**An Evangelical Response to**

**Bart Ehrman Part 1 –**

# Textual Variants

Dec. 12, 2022

This paper is intended for Christians who might be wondering about books by a Bible critic named Bart Ehrman. Dr. Bart Ehrman began his adult life as an evangelical who attended Moody Bible College, and then Princeton Theological Seminary where he became a liberal Christian. Some years after that he became an agnostic and teaches at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He has been featured on the History Channel and other shows. Ehrman is one of the more famous professional Bible critics around.

Three books Ehrman has written are *Misquoting Jesus*, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, and *Jesus, Interrupted*. This paper answers two key points that he argues:

**1) Ehrman sees many manuscript variants as corrupting the Bible.**

**Brief answer:** There are many places where some scribes and translators paraphrased to try to clarify the meaning or reduce misunderstanding. They made many mistakes too. While it would have been better if they had not made any mistakes or changes, we can still be certain of about 97% of all words in the New Testament by looking at early manuscripts, and comparing manuscripts.

**2) While Ehrman acknowledges that most of these changes do not materially affect the meaning, he says a few of these are very significant, even if they don’t affect doctrine.**

The seven significant variants he mentions are:

1 Jn 5:7-8 – Johannine Comma

Lk 22:19-20 – broken for you

Lk 22:43-44 – angel strengthened, drops of blood

Lk 23:34 – Father forgive them

Jn 7:53-8:11 – Pericope of the adulteress

1 Cor 14:34-35 – location of verses on women

Mk 16:9-20 – Ending of Mark

**Brief answer:** These do not impact our faith or practice. The differences are less than between the KJV and either the NIV or New American Standard Bible translations. This is in contrast to changes such as in Sura 53 in the Qur’an of Islam, where at least 11 early Muslim sources documented that Mohammed originally said that the intercession of idol goddesses was to be hoped for. In fact, the New Testament variants have had negligible impact on the Christian church compared to later Medieval church doctrines historically added to the Roman Catholic and eastern Orthodox churches, that everyone agrees were never said in the Bible.

Ehrman says that his criticisms are not critical of a liberal type of Christianity (*Jesus, Interrupted* p.271). However, his books do attack Bible-believing Christianity.

Ehrman also brings up three other issues: alleged contradictions, what early Christians were like, and what books should be in the Bible. These will be discussed in subsequent parts.

**Ehrman in the Footsteps of Other Bible Critics**

As Ehrman points out, much of what he presents in his book *Jesus, Interrupted* is repeated by others elsewhere, but he has concisely collected these things together. This is not intended as a personal criticism of Ehrman, but rather a conservative Christian response to the ideas he presents. While some things he says are correct, some things are wrong, and some are half-true. This article is not only to wade through some of his mistakes, but also to show what is correct.

**“Shocking” Theology from Ehrman**

Ehrman appears to like to present things in a shocking way. I found this very shocking, but perhaps in a way he did not intend.

**Ehrman says**, “Did Luke think that Jesus was in agony when going to his death, or that he was calm and controlled? It depends entirely on what you make of the textual variant in Luke 22:43-44, where Jesus allegedly sweated great drops as if of blood before his arrest. Leave the verses in, as some manuscripts do, and Jesus is obviously in deep agony. Take them out and there is no agony, either in this passage or anywhere else in Luke’s passion narrative, as we saw earlier when we noticed that Luke had eliminated all of Mark’s references to Jesus’ being in pain, uncertain up to the end.” *Jesus, Interrupted* p.187

I think a Christian might be shocked to find out that Luke has eliminated all references to Jesus’ agony, pain, and suffering. In fact, I think no one would be more shocked at to hear about Ehrman’s claim than Luke himself! Here is what Luke said about Christ suffering.

Luke 9:22 “And he [Jesus] said, ‘The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by… and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”

Luke 17:25 “but first he [the Son of Man] must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.”

Luke 22:15 “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.”

Luke 22:19b, 20b “This is my body given *for you*; do this in remembrance of me.” … (20b) “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out *for you*.” (Ehrman disagrees that the italicized parts were in the original.)

Luke 22:64 the soldiers mocked and beat Jesus

Luke 24:26 “He [Jesus] said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’”;

Luke 24:46 “He [Jesus] said to them, 'Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day,'”

Ehrman agrees with the generally accepted view that Luke and Acts were by the same author. (*Jesus, Interrupted* p.46 and p.286, note 11.)

Acts 1:3 “After his [Jesus’] suffering”

Acts 3:18 “But what god foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled.” (ESV) (Peter is speaking)

Acts 17:3 [Paul was] “explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead.”

Acts 26:22b-23 “I [Paul] am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen – that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles.”

Since it only takes one quote by Luke to prove that Luke mentions Jesus' pain and suffering, and we have at least ten quotes, It is false that Erhman writes that Luke does not mention Jesus’ pain and suffering apart from Luke 22:43-44.

**Why Look at Textual Variants?**

Ehrman sarcastically accuses Bible-believing Christians of hypocrisy, in Christians saying that textual variants don’t matter very much, and then Dallas Theological Seminary and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary sponsor expensive projects to examine the Greek New Testament manuscripts. Ehrman says, “[Textual variants] matter for interpreting for how we interpret the New Testament; they matter for knowing about the historical Jesus; they matter for understanding the history of the Christian church after Jesus’ death.”

Textual variants affect interpreting the New Testament slightly, but I am not convinced that Ehrman himself honestly believes that textual variants matter for understanding the historical Jesus. He does not believe that writings besides the gospels tell us about the historical Jesus, and I question just how much of the gospels he believes accurately tell us about Jesus either.

Ehrman (whether accidentally or not) is saying that the statement “the variants do not affect our faith” equates to “we are saying they do not matter at all.” I certainly do not believe they equate. Early Bible manuscripts, and their variants, can show us two important things:

1) How accurately the basic meaning was preserved. For this purpose, a Latin, Armenian, or other translation is just about as good as the original Greek.

2) Exactly how precisely each word was transmitted through the ages. For determining the exact precision of words, a translation is not as good as the original language.

In summary, the 5,838 Greek Bible manuscripts and lectionaries, and 13,000 or so other Bible manuscripts, show us the meaning has been preserved with reasonable accuracy. They also show us that the precision is not as high as we might desire. Consider this though: while God could have chosen to miraculously preserve every single word, He deliberately chose not to have this happen. Perhaps the reason was that we would not elevate the words above the meaning.

## **Ehrman’s “Nine Overarching Theses” of** *Misquoting Jesus*

In his book *Jesus, Interrupted pp.*183-184, Ehrman gives nine points to sum up his book *Misquoting Jesus*. Following are an evangelical response to his nine points.

