

# Did the Bible Misquote Jesus Debate

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**“Can the New Testament Be Inspired in Light of Textual Variation?”**

**Dr. James White vs. Dr. Bart Ehrman**

January 21, 2009

## **Mike O’Fallon—Moderator**

I want to go over the—first of all—the time that we’re going to be spending on the debate tonight. First of all, and you can go ahead and jot this down so you can follow along, so you know when the bathroom breaks are coming [audience laughter]. First of all, we’ll start off with two thirty minute opening statements, first by Dr. Ehrman, then by Dr. White; we’ll be taking a ten minute break at the end of that time. After which we’ll have two fifteen-minute rebuttals, first by Dr. Ehrman, then by Dr. White; we’ll be taking a five-minute break at that time. After which, we will have twenty minutes of affirmative cross-examination, then twenty minutes of negative cross-examination; after which we will have another five-minute break before we go into our closing statements. Our closing statements will be comprised of two ten minute closing statements; first, of the affirmative, and then of the negative. At the end of which, we will be opening up the floor for your comments and questions. Now, this will be a Q&A session where we would ask that you please direct, first, who you are asking the question of, please keep the question under 30 seconds, no rhetorical questions, and only one question, please. Please state who you are asking the question to, and then please kindly step away and wait for an answer. We do not allow debates after that time; then, whoever is answering that question has one minute to respond, and then the other person—who was not responding to the question—has thirty seconds to reply as well. During that time, I will control the microphone, just be respectful of what’s happening here, and we’ll do great.

Well tonight, the question that we have—and the thesis is—“Did the Bible Misquote Jesus?” And with us tonight to debate this question, is first let me introduce: The author of more than twenty books, including two New York Times bestsellers: *Misquoting Jesus*, and *God’s Problem*. He is a James A. Gray, Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, and is a leading authority on the New Testament and the history of early Christianity. His work has been featured in *Time*, *The New Yorker*, *The Washington Post*, and other print media; and he’s appeared on NBC’s *Dateline*, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, CNN, *The History Channel*, *National Geographic*, *The Discovery Channel*, the BBC, major NPR shows, and other top media outlets. He lives with his wife in Durham, North Carolina; would you please welcome with me, Dr. Bart Ehrman. [applause]

We also have with us: The Director of Alpha and Omega Ministries; he is a professor, having taught Greek, Systematic Theology, and various topics in the field of apologetics. He has authored or contributed to more than twenty books, including: *The King James Only Controversy*, *The Forgotten Trinity*, *The Potter’s Freedom*, and *The God Who Justifies*. He is an accomplished debater, having

engaged in more than sixty moderated public debates with leading proponents of Roman Catholicism, Islam, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Mormonism. Would you please welcome with me, Dr. James White. [applause]

First to come to the microphone tonight, and for you, is Dr. Bart Ehrman with thirty minutes of his opening statement.

### **Dr. Bart Ehrman—Opening Statement**

Well, thank you very much for that warm welcome. How many of you in here would say that you are a Bible-believing Christian? Okay, good. How many of you have read a book by James White? Okay. How many of you read a book by me? Okay. How many of you would love to see me get creamed in this debate? [audience laughter]

Well, I take this topic very seriously, and I think it is one of the most important topics that there is; not just for believing Christians, but for everyone. The New Testament is the most widely purchased, thoroughly studied, highly revered book in the history of our civilization. Knowing more about where it came from, and how it came down to us is critical for everyone in our culture; whether they are believers or not. This is the question that I have devoted a major portion of my adult life to. When I was twenty-two years old I went off to Princeton Theological Seminary to study with a master of Greek manuscripts, a man named Bruce Metzger, I did both my Master's and PhD with Professor Metzger, and in the thirty years since, I have spent a good chunk of it studying the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. I tell you this because I want you to know that this is a topic that is near and dear to my heart, and so I'm glad to have a very serious discussion about it with James White.

I want to begin by talking about how we got the books of the New Testament; how we actually got the books of the New Testament. This may not be a question that ever occurred to you, because you go to a bookstore and you buy a New Testament, and it is the same set of books every time. Twenty-seven books, always in the same sequence, always between a hard cover—or in paperback—and every time you buy a certain translation, it's the same translation no matter where you buy it. If you buy an NIV it doesn't matter whether you buy it in Palo Alto, if you buy it in Las Vegas—you can't buy it there [audience laughter]—if you buy it in New York; it's always the same translation no matter what. Well, it wasn't always that way; because—of course—before the invention of printing, there was no way to reproduce manuscripts accurately, time after time after time. Printing wasn't invented until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, so what was happening in the fifteen hundred years before that, to the Bible—to the New Testament?

Well, I'm gonna start by giving you an example of what happened, with the Gospel of Mark. We don't know actually who wrote the Gospel of Mark, but say it was somebody named Mark. We don't know where he was writing, but the tradition is that he was writing in Rome; so let's say Mark was writing in Rome. Mark wrote down a Gospel, an account of the life of Jesus; His ministry, His death, and His resurrection. He probably wrote this account for his own community; he didn't originally plan that it was going to become part of the Bible, he was simply writing an account for his community so that they

would know of the things that Jesus said and did and experienced leading up to His death and resurrection.

How was this book actually published? Well, in the ancient world there was no such thing as publication the way we think of, where if James writes a book the publisher prints off several thousand copies and sends it around to bookstores throughout the country; that's easily done now, but in the ancient world it couldn't be done at all. If you wanted to publish a book, it meant that you put it in circulation; which means you lent it out to somebody. And if they wanted a copy, they had to make a copy. The way they made a copy is by copying it by hand; or by having somebody else copy it by hand. There was no other way to reproduce a book. You had to copy it one chapter, one page, one sentence, one word, one letter at a time. It was a very slow and painstaking process, even if you were professionally trained to do it. The earliest Christians, evidently, were not among the intellectual elites of their day, most of the early Christians—as is true for most people in the Roman Empire—most Christians were illiterate—they couldn't read or write. So, who was copying this copy of the Gospel of Mark? Well, it'd be whoever who was in his community—say in Rome—who was able to copy a text; somebody who was literate—among the Christians presumably. This would be the person who would copy it for, say, his own house church. Mark maybe had a community of, say, ten or twenty people who met in his house church and maybe across town in Rome—Rome was a very large city—there was another house church and they wanted a copy of the Gospel, well somebody copied it.

What happens when somebody copies a document by hand; slowly, painstakingly, one letter at a time? Well, if you don't know what happens try it for yourself sometime. I tell my students if they want to know what it is like to copy a text, just sit down and copy the Gospel of Matthew and see how well you do. I can tell you what will happen if you copy the Gospel of Matthew some evening: You will make mistakes. There will be a time where your mind will wander, you'll get tired, you'll get bored, you'll start thinking of something else, and you'll make mistakes.

The first person who copied the Gospel of Mark no doubt made mistakes. Now how was Mark copied after that? Well, the original would have been copied, but then the copy would have been copied. And the problem is when somebody copied the copy, they not only copied the original words, they copied the mistakes that the first scribe had made. And they made their own mistakes. What happened, then, when somebody came along and copied that second copy? That person replicated the mistakes of both of his predecessors, and made his own mistakes. And copies were made, week after week, year after year, decade after decade, copies were being made of the Gospel of Mark; copies of the original in which every time a new copy was made, the mistakes of the predecessors were repeated; unless somebody had the bright idea of correcting the mistakes.

Now, it's not always clear if a scribe would know where there had been a mistake made. It may be that in places—in fact the scribe who is copying something didn't just make a grammatical error or sort of fall asleep for a second and leave out a word, but maybe he actually changed the text because he thought it would make better sense if he changed it to say *this* instead of *that*. Well, if that's what he did, how would his successor—the next copyist—know that he had made the change? Only if he had the original to compare it with; but if he didn't have the original to compare it with, then he wouldn't know that a

mistake had been made in many places and so he would copy that mistake. But suppose he thought the mistake had been made, but he didn't have the original to compare it with. How would he correct the mistake? He would take his best guess at what probably the original said. But what if he guessed wrong? It is possible that scribes corrected mistakes incorrectly. And then you've got three problems at that place: you've got the original text, you've got the original mistake, and you've got a mistaken correction of the original mistake. And so it goes for week after week after year after decade, on and on and on, copies made of copies made of copies.

This went on for a very long time and eventually, the original Gospel of Mark was lost. We no longer have the original Gospel of Mark, and we don't have the original copy of Mark, and we don't have a copy of the copy of Mark or the copy of the copy of the copy of Mark. Now, what I'm telling you now is not sort of slanted information, I'm telling you facts. We don't have anything like the original of Mark's Gospel, or an early copy of Mark's Gospel. The first copy we have of Mark's Gospel is a text that is called P45. It's called P45 because it was the 45<sup>th</sup> papyrus manuscript to be discovered. Papyrus is the ancient equivalent of paper; so we use paper to write on, in the ancient world they used papyrus to write on. The oldest manuscript we have of the New Testament happened to be written on papyrus, the 45<sup>th</sup> papyrus manuscript to be discovered is called P45 and it contains the copy of the Gospel of Mark that dates from around the year 220. Now, I'm not sure when Mark was written, some people think it was written in year 50, in the year 60, in the year 70; I think—my own opinion is—that it was written sometime around the year 70. If that's the case, then our first surviving copy of Mark was produced a hundred and fifty years after the original. Not from the original, but from copies of the copies of the copies of the copies of the original. We don't have anything earlier for the Gospel of Mark.

This is what P45 looks like: This is one page of P45. P45 has portions of eight chapters of Mark; so this earliest copy of Mark doesn't have the whole thing, it has portions of half of the chapters of Mark, yet this is the earliest. As you can see, it's very fragmentary because this was discovered in Egypt and it eroded over the years. It's written in Greek, the original language of the Gospel of Mark, it's the original language of all of the books of the New Testament. You can see—you can probably get a good sense here—that it's rather hard to read this because they don't put any separations between paragraphs, or between sentences, or even between words—they all run together one after the other, making it very easy indeed to make a mistake when you are trying to copy one of these texts.

This, then, is the oldest copy of Mark, P45, from around the year 220. Our next earliest copy comes from the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Our first complete copy of the Gospel of Mark from beginning to end, from the first verse to the last verse, a copy of the New Testament that has the entire Mark, is from three hundred years after Mark was copied originally. That's the situation we're facing when we're dealing with the manuscripts of the New Testament. Not just Mark, but all of our manuscripts—we're in the same boat. We don't have any of the originals, we don't have any original copies, we don't have any original copies of the copies; we have copies that were made many decades—in most cases—many centuries later and we know that there were changes made. How do we know: Because all of the copies differ from one another.

