	καὶ	<u>Πρίσκιλλα</u>	1241
ἀσπάζονται	ὑμᾶς ἐν κ̄ω̄		<u>Πρίσκιλλα</u>	καὶ	<u>Ἀκύλας</u>	945
<u>ἀσπάζετε</u>	ὑμᾶς ἐν κ̄ω̄	<u>Ἀκύλας</u>	<u>πολλά</u>	καὶ	<u>Πρίσκιλλα</u>	D*
<u>ἀσπάζεταιται</u>	ὑμᾶς ἐν κ̄ω̄	<u>Ἀκύλας</u>	<u>πολλά</u>	καὶ	<u>Πρίσκιλλα</u>	D ^{1,2}
ἀσπάζονται	ὑμᾶς ἐν κ̄ω̄	πολλά Ἀπολλῶ καὶ	Ἀκύλας	καὶ	<u>Πρίσκιλλα</u>	460 1836
omit						A
<u>ἀσπάζεται</u>	ὑμᾶς ἐν κ̄ω̄	πολλά	Ἀκύλας	καὶ	<u>Πρίσκιλλα</u>	104
<u>ἀσπάζεταιται</u>	ὑμᾶς ἐν κ̄ω̄	πολλά	<u>Ἀκύλα</u>	καὶ	<u>Πρίσκιλλα</u>	796
<u>ἀσπάζεταιται</u>	ὑμᾶς ἐν κ̄ω̄	πολλά	Ἀκύλας	καὶ	<u>Πρίσκιλλα</u>	C K Ψ
<u>ἀσπάζεταιται</u>	ὑμᾶς ἐν κ̄ω̄	πολλά	Ἀκύλας	καὶ	<u>Πρίσκιλλα</u>	2464
<u>ἀσπάζετε</u>	ὑμᾶς ἐν κυρίῳ	πολλά	Ἀκύλας	καὶ	<u>Πρίσκιλλα</u>	τ
<u>ἀσπάζοντε</u>	ὑμᾶς ἐν κ̄ω̄	πολλά	Ἀκύλας	καὶ	<u>Πρίσκιλλα</u>	489 1874
<u>ἀσπάζοντε</u>	ὑμᾶς		<u>Ἀκοίλας</u>	καὶ	<u>Πρίσκιλλα</u>	1243
<u>ἀσπάζονται</u>	ὑμᾶς ἐν κ̄ω̄	πολλά	Ἀκύλας	καὶ	<u>Πρίσκιλλα</u>	1646
ἀσπάζονται	ὑμᾶς ἐν κ̄ω̄	πολλά	<u>Ἀκύλα</u>	καὶ	<u>Πρίσκιλλα</u>	F
ἀσπάζονται	ὑμᾶς ἐν κ̄ω̄	πολλά	<u>Ἀκύλλας</u>	καὶ	<u>Πρίσκιλλα</u>	205
ἀσπάζονται	ὑμᾶς ἐν κ̄ω̄	πολλά	Ἀκύλας	καὶ	<u>Πρίσκιλλα</u>	131* 330
ἀσπάζονται	ὑμᾶς ἐν κυρίῳ	πολλά	Ἀκύλας	καὶ	<u>Πρίσκιλλα</u>	Eg ¹
ἀσπάζονται	ὑμᾶς ἐν κ̄ω̄	πολλά	Ἀκύλας	καὶ	<u>Πρίσκιλλα</u>	424 517 1270 1611
ἀσπάζονται	ὑμᾶς ἐν κ̄ω̄	πολλά	Ἀκύλας	καὶ	<u>Πρίσκιλλα</u>	2147 [↑1734 1891
ἀσπάζονται	ὑμᾶς ……	……	…κύλας	καὶ	<u>Πρίσκιλλα</u>	2344
ἀσπάζονται	ὑμᾶς ἐν κ̄ω̄	πολλά	Ἀκύλας	καὶ	<u>Πρίσκιλλα</u>	G L 049 075 1 6 69

88 131^c 209 226 323 365 440 547 614 618 910 927 999 1175^c 1242 1245 1315 1319
1352 1424 1448 1505 1573 1735 1738 1827^s 1854 1982 2125 2400 2412 2495 2815

Using Swanson’s text, the other instances of the occurrence of the two names, “Aquila and Priscilla indicate the following results:

¹⁷⁸Reuben Swanson, *New Testament Greek Manuscripts: 1 Corinthians* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003), 285.