**1. Ehrman says, “We don’t have the originals of any of the books of the New Testament.”** (*Jesus, Interrupted* p.183)

This is true, but high precision is not needed to know what God wanted to tell us.

In his discussion of how he came to be an agnostic, there is a lesson that Christians can learn from: his prior view of the Bible. Bart Ehrman compares his view to the “KVJ-only” view that only the King James Bible (in the English language) is God’s word. He says that view is silly, because of all the people who lived before the King James Version in English in 1611. Did they not have God’s Word? (*Jesus, Interrupted* p.182) While Ehrman did not believe in KJV-only, he says his prior view was similar; except rather than believing that only the KJV was God’s word, Ehrman, at that time, believed only the original Greek and Hebrew were God’s word.

Ehrman writes, “Why would God have inspired the words of the Bible if he chose not to preserve these words for posterity? Put differently, what should make me think he had inspired the words in the first place if I knew for certain (as I did) that he had not preserved them? This became a major problem for me in trying to figure out which Bible I thought was inspired.” *Jesus, Interrupted* p.182

But nobody today has the original autographs, and the copies we have contain mistakes. Furthermore, what if in many cases today, the best scholarship is unable to reconstruct with certainty the exact words in the originals? Does this mean we do not have God’s Word? This would be a real problem, but only if you are more concerned about the exact words than the meaning of the words.

While I believe that the originals were God’s inerrant Word, my view parts company with Ehrman’s former view that only the originals were God’s Word. I believe that God’s Word was the meaning God imparted. So the originals were God’s Word, the copies were God’s Word, and translations are God’s Word, even though they are transmitted imperfectly.

What should be a Christian’s highest authority? Many Catholics might say a combination of the Pope, church councils, tradition, and the Bible. A common evangelical Protestant view, which Ehrman held, is “just the Bible.” My view is slightly different: I would say “God.” But since I believe the Bible is God’s inerrant word in original manuscripts, what’s the difference? The difference is in focus: we should be more concerned with the message God is communicating to us than the exact words. Not seeing this distinction can make us run afoul of 2 Timothy 2:14: “Keep reminding them of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen.” (NIV)

Quarreling about words ruins those who listen when people think the words are more important than the meaning. Their theological arguments may wax hot, but their love for the Lord can wane cold.

In Ehrman’s tragic wandering from the faith, there is a warning for us to heed. When a person considers the New Testament’s words more important than its message, they may encounter an unpleasant surprise: we are not totally sure of almost 3% of the words.

**2. Ehrman writes, “The copies [of the New Testament] we have were made much later, in most instances many centuries later.”** (*Jesus, Interrupted* p.183)

We actually have significant portions (at least a 1/5) of many N.T. books by 195 years later (c.225 A.D.) Parts in gray are summed up in the rows that say (sum). Look this over and you decide if he is correct.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Book** | **Manuscript** | **Date** | **% verses** | **Included / Total** |
| Mt | p45 (Chester Beatty I) | 200-225 A.D. | 6 % | 61 / 1071 verses |
| Mt | p104 (p. Oxyrhynchus 4404) | 100-150 A.D. | 0.5 % | 5.5 / 1071 verses |
| Mt | p1 (p. Oxyrhynchus 2) | c.200 A.D. | 3 % | 17.5 / 1071 verses |
| Mt | p64 (Magdalen) | ca.200 A.D. | 1 % | 9 / 1071 verses |
| Mt | p77+p103 | 140-200 A.D. | 1.5 % | 10+6 /1071 verses |
| Mt (sum) | p45+p104+p1+p64+p77+p103 | c.150-225 A.D. | 9 % | 99 / 1071 verses |
| Mk | p45 (Chester Beatty I) | 200-225 A.D. | 17 % | 147 / 678 verses |
| Lk | p75 (Bodmer 14/15) | ca.175 A.D. | 66 % | 758 / 1151 verses |
| Lk | p45 (Chester Beatty I) | 200-225 A.D. | 21 % | 242 / 1151 verses |
| Lk | p4 | 100-150 A.D. | 8 % | 95 / 1151 verses |
| **Lk (sum)** | p75+p45+p4 | 100-225 A.D. | 72 % | 824 / 1151 verses |
| Jn | p52 (John Rylands) | 100-150 A.D. | 0.4 % | 5 / 879 verses |
| Jn | p66 (Bodmer II) | 125-175 A.D. | 91 % | 808.5 / 879 verses |
| Jn | p90 (p. Oxyrhynchus 3523) | c.175 A.D. | 1 % | 12 ./ 879 verses |
| Jn | p75 (Bodmer 14/15) | ca.175 A.D. | 67 % | 597 / 879 verses |
| Jn | p45 (Chester Beatty I) | 200-225 A.D. | 9 % | 84 / 879 verses |
| **Jn (sum)** | p66+p75+p45 | 125-225 A.D. | 93 % | 833 / 879 verses |
| Acts | p38 (p. Michigan Inv. 1571) | Late 2nd / early 3rd | 1 % | 13 / 1003 verses |
| Acts | Uncial 0189 | Late 2nd / early 3rd | 2 % | 19 / 1003 verses |
| Acts | p29 | 200-225 A.D. | 0.3 % | 3 / 1003 verses |
| Acts | p45 | 200-225 A.D. | 29 % | 289 / 1003 verses |
| Acts | p48 | c.220 A.D. | 1 % | 12 / 1003 verses |
| **Acts (sum)** | p45 + p38 | 175-225 A.D. | 32 % | 326 / 1003 verses |
| **Rom** | p46 (Chester Beatty II) | 100-150/200 A.D. | 54 % | 234 / 433 verses |
| **1 Cor** | p46 (Chester Beatty II) | 100-150/200 A.D. | 99 % | 431 / 437 verses |
| **2 Cor** | p46 (Chester Beatty II) | 100-150/200 A.D. | 95 % | 254 / 257 verses |
| **Gal** | p46 (Chester Beatty II) | 100-150/200 A.D. | 94 % | 140 / 149 verses |
| **Eph** | p46 (Chester Beatty II) | 100-150/200 A.D. | 97 % | 150 / 155 verses |
| **Php** | p46 (Chester Beatty II) | 100-150/200 A.D. | 81 % | 84 / 104 verses |
| **Col** | p46 (Chester Beatty II) | 100-150/200 A.D. | 83 % | 79 / 95 verses |
| 1 Th | p30 | early 3rd century | 21 % | 19 / 89 verses |
| 1 Th | p46 (Chester Beatty II) | 100-150/200 A.D. | 19 % | 17 / 89 verses |
| **1 Th (sum)** | p30+p46 | 100-225 A.D. | 31 % | 28 / 89 verses |
| 2 Th | p20 | early 3rd cent. | 13 % | 6 / 47 verses |
| 1 Tim | Sinaiticus | 340-350 A.D. | 100 % | 113 / 113 verses |
| 2 Tim | Sinaiticus | 340-350 A.D. | 100 % | 83 / 83 verses |
| **Tt** | p32 | 150-200 A.D. | 46 % | 21 / 46 verses |
| Phm | p87 | c.125 A.D. | 12 % | 3 / 25 verses |
| **Heb** | p46 (Chester Beatty II) | c.200 A.D. | 99 % | 300 / 303 verses |
| Jms | p23 (p. Oxyrhynchus 1229) | early 3rd cent. | 6 % | 7 / 108 verses |
| 1 Pet | none before 225 A.D. | c.300 A.D. | 0 % | 0 / 105 verses |
| 2 Pet | none before 225 A.D. | c.300 A.D. | 0 % | 0 / 61 verses |
| 1 Jn | none before 225 A.D. | 325-350 A.D. | 0 % | 0 / 104 verses |
| 2 Jn | none before 225 A.D. | c.300 A.D. | 0 % | 0 / 13 verses |
| 3 Jn | none before 225 A.D. | 325-350 A.D. | 0 % | 0 / 14 verses |
| Jde | none before 225 A.D. | c.300 A.D. | 0 % | 0 / 25 verses |
| Rev | none before 225 A.D. | 250-300 A.D. | 0 % | 0 / 404 verses |
| **Total** | **these mss** | **before 225 A.D.** | **52.3 %** | **4162 / 7952 verses** |

