

# A Light in the Darkness

THE DOCTRINE OF THE WORD OF GOD



# Why Not Absolute Inerrancy?

- The Bible does not claim for itself precision in scientific or historical matters (or in some cases, theological matters).
- Conventions of the time for reporting history and reproducing teaching are looser than what is generally required by absolute inerrancy.
- Taking certain claims of Scripture *precisely* seems to lead to internal contradictions, not inerrancy. Paul's 23,000 (1 Cor. 10:8) vs. Moses's 24,000 (Num. 25:9) is a great example.
- When evaluated according to contemporary scientific categories, absolute inerrancy seems, again, to lead to errancy. For example, in contemporary entomology, no insect has only four legs (Lev. 11:20).
- For these reasons and others, it seems best to adopt a more nuanced understanding of inerrancy that better fits the intended purposes of the authors of Scripture and the historical and teaching conventions of the time.



# What About All the Changes and Errors?

- Textual variant: Any place among the manuscripts in which there is a variation in wording, including word order, omission or addition of words, even spelling differences.
  - So understood, there are approximately 400,000 variants in the New Testament manuscripts. To put that in perspective, there are only about 140,000 words in the New Testament and thus, there are more variants than words.
- Neither Meaningful nor Viable
  - Spelling Errors
  - Parablepsis
    - The middle section [bracketed below] of John 17:15 is missing in Codex Vaticanus.
      - “I do not pray that you take them from the [world, but that you keep them from the] evil one.”
        - The scribe very likely was copying from an exemplar that read:
          - ... *them from the*  
*world... ..*
          - ... *them from the*  
*evil one...*



# What About All the Changes and Errors?

- Haplography
  - 1 Cor. 9:2 is missing in Codex Alexandrinus because it ends with the same four words as 9:1 (ὁμοῖς ἐστε ἐν κυρίῳ). After finishing verse one, the scribe's eyes returned to the end of verse two, instead.
    - “Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship *in the Lord*? If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship *in the Lord*.”
- Dittography
  - In Acts 19:34, the cry of the mob, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians,” is given twice.



# What About All the Changes and Errors?

- Neither Meaningful nor Viable **(75%)**
- Viable, but not Meaningful
  - Changes in word order/synonyms
    - “Christ Jesus” vs “Jesus Christ”
    - John 6:49
      - Alexandrian: “εν τη ερημω το μαννα” (... in the wilderness manna)
      - Byzantine: “το μαννα εν τη ερημω” (... manna in the wilderness)
  - Spelling Differences
    - Was John’s name spelled with one nu (‘n’) or two?
      - Ιωαννης vs Ιωανης
  - Movable Nu
    - An optional grammatical feature of Greek, a nu can be added or removed to some words to *prevent* two vowel sounds in a row (“I don’t want to see eels”) or to *create* a long syllable in poetic meter (“Do you want to see seals or do you want to see eels? I know you can’t handle my flow, oh but you can give me some dough)



# What About All the Changes and Errors?

- Meaningful, but not Viable
  - Itacism
    - Certain vowels and diphthongs, particularly those pronounced with the long ‘e’ sound (e.g., “feet”) were frequently substituted by mistake resulting in non-sense errors.
      - In p<sup>46</sup> and Codex Vaticanus, 1 Cor. 15:54 reads, “Death is swallowed up in conflict” (νεῖκος) instead of “victory” (νῖκος).
      - Instead of seeing a “rainbow” (ἵρις) around God’s throne in heaven, Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Alexandrinus read that John saw “a priest (ἱερεῖς) that had the appearance of an emerald.”
  - Other Nonsense Errors | A Sampling
    - Instead of Jesus talking of the Scriptures as “they that bear witness (αἱ μαρτυροῦσαι) about me” in John 5:39, Codex Bezae reads “they are sinning (ἁμαρτανοῦσαι) about me.”
    - Instead of the seven angels being clothed in “pure, bright linen (λίνον)” in Rev. 15:6, Codex Alexandrinus and Codex of Ephraem read that they were clothed in “pure, bright stone (λίθον).”