- Acts 18:19: The order is “Priscilla and Aquila” - No instances of haplography
- Acts 18:26: The predominate order is “Aquila and Priscilla” - Of the 11 lines of comparative text, 3 present the order “Priscilla and Aquila.” In other words, if there is intentional change here, the change does not appear to be in order to put the man first, but to put the woman first.
- 1 Cor. 16:19: The predominate order is “Aquila and Priscilla” - Of the 30 lines of comparative text, 1 presents the order “Priscilla and Aquila.” In other words, if there is intentional change here, the change does not appear to be in order to put the man first, but to put the woman first.
- Rom. 16:3: The order is “Priscilla and Aquila” - No instances of haplography
- 2 Tim. 4:19: The order is “Priscilla and Aquila” - No instances of haplography

APPENDIX 3

The following chart is reproduced by permission from Maurice A. Robinson, “The Integrity of the Early New Testament Text,” (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: *Evangelical Theological Society: 57th Annual Meeting*, 2005), 24.

**SUMMARY TABLE: EXAMINED POPYRI ARRANGED
ACCORDING TO STABILITY OF TEXT**

* = entire papyrus fragment fully collated

Papyrus	Tested in	Raw WID	Raw Stability	Adjusted WID	Final Stability
ⲡ ¹⁰¹	*Mt	18/119	84.9%	17/119	85.7%
ⲡ ⁴⁵	Jn	91/593	84.7%	83/593	86.0%
ⲡ ¹¹⁰	*Mt	12/82	85.4%	10/82	87.8%
ⲡ ¹⁵	*1Co	55/419	86.9%	49/419	88.3%
ⲡ ⁹⁰	*Jn	36/240	85.0%	27/240	88.7%
ⲡ ⁶⁶	Jn	132/887	85.2%	97/887	89.1%
ⲡ ⁵	Jn	63/325	80.6%	35/325	89.2%
ⲡ ¹¹¹	*Lk	5/49	89.8%	5/49	89.8%
ⲡ ⁵⁰	*Ac	37/233	84.1%	23/233	90.1%
ⲡ ¹¹⁴	*He	10/75	86.7%	7/75	90.7%
ⲡ ⁷²	2Pe	83/384	78.4%	35/384	90.9%
ⲡ ³⁷	*Mt	61/601	89.9%	49/601	91.8%
ⲡ ¹⁰⁶	*Jn	23/219	89.5%	17/219	92.2%
ⲡ ⁴⁶ (a)	Ro	62/512	87.9%	40/512	92.2%
ⲡ ³⁹	*Jn	12/161	92.5%	12/161	92.5%
ⲡ ⁵³	Ac	18/180	90.0%	13/180	92.8%
ⲡ ⁴⁷	Re	39/411	90.5%	28/411	93.2%
ⲡ ⁷⁵	Jn	84/825	89.8%	55/825	93.3%
ⲡ ⁷⁷ +ⲡ ¹⁰³	*Mt	17/197	91.4%	13/197	93.4%
ⲡ ⁹⁸	*Re	16/182	91.2%	12/182	93.4%
ⲡ ¹⁰⁰	*Jas	29/291	90.0%	18/291	93.8%
ⲡ ²⁰	*Jas	24/250	90.4%	15/250	94.0%
ⲡ ⁴⁹	*Eph	30/356	91.6%	21/356	94.1%
ⲡ ⁵²	*Jn	8/84	90.5%	4/84	95.2%
ⲡ ⁴⁶ (b)	He	16/272	94.1%	13/272	95.2%
ⲡ ⁸⁶	*Mt	10/135	92.5%	5/135	96.3%
ⲡ ²⁷	*Ro	18/422	95.7%	15/422	96.4%
ⲡ ¹⁰⁸	*Jn	7/114	93.9%	4/114	96.5%
ⲡ ¹³	He	17/292	94.2%	9/292	96.9%
ⲡ ¹¹⁵	Re	9/285	96.8%	7/285	97.5%
				Average:	92.2%

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