Ehrman says that manuscript p46 was written in the third century in *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* p.87. However, others date this earlier. For example, the Greek New Testament by Kurt Aland et al. 4th revised edition dates p46 as “about 200” A.D. More recently it has been dated to 81-96 A.D. by Young Kyu Kim. Comfort dates this to early to mid-2nd century. Kenyon in 1936 dated it to 200-250 A.D., mainly on the stichometric notes. Wilcken in 1935 dated it to 200 A.D., but he only looked at one leaf. However, Comfort provides extensive comparisons to other manuscripts, and while he cannot rule out Kim’s dating, Comfort dates Chester Beatty II to 100-150 A.D.

These other scholars all have an earlier date for manuscript p46 than Bart Ehrman does. This is significant because it can color his view of the earliness of the manuscript evidence.

**3. Ehrman writes, “We have thousands of the copies, in Greek – language in which of all the New Testament books were originally written.”** (*Jesus, Interrupted* p.184)

Agreed: we have over 197 Greek manuscripts from the 2nd to 6th centuries. We have 5,939 total Greek manuscripts and 2,462 Greek lectionaries. (<https://greeknewtestament.net/> Oct. 25, 2022)

**4. Ehrman writes, “All of these copies contain mistakes – both accidental slips on the part of the scribes who made them or intentional alterations by scribes wanting to change the text…”** (*Jesus, Interrupted* p.184)

Technically this statement is false. Some fragments have no differences from what we think the original is, and others show no evidence of intentional alterations.

We do have many variants, but even Ehrman (on point 6) agrees that that vast majority of them are insignificant. As examples to show the unimportance of most variants, here are variants in the Gospel of John chapters 1-4. Only the first couple of choices are given, with the first one the primary.

All of John is at [www.Biblequery.org/ntjnmss.htm](http://www.Biblequery.org/ntjnmss.htm). The rest of the New Testament is on the site too. There are also grids showing which manuscript has which variant.

**Jn 1:4** “was the life” vs. “is the life”

**Jn 1:13a** "who were not born," vs. "who did not come into being," vs. "who was not born"

**Jn 1:13b** “nor of man’s will” vs. [absent]

**Jn 1:18** “only begotten God” vs. “the only begotten God” vs. “the only begotten son” (2 words)

**Jn 1:19** “sent to him … Levites” vs. “sent … Levites to him” vs. “sent … Levites” (2 words)

**Jn 1:21** “What then? You are Elijah?” vs. “What then? Elijah are you?”

**Jn 1:26** “has stood” vs. “stands” vs. “was standing” vs. “had stood”

**Jn 1:28** “Bethany” vs. “Bethabara” So this is not counted in the totals.

**Jn 1:34** “the Son of God” vs. “the Chosen One of God”

**Jn 1:41** “first [thing/one]” (*proton*: adjectival noun) vs. “first” (*protos*: adverb)

**Jn 1:42** “son of John” vs. “son of Jonah” vs. “son of Joanna”

**Jn 2:12** “his mother and his brothers” vs. “his mother and brothers”

**Jn 2:15** “a whip” vs. “as/like a whip”

**Jn 2:24** “him” vs. “himself” (1 letter difference) vs. absent

**Jn 3:5** “God” vs. “Heaven”

**Jn 3:13** “son of man” vs. “son of man who is in the Heaven” (5 words)

**Jn 3:15** “in/on Him” (*en autu*) vs. “upon/in Him” (*ep autu*) vs. “in Him” (*eis auton*)

**Jn 3:20** “the works of him” vs. “of him the works”

**Jn 3:25** “with [a] Jew” vs. “with [some] Jews”

**Jn 3:27** “and not one” vs. [absent]

**Jn 3:28a** “testify/bear witness to me” vs. “testify/bear witness”

**Jn 3:28b** “I said” vs. “I said that”

**Jn 3:31-32** “is. What” vs. “is. And what”

**Jn 3:34** “he gives the Spirit” vs. “God gives the Spirit” vs “he gives” (2 words)

**Jn 4:1** “Jesus knew” vs. “Lord knew”

**Jn 4:3** “went away again” vs. “went away”

Jn 4:5 “Sychar” vs. “Sichar” (spelling, one letter) vs. “Shechem”

**As Bart Ehrman says, most manuscript variants produce no significant differences in meaning.**

**5. Ehrman writes, “We don’t know how many mistakes there are among our surviving copies, but they appear to number in the hundreds of thousands. It is safe to put the matter in comparative terms: there are more differences in our manuscripts that there are words in the New Testament.”** (*Jesus, Interrupted* p.184)

Judge for yourself: if 50 manuscripts have a single word one way, and we think it should be a different way, do you count that as 50 mistakes (1 per copy) or one mistake? This is true if you count that as 50, but not true if you count is as one mistake. The good news is that because we have so many manuscripts, we can filter out many of the mistakes that were only in one or a few manuscripts, and can reduce that “hundreds of thousands” down to under 4,000.