# What About All the Changes and Errors?

- Instead of striving to enter God's promised rest, so that no one will fall by the "same sort of disobedience (ἀπειθείας)" (Heb. 4:11), Codex Claromontanus (c. 550) reads that the striving is that so no one will fall by the "same sort of truth (ἀλήθεια)."
- Instead of reading *down* the two columns of text, the scribe who produced Luke's genealogy (Lk. 3:23-38) in Codex 109 (fourteenth century) followed the lines *across* the two columns resulting in everyone having the wrong father, God being a part of the genealogy fathered by Aram, and Perez (not God) being the source of the human race.

- Neither Meaningful nor Viable (75%)

- Viable, but Not Meaningful | Meaningful, but not Viable (24%)

“To be sure, of all the hundreds of thousands of textual changes found among our manuscripts, most of them are completely insignificant, immaterial, and of no real importance for anything other than showing that scribes could not spell or keep focused any better than the rest of us.” – Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*

- Viable and Meaningful (<1%)



# What About All the Changes and Errors?

- Longer ending of Mark (Mk. 16:9-20)
- Woman caught in adultery (Jn. 7:53-8:11)
- The Johannine Comma (1 Jn. 5:7-8)
- Was Jesus compassionate (σπλαγχνισθείς) or angry (ὀργισθείς) with the leper? (Mk. 1:41)
- Does faith come by hearing the word of Christ (χριστοῦ) or of God (θεοῦ)? (Rom. 10:17)
- Did Christ suffer so that “by the grace of God (χαριτι θεοῦ)...” or so that “without God (χωρις θεοῦ)...?” (Heb. 2:19)
- Did John write so that “*our joy* may be complete” or so that “*your joy* may be complete?” (1 Jn. 1:4)
- Did an angel come and trouble the waters in John 5:4?
- Did an angel appear to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane as he sweat drops of blood according to Luke? (Luke 22:43-44)



# What About All the Changes and Errors?

- “The position I argue for in *Misquoting Jesus* does not actually stand at odds with Prof. [Bruce] Metzger’s position that the essential Christian beliefs are not affected by textual variants in the manuscript tradition of the New Testament.”  
–Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*
- “I do not think that the ‘corruption’ of Scripture means that scribes changed everything in the text, or even most things. The original texts certainly spoke at great length about Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. The issues involved in the corruption of the text usually entail nuances of interpretation. These are important nuances; but most of the New Testament can be reconstructed by scholars with reasonable certainty—as much certainty as we can reconstruct \*any\* book of the ancient world.” –Bart Ehrman, email communication
- Of the approximately 140,000 words of the NT, scholars only debate about 1,400 of them, meaning that we can confidently reconstruct 99% of the New Testament, with the remaining 1%, while important, not affecting Christian doctrine, ethics or practice.



Author	Work	Date Written	Earliest MSS	Time Gap	Old #	New
Homer	<i>Iliad</i>	800 BC	c. 400 BC	400	<b>643</b>	1,800+
Herodotus	<i>History</i>	480-425 BC	1 <sup>st</sup> C AD	1,350	8	109
Sophocles <sup>29</sup>	Plays	496-406 BC	3 <sup>rd</sup> C BC	100-200	100	193
Plato	Tetralogies	400 BC	895	1,300	7	210
Caesar	<i>Gallic Wars</i>	100-44 BC	9 <sup>th</sup> C	950	10	251
Livy	<i>History of Rome</i>	59 BC-17 AD	Early 5 <sup>th</sup> C	400	1 Partial, 19 copies	90 & 60 copies
Tacitus	<i>Annals</i>	100 AD	1 <sup>st</sup> half: 850, 2 <sup>nd</sup> : 1050 (1100 AD)	750-950	20	2 + 31 15 C copies
Pliny, the Elder	<i>Natural History</i>	49-79 AD	5 <sup>th</sup> C frag: 1; Rem. 14-15 <sup>th</sup> C	400 (750)	7	200
Thucydides	<i>History</i>	460-400 BC	3 <sup>rd</sup> C BC (AD 900)	200 (1,350)	8	96
Demosthenes	Speeches	300 BC	Some frags from 1 C. BC. (AD 1100)	1,100+ (1,400)	200	340
Greek N.T. Manuscripts		50-100 AD	AD 130 (or less) <sup>30</sup>	50	5366	5,838
Greek New Testament Early Translations						18,524



# An Exercise in Textual Criticism