Let me give you some statistics. How many copies do we have? Well, it's a little bit hard to say exactly how many copies we have of the New Testament, but we have something like 5,500 copies in Greek, the language in which they were originally written. Plus we have thousands of copies in Latin, and we have copies in other ancient languages that people who are textual scholars learn when they're sort of into learning dead languages—they learn Syriac, and they learn Coptic, and they learn Gothic, and they learn Old Church Slavonic—and you've got manuscripts in all these languages. But in Greek, the original language of the New Testament, there are 5,500 or so manuscripts; from complete manuscripts to fragmentary copies: 5,500. So, that's a lot, that's a lot, that's more than you have for any other book in the ancient world, so that part's good. That's the good news: That we have so many of these things. The bad news is, that none of them goes back to the original, and all of them have mistakes in them.

What can we say about the ages of our copies? Well, the oldest copy we have is another papyrus: P52 it's called, because it was the 52<sup>nd</sup> papyrus found. This is a little scrap of the Gospel of John. It looks rather large, here on the screen, in fact it is the size of a credit card. It's the size of a credit card, written on front and back—which is important to know, since it was written on front and back it means it came—not from a scroll, the way most people wrote ancient books—but from a codex like our books, where you write on both sides of the page and bind them together into a book. It's a little bit hard to date a fragment like this, experts in ancient handwriting—who are called paleographers, who do this for a living—paleographers date this thing, probably to the first half of the second century. So, maybe 30, 40, 50 years after John was originally written plus or minus 25 years—don't really know exactly when something like this was written—but maybe 125, plus or minus 25 years. This is from—it's a very important piece, this P52—it's an account of the trial before Pilate from the Gospel of John. With a few words from the trial here, ending it on the back side—if you were to flip this over you would see some more words—and so this is a very interesting little fragment, and it's the earliest thing we have. Of any fragment—of anything from the New Testament, from maybe 30 or 40 years after John was originally written.

Most of our manuscripts are nowhere near that early. Ninety four percent of the manuscripts that we now have—Greek manuscripts—date from after the 9<sup>th</sup> century. So, eight hundred, nine hundred years after the originals is when we start getting lots of copies. So you'll sometimes sit and have people tell you that the New Testament is the best attested book from the ancient world, and they're absolutely right! It is absolutely the best attested book from the ancient world, the problem is the attestation of the book comes centuries after it was originally written; many, many, many centuries after originally written is when most of our manuscripts come from.

Well, okay, so we have all these manuscripts; how many mistakes are found in those manuscripts, exactly? Well, during the Middle Ages people didn't think much about this, I mean, scribes who were copying the text realized that their predecessors had made mistakes, and they occasionally would notice mistakes—well they didn't think much of it. People didn't start thinking much of it until the invention of printing. When printers had to actually print a verse and had to decide what words to print in the verse. And the problem is they had different manuscripts with different words in each verse and they had to decide which words were the original words, and which words do we want to print, and how do we know? Because we have all of these all of these manuscripts that have differences in them. And so, it

wasn't until the invention of printing that people started thinking about this seriously, and it didn't become a real issue until almost exactly three hundred years ago—the year 1707.

In the year 1707 there was a scholar at Oxford named John Mill—unrelated to John Stuart Mill, the Victorian some of you know about—this John Mill was a textual scholar of the New Testament. He spent thirty years of his life studying the manuscripts of the New Testament. He had access to about a hundred manuscripts of the New Testament and he studied them thoroughly, and then he put together a book, he called it the *Novum Testamentum Graece*, “The Greek New Testament” of John Mill in 1707. And what he did in this Greek New Testament is printed a line or two of Greek verses from the New Testament—Matthew chapter 1 verse 1, verse 2, verse 3—but then at the bottom of the page he listed places where the manuscripts had differences, for every verse. To the shock and dismay of his readers, John Mill's Greek New Testament listed 30,000 places where the manuscripts disagreed with one another. Thirty thousand places of variation among the manuscripts.

Some of his detractors were quite upset by this, and claimed that John Mill had published his *Novum Testamentum Graece* in order to render the text of the New Testament uncertain; they thought this was some kind of demonic plot on the part of a university professor. But, his supporters pointed out he hadn't actually invented these 30,000 places of variation, he just noticed that they exist; as they do exist, in our manuscripts.

Well, that was 300 years ago; based on the study of 100 manuscripts. Now we have over 5,500 manuscripts, which have been studied quite assiduously by scholars, although they have not been thoroughly studied yet. What can we say about the number of variations today among our manuscripts of the New Testament? The reality is, we don't know how many changes scribes made in their texts of the New Testament. We don't know because nobody has been able to add up all the numbers yet. Even with the development of computer technology, we don't know how many differences there are. There are scholars who will tell you that there are 300,000 differences, scholars will tell you there are 400,000 differences; people will come up with all sorts of numbers, but the reality is we don't know. We can put it in relative terms: There are more differences in our manuscripts, than there are words in the New Testament. Well, that's a lot of differences, probably several hundred thousand. So, that is the situation that we face.

Well what kind of changes are there? What are these differences, do they really matter for anything? Let me start off by saying, quite emphatically, most of these differences I'm talking about don't matter for a thing. They absolutely don't matter. Many of them you cannot translate from Greek into English; you have two differences, and there's no way to translate the difference. Many of the changes tell us nothing more than that scribes in the ancient world could spell no better than my students can today. Scribes, of course, didn't have spell check. [laughter] Those of you who are students, I've got to tell you, I don't understand why students hand in papers with misspelled words—I mean, the computer tells you, you misspelled it! I mean, how hard can it get! Scribes, they didn't have computers telling you—you know—with written works: This is misspelled. And scribes, by the way, didn't even have dictionaries, and in many places, they didn't care how things were spelled. The reason you know they didn't care, is because sometimes you'll have a verse that will have the same word two or three times, and a scribe

will spell it three different ways. So, well those are all differences but they don't matter for anything—most of the time spelling differences don't matter for anything.

Those kinds of differences, I would call “accidental” differences; accidental changes where a scribe simply messes something up, he makes a mistake of some kind—for example—a misspelling, or another kind of accidental mistake. [Dr. Ehrman tries to show a slide, but is not able to pull it up.] In Luke 12:8,9 Jesus says, “Whoever acknowledges me before people the Son of Man will acknowledge before the angels of God. Whoever denies me before humans will be denied before the angels of God, and everyone who speaks a word against the Son...” Now, the way this slide was supposed to work was this word “God” was supposed to be up here, and this word “God” was supposed to be up here ‘cause I’m trying to illustrate something; which is that these words end the same way in the two lines. What happens if a scribe is copying this, and he copies these words, “Before the angels of God,” and so he’s writing down these words, he writes down the words, “Before the angels of God,” and he looks back at the manuscript he’s copying and he’s just writing down this word, “Before the angels of God,” but his eyes alight on this sequence, “Before the angels of God,” and he keeps writing. If he does that, then the next thing he writes is, “And everyone who speaks a word against the Son.” In other words, he leaves out this line; which in fact is what happened in a number of manuscripts; that middle line is left out because scribes—their eyes skip from the same words at the end of one line to the same words at the end of the next line.

Now, for those of you who are interested in such things—I see some of you are taking notes—this kind of mistake actually has a name, the idea of words ending in the same way is called *homoioteleuton* and when your eye skips from one line to another it’s called *parablepsis*. So, this kind of mistake is called *parablepsis* occasioned by *homoioteleuton*, as I tell my students, they don’t remember it either. There are other kinds of accidental mistakes; scribes made serious blunders in their manuscripts. Sometimes scribes will leave out not just a word or a line, sometimes they leave out a whole half a page, sometimes they leave out an entire page, sometimes they would do the most amazing things; mistakes that you can’t believe they would make, they made. We have these in our manuscripts.

Let me emphasize: I’m not suggesting the scribes changed their manuscripts, I’m not concluding that they changed them. I’m *telling* you they changed their manuscripts, and it’s a fact, because we have the manuscripts, and all the manuscripts differ from one another in sometimes in very small ways, sometimes in very big ways. These things that I’ve been telling you up to this point are what I’m calling “accidental” changes, but there are also changes—that look at least—like they were made intentionally. Scribes aren’t around for us to ask what their intentions were, but there are some changes that look like—they’re really hard to explain just by a scribe being too sleepy or something.

Let me just give you a few examples of changes that look like were probably intentionally made; these are rather more serious than “accidental” changes of something like spelling. Virtually all scholars agree today that one of the most famous stories of the New Testament was—in fact—inserted by scribe—that it wasn’t originally found in the New Testament. It’s the story found in the Gospel of John, chapter 7 and 8, the famous story of the woman taken in adultery. Where the Jewish leaders dragged this woman before Jesus and set a trap for him. They say, “This woman’s been caught in the act of adultery, the law

of Moses says we're supposed to stone a person like this. What do you say?" This is a trap. Because if Jesus says, "Well, yeah, stone her," then he's violating His teachings of love and mercy. But if He says, "No, forgive her," then He's breaking the law of Moses. So what's it going to be? Well, Jesus stoops down on the ground and—He has a way of getting out of these traps in the New Testament—so He stoops down to the ground, starts writing on the ground, He looks up and says, "Let the one without sin among you be the first to cast a stone at her." And that causes everybody to recognize their own guilt, and they leave one by one, until He looks up. There's nobody left there, and Jesus says to the woman, "Is there no one left here to condemn you?" She says, "No Lord, no one." He says, "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more."

This is a beautiful story filled with pathos; we know it's one of the best stories in the New Testament because it's in every Jesus movie ever made. Even Mel Gibson couldn't leave it out. Even though *The Passion of the Christ* is really about Jesus' last hours, he has a flashback to this event, because you have to have this scene in a movie if you're making a movie about Jesus. And so you have the woman taken in adultery even in Mel Gibson's version. This is a very popular account, obviously, and a very moving account. Unfortunately it was not originally in the New Testament. In your New Testament there will probably be brackets placed around this story, with a footnote indicating that it's not found in the oldest authorities. In fact, it's not found in the oldest authorities, and there are all sorts of reasons that if I had half an hour I would give you, for why scholars for centuries have known that as great as this story is, it did not originally belong in the Gospel of John, or in fact, any other passage of the New Testament.