In basic agreement with my statement, here is what Ehrman writes in *Lost Christianities* p.221: “In spite of the remarkable differences among our manuscripts, scholars are convinced that we can reconstruct the oldest form of the words of the New Testament with reasonable (though not 100 percent) accuracy. … Making these decisions is obviously a complicated business; as a result, there are numerous places of textual variation where scholars continue to disagree concerning the ‘original’ form of the text.”

So we agree on this, defining “reasonable accuracy” as about 97%. Here is my book-by-book summary of uncertainties in the New Testament.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Book of the New Testament** | **Total verses** | **Total words in Greek** | **Greek words in question** | **Percent accuracy** | **100 - % accuracy** |
| Matthew | 1,071 | 18,346 | 560 | 96.9 % | 3.1 % |
| Mark (exc.16:9-20) | 666 | 11,270 | 409 | 96.4 % | 3.6 % |
| -- Mark 16:9-20 | Add. 12 | --- | additional 166 | (-1.5%) | + 1.5 % |
| Luke | 1,151 | 19,482 | 502 | 97.4 % | 2.6 % |
| John (exc.7:53-8:11) | 879 | 15,635 | 352 | 97.7 % | 2.3 % |
| -- John 7:53-8:11 | Add. 12 | --- | additional 169 | (-1.1) % | + 1.1 % |
| Acts | 1003 | 18,450 | 600 | 96.7 % | 3.3 % |
| Romans | 433 | 7,111 | 201 | 97.2 % | 2.8 % |
| order: Rom 16:25-27 | --- | --- | additional 53 | (-0.7%) | 0.7% |
| 1 Corinthians | 437 | 6,830 | 108 | 98.4 % | 1.6 % |
| Order: 1 Cor 14:34-35 | --- | --- | Additional 36 | (-0.5%) | 0.5% |
| 2 Corinthians | 257 | 4,477 | 68 | 98.5 % | 1.5 % |
| Galatians | 149 | 2,230 | 43 | 98.1 % | 1.9 % |
| Ephesians | 155 | 2,422 | 54 | 97.8 % | 2.2 % |
| Philippians | 104 | 1,629 | 37 | 97.7 % | 2.3% |
| Colossians | 95 | 1,582 | 36 | 97.7 % | 2.3 % |
| 1 Thessalonians | 89 | 1,481 | 28 | 98.1 % | 1.9 % |
| 2 Thessalonians | 47 | 823 | 13 | 98.4 % | 1.6 % |
| 1 Timothy | 113 | 1,591 | 32 | 98.0 % | 2.0 % |
| 2 Timothy | 83 | 1,238 | 17 | 98.6 % | 1.4 % |
| Titus | 46 | 659 | 8 | 98.8 % | 1.2 % |
| Philemon | 25 | 335 | 6 | 98.2 % | 1.8 % |
| Hebrews | 303 | 4,953 | 87 | 98.2 % | 1.8 % |
| James | 108 | 1,743 | 32 | 98.2 % | 1.8 % |
| 1 Peter | 105 | 1,678 | 68 | 96.0 % | 4.0 % |
| 2 Peter | 61 | 1,100 | 44 | 96.0 % | 4.0 % |
| 1 John excluding 1 Jn 5:8 | 104 | 2,140 | 34 | 98.4 % | 1.6 % |
| 2 John | 13 | 245 | 8 | 96.8 % | 3.2 % |
| 3 John | 14 | 218 | 4 | 98.2 % | 1.8 % |
| Jude | 25 | 458 | 14 | 96.9 % | 3.1 % |
| Revelation | 404 | 9,851 | 138 | 98.6 % | 1.4 % |
| **Totals** | 7,964 | 137,977 | 3,931 | 97.1 % | 2.9 % |

**6. Ehrman writes, “The vast majority of these mistakes are completely insignificant, showing us nothing more than that scribes in antiquity could spell no better than most people can today.”** (*Jesus, Interrupted* p.184)

We agree here, but let’s see anyway how the “variant 3%” can be categorized.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Section of the New Testament** | **Total Greek words** | **Total words in question** | **Percent accuracy** | **Places with the number of words in question** | | | | | | | | | | |
| **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **8** | **9** | **10** | **11+** |
| Matthew | 18,346 | 560 | 97.0 % | 141 | 32 | 18 | 7 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 15,12,12,17,30,12,12,15,23,19,13 |
| Mark | 11,270 | 575 | 96.4-1.5% | 81 | 48 | 20 | 8 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 2 | 11,11,17,166 |
| Luke | 19,482 | 502 | 97.4 % | 102 | 39 | 19 | 11 | 12 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 20,26,21 |
| John | 15,635 | 521 | 97.7-1.1% | 134 | 37 | 8 | 4 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 12,168,29 |
| Acts | 18,450 | 600 | 96.7 % | 235 | 44 | 13 | 11 | 2 | 7 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 12,12,18,23,23 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Paul’s writings | 32,408 | 735 | 97.75 % | 351 | 59 | 13 | 7 | 7 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 11,13,14,36,53 |
| Romans | 7,111 | 254 | 96.4 % | 84 | 12 | 7 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 11,13,14,53 |
| 1 Corinthians | 6,830 | 144 | 97.9 % | 66 | 11 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 36 |
| 2 Corinthians | 4,477 | 68 | 98.5 % | 45 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | - |
| Galatians | 2,230 | 43 | 98.1 % | 28 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | - |
| Ephesians | 2,422 | 54 | 97.8 % | 26 | 8 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | - |
| Philippians | 1,629 | 37 | 97.7 % | 17 | 6 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | - |
| Colossians | 1,582 | 36 | 97.6 % | 29 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | - |
| 1 Thessalonians | 1,481 | 28 | 98.1 % | 10 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | - |
| 2 Thessalonians | 823 | 13 | 98.4 % | 11 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | - |
| 1 Timothy | 1,591 | 32 | 98.0 % | 13 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | - |
| 2 Timothy | 1,238 | 17 | 98.6 % | 12 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | - |
| Titus | 659 | 8 | 98.8 % | 6 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | - |
| Philemon | 335 | 6 | 98.2 % | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | - |
| Other NT | 12,544 | 267 | 97.9 % | 189 | 24 | 6 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | - |
| Hebrews | 4,953 | 87 | 98.0 % | 42 | 8 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | - |
| James | 1,743 | 32 | 98.2 % | 26 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | - |
| 1 Peter | 1,678 | 68 | 96.0 % | 38 | 8 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | - |
| 2 Peter | 1,100 | 44 | 96.0 % | 30 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | - |
| 1 John(excl. 1Jn5:8) | 2,140 | 34 | 98.4 % | 29 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | - |
| 2 John | 245 | 8 | 96.8 % | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | - |
| 3 John | 218 | 4 | 98.2 % | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | - |
| Jude | 458 | 14 | 96.8 % | 12 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | - |
| Revelation | 9,851 | 138 | 98.6 % | 99 | 7 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | - |
| Totals | 137,977 | 3,932 | 97.2 % | 1187 | 289 | 100 | 51 | 39 | 17 | 15 | 8 | 10 | 10 | 31 Total |
| Uncertainty in % | - | - | 2.8 % | .9 | .2 | .1 | .04 | .03 | .01 | .01 | .01 | .01 | .01 | .6 |
| % uncertainty | - | - | 100 | 30 | 15 | 8 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 26 |

