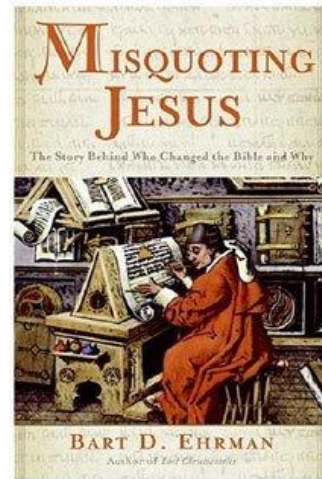


**Analysis of Bart Ehrman, Misquoting
Jesus, and Evangelical Textual Criticism**
P.J. Williams



Synopsis of *Misquoting Jesus*

Introduction (pp. 1-15). Ehrman's 'testimony'.

1. *The Beginnings of Christian Scripture* (pp. 17-43): religion of the book forms canon amid widespread Christian illiteracy.

2. *The Copyists of the Early Christian Writings* (pp. 45-69): the problems involved in copying texts and the possibility that there were multiple 'originals'.

3. *Texts of the New Testament* (pp. 71-99): a history of the text under professional scribes and early printed editions until 1707 when Mill declared that there were 30,000 variants in the NT. The number is now estimated at between 200,000 and 400,000.

4. *The Quest for Origins* (pp. 101-125): people who have advanced the study of the NT text: R. Simon, R. Bentley, J.A. Bengel, J.J. Wettstein, K. Lachmann, Constantine von Tischendorf, B.F. Westcott and F.J.A. Hort.

5. *Originals That Matter* (pp. 127-149): one variant in a book can completely alter our picture of Jesus: Mark 1:41 (Jesus was angry), Luke 22:43-44 (Jesus' sweat) and Hebrews 2:9 (reading $\chi\omega\rho\iota\varsigma\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ 'without God' rather than $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\tau\iota\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ 'by the grace of God').

6. *Theologically Motivated Alterations of the Text* (pp. 151-175): scribes in the early centuries of Christianity sometimes allowed theological considerations to dictate what they wrote.

7. *The Social Worlds of the Text* (pp. 177-205): early Christians changed texts to restrict the role of women, denigrate Jews and avoid criticism from pagans.

Conclusion: Changing Scripture: Scribes, Authors, and Readers (pp. 207-218): '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 ...' (p. 207). The changes in the New Testament make it impossible to believe that God inspired the original words.

Praise

- The material in this book has been worked on for some time and is presented in a mature form.
- The author highlights importance of establishing original text.
- The author agrees with evangelicals that without verbal inspiration it is hard to speak of scriptural authority.

Critique

- Lack of emphasis on manuscripts
- Uncertain analysis of variants
- Historical model
- Inconsistency of textual method
- Misuse of statistics
- Exaggeration
- Misunderstandings of concepts of inspiration

Lessons to learn

- Evangelical theologians have ongoing research, educational, and pastoral responsibilities in relation to textual criticism.
- There is continued need for precision in doctrinal formulation, particularly in stressing the verbal and non-material nature of inspired text.
- There is need to emphasise the power of God's word in disadvantageous settings.
- A Prayer

Quotations from *Misquoting Jesus*

'I kept reverting to my basic question: 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—sometimes correctly but sometimes (many times!) incorrectly? What good is it to say that the autographs (i.e., the originals) were inspired? We don't *have* the originals! We have only error-ridden copies, and the vast majority of these are centuries removed from the originals and different from them, evidently, in thousands of ways.' (p. 7)

'... it is a very complicated business talking about the 'original' text of Galatians. We don't have it. The best we can do is get back to an early stage of its transmission, and simply hope that what we reconstruct about the copies made at that stage—based on the copies that happen to survive (in increasing numbers as we move into the Middle Ages)—reasonably reflects what Paul himself actually wrote, or at least what he intended to write when he dictated the letter.' (p. 60)

'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.' (p. 207)

'When I was a student just beginning to think about those fifteen centuries of copying and the vicissitudes of the text, I kept reverting to the fact that whatever else we may say about the Christian scribes—whether of the early centuries or of the Middle Ages—we have to admit that in addition to

copying scripture, they were changing scripture. Sometimes they didn't mean to—they were simply tired, or inattentive, or, on occasion, inept. At other times, though, they did mean to make changes, as when they wanted the text to emphasize precisely what they themselves believed, for example about the nature of Christ, or about the role of women in the church, or about the wicked character of their Jewish opponents.

This conviction that scribes had changed scripture became an increasing certitude for me as I studied the text more and more.' (p. 210)

'As I realized already in graduate school, even if God had inspired the original words, we don't have the original words. So the doctrine of inspiration was in a sense irrelevant to the Bible as we have it, since the words God reputedly inspired had been changed and, in some cases, lost.' (p. 211)

'... the only reason (I came to think) for God to inspire the Bible would be so that his people would have his actual words; but if he really wanted people to have his actual words, surely he would have miraculously preserved those words, just as he had miraculously inspired them in the first place. Given the circumstance that he didn't preserve the words, the conclusion seemed inescapable to me that he hadn't gone to the trouble of inspiring them.' (p. 211)

Suggestions for further reading:

J. Ed Komoszewski, M. James Sawyer, and Daniel B. Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus* (Kregel, 2006).

[<http://www.reinventingjesus.info/>]

The Evangelical Textual Criticism blog

[<http://evangelicaltextualcriticism.blogspot.com/>]

Daniel B. Wallace, 'The Gospel according to Bart'

[http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=4000]

Ivo Tamm, Masters thesis critiquing Bart Ehrman's *Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* [in German]

[http://www.evangelicaltextualcriticism.com/documents/Theologisch-christologischeVarianten_Tamm.pdf]

Key books by Ehrman

- The Gospel of Judas*. National Geographic, 2006 (with other authors).
- Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene: The Followers of Jesus in History and Legend*, Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Misquoting Jesus: The Story of Who Changed the New Testament and Why*. HarperSanFrancisco, 2005.
- Co-authored with Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Origin, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th edition. Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Truth and Fiction in the DaVinci Code: A Historian Reveals What We Can Really Know about Jesus, Mary, and Constantine*. Oxford University Press, 2004.
- A Brief Introduction to the New Testament*. Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Christianity in Late Antiquity: A Reader*. (Co-edited with Andrew Jacobs) Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Lost Christianities*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Become the New Testament (a reader)*. Oxford University Press, 2003.
- The Apostolic Fathers*. 2 vols. Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*. Oxford University Press, 1999.
- After the New Testament: A Reader in Early Christianity*. Oxford University Press, 1998.
- The New Testament and Other Early Christian Writings: A Reader*. Oxford University Press, 1998; Second edition, 2004.
- The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*. Oxford University Press, 1997; Second edition, 2000; Third edition, 2004.
- The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis*. Eerdmans, 1995. (Co-edited with Michael W. Holmes)
- The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*. Oxford University Press, 1993.
- The Text of the Fourth Gospel in the Writings of Origen*. Scholars Press, 1992. (Co-authored with Gordon D. Fee and Michael W. Holmes)
- Didymus the Blind and the Text of the Gospels*. Scholars Press, 1986.