A second example: The last twelve verses of Mark. Mark, for me, Mark is my favorite Gospel. Mark doesn't beat you over the head with his theology. Mark is very subtle and very, very smart in how he constructs his Gospel. At the end of his Gospel, Jesus has been betrayed, He has been denied, He has been put on trial before Pontius Pilate, He's been killed, executed by crucifixion, He's been buried, and on the third day the women go to the tomb and He's not there. But there's a man in the tomb. And the man says, "You're looking for Jesus of Nazareth, He's not here. Go tell Peter and the disciples that He will meet them in Galilee." And then we're told—Mark 16:8—the women fled from the tomb, and they didn't say anything to anyone, for they were afraid, period. It ends there. That's the last thing that happens in Mark's—the women don't tell anybody. And you think, "Whoa, wait a second, how can they not tell anybody?" Well, scribes who copied the Gospel of Mark got to that point, where it says the women didn't tell anybody, and the scribes said exactly the same thing: Whoa, how could they not tell anybody? And the scribe added twelve verses, where the women do go tell the disciples, the disciples do go to Galilee, they do meet Jesus, and Jesus tells them to go make disciples, that people be baptized in His name, that the people baptized in His name will speak in tongues, that they will be able to handle snakes, they will drink poison, and it won't harm them. These are the verses that are very important in my part of the country, my part of the south, where we have the Appalachian snake handlers; they get their theology from these last twelve verses of Mark. I've often thought that in the ambulance on the way to the hospital, maybe one of the paramedics ought to say, "You know, actually those verses weren't originally in the Gospel of Mark." [laughter]

That's where the idea of handling snakes comes from, those verses, not originally in the Gospel of Mark. Not found in our oldest and best manuscripts, and lots of reasons that scholars have known for a very

long time, they don't belong there. I think on these two points I'll be very surprised if James disagrees with this, because this is the sort of thing textual scholars have known for a very long time.

A couple of other quick examples, before I close. One of Jesus' most memorable lines is in Luke 23:34. It's found only in Luke, He's being nailed to the cross, and Jesus prays, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing." But the verses are not found in some of our oldest and best manuscripts. Was that verse originally—did Jesus originally say the prayer or not? It depends which manuscript you read! So, to my final example: Matthew chapter 24, Jesus is talking about—that should be chapter 25, I think. Matthew chapter 25, Jesus is talking about the end times, is it 25 or 24? We're going to say 24. This may be a scribal mistake, but we think it was 24 [laughter]. In Matthew chapter 24, Jesus is telling His disciples what's going to happen at the end of time and then He says that no one knows the day or the hour when these things will take place, not the angels in heaven, not even the Son. In other words, not even the Son of God knows when these things will take place. Scribes copying this found this rather confusing, how could the Son of God not know when the end is going to come? How did the scribes deal with that problem? They took out the words. In a number of manuscripts, the words are omitted.

Well, did Jesus say that or not? Well, it depends—in Matthew's Gospel—it depends which manuscripts you read. Let me come to a very quick conclusion. Do we have a reliable text of the New Testament? Are there places where the Bible misquotes Jesus? The short answer is there is no way to tell. We don't have the originals, or the original copies, or copies of the copies. There are passages that scholars continue to debate, is this the original text or not? And there are some passages where we will never know the answer.

Thank you

### **Dr. James White—Opening Statement**

Good evening, and welcome; I wish to thank you all for coming this evening, and I especially thank Dr. Ehrman for being with us this evening as well. We gather to discuss a vitally important topic: Can we trust the New Testament we possess today accurately reflects what was written nearly 2,000 years ago. Does the Bible misquote Jesus? Few topics are more important, more central than this one. Less than a year ago at the Greer-Heard Forum in Louisiana, an audience participant asked Bart Ehrman, "Wouldn't one of the most important reasons to study New Testament textual criticism be to defend its integrity against critics like you?" Dr. Ehrman responded wryly, "Good luck."

Well, I'm a good Calvinist and I don't believe in luck, but let's dive in anyway. Dr. Ehrman has already laid out his case for us, I would like to focus upon the key issues he presents by quoting him from a recent radio debate he did with Peter Williams of Cambridge University. Dr. Ehrman seemed very intent upon making sure this particular statement made it into the record right at the end of the program. He said, "My book isn't questioning at all whether God is true or not. The question is whether the New Testament can give us access to this truth of God. And my question is, how can it do so if we don't know what words were in the Scriptures? And the reality is, there are places where we don't know what the New Testament books originally said. So if we don't know what they said, how can they be

authoritative? That strikes me as a pressing question, one that eventually led me away from my beliefs in the inspiration of the Scripture, into viewing the Bible as still a terrifically important and valuable book, but not as delivering the words of God.”

Now these words echo what Dr. Ehrman said in a radio interview in October of 2007, “I thought at one time that God had inspired the very words of the Bible. We actually have thousands of manuscripts of the New Testament in the original Greek language, but most of the copies are hundreds of years after the originals and they all have differences in them. These thousands of manuscripts have hundreds of thousands of differences among them. And after a while I started thinking that it didn’t make much sense to say that God has inspired the words of the text, since it was pretty obvious to me that He hadn’t preserved the words of the text, because there are places where we don’t know what the text originally said. So it started making less sense to me to think that God had inspired the words, because if He had done the miracle of inspiring the words in the first place, then it seemed like He would have performed the miracle of preserving the words after He inspired them. He obviously hadn’t preserved them because we didn’t have them, and that made me then doubt the doctrine of inspiration.”

We need to understand this evening, that as Dr. Ehrman has stated over and over again, there isn’t anything really new in his book, *Misquoting Jesus*. Any person with sufficient interest and availability of scholarship has known about the factual issues he raises all along. But it is the conclusion Dr. Ehrman reaches that is unusual. Unlike Tischendorf, Bengel, Warfield, Carson, Silva, or Wallace, all of whom were or are fully conversant with the entire range of New Testament readings, Dr. Ehrman has found this information irreconcilable with Evangelical faith; part of his reasoning flows from his assertion that particular textual variants change the entire meaning of books of the Bible. He has said, “Did Jesus get angry at a leper who wanted to be healed? It depends on which manuscript you read. Did He die apart from God? It depends on which manuscript you read. Does the New Testament specifically refer to the doctrine of the Trinity? It depends on which manuscript you read. Did Jesus confront this woman taken in adultery? It depends on which manuscript you read.”

So, let’s summarize the argument this evening. We have been told there are more textual variants in the New Testament than there are words in the New Testament. That is true. There are places where we do not know what the New Testament originally said flows from that argument; and therefore the New Testament cannot be the authoritative Word of God. I would like to offer a faithful response to Dr. Ehrman’s position this evening. Given first of all, that there are as of November of 2008, 5,752 cataloged, handwritten New Testament manuscripts, and given that there are approximately 400,000 textual variants amongst these Greek manuscripts—leaving off the Latin, Coptic, Syriac, et cetera—graphically we can see the situation as presented by Dr. Ehrman like this. Sadly, for the majority of those who hear these numbers or see a graph like this, it is assumed that this means there are three options for every single word in the New Testament. This is the conclusion of many atheists and Muslims, with whom I’ve had dialogue. But is this the case? Surely not, the repetition of the bare fact that there are more variants in the New Testament than there are words in the New Testament without proper historical context is grossly misleading. The fact is that the vast majority of these variants are utterly irrelevant to the proper understanding and translation of the text.

Let's note the truth of the matter. The more manuscripts you have, the more variants you will have amongst them. If you only have a small number of manuscripts, you have fewer variants; you likewise have less certainty of the original readings. These go hand-in-hand. Obviously, having manuscripts coming from different areas at different times, yet all testifying to the same text is strong evidence that you possess the document in its original form. The more manuscripts you have and the earlier they are is important. The fewer manuscripts you have, the higher possibility of major emendation, editing, and corruption. The New Testament has more manuscripts than any other work of antiquity, approximately 1.3 million pages of handwritten text.

So while at first glance, the number of variants intimates a horribly corrupt textual tradition, this is not the case. Instead, when we recognize that the vast majority of variants are simply meaningless—they are as noted: Spelling differences such as whether you spell John with one *nu* or two *nus*, and especially the concept of the movable nu (the bane of the existence of the first year Greek student, and the scribe alike it seems), the actual number of meaningful textual variants of the New Testament presents a very different picture.

Here we see a more meaningful comparison, that of the number of words in the New Testament in comparison with the variants that actually impact the meaning of the text. And when you then add viability in, that is whether these variants have a chance to be original, the situation changes even more. Perhaps a different view will help illustrate the relationship a little bit better. Sadly, this is probably not what most people have in mind when they hear modern critics on NPR assuring us that the New Testament is hopelessly corrupted. Now let's look a little closer at the kinds of variants that we are talking about.

As we noted, the vast majority of the variants are non-meaningful; they simply cannot be translated from Greek into English—or any other language for that matter—they do not impact the meaning of the text. Next we have nonviable variants—that is there is simply no possibility that this variant was original. A particular spelling error in a 15<sup>th</sup> century manuscript that otherwise is pretty much nondescript, doesn't really have much of a chance of being the original reading of the New Testament. But then we have those variants that are meaningful and viable. They change the meaning of the text, and they could possibly be original—they have sufficient manuscript attestation. Of these we have scribal errors, and scribal errors—as human beings we make certain kinds of errors that can be identified and cataloged—these include errors of sight, such as homoioteleuton which Dr. Ehrman referred to (confusing words with similar endings), as well as errors of hearing in cases where the original was being read in a scriptorium. Then we have harmonizations, whenever you have parallel accounts in the New Testament such as the synoptic Gospels or between Ephesians and Colossians, where you have similar materials, it is very common for the scribes to harmonize—either purposefully, or simply because they knew the other text better, and it was a mistake of the mind. And then we have purposeful changes, the majority of these are innocent as well, with the scribe thinking there is an error in the text, but being himself ignorant of the backgrounds and hence making a mistake on his own.

There are about 1,500 to 2,000 viable, meaningful textual variants that must be examined carefully, comprising maybe—at most—1% of the entire text of the New Testament. Of these, historically,

scholars have believed the vast majority are scribal errors of sight or hearing. Let me quote one scholar on this:

Most of these differences are completely immaterial and insignificant; in fact most of the changes found in our early Christian manuscripts have nothing to do with theology or ideology. Far and away the most changes are the result of mistakes, pure and simple—slips of the pen, accidental omissions, inadvertent additions, misspelled words, blunders of one sort or another when scribes made intentional changes, sometimes their motives were as pure as the driven snow. And so we must rest content knowing that getting back to the earliest attainable version is the best we can do, whether or not we have reached back to the “original” text. This oldest form of the text is no doubt closely (very closely) related to what the author originally wrote, and so it is the basis for our interpretation of his teaching.

The gentleman that I’m quoting is Bart Ehrman in *Misquoting Jesus*. [audience laughter] Now, what of the assertion that the text of the New Testament was corrupted before our earliest manuscript evidence? We have a dozen manuscripts within the first 100 years after the writing of the New Testament. All are fragmentary, but grand total they represent a majority of the books in the New Testament and about 4/10 of the text of the New Testament. We have more than 120 manuscripts within the first 300 years.

Now, a key fact that must be kept in mind, regarding the New Testament manuscript tradition, is the existence of multiple lines of transmission. Let’s illustrate what we mean. The earliest manuscripts in our possession demonstrate the existence not of a single line of corrupt transmission, but multiple lines of transmission of varying accuracy. Many of these lines intersect and cross defying easy identification. But the important thing to remember is that multiple lines are a good thing. They ensure a healthy manuscript tradition that is not under the control of any central editing process. One of the examples often noted related to the early transmission of the text is a relationship between this manuscript, P75 (from around A.D 175) and this manuscript, Codex Vaticanus (from A.D. 325).