85% of the variants are one and two-word changes. The last line shows that 45% of all the uncertainty is from one and two-word changes.

You can see this and the chart on the following pages at [www.Biblequery.org/ntmss.html](http://www.Biblequery.org/ntmss.html).

One of the main contentions of Ehrman’s book, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, is that many of the variants such as “Christ” instead of or addition to “Jesus”, and vice versa, were attempts to counter a) Docetism, Gnosticism, and other teaching denying the humanity of Christ, b) Ebionites and other teaching denying the deity of Jesus, or 3) adoptionism, saying that “Christ” came upon “Jesus” at His baptism.

**7. Ehrman writes, “But some of the mistakes matter – a lot. Some of them affect the interpretation of a verse, a chapter, or an entire book. Others reveal the kinds of concerns that were affecting scribes, who sometimes altered the text in light of debates and controversies going on in their own surroundings.”** (*Jesus, Interrupted* p.184)

This is his most important assertion and where I disagree. For now let’s just categorize the larger differences. At the end of this section we will look at two facets of the large variants: how certain are we of the correct reading, and how much difference choosing the wrong variant would make.

Of all the uncertainties in the New Testament, 9% (336 words) are just in two passages: Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53-8:11. An additional 1 ½ % are due to the placement of Romans 16:25-27. I would assert that we are so certain about 1 John 5:7-8 that it does not cause any significant uncertainty. The previous table shows that only 22% of the uncertainty is from the larger variants (> 10 words).

**8. Ehrman says, “The task of the textual critic is both to figure out what the author of the text actually wrote and to understand why scribes modified the text (to help us understand the context within which scribes were working.)”** (*Jesus, Interrupted* p.184)

This is partially true. It is good to try to determine what the original author wrote, but in some places we have to stop and say we cannot tell which words were exactly the original. While people can guess why words were edited, we cannot really know.

**9. Ehrman says that after three hundred years of scholarship, “there are some passages where serious and very smart scholars disagree about what the original text said, and there are some places where will probably never know what the original text said.”** (*Jesus, Interrupted* p.194)

This is half-true. This is true in the sense that we might not ever know on earth precisely the exact words that were said. However, we can still know the message and basic meaning. I assume that even Ehrman would agree that we can know what the original text said, even in places where we do not know the exact words the original text used.

## How Significant are the most Significant Manuscript Variants?

Ehrman says that “the vast majority of textual alterations don’t matter at all” (*Jesus, Interrupted* p.185), but he also says that some are very significant. So let’s look at seven variants Ehrman says are the most significant, and ask two questions: how much uncertainty do they add to the text, and how significant they would be.

The seven significant variants he mentions are:

1 Jn 5:7-8 – Johannine comma

Lk 22:19-20 – broken for you

Lk 22:43-44 – angel strengthened, drops of blood

Lk 23:34 – Father, forgive them

Jn 7:53-8:11 – pericope of the adulteress

1 Cor 14:34-35 – location of verses on women

Mk 16:9-20 – ending of Mark

### 1 John 5:7-8 (Three in heaven…)

*Jesus, Interrupted* pp.186-187, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* p.45, note 116

1 Jn 5:7-8 “For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.” (NKJV. Parts in gray are the textual variant in question.)

**Added Uncertainty: There is almost none.** This “variant” of 25 words actually is not in any Greek manuscript prior to the tenth century, and it has never been in Bibles in the orthodox churches. The passage is also absent in Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopic, Arabic, Slavonic, and apparently everything except Latin. However, it is not even in the early form of Old Latin or the Vulgate as issued by Jerome, according to *A Textual Commentary on the New Testament* 2nd edition p.648. It has been found in only four Greek manuscript texts in the 10th, 12th, 14th and 16th centuries. In four other late Greek manuscripts it was added as a note in the margin. Both *When Critics Ask* pp.540-541 and *The Complete Book of Bible Answers* pp.73-74 add that the only reason it is in any late Greek manuscripts at all is that Erasmus was pressured to include it in his third edition of the Greek New Testament of 1522. Erasmus himself omitted it in his fourth and fifth editions 1516 and 1519. (See the *New International Dictionary of the Bible* p.225 for more info on this.) Erasmus said he would include it if and only if a single Greek manuscript could be found that had it. After his second edition, one was found. It is called Codex Gregory 61, copied in 1520 by a Franciscan friar named Froy (or Roy) (note the date). Since Erasmus did not know of the source, he added it in his third edition in 1522 because the Catholic Church wanted it added. It was not in Luther’s Bible until a printer named Fayerabend added it in 1574.

To be fair to the other view, here is the counter-argument. This passage has been found in some Armenian manuscripts [Arm] from 5th century

The second earliest place it is found is in the work *Liber Apologeticus*, written by either the Spanish heretic Priscillian or his follower Bishop Instantius around 385 A.D.

It is in the writings of Varimadum (380 A.D.), John Cassian (435 A.D.), and Speculum (5th century.).  
It is in various Italic versions and in the Clementine version of the Latin Vulgate. “testimony/witness on earth, spirit, water and blood, and the three are one in Christ Jesus. And the three bear testimony/witness in heaven, the father, word, and spirit.”

*Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* p.375 says it was in the Old Latin [Italic] as early as the fifth century, and in the very late miniscule 635 in the margin.

It was accepted by the Catholic Church and in the King James Version.

**Significance of 1 John 5:7-8:** It does not change a thing, because all doctrines of the Trinity are found in other places in the Bible.

**Here is Ehrman’s counter-argument:** “It simply isn’t true that important doctrines are not involved. As a key example: the only place in the entire New Testament where the doctrine of the Trinity is explicitly taught is in a passage that made it into the King James translation (1 John 5:7-8) but is not found in the vast majority of the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. I would suggest that the Trinity is a rather important Christian doctrine.” (*Jesus, Interrupted* p.186)

**Contrary to what Ehrman tells us**, this added text does not teach or use the word Trinity; it only shows a threeness, as does the baptismal formula in Matthew 28:19. A Mormon, who believes many true gods exist, could agree with the added text too. Even a Jehovah’s Witness could agree with these verses, though it is not in their Bible either. So much for saying the Trinity is explicitly taught in this verse.

**Ehrman writes,** “A typical response to this rebuttal is that the doctrine of the Trinity can be found in Scripture without appealing to 1 John 5:7-8. My reply is that this is true of every single Christian doctrine. In my experience, theologians do not hold to a doctrine because it is found in just one verse; you can take away just about any verse and still find just about any Christian doctrine somewhere else if you look hard enough.” (*Jesus, Interrupted* p.186)

**Summary of Response:** Ehrman’s own downplaying the significance of these additions is true. Moreover, though we have 15 pre-Nicene Christian writers who mention or discuss the Trinity without appealing to this verse, with one possible exception (1), none appeal to this verse.

In conclusion, it would be invalid to say this was an early church manuscript variant: it is a later one in the western and Catholic church.

Footnote 1 - The only exception to that is a reference to John 1:5-8 found in the anonymous *Treatise on Rebaptism* (250/4-256/7 A.D.) ch.18; written in Greek) in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* vol.5 p.677. However the footnote says that it quotes the Latin formula, not the Greek. Thus, they may have been added by the translator later.

### Luke 22:19-20 (broken…for you)

**Ehrman writes:** “Second, did Luke understand that Jesus’ death was an atonement for sin? It depends on what you do with Luke 22:19-20. Everywhere else in Luke, as we saw in chapter 3, Luke has eliminated Mark’s references to Jesus’ death as an atonement. The only remnant of that teaching is in some manuscripts of the Lord’s Supper, where Jesus says that the bread is his body to be broken ‘for you’ and the cup is his blood poured out ‘for you’. But in our earliest and best manuscripts, these words are missing (much of v.19 and all of v.20). It appears scribes have added them to make Luke’s view of Jesus’ death conform to Mark’s and Matthew’s. I’d say that’s rather important – unless you think that Luke’s views on the subject don’t really matter.” *Jesus, Interrupted pp.*187-188

**Added uncertainty:** There is none from the six words he brings up. This three-Greek-word phrase (τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν) “for/on account of you” is only found in two places in Luke 22. Sometimes people can get their notes mixed up, and I am guessing this is what happened to Bart Ehrman here. These words are in fact in the earliest manuscripts and others, including manuscript p75, Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, Sahidic Coptic, Bohairic Coptic, according to *The Greek New Testament* (fourth revised edition) by Aland et al. (p.295). *The Text of the Earliest New Testament Greek Manuscripts*, by Comfort and Barrett p.557, also shows this was there in p75, though it indicates some letters were hard to read. The UBS indicates a different variant, where Bezae Cantabrigiensis (5th or 6th century) and some Italic manuscripts from the 4th and 5th centuries were missing verses 19b and 20, including the two occurrences of this phrase. Bezae Cantabrigiensis has many unique readings and is not a particularly early manuscript.

**Significance of Luke 22:19-20:** None. Ehrman claims that Luke did not understand Jesus’ death as an atonement for sin or for us. In this passage, I think even Ehrman would agree that Luke did understand Jesus’ death as atoning, if the two occurrences of “for you” were in the original.

Regardless though, it is agreed that Luke and that Acts were by the same author, and Acts speaks of Jesus dying for us.

Acts 5:30-31 “The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead – whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.”

In Acts 8:32-33 Philip quotes Isaiah 53:7-8. Isaiah 53:4-5 says that the suffering servant “was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.” Isaiah 53:6b says, “and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Isaiah 53:10a says, “Yet it was the LORD’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering.…” We have a number of copies and quotes of Isaiah 53 from the time of Christ, and there is no question that Luke was familiar with Isaiah 53, especially since he quotes part of it in Acts 8:32-33.

### Luke 22:43-44 (angel strengthened him)

*Jesus, Interrupted pp.*187-188, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture pp.*187-194; *Lost Christianities pp.*225-226

Lk 22:43-44 “And an angel from Heaven appeared to Him, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more intently. And His sweat became as drops of blood falling down onto the earth.” [Green’s literal translation] vs. both verses are absent (26 words) (p69, p75, first corrector of Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, Freer Gospels).

**Ehrman says,** “First, did Luke think that Jesus was in agony when going to his death, or that he was calm and controlled? It depends entirely on what you make of the textual variant in Luke 22:43-44, where Jesus allegedly sweated great drops as if of blood before his arrest. Leave the verses in, as some manuscripts do, and Jesus is obviously in deep agony. Take them out and there is no agony,…”

**Summary of Response:** As mentioned previously, Luke spoke extensively of Christ’s sufferings; actually he spoke about it more than the two times in Mark.

**Added uncertainty: This is a larger variant of 26 words.** Manuscripts p75 (175-225 A.D.), p69 (middle 3rd century), Vaticanus (325-350 A.D.), and at least 7 other early manuscripts do not have these words. On the other hand, the uncorrected Sinaiticus (340-350 A.D.), the Byzantine Lectionary, and at least 13 other manuscripts do. *The Diatessaron*, Justin Martyr (135-165 A.D.), Irenaeus (182-188 A.D.), and Hippolytus (222-234/235 A.D.) have Lk 22:43-44, so if this was added, it was added very early.

**Significance of Luke 22:43-44:** The phrase “drops of blood” is found only in this verse. An angel strengthening him at the Garden of Gethsemane is only in this verse. However, angels attended to Christ after his temptations in Mt 4:11 and Mk1:13. Regardless, neither of these affect Christian doctrines, experience, or practice.

**Luke 23:34 (Father, forgive them…)**

*Jesus Interrupted* p.188

Lk 23:34 “Then Jesus said, ‘Father forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” vs. absent (12 words).

**Ehrman writes:** “Early Christians interpreted this as a prayer of forgiveness for the Jews, ignorant of what they had done. No wonder some scribes omitted the verse in the context of Christian anti-Judaism in the second and third centuries, when many Christians believed that Jews knew exactly what they were doing and that God had in no way forgiven them.” *Jesus, Interrupted* p.188. By the way, Ehrman has not established that there was any anti-Semitism in the second or third centuries. Saying that Jewish authorities were wrong to reject Christ is not anti-Semitism.