These two manuscripts are clearly very closely related in their text. Indeed, they may be more alike than any other two ancient manuscripts in the portions where Vaticanus contains the same sections of Scripture as P75—Vaticanus is a much larger manuscript obviously. But remember, 150 years separates the copying of these two manuscripts. And yet we know that Vaticanus is not a copy of P75, for it actually contains readings that are earlier than some in P75. This means we have a very clean, very accurate line of transmission, illustrated by these two texts, that goes back to the very earliest part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century itself. What this illustrates needs to be kept in mind—the burden of proof lies upon the skeptic, who asserts corruption of the primitive New Testament text since the extant manuscripts demonstrate multiple lines of independent transmission. The skeptic must explain how the New Testament text can appear in history, via multiple lines of transmission, and yet each line presents the same text, yet without any controlling authority.

As time is short, let us now compare the two extremes of the complete manuscript spectrum, to see just how wide the range of readings really is. The Byzantine text platform would be considered the “right

side” of the spectrum, while the Westcott-Hort text of 1881 would be on the “left side,” for those of you familiar with these issues: the Byzantine versus Alexandrian text-types. What happens when we ask a computer to mark out the differences between the two ends of the spectrum of the manuscript tradition for us? So please keep in mind, we are looking here at printed text—not manuscripts—hence this is not a comparison of textual variants, but of representative collations of the two ends of the manuscript spectrum.

Here we have Hebrews 4: 9-15. There is exactly one difference between the two ends of the spectrum at this point. Here’s Hebrews 6:15 through 7:3. There are no differences between the two ends of the spectrum. Here’s Galatians 1:6-15; here we have two, and the verb form there—we’ll see here in a moment, I’ll actually put up the textual data for that—is a pretty messy textual variant, but as you can see, the vast majority of the text has no variation between these two ends of the spectrum. Now, the Gospels, we have 3,500 copies of the 5,752—3,500 per Gospel collection—so they get copied a whole lot more, isn’t there going to be a whole lot more there? Well, there can be. Here’s Mark 5:25-36, and yet, notice even here where you have these two words here, *euthus*, the difference between *euthus* and *eutheos*, which is not exactly going to change the meaning of the text whatsoever.

In fact, if you tally up the total of differences between the Majority Text (which of course is Byzantine in nature), and the critical text (Nestle-Aland United Bible Societies’ text) you would find just under 6,600 differences, or a total of 95%-plus agreement, at the *widest* point in the spectrum. But are there not some very challenging, difficult variants? Certainly there are, I just mentioned this one. Here’s a pretty messy variant, Galatians 1:8; and here’s the textual data provided to you, and there are six different readings for this particular verb. Six different ways to read it; yet even here, all the difference in translation would be whether you say, “Proclaim to you,” or just, “Proclaim,” and what tense of the verb you use. That’s all the difference these variations make at this particular point in time.

It is vital to understand a basic truth about the manuscript tradition of the New Testament, to quote Kurt and Barbara Aland, “The transmission of the New Testament textual tradition is characterized by an extremely impressive degree of **tenacity**. Once a reading occurs it will persist with obstinacy. It is precisely the overwhelming mass of the New Testament textual tradition...which provides an assurance of certainty in establishing the original text.” Basically what this means is that once a reading appears in the manuscripts, it stays there. That includes scribal errors and even nonsense errors. Why would this be a good thing? Because of what it means on the other side: **The original readings are still in the manuscript tradition**. This is key! When we have a variant with three possibilities, A, B, and C, we do not have to worry about D, “None of the above!”

There is every reason to believe that our problem is not having 95% of what was originally written, but instead of having 101%. As Rob Bowman has put it, it is like having a 1,000 piece jigsaw puzzle, but you have 1,010 pieces in the box. The task is weeding out the extra; the originals are there. This is important to emphasize in light of Dr. Ehrman’s repeated assertion that we “don’t know” what the original New Testament said. I would like Dr. Ehrman to explain this assertion: is he saying that he is willing to demonstrate that there are variants in the New Testament where **none** of the extant readings could **possibly** be original, or is he applying the impossible standard of absolute certainty on every single

variant, which would require absolute perfection of copying? Which would mean, of course, that Scripture could not even have been revealed until at least the printing press, or more likely the photocopier.

We quoted Dr. Ehrman speaking of the miracle of inspiration requiring the miracle of preservation. I would like to assert that the issue is not **if** God preserved His Word, but **how**. Dr. Ehrman seems to have concluded many years ago that preservation would require perfection of copying, something not seen in any ancient document. But is this the only way, or even the best way, to preserve Scripture? Ironically, the idea of a single, perfectly preserved version is indeed a very popular concept: amongst Muslims. This is in fact their view of the Qur'an, but it has never been the view of informed Christianity. In fact, the Islamic assertion of a single, preserved version leads to the inevitable questioning of those who produced it, such as Uthman, the third Caliph, who burned the sources he used!

But if preservation is not to be found in a single manuscript tradition with no variants, how then *has* the text been preserved? It has been preserved through the very mechanism that produced the majority of the textual variants: the rapid, uncontrolled, widespread explosion of manuscripts during the early centuries of the Christian era. Let's look at how it happened.

The initial Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament were written at various places at various times. Some were written for distribution within the community—such as the Gospels—and others were Epistles sent to specific locations. Then copies would be made and sent elsewhere. Often Christians travelling from one place to another would encounter a book they had not heard of before, and hence would make a copy to bring back to their own fellowship. And though a graphic that would represent how many different lines of transmission there were and how often they were interconnected would rapidly become useless due to the number of manuscripts that would be on the screen, the fact of that complex history of transmission should be kept in mind.

Over time, single books would be gathered into collections. This was especially true of the Gospels, and the Epistles of Paul, hence we have P75 and P66—Gospel collections—and P46, containing the Epistles of Paul, all dating from the middle to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. These collections would then come together until, finally, after the peace of the church in 313, you could have entire copies of the Scriptures such as we find in Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus.

But the important point to note is the multifocality of this process. Multiple authors, writing at multiple times, to multiple audiences produced a text that appears in history, already displaying multiple lines of transmission. This results in the textual variants we must study, but it also results and illustrates something else. There was never a time when any one man, or group of men, had control over the text of the New Testament. There was never a Christian Uthman. All assertions regarding adding doctrines, changing theology, removing teachings, etc., are without merit. The Christian church was a persecuted minority without power to enforce a uniform textual transmission as in Islam.

Textual variation, then, is an artifact of the method used to preserve the text **as an entire textual tradition**. The relatively small amount of meaningful variation is a small price to pay to avoid the impossible position of having to defend an edited, controlled text that can make no claim to

representing the original. This has surely been the primary viewpoint of Christian scholars for centuries, and as such, the mere presence of textual variation does not substantiate Dr. Ehrman's repeated assertion that "we do not know what the New Testament originally said." Perfection of transmission is not relevant to the historical reality of the New Testament.

I believe the evangelistic command of Christ contained in the Gospels was taken seriously by the church. Hence the church wanted the message of Christ to go out into all the world, and quickly. The result was that the Scriptures, that the church treasured, would likewise be distributed far and wide—not in a controlled fashion. The idea of paralleling the Christian scriptures and, let's say, the 10<sup>th</sup> century Masoretes, who were not in any way trying to distribute their scriptures all around the world, is utterly fallacious. The method of preservation would have to match the purpose of the early church. And the idea of having a controlled, non-distributed, high-into photocopied text, flies in the face of the reality of the early church.

Time precludes a full demonstration of the fact that the New Testament manuscript tradition is deeper, wider, and earlier than any other relevant work of antiquity. The worst attested New Testament book (Revelation) has earlier, fuller attestation than any other work of its day including (Suetonius, Tacitus, Josephus, Pliny, etc.). In fact, while we have fragments of the New Testament that date within decades of the original writings, the average classical work has a five hundred year gap between its writing and its first extant manuscript evidence. The New Testament as a whole has thousands of times the documentary evidence as the average classical work.

And consider how often you hear any skeptic noting the horrific textual foundation of such works as the Gospel of Thomas, known only from a single Coptic manuscript and some Greek fragments. Why do you not hear a constant drumbeat of, "We don't have any idea what the Gospel of Thomas actually said..."? At least with the Gospel of Thomas that would be quite probable, since we have such scant textual evidence for it, and there are tremendous differences between the Greek fragments and the single Coptic manuscript.

What about the claim that textual variants change the entire message of a book? Dr. Ehrman seems to say that if we read *orgistheis* (angry) at Mark 1:41 that this will somehow change the entire Gospel of Mark. Yet, as Ehrman himself notes, Jesus' treatment of the man is consistent with such a reading, and it is not the only time in Mark when Jesus shows His true humanity through anger, such as Mark 3:5 and 10:14. Likewise, does whether we read "by the grace of God" or "apart from God" (*charis theou*) in a sub-clause in Hebrews 2:9 change the entire message of the epistle to the Hebrews? Once again, Ehrman has argued that "apart from God" is consistent with the theology of Hebrews to begin with (and I agree): so how can the variant itself change the entire message of the book of Hebrews?

Most Christians have never had the privilege of studying the textual history of the Scriptures. From my first days in Greek class, I have been fascinated by the field. The irony of our encounter this evening, is that you have two speakers who have both examined the same data, and yet come to polar opposite conclusions. One sees the end of faith, the other, its very foundation. P52 is one of the earliest fragments we possess of the New Testament, Dr. Ehrman showed it to you; I have a tie of it, both sides,

fully readable, Bart, I want you to notice...[audience and Dr. Ehrman laugh as Dr. White shows it]. When it was first identified last century, it was sent to four papyrologists. Three of the four dated it as early as 100 and as late as 150, the fourth placed it in the late 90s. It contains portions of John 18:31-33 and 37-38, which is ironic both because that is where Jesus is speaking about truth with Pilate, as well as the fact that German scholarship was convinced for a long time that John was not written until AD 170.

But here we have an ancient text, which if it was as early as 100 could conceivably be a first or second generation copy of the original; which surely would have still been around in its day one way or the other. Here we see how the text would have flowed around this particular fragment. These words, then, were copied and recopied over the centuries. Here is how they appear around the year 400 in Codex Alexandrinus. They are the same words, the same message, the same story, three centuries later. The uncial text of the first eight centuries gave way to the minuscule form, and here from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, we have the same text, the same words, the same message, being transmitted faithfully. Finally, in 1516 the first printed and published Greek New Testament appeared, the work of Desiderius Erasmus, here in its 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, the same words found in P52 up here, on the sacred page.

We can move from there to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the more modern, critical text of Tregillus and finally on to the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the 21<sup>st</sup> edition of the Nestle-Aland text of 1949. This scan came from the text of my father, who used it to study Greek under Kenneth Weist at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. And finally on into the modern Nestle-Aland text in electronic format in the Stuttgart Electronic Study Bible, replete with textual notes and sigla; same words, same message. One text, written during a time of persecution upon papyri, 1900 years ago, most probably at the risk of the scribe's life, transmitted throughout the years faithfully, to our very day.

The story of P52 could be repeated over and over again, great treasures of history that testify to the ancient transmission of the words of the apostles include tiny scraps, like these fragments from P60 from the Gospel of John, or this portion of P20 from the Epistle of James, chapters 2 and 3, or this page (I saw myself a number of years ago) from P72—the earliest manuscript we have with 1 and 2 Peter and Jude. I confess I felt a tremendous connection with this ancient fellow believer, who not only loved the words so much he invested the time to hand write these words, but who likewise risked his life to possess these words. I likewise feel a connection because here in this priceless treasure are words I live by, one of the earliest testimonies for the deity of Christ, an example of Granville Sharpe's rule—2 Peter 1:1—where Jesus is called our God and Savior. Or the great treasure of P66 containing major portions of the Gospel of John, here we have the famous passage in the prologue of John, John 1:1, here the last clause *kai theos en ho logos* "and the Word was God." In this early collection of Paul's writings, P46, it witnesses to a faith that has endured to our very day; this picture is of the end of Galatians and the beginning of Philippians, showing that the earliest evidence supports the historic acceptance of Pauline authorship of these works.

Think about these handwritten papyri written by persecuted believers, slated for destruction by the decree of Caesar himself, and yet despite 250 years of persecution and the destruction of countless copies, this body of writings the New Testament today boasts the broadest and earliest manuscript

tradition of any comparable ancient writing. You'll forgive me, please, for seeing in this the very hand of God Himself.

So does the New Testament misquote Jesus? If by these words we are referring simply to the expected reality that there are variations in the handwritten manuscript tradition of the New Testament as there would be with any ancient document then we have to ask, did we expect the apostles to use photocopiers? For if the standard to avoid accusation of misquotation is absolute perfection of copying, then God would have been precluded from giving His revelation to mankind until 1949, when the first photocopiers were built. But that simply cannot be accepted.

Instead we have seen that the New Testament manuscript faithfully provides to us the writings of the apostles. The variants, while important, do not change the message of the New Testament, and in the vast majority of cases, we are able to determine the original form. Truly it must be said that if we cannot know what the New Testament said, then we cannot know what any historical source, outside of inscriptions on stone, originally said either. If the most widely documented ancient literary collection, with the earliest attestation is insufficient to accurately communicate to us the words of men of the past, then clearly we must throw out everything we have claimed to know about history. The onus is on the skeptic. The New Testament sets the standard, providing clear evidence of its trustworthiness. If that is not enough, is it possible the skeptic has set a standard that is unreasonable? And if so, why? That is the question this evening. Thank you very much. [applause]

### **Mike O'Fallon—Moderator**

[Edited out audience guest introductions/book sales tables announcements.]

We will now begin our period of fifteen-minute rebuttals, beginning with Dr. Ehrman, will you please welcome him. [applause]

### **Dr. Bart Ehrman—Rebuttal**

Thank you very much, and thank you, James, for that very energetic and intelligent opening statement; I appreciate it very much. Let me speak frankly. I don't know how much of what James just said could sink in with people who aren't in the field. I don't know how much of what he said actually registered, and how much sounded really intelligent. I can tell you it was very intelligent, but I do want to make a plea with all of you. I have been asked a number of times, over the last several weeks by friends and colleagues why I am spending three days, that I could otherwise be spending on my own research coming to Florida to have this debate with James. Knowing that the audience would be by and large Evangelical Christians, and I am not. And why would I take my time to do that? The reason I wanted to take my time to do that, is because—I hope—that through these presentations, both James and mine, people will open their minds to other possibilities than the ones they are naturally inclined to accept. It is very, very difficult to change your mind about something that is a deeply held conviction. It is emotionally traumatic, and most people aren't willing to do it. Most of you here won't be willing to do it. My plea is that you think, at least, about an alternative point of view.

What James has just done is given a thirty minute presentation that was in part rhetorically functioning in order to assure you that smart people can hold onto the points of view that you hold. Fair enough. There are a lot of very smart Evangelical Christians in the world, absolutely. But there are other points of view, and you shouldn't write them off because they're uncomfortable. They might be right; and you should not be afraid to go where the truth takes you. I think that there may be only two or three people here who are really willing to open up to the possibility that there might be other views. That—other than the ones that they personally subscribe to, that James has just confirmed by giving an intelligent talk. I'm just asking you for the possibility of opening up and thinking that it might be different. I used to believe everything that he just said. I used to agree 100% with the entire presentation. But, I changed my mind. I didn't change my mind willingly, I prayed about it a lot, I thought about it a lot, I went down kicking and screaming, but I ended up thinking that the truth was other than what I had believed before. And I hope some of you can do the same thing; because I can tell you, it is worth following the truth.

Let me summarize what I think to be the theses of my book *Misquoting Jesus*. (Let me see...I don't have my timer on, is that timer going? Good, thank you.) All right, it says I still have 25 minutes left [laughter]. It's a textual mistake. [audience laughter]

Let me tell you what I think are the theses of my book *Misquoting Jesus*. These are the theses, I'm going to state these because I think that there are nine of them, and I think that James only disagreed with half of one of them. But I might be wrong.

Theses:

1. We don't have the originals of any of the books of the New Testament.
2. The copies that we have were made much later, in most instances many centuries later.
3. We have thousands of these copies just in the Greek language, in which the New Testament books were all originally written.
4. All of these copies contain mistakes—either accidental slips on the part of the scribes that made them, or intentional alterations by scribes wanting to change the text to make it say what they already wanted it to mean, or thought that it did mean.
5. 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 latter in comparative terms, there are more differences in our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament.
6. The vast majority of these mistakes are completely insignificant in material and unimportant. A good portion of them shows nothing more than the scribes in antiquity could spell no better than people can today.
7. Some of the mistakes, however, matter a lot. Some of them effect how a verse, chapter, or an entire book is to be interpreted. This is the point on which I think he disagrees. Others of them reveal the kinds of concerns that were affecting scribes, who sometimes altered the texts in light of the face of controversies going on in their own contexts.
8. The task of the textual critic, people like me, is to figure out what the author of a text actually wrote, and to see why scribes modified what he wrote.

9. Despite the fact that scholars have been working diligently at these tasks for 300 years, there continues to be heated differences of opinion. There are some passages where serious and very smart scholars disagree about what the original text said, and there are some places where we will probably never know.

If James wants to insist that we have the original text, then I want to know: How does he know? In any given place, and I can cite dozens of them, he will have differences of opinion not only with me, who is an expert in this field, but with every other expert in the field. If God preserved the original text intact, where is it? Why don't we have it, and doesn't he know where it is? I don't know the answer to that.

Where he disagrees is in the statement that the differences actually can matter a lot. He points out most of the differences don't matter for much of anything, and that is something that I myself have said. My point here—now I'll tell you my rhetorical point—I have nine theses in this book, and he agrees with eight and a half of them. So let's deal with the half that he disagrees with, that these differences actually can matter a lot. Well, during the break, I just decided to jot a few things down, just off the top of my head, without knowing in advance what he's going to say, or what I was going to say in response.

So, there's one textual variant in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus got angry at a leper who wanted to be healed. In another variant in the same passage, it says that Jesus loved him. Is there a difference between loving him and getting angry? I say there's a difference. Did Jesus feel anxiety going to His cross in the Gospel of Luke, or did He not? That's a big difference. Is Jesus ever called "the Unique God" in the New Testament? It depends which manuscript you read and it's a big difference. Is the doctrine of the Trinity explicitly taught in the New Testament? It depends which manuscript you read, and it's a big difference. Did Jesus pray for those killing Him, "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing?" It's a big difference whether He did or not. Did the voice at the baptism indicate that it was on that day that Jesus became the Son of God? It depends which manuscript you read. These differences matter. Don't let James' assurances otherwise lull you into thinking that in fact there's not a big deal here. There is a big deal here. These differences matter. Yes, most of the hundred thousand—hundreds of thousands—don't matter, but many of them do matter. There are places where we don't know what the text originally said.

Let me respond to a couple of specific comments that he made. This is difficult to do because we are getting into the realm of scholarship and it's hard to simplify what this is about in my five minutes and forty three seconds. At one point he pointed out that we have an early manuscript, P75, from the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century, early 3<sup>rd</sup> century, and Codex Vaticanus that would be 150 years later that are very similar to one another. So he claims, therefore, because there's accurate copying between P75 and B, we know that there are no primitive corruptions. This is a completely bogus argument. You can take other manuscripts from the same vein as P75 and put them up against Codex Vaticanus, and they differ a lot. He put a manuscript on the screen that was the oldest manuscript that he says that he had studied; I actually looked at this manuscript, held it in my hand for two hours one afternoon two summers ago, P52. And he pointed out that this is very similar to the wording that you find in the trial of John before Pilate in John's Gospel—the trial of Jesus before Pilate in John's Gospel—in later manuscripts. He

doesn't point out that there is a significant textual variant even in this credit card sized fragment of a manuscript: A significant textual variant involving the addition and subtraction of certain words.

We don't know how often the earliest scribes changed their text. Let me bring up one datum that has not been brought up yet. The later scribes of the Middle Ages don't disagree from one another very much because they're trained scribes. The earliest copyists were not trained scribes. The fact that later manuscripts agree a lot don't tell you what the early manuscripts did. Did the earliest manuscripts agree a lot, with themselves or with the originals? As it turns out, most of the variants that we have in our textual tradition are from the earliest manuscripts. That means that the earliest copies were the least—copyists—were the least qualified copyists. What about the copyists who were copying earlier than the surviving copyists? Are we to believe that all of a sudden they were virtually perfect? I don't think so. I think that in fact, they probably changed their manuscripts a lot. What's the evidence? The surviving early manuscripts differ a lot.

James came up with a very strange statistic that I don't understand where he said that there's some kind of 95% agreement at different ends of the spectrum. So that virtually we're certain about the entire text of the New Testament. I don't know if James has ever actually looked at manuscripts before, but I can tell you that it isn't that simple. When people try to classify manuscripts, to group them together, so that you've got—say that you've got a thousand manuscripts and you want to know which manuscripts are most like other manuscripts, you compare them all with one another. If manuscripts agree in 70% of their variations, you count that as extremely high, because it doesn't happen very often. So, I don't know where this 95% figure came from, but you shouldn't rest assured that these manuscripts are all like one another, because they're not all like one another.

Let me end my final two minutes and twenty seconds with the issue that he really does want to talk about: The issue of preservation. He thinks that the point of my book *Misquoting Jesus* is that God did not preserve the text, therefore God did not inspire the text. That is not the point of my book, it is not the point of any of the major chapters in my book, it is simply the point that I begin and end the book with to explain why this matters to me, personally. It matters to me personally. It matters to me personally. There are scholars that disagree, but it's not the main point of the book *at all*; as you'll see if you simply read the chapters where I don't even mention the issue.