**Added uncertainty: 12 words.** It is absent from p75, Vaticanus, Sahidic Coptic, and other early manuscripts. Alexandrinus, Ephraemi Rescriptus, and Irenaeus and Hippolytus, and other manuscripts and writers include it. It is present in the original Sinaiticus, but a later corrector crossed it out, and a second corrector put it back. It is also present in the Byzantine manuscripts, John Chrysostom, and Augustine.

**Significance of Luke 23:34:** Jesus asking the Father to forgive them is only found in this text. Jesus spoke in many places of forgiveness, and there is no doubt that we are to obey Jesus’ teaching to forgive others, even our enemies. There is sheer conjecture that not including this was deliberately done against the Jews. There is no evidence of why this was removed, if in fact it was removed and not added.

**John 7:53-8:11 (Woman caught in adultery)**

*Jesus interrupted* p.188; *Lost Christianities* p.221

**Ehrman writes:** “Some variants, including those just mentioned, are terrifically important for knowing what traditions about Jesus were in circulation among the early Christians. Did Jesus have an encounter with an adulterous woman and her accusers in which he told them, ‘Let the one without sin among you be the first to cast a stone at her,” and in which he told her, after all her accusers had left, ‘Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more.”? It depends on which manuscripts of John you read.” *Jesus, Interrupted* p.188

**Summary of Response:** The uncertainty of this passage does not affect our faith or practice, and doesn’t change what we know of Jesus’ character.

**Added uncertainty: 169 words.** Manuscripts that never contained John 7:53-8:11 include:

Bodmer II (=p66) (125-175 A.D.), Bodmer 14,15 (=p75) (early 3rd century), Vaticanus (325-350 A.D.), Sinaiticus (340-350 A.D.), Alexandrinus (c.450 A.D.), L, N, T, W, X, Delta, Theta, Psi, 0141, 0211, 22, 33, 157, 209, 565, 892, 1230, 1241, 1253, 1333\*, 2193, 2768, family 1424, Diatessaron, Old Syriac, Sahidic Coptic, some early Armenian, Gothic. Writers that mention the last part of Mark but did not include it are Clement of Alexandria (193-217/220 A.D.), Tertullian (198-220 A.D.), Origen (225-254 A.D.), Chrysostom (before 407 A.D.), Nonnus (431 A.D.), Cyril of Jerusalem, Cosmas, Theophylact. Those who include it here are the Byzantine Lectionaries, Cantabrigiensis (5th-6th century), some early Armenian texts, *Apostolic Constitutions* book 2 ch.14 (c.380 A.D.). Those who place it after John 7:36 include the f1 family and the standardized Armenian. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* vol.9 p.91 says that no early commentator mentions it until Irenaeus (182-188 A.D.), and it is only in the Latin translation.

The following manuscripts included it, but with obelisks showing a question about its authenticity. E, S, Lambda, Pi, **l** 077, **l** 443, **l** 445, **l** 69m, **l** 170m, **l** 185m, **l** 211m, **l** 1579m, **l** 1761m. See Bruce Metzger *Textual Commentary* 2nd edition pp.219-223 for more information on why some think it should be excluded. For the other view, Zane C. Hodges in *Greek New Testament*, Introduction pp.xxiii-xxxii says that more than 900 manuscripts include it.

**Significance of John 7:53-8:11:** It is a beautiful story illustrating what we already know about Christ’s compassion. Even those who think John did not originally have it might still consider it a true story. Regardless though, it does not affect Christian faith or practice.

**1 Cor 14:34-35 (location: after verse 34 or after verse 40)**

*Jesus Interrupted pp.*188-189; *Lost Christianities pp.*37-38

**Ehrman writes:** “it appears that Paul’s injunction to women to be ‘silent’ in the churches and ‘subordinate’ to their husbands was not originally part of 1 Corinthians 14 (vv.34-35) but was added by later scribes intent on keeping women in the place. Is that significant or not?” *Jesus, Interrupted pp.*188-189

“That attitude [in Romans 16] is much better than the one inserted by a later scribe into Paul’s letter of 1 Corinthians, which claims women should always be silent in the church (1 Corinthians 14;35-36)…” *Jesus, Interrupted pp.*280

**Summary of Response:** Ehrman is wrong here: I have seen no variant where 1 Cor 14:34-35 is absent; only the location is different in some rather later manuscripts (c.450-550 A.D). Why would he be concerned solely about the location of 36 words in 1 Corinthians 14 and not the location of 53 words in Romans 16:25-27”? It appears his criteria is that he does not personally like the content of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, but he does not object to Romans 16:25-27.

**Added uncertainty:** Only the location of these 36 words is somewhat uncertain, but the early manuscripts and early church writers are fairly sure of the location. They are either after verse 34 (most manuscripts) or else after verse 40 (bilingual Bezae Cantabrigiensis c.450-550 A.D. and some Italic and Latin Vulgate manuscripts).

**Significance of the location of 1 Cor 14:34-35:** Bart Ehrman said that he wishes these verses about women speaking in the churches were not in the Bible. However, the variant is only the location of these verses. Of course, variation in location of two verses do not give us license to reject meanings we don’t’ like.

Thus Ehrman’s appealing to uncertainty on the location of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, and only in some late manuscripts, is not valid to indicate absence.

**Mark 16:9-20 (Ending of Mark)**

*The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture pp.*219; *Lost Christianities pp.*78-79, 220-221

**Ehrman writes:** “In one aspect of the resurrection narratives there is little debate: it appears that the final twelve verses of Mark’s Gospel are not original to Mark’s Gospel but were added by a scribe in a later generation.” (*Jesus, Interrupted* p.48) He also says, “After his resurrection, did Jesus tell his disciples than those who came to believe in him would be able to handle snakes and drink deadly poison without being harmed? It depends on which manuscripts of Mark you read.” *Jesus, Interrupted* p.188

**Summary of Response:** There is more evidence that this should be in that out. Regardless though, there is little taught at the end of Mark (protection from snakes, poison, etc.) that is not also taught elsewhere. (Luke 10:19, etc.).

**Added uncertainty: 166 words.** Scholars have strong opinions on both sides.

The most common evidence people use against it is that two major manuscripts, Vaticanus (325-250 A.D.) and Sinaiticus (340-350 A.D.) do not have this. However, Vaticanus has a blank space for this. Vaticanus only has blank spaces between a few books, such as Malachi and Matthew. Sinaiticus also has a blank space there, but it has a blank space between almost all books.