I found his discussion of preservation to be convoluted and obscure and I didn't really understand it, so let me put it to you in simple terms and see if this makes sense. This is the way I look at it: If God did inspire the words of the Bible to make sure that the human authors wrote what He wanted to be written (that's the doctrine of inspiration), why did He not preserve the words of the Bible, making sure that the human scribes who copied the text wrote what He wanted to be written? James replied, "Well they didn't have photocopy machines." I know they didn't have photocopy machines, but if God can inspire people to write His text, why can't He inspire people to preserve His text? I don't know the answer to that. If you want to say that God inspired the Bible, which Bible did He inspire? The one you read in English? The Greek manuscript on which it is based? Which Greek manuscript? All of them are different from one another, which ones did He inspire? Were they all inspired so that the different versions of Jesus' words in all these manuscripts—even though they're all different, they're all inspired? How would

you know which words are inspired if you don't know which words are originally in the Bible? I don't have good answers for that. These are the reasons I gave up my view of inspiration, but it's not the point of *Misquoting Jesus*, and it's not really the subject of this debate. The debate is, "Does the Bible Misquote Jesus?" And I'm afraid the answer is yes.

### **Dr. James White—Rebuttal**

It is a little bit difficult for me to understand why Dr. Ehrman misunderstood so many of the things that I presented to you. First of all, I do believe that all of you are fully capable of understanding what I was saying. I call Christians to a higher level, to understand issues of textual criticism. I did that in 1995 when I published a book that is used in seminaries and Bible colleges across the land called *The King James Only Controversy*, which is an introduction to textual criticism. Dr. Ehrman has often said that his book was the first book for laymen on that subject, it was not. Mine was out in 1995, is used at Southern Seminary and Master's College and places like that. And if you've read that, then you've probably followed everything I was saying because it really wasn't anything new.

Dr. Ehrman has just pointed out that, "Look. why does this matter? It has to do with, you know, James wants to talk about preservation." Well, you know, when a statement—when statements are made—at the beginning of your book, the conclusion of your book, you raise them yourself in the debates you do against Dan Wallace, and in almost every single talk that you give, I think that means it's probably something that's fairly important. And when the people out in the world like Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins and all my Muslim apologist friends grab onto those words and assume that you are giving a scholarly conclusion, yeah, I think that's something worth debating. If I put something in the conclusion of my book and people take that and run with it, I think I'm responsible for that. And so I think it is something that we should be examining this evening.

Now, it's interesting—those of you who were here this afternoon—notice that some of the verses that Dr. Ehrman noted were the very verses that we looked at: Mark 1:41, Luke chapter 22, we talked about Hebrews 2:9 and others that he raised. Evidently he does not understand what it is I just tried to assert to you. He says, "How does James know that he has the original?" Once again, I honestly do believe I'm not telling you anything that is unusual for believing textual critics to have said for a long period of time. We believe that the originals exist in the manuscript tradition—not a single manuscript—but in the manuscript tradition. So that when we look at Mark 1:41 and we look at the evidence that is the difference between Jesus with compassion reaching forth his hand or with anger reaching forth his hand, *spagchnistheis* versus *orgestheis*, we can look at the manuscript evidence and one of those two is the original. That's the point.

The idea that we have to have absolute unanimity of opinion has never been held by anybody as the basis for believing God has preserved His Word, yet that is the standard that Dr. Ehrman presents; and no work of antiquity can ever meet that. That's why I keep saying that the only way, then, that you can have a handwritten communication would in essence be that if a scribe is about to misspell a word or about to make an edit, all of a sudden he bursts into flames. Or God transports him off the rock here called Earth, or He all of a sudden takes over in automatic writing and makes him write the right word. This kind of assertion is just simply without merit; there is no reason to believe that. That's why I

presented to you the idea of how God has preserved His Word. And that He has preserved it through the entire manuscript tradition so that there is never a controlling authority that can change or edit the text, put in doctrines, take out doctrines, etc., etc. The result of that is we have to look at textual variants, but the fact is, that is the best way to preserve the text, especially given the evangelical mandate of the early church.

And so what I've said is exactly what Kurt and Barbara Aland said, and so I've asked him to respond to what they said. In their words, "Does tenacity exist?" Does the manuscript tradition provide us with the original readings, yes or no? That is the question we need to look at. He accused me of trying to lull you into not considering these things. Obviously, if you were to pick up the books I've written on this subject, and see that I have addressed these textual variants, that I've talked to everybody about John 7:53-8:11, the longer ending of Mark, and these textual variants, went into much more depth in my book on these subjects, then you would know I'm not trying to lull anyone. I've been beating this drum for a long time. We need to know about the history of the New Testament. I'm not trying to lull anybody into anything, I'm trying to say, "Look, I think there is a grossly imbalanced presentation being made by Dr. Bart Ehrman, and he's getting all the media in the world on it; but the other side doesn't get any calls from NPR. The other side doesn't get to be on The Daily Show. Only one side gets to be on those programs, and I think it's time for the other side to be known."

He totally misunderstood what I was trying to present to you, and I got this feeling when Dan Wallace presented the same information, I never heard Dr. Ehrman respond to it then either. I was simply trying to demonstrate, when I looked at P75 and Codex Vaticanus, that while these two manuscripts are extremely close to one another in their readings, they are not copies of one another. They have different readings, and therefore, because you have that happening not just with them but with other manuscripts as well, the issue is you have multiple lines. Dr. Ehrman keeps presenting it like it's the phone game, where you have one copy of one copy of one copy of one copy in a straight line adding up all these errors. That's not how it works. Not only did they sometimes have multiple copies, sometimes had scriptoria where people were reading so you'd have one copy and sometimes they would switch the copy in between, and so on and so forth. So you have a text with a mixed textual nature to them; it's much more complicated than that. And there are multiple lines of transmission. So the idea that, well, you know, if there were these primitive corruptions before the manuscript tradition is found in history, therefore we could never know what the originals were. When you have multiple lines, how do all of those multiple lines end up having the same readings in them? Not identical readings, but it's still the same New Testament, it's still teaching the same thing.

He also did not understand whatsoever, the graphics I put up, where I asked a computer program to compare for us two different texts; the Westcott and Hort text and the Byzantine Majority platform text. I was not saying that there was 95% agreement in the comparison of the two manuscripts. In fact, I said clearly, roll the tape back and listen, I said very clearly, "We are looking at printed texts here," that is: What does the Byzantine manuscript tradition look like, what does the Alexandrian look like, and let's compare the various places using computer technology to do so. And I gave you the exact number; it's just under 6,600 differences between the Byzantine Majority Text and the Modern Critical Text. That's a number, put it into the math for yourself, it's about 95% agreement, there's about a 4.7% variation

between those *printed* collations. I tried to be very clear about that, and Dr. Ehrman has misunderstood what I was saying, calling it a completely bogus argument. He has simply misunderstood what it is that I was saying.

Now, I would like to take your attention back to the examples he just gave. Mark 1:41, Dr. Ehrman believes he knows the original; he believed that it is the reading Codex Bezae Cantabriginesis—Codex D—even though people like Aland and Metzger and even D. C.—Dr. Parker—have pointed out that when Bezae is alone against the earlier manuscript tradition, that it probably should not be given much weight. Only when it agrees with the earlier tradition should it be given weight in those situations, again I presented a paper on that earlier today.

We looked at the bloody sweat, he didn't mention Hebrews 2:9 but I will because he believe he knows what the original there is too. The unique God, *monogenes theos*, John 1:18; he actually at that point takes—I think—a rather unusual point of view, I think it would be a great thing that many people have disagreed with him on this particular reading, the majority today think *monogenes theos*, “Unique God” is the best reading at that point. The *Comma Johanneum*, no serious textual scholar believes that that has any viability as being original, it is not even a part of the New Testament manuscript tradition—1 John 5:7—until maybe the 15<sup>th</sup> century at the earliest, it comes over from the Latin very, very clearly. It is not a viable variant at that particular point. Each one of these variants, I have mentioned many—sitting over there on my desk I have the NA27/NET Diglot and we make that available, I encourage people to purchase that so that you can look at the textual evidence yourself. And you will see, these various variants, you will be able to see what the manuscript evidence is. And here is the point: If the standard is that there can be no disagreement for the Bible to be the authoritative Word of God, and these are things that Dr. Ehrman has said—he even made sure at the end of the radio program just a few weeks ago in London (probably sitting in the same studio I sat in November on the same program), to insert into the discussion his thesis statement that, well, look, how can this be the authoritative Word of God when we don't know what it originally said?

What he's saying is, if scholars can disagree, then it's impossible to know what it originally said. No, I say, let everybody know what the variants are, look at how it would impact the meaning of the text, and recognize that none of the New Testament books are changed by any of these readings. That's why I challenged Dr. Ehrman: Show us where your reading of Hebrews 2:9 changes Hebrews as a book. Show us where reading “angry” at Mark 1:41 changes the meaning of the Gospel of Mark. When do any of these—John—John clearly presents the deity of Christ in a multiple of places, whether John 1:18 reads *theos* or *huios*.

Where do any of these actually do what Dr. Ehrman says, change an entire book of the Bible. He has said that many, many times. I will say to you that his opening statement is a statement that I have heard at least 25 times myself. Because I have listened to all of his classes, I have listened to all of his debates, over on my table I have all of his books including his doctrinal dissertation and his Brill compilation of all of his scholarly writings. I don't get the feeling that Dr. Ehrman has looked at anything that I've written on this subject whatsoever. And that has led unfortunately to his rebuttal being filled, primarily, with a misunderstanding of what I actually presented to you. And I am sorry for that.

For the fact of the matter is, here is the issue that we must get to in the cross examination: Does he or does he not agree with Kurt and Barbara Aland, Dan Wallace, and others who believe in the tenacity of the text. That is, that once a reading enters into the text it stays there, even if it's silly. He love to tell the story of manuscript 109, where the scribe copied across columns in the genealogy of Jesus and ended up really making everything pretty messy, because, I don't know if he was asleep, needed contact lenses or something, I don't know, but he made a mess. But it's still there. There are nonsense readings in the manuscript tradition; they stay there, we still have them. That means the original readings are still there as well.

Now, are there times, are there a small number of places where we have to look at those variants and sometimes when it seems like the internal and external evidence is very, very close, should we not do exactly what modern Bible translators have done and put notes in the column that say, "Some early manuscripts say this, and some early manuscripts say this." Those of you who have ever heard me preach know that when I preach on something like that, I raise those issues. I don't believe that Christians should be "protected" from those things; because there's no reason to do so. That has been part and parcel of my emphasis all along. And so, do the original readings continue to exist to this day, that's the first question. And is the standard that is being presented this evening, reasonable? I submit to you that if your standard is that God is supposed to somehow strike scribes dead before they make a mistake, or somehow work some sort of miracle where they want to write one word, because they don't really know how to spell the word, and all of a sudden their hand is taken over and they're writing something else. I suggest to you that is unreasonable, it is not scholarly, there is no grounds for it, and I wasn't trying to lull you into not thinking by presenting to you a very different way of understanding how the New Testament has been preserved over time.

That will be the issue this evening. That is what we must look at. Where do these variants actually change the meaning of an entire book, do we believe in the tenacity of the original text, is it still there, and can we make it a reasonable thing to say, that if the New Testament was inspired, that somehow God must work a second kind of miracle where every scribe—even if he's huddled in fear of the Romans in the first few centuries, copying by candlelight on a scrap of papyrus—that somehow he must be transformed into a perfect dictation machine. I submit to you that was not the standard that even Jesus and the apostles used. Jesus and the apostles—look at the Gospels, what do they quote from? The vast majority of the time they quote from the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, not the Hebrew Old Testament and there are times when the New Testament writers actually quote textual variants between the Septuagint and the Hebrew. They didn't follow Dr. Ehrman's standard in regards to these things. The question this evening is: Why should we?

Many have been those—Tischendorf, just to name one, Dan Wallace, Moises Silva, Gordon Fee—who don't follow this idea that, well, you know, unless there's absolute perfection of copying, then we just don't know. This is a form of radical skepticism that would cause us to reject every other ancient work's accuracy as well. Do we really need to do that? I submit to you, we do not. Thank you very much.  
[applause]

## **Mike O'Fallon—Moderator**

Okay ladies and gentlemen, let me explain to you how this is going to be going. We're going to have two twenty-minute periods of cross-examination. During the first period of cross-examination, Dr. Bart Ehrman will be asking the questions of Dr. White. During that time, Dr. White can only answer the questions; he cannot ask his own questions. After that twenty minute period, we'll be then going to Dr. White; he'll be asking questions of Dr. Ehrman in the same fashion. After that time we'll have a very brief break, and then we'll go back into our time of final comments. Starting first tonight Dr. Bart Ehrman.

## **Affirmative Cross-Exam**

**Dr. Ehrman** Okay, thank you. Is this on, can you hear me okay? Hope you're all having as much fun as I am. [audience responds] Okay, James, thank you again. Very lively rebuttal. I have a number of questions, some of them can be answered very quickly, I think.

First, in your opening address, you said that there are only 1,500 to 2,000 viable differences among our manuscripts. Where did you get that number?

**Dr. White** I said viable and meaningful.

**Dr. Ehrman** Where did you get that number?

**Dr. White** I got that number from a number of studies by Dan Wallace, that examine both the issue of viability as far as the number of manuscripts behind a reading, as well as those that actually change the meaning. He has estimated—actually I went above his number—he's estimated 1,100 to 1,400 at that point I went above that number just simply so as to be careful.

**Dr. Ehrman** So this is Dan Wallace's opinion?

**Dr. White** I think Dan Wallace is an excellent scholar and he very regularly has accurate numbers; especially in material that—

**Dr. Ehrman** I'm just wondering how somebody knows that it's both viable and important. For example you don't think Mark 1:41 is important or that Hebrews 2:9—

**Dr. White** I never said that sir—

**Dr. Ehrman** Does he think those are important?

**Dr. White** We would both say those are important, sir.

**Dr. Ehrman** So those are included in the 1,500 to 2,000—

**Dr. White** They would be, yes, sir.

**Dr. Ehrman** It just seems like it's a little odd to come up with a number like that, that is probably more guesswork than anything, but okay. You say there are twelve manuscripts written within a century of the books of the New Testament. That's news to me, what are these twelve manuscripts?

**Dr. White** I'm not sure why that's news to you, sir, Dr. Wallace said the same thing to you at the Greer Heard Forum as well, in his opening statements, so I don't understand how that could be news. But if you would look, for example, at Phillip Comfort's *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary* and again since Dr. Wallace presented that to you—

**Dr. Ehrman** I'm asking what the manuscripts are.

**Dr. White** A whole list? Well, I can look one up for you—

**Dr. Ehrman** I know P52.

**Dr. White** Yes, there are a number of course—partly we—would be the issue of when we date those New Testament manuscripts—

**Dr. Ehrman** Yes, it would. That is my question—

**Dr. White** For example, P32 of Titus is quite possibly that early as well. If you want an entire list, I can look it up for you here; it will take me some time to get to it—

**Dr. Ehrman** I think the fact that Dan Wallace says something doesn't really make it so.

**Dr. White** I didn't say just Dan Wallace, I am reading something other than Dan Wallace in front of us here.

**Dr. Ehrman** Uh huh, P32 is dated to the year 200.

**Dr. White** Well, again, there are many people who believe that the numbers that are assigned in the back of Nestle-Aland are extremely conservative—

**Dr. Ehrman** I see.

**Dr. White** And obviously there are many—for example TCC—

**Dr. Ehrman** Conservative would mean that they're dated later than normal, or earlier? I don't understand.

**Dr. White** Being dated not as early as they could be.

**Dr. Ehrman** Well yeah, you could date anything to any date you want. But the question is what grounds do you—

**Dr. White**                    Actually, that's correct and are you familiar with T.C. Skeete's [uncertain of proper spelling of name] discussion of these concerns?

**Dr. Ehrman**                [chuckling] Yeah, I do know T.C. Skeete, yes.

**Dr. White**                    Okay, well, and you're aware of the fact that on a number of the papyri manuscripts listed in the Nestle-Aland text he would actually give an earlier—

**Dr. Ehrman**                Okay, let's talk about T.C. Skeete, when does he date P32?

**Dr. White**                    Well, again, I don't believe that he addressed P32 specifically, I believe that his was a manuscript of John that I was reading about, but are you not aware of the fact—

**Dr. Ehrman**                You're not supposed to be asking questions, I think.

**Dr. White**                    You're correct, that's right.

**Dr. Ehrman**                So, I think that this number twelve is exceedingly high, as is the number 200 within 300 years and so that's why I was just wondering—

**Dr. White**                    I'm sorry, 200 within 300 years?

**Dr. Ehrman**                You said that there were 200 manu—

**Dr. White**                    I said there were 120, sir.

**Dr. Ehrman**                Oh, 120?

**Dr. White**                    Yes.

**Dr. Ehrman**                That's still probably high. Let's go to this business with the Byzantine and Alexandrian texts; you said you weren't talking about manuscripts you were talking about—I believe you said—printed collation is that correct?

**Dr. White**                    Yes, sir.

**Dr. Ehrman**                Can you tell me what a collation is?

**Dr. White**                    Well, I was using the term there to speak of the collection of readings of a wide family of manuscripts into one representative text such as you have in the Majority Text. Or you had in that particular instance, the Westcott-Hort text. That's different from a collation of a specific manuscript where you take a base text and then you work through a particular manuscript providing every variation from that base text. Historically the TR has normally been used, but thankfully in recent years Codex Vaticanus has frequently been used as the base text for collation and things like that. So there's two different ways in which you—

**Dr. Ehrman** No, your latter definition is what a collation is, the other isn't a collation it's a printed text; which is quite different. But let's talk about collations for a second. Suppose you compared a collation of a Byzantine manuscript with an Alexandrian manuscript, you think you would get a 95% level of agreement?

**Dr. White** Of course not; I never even intimated such a—

**Dr. Ehrman** Okay, how high would the agreement be?

**Dr. White** Well again, as you pointed out in your Brill compilation, that you need to have about a 70% to assign a manuscript to a particular manuscript family, and so Byzantine text would fall into the 50%. However, that's not the assertion I was making—

**Dr. Ehrman** I understand your assertion, but now you're telling me that if you collate a Byzantine manuscript against an Alexandrian manuscript there'll be a 50% agreement?

**Dr. White** I'm really surprised that you're not following what I'm saying, sir, because obviously as you know, when you're talking about percentages of variation you're talking about not the total words in the manuscript and their readings—you're talking about the variations. I was talking about the total words, as I displayed before the people I was giving a computer render—

**Dr. Ehrman** Let me repeat my question. When you collate a Byzantine and Alexandrian manuscript, what is the level of agreement?

**Dr. White** On variants or words, sir?

**Dr. Ehrman** On words.

**Dr. White** Words and variants are two different things—

**Dr. Ehrman** I understand that, because in fact, you're the one who's talking about words as being 95% in agreement. I'm asking you, if you don't collate two texts—but you collate two manuscripts what is the level of agreement in the words?

**Dr. White** The words would, again, in a collation the percentage of difference is in the variants, not in the total words of the manuscript, sir. What I was presenting—

**Dr. Ehrman** Are you saying you don't know the answer?

**Dr. White** No, sir, I think your question is comparing apples and oranges.

**Dr. Ehrman** Okay, let me ask this: Have you ever collated a Byzantine manuscript?

**Dr. White** A Byzantine manuscript? No, sir, I have not.

**Dr. Ehrman** Okay, have you collated an Alexandrian manuscript?

**Dr. White** I have worked on sections in seminary, yes, sir.

**Dr. Ehrman** Have you collated an Alexandrian manuscript against a Byzantine manuscript?

**Dr. White** Using the TR? If you would call that—that's not even a Byzantine manuscript—so, I've never put B against a Medieval minuscule, no.

**Dr. Ehrman** Okay, well the reason it matters is because you were making a statement about Byzantine and Alexandrian texts.

**Dr. White** Yes, sir.

**Dr. Ehrman** But in fact, when you compare the manuscript with one another, this 95% agreement seems to me to be a somewhat specious number. Because in fact—

**Dr. White** Is that a question, sir?

**Dr. Ehrman** I'm getting there.

**Dr. White** Okay.

**Dr. Ehrman** Isn't that a specious number?

**Dr. White** No, sir, it's not because [Dr. Ehrman laughs] you seem to refuse to allow what I've presented to these people. I ask anyone in the audience, go get BibleWorks load Westcott and Hort, load the Majority Text, activate the module that compares them and see for yourself—

**Dr. Ehrman** But you're comparing printed texts!

**Dr. White** I said that in my presentation. I even stopped and said, "Now these are not manuscripts, these are printed texts."

**Dr. Ehrman** Yes, that's a very important distinction. I don't have a timer, how much time do we have?

**Dr. White** Twelve minutes.

**Dr. Ehrman** Oh, very good. Okay, let's see, so where do we want to go from there? Let's talk about your main point, which seems to be that the original text is preserved somewhere in the manuscript tradition that we have all these variants, and that in every case one of the variants is the original text. Is that your understanding?

**Dr. White** Yes. I believe in the tenacity of the text; that when we have a variant the reason that we can invest the time in looking into it is that one of the readings that is there is the original reading. I don't believe we need to engage in conjectural emendation, just simply to fill in gaps as we do with most classical works.