Some Early church writers that indicate it was not or should not be there:

c.360 A.D. Eusebius *Questions to Marianus I*

193-217/220 A.D. Clement of Alexandria

225-254 A.D. Origen (from Alexandria)

407 A.D. Jerome, *Epistle 120*

At least 6 other ancient manuscripts

Sinaitic Syriac

900-1000 an A.D. Armenian manuscript says the ending was added by Aristion, whom Papias mentions

Some Georgian (from the fifth century)

Early church writers that indicate Mark 16:9-20 were present are:

182-188 A.D. Irenaeus *Against Heresies* Book 3 ch.10 verse 5. (Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp, disciple of John) “Also, towards the conclusion of his Gospel, Mark says: “So then, after the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God;” (quote from Mark 16:19)

c.170 A.D. Tatian’s *Diatessaron* ch.55, quotes Mark 16:15-20

200 A.D. Tertullian *Treatise on the Soul*

“not of one only, as in the case of Socrates' own demon; but of seven spirits as in the case of the Magdalene” (However this specific teaching, that seven demons were cast out of Mary Magdalene, is also in Luke 8:2.)

200-220/240 A.D. Tertullian *Scorpiace* ch.15 p.648

“It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.’ But even now it will be right that he hear it, seeing that, long after, he has poured forth these poisons, which not even thus are to injure readily any of the weak ones, if any one in faith will drink, before being hurt, or even immediately after, this draught of ours.” (somewhat allegorical allusion to drinking poison unharmed)

120-150 A.D. *The Didache*

3rd/4th century. Curetonian Syriac translation

*Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* Book 6 section 3 ch.15 (latest parts in the c.380 A.D.)

For the Lord says, … ‘He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.’” (quotes Mark 16:16)

*Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* (c.380 A.D.) book 7 section 1 ch.1. (cf. book 5 and book 8)

Quotes verbatim Mark 16:17-18 as by Jesus Christ

c.450 A.D. Alexandrinus

3rd-4th century Bohairic Coptic

3rd-4th century Sahidic Coptic

5th century Freer Gospels

400-500 A.D. Ephraemi Rescriptus Manuscript

400-600 A.D. Codex Bezae manuscript

~700 A.D. an extensive Byzantine text family

Later Bible texts (At least 38 total texts): Philoxenian Syriac, Harclean Syriac, Palestinian Syrian, Ethiopic, some Georgian (from the fifth century), Slavonic, Italic, Vulgate, Fayyumic Coptic

There is also a shorter ending to Mark which is in the following manuscripts:

Bohairic Coptic 3rd/4th century

Ethiopic [Eth] from c.500 A.D.

A Catalogue of Manuscripts of Mark

p45 Papyrus 45 (225 A.D.) ~ damaged

B Vaticanus (325 A.D.) ~ omission

ℵ Sinaiticus (375 A.D.)~ omission

A Alexandrinus (400 A.D.) ~ inclusion

C Ephraemi (450 A.D.) ~ inclusion

D Bezae (500? A.D.) ~ inclusion

W Washington (400 A.D.) ~ inclusion with Freer Logion

The f1 miniscules (1, 118, 131, 209, 1582) ~ inclusion with note or sigla

The f13 miniscules (13, 346, 543, 826, 828, 69, 124, 788, 983, 1689) ~ inclusion

Taken from *Mark 16:9-20, a Study of the External Evidence*, by Jim Snapp II (2003)

**Significance of Mark 16:9-20:** Every doctrine or concept in the longer ending of Mark is found elsewhere in the Bible except for four things:

**1.** Jesus had earlier driven seven demons out of Mary Magdalene.

**2.** Signs to accompany those who believe:

[when compelled], can safely pick up snakes with hands. (Luke 10:19 says they could trample snakes and scorpions, which is similar to Mark 16). Also an example is given in Acts 28:3-6 of Paul getting bitten by a viper with no harm done to him.

**3.** [when compelled], can safely drink deadly poison.

**4.** This is the most severe rebuke recorded that Jesus gave to the disciples.

**Conclusion:** If Mark 16:9-20 was wrongly added to some manuscripts, it was first added before 150 A.D. If it was wrongly taken out, then it was taken out before 217 A.D.

See *The Complete Book of Bible Answers* p.32 and *When Critics Ask pp.*377-378 for more info, and the *New Geneva Study Bible* p.1597 for a concise summary of the pros and cons.

**Conclusion**

There are many variants in the New Testament, as Bart Ehrman points out. However, he neglected to say that we can be reasonably certain of the bulk of all New Testament words, 97% by my count. Ehrman also correctly says that most of the manuscript variants are insignificant and do not affect any doctrines in Christianity. However, when he says that some of the variants matter a lot, he has not shown where this is so. In fact, his attempts to show how variants at 1 John 5:7-8 and 1 Cor 14:34-35 matter a lot might appear strong to him but are actually invalid.

We can learn that we should focus on the meaning of the Bible, not the individual words of the Bible, lest we forget 2 Timothy 2:14. Many of the variants in the Bible were undoubtedly accidental, but certainly at least some could not be. It is unfortunate that some early scribes wanted to slightly “improve” God’s Word, but this is not much different from paraphrases of the Bible today. They wanted to “help God out” in doing things God did not want them to do. Sometimes if Christians today are more committed to a “cause” than to God, they can be tempted to use deceit or other improper means to try to help God out. But God does not want our help; He wants our obedience. In the bema-seat judgment, our works for God will be burned up as with fire if we were not doing them from proper motives (see 1 Corinthians 3:12-15). Trust that God can still move as He wishes without the need for you. God’s calling to minister is not a necessity for Him, but rather an invitation and a privilege for you to be used by Him.

Alleged Bible contradictions are discussed at [www.BibleQuery.org/OtherBeliefs/Skeptics/ResponsetoEhrman2\_AllegedContradictions.html](http://www.BibleQuery.org/OtherBeliefs/Skeptics/ResponsetoEhrman2_AllegedContradictions.html).

The canon of the Bible is discussed at [www.BibleQuery.org/OtherBeliefs/Skeptics/ResponsetoEhrman4\_Canon.html](http://www.BibleQuery.org/OtherBeliefs/Skeptics/ResponsetoEhrman4_Canon.html).

The video series another speaker called the Making of the Messiah is discussed at [www.BibleQuery.org/OtherBeliefs/Skeptics/ResponseToTheMakingOfTheMessiah.html](http://www.BibleQuery.org/OtherBeliefs/Skeptics/ResponseToTheMakingOfTheMessiah.html).

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by Steven M. Morrison, PhD.