**Dr. Ehrman** Okay. And, why do you think this?

**Dr. White** Because that seems to be the conclusion of not only Kurt Aland—and an extensive discussion of that, I cited it in my opening statement—but that also seems to have been the belief of a large majority of the textual critical scholars down through the ages from Tischendorf onwards. Moises Silva, Dan Wallace and others have also nunciated the exact same things.

**Dr. Ehrman** So it's because authorities have told you this?

**Dr. White** Well and I also find it to be very consistent with my own study of the textual variations in the New Testament.

**Dr. Ehrman** Okay. Would you agree that Eldon Epp is probably the dean of textual criticism in America today?

**Dr. White** I think Eldon Epp, yourself, and D. C. Parker are probably the biggest names right now, unfortunately I would say that the perspective that you are now pursuing—and as you yourself have said the past 10-15 years—you've pretty much given up on working on the original texts, that's sort of been done—

**Dr. Ehrman** So, okay, so Epp in America, and Parker—he's English—and maybe Keith Elliot in England, he's a big name. How about in Germany, who would be the authorities now, living?

**Dr. White** With the Alands out of the picture—

**Dr. Ehrman** Barbara's still living.

**Dr. White** I'm sorry?

**Dr. Ehrman** Barbara's still living.

**Dr. White** Yeah, but I don't think she's publishing or anything, she's retired from the institute.

**Dr. Ehrman** Maybe Klaus Wachtel or Gerd Mink...

**Dr. White** Yes, well, I'm sorry I don't keep up with German textual criticism today.

**Dr. Ehrman** How about in France?

**Dr. White** I don't know anybody in France, sir.

**Dr. Ehrman** Probably Christian-Bernard Amphoux.

**Dr. White** Mm-hmm.

**Dr. Ehrman** These are the biggest name in the field: Epp, Parker, Elliot, Aland, Wachtel, Mink, Amphoux. So far as I know, none of them agree with you on this particular point about the preservation of the text.

**Dr. White** Aland doesn't, even though it's in the book?

**Dr. Ehrman** Who wrote that book?

**Dr. White** Kurt and Barbara Aland.

**Dr. Ehrman** Yeah, Kurt [Dr. Ehrman pronounces this "court" as opposed to Dr White's "curt"]. I don't know about Barbara Aland, but what do you think about the movement that Parker is especially driving, which states that in fact, it no longer makes sense to talk about "the original text?"

**Dr. White** I think it is an abandonment—I agree with Moises Silva's comments—you're familiar with those?

**Dr. Ehrman** Oh yeah.

**Dr. White** I agree with Moises Silva's comments in response to —specifically D. C. Parker—when, would you like me to read what he says or just—since you know it so well?

**Dr. Ehrman** We've got the time to kill, go ahead sure. [laughter]

**Dr. White** Actually, he says, "Nor do I find it helpful when David Parker, for example, sanctifies his proposals by a theological appeal to divinely inspired textual diversity, indeed textual confusion and contradiction that is supposed to be of greater spiritual value than apostolic authority." Actually his primary exhibit he gives in response to that is your book, *Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*. Where he says you cannot read a page—he says, "There is hardly a page in that book that does not in fact mention such a text or assume its accessibility," that is: the original. I'm not sure if you've changed your viewpoint since 1993, but Moises Silva certainly would seem to feel that if you now agree with Parker that you have.

**Dr. Ehrman** Yeah, I have changed my view a little bit, but my question is really about Parker. Why is it that David Parker thinks we can't get back to the original text?

**Dr. White** Well, there are a number of reasons, theological and genealogical. Obviously I have focused on his theological reason, in that he asserts that we have made an artificial distinction between text and tradition which I certainly would strongly disagree with. But, as you yourself have said, as far as the current state of manuscript tradition is concerned we're as far back as we can get. I think the term you used in an SBL article a few years ago was now we're just "tinkering," as far as that is concerned. And so apart

from some major find, a Dead Sea Scrolls level New Testament type of find, there tends to be a fair amount of skepticism of being able to get any farther back.

**Dr. Ehrman** Yeah, yeah, I agree with that. Can you tell me when I've got like a minute and a half left?

**Dr. White** Absolutely.

**Dr. Ehrman** So, yeah, well, let's approach this from a different angle. This business with P75 to B, a lot of people have used this and let me say, I know you keep saying I don't understand things, but you know, I understand them—I just don't buy them. And so let me tell you—let me ask you about this P75 to B. P75, say it was copied in the year 175 and say B was copied in the year 350 and that 350 is not a copy of P75, but it's very close to P75; that's an argument for showing that there is a consistent line of tradition—at least in that proto-Alexandrian line, right?

**Dr. White** Right.

**Dr. Ehrman** What is that—so the fact that somebody in the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century accurately copies the text. What does that tell you about somebody copying a text in the year 70?

**Dr. White** A number of things. What I was attempting to explain, and you may consider it bogus and dismiss it, it doesn't change the fact that what I was attempting to present was this issue of multiplicity and the multiple lines of transmission. That these two manuscripts are probably closer together than any other two manuscripts from that time period in their readings, and yet they are not in the same specific line of transmission.

**Dr. Ehrman** Oh no, that's incorrect! They're both proto-Alexandrian manuscripts, aren't they?

**Dr. White** As I put on the screen, sir, what I meant by that was P75 is not the direct ancestor—

**Dr. Ehrman** No, but they're still in the same line—they're so much in the same line of tradition that they're cousins virtually, aren't they?

**Dr. White** Okay, I'm attempting to answer but you're just arguing with my answer...

**Dr. Ehrman** But you're not seriously going to contend that P75 and B are not in the same line of tradition, are you?

**Dr. White** I obviously define the term "line" there as direct, lineal, genealogical, ancestor which I did in my opening statement as well. What I'm saying is, while they're both clearly proto-Alexandrian manuscripts, they're in the same stream, they represent two different lines within that stream because Sinaiticus—I mean Vaticanus—contains readings that are older than P75.

**Dr. Ehrman** Okay, let me ask this: How many genealogical, lineal manuscripts do we have related to one another?

**Dr. White** Gene—I don't even understand—

**Dr. Ehrman** Well you just said that they're not in a lineal genealogical line with each other; in other words, one is not a copy of another.

**Dr. White** Exactly, P75—

**Dr. Ehrman** How many copies of other manuscripts do we actually have?

**Dr. White** All I said, sir, is that P75 is not what was copied to make Vaticanus. I do not have any other way of expressing the statement—

**Dr. Ehrman** I'm asking how many copies of manuscripts do we have? In other words, where we have the original, and the copy?

**Dr. White** You mean, where we absolutely know which one was copied from which?

**Dr. Ehrman** You're saying B is not a copy of P75—

**Dr. White** Because it contains different—more ancient—readings.

**Dr. Ehrman** Yes, I got that. So, but I'm wondering if that's usual or unusual. Do we have copies of manuscripts in the tradition?

**Dr. White** We don't have—the only thing I can think that you're asking is something like 1739 where we know something about the nature and origination of what it is a copy of or even Bezae or something like that, but very rarely do we know the exact lineal parent of any manuscript in the first thousand years.

**Dr. Ehrman** Exactly, so the fact that they aren't—one isn't the copy of the other—is in fact, completely normal, right, because we don't have copies.

**Dr. White** Yes, sir.

**Dr. Ehrman** But they are so closely related that they're in the same line of tradition, of course?

**Dr. White** Yes.

**Dr. Ehrman** Okay, good. What then, does the fact that B is close to P75 but not a copy of P75, B copied in the year 350, say? What does that tell us about copying practices in the year 70?

**Dr. White** I said what it does is demonstrate that the onus is upon the skeptic to assert that there is corruption in the primitive period. Because since we have multiple lines coming out of the early period, and yet it is the same New Testament that if there was

some kind of primitive corruption you would have multiple corrupted lines coming out that vary massively from one another and that is not the case.

**Dr. Ehrman** Oh, oh, that's not the case? So you said that in seminary you did some collations of early manuscripts, tell me how did the early manuscripts stack up against each other in comparison with the later manuscripts?

**Dr. White** As I've said in my published works, the vast majority of meaningful and viable variants take place within the first 250, 300 years of the transmission history of the New Testament; that's a given.

**Dr. Ehrman** Yeah, let me reword it. If you compared two Byzantine late manuscripts to one another—

**Dr. White** Of course.

**Dr. Ehrman** Will they agree a lot or not very often?

**Dr. White** Well of course, the variations between a 14<sup>th</sup> century Byzantine minuscules are almost totally based upon scribes falling asleep, or slapping a bug while they're writing—

**Dr. Ehrman** What about the early manuscripts?

**Dr. White** The early manuscripts, because as I said in my opening presentation, they're being done in a very different period of time where very rarely did Christians have access to scriptoriums or things like that, because of persecution taking place, the destruction of texts and things like that; there is a much wider variation between them.

**Dr. Ehrman** So the earlier the manuscript, the more differences there are between them?

**Dr. White** As P72 demonstrates, these men were not, by and large—well P75 is different but P62, P66—these were not professional scribes.

**Mike O'Fallon** One Minute.

**Dr. White** I'm sorry?

**Mike O'Fallon** One Minute.

**Dr. White** Oh, I'm sorry.

**Dr. Ehrman** So let me just say—the point is the earlier you go, the more different they are. So you just extrapolate that the earliest were probably the most different. Let me ask about P72 where you resonate with this particular text, you said, that has 2 Peter and Jude in it. What other documents are found in P72?

**Dr. White** There's some non-canonical documents in P72. My recollection was that 1,2 Peter and Jude were the only canonical documents in it.

**Dr. Ehrman** Right, so I'm just wondering about you resonating with this document. Do you think this scribe thought that what he was copying was scripture?

**Dr. White** Well, I don't think that you can simply jump to the conclusion that because scribes included books in a single codex that meant that they believed that everything in that codex was necessarily Scripture. There are all sorts of works that were considered to be very beneficial for the reading of people that were included in codices that were not necessarily canonical.

**Dr. Ehrman** Yeah, I just thought that it was odd that that particular manuscript was one that you resonate with because it's the earliest attestation we have of the Protoevangelion Jacobi.

**Mike O'Fallon** Time

**Dr. Ehrman** Okay. Thank you.

### **Mike O'Fallon—Moderator**

Now Dr. White has twenty minutes for cross-examination.

### **Negative Cross-Exam**

**Dr. White** Dr. Ehrman, you said in your rebuttal that P52 contains a major—I believe it was, you can correct me, please, if I was wrong—a major textual variant that changes the meaning of the text. Do you have access to a textual variant there that is not listed in the Nestle-Aland text?

**Dr. Ehrman** It's the restoration in the *lacuna*, as Metzger points out in his manuscripts of the New Testament of the absence of the words *eis touto* before *elalutho*. And there are a couple of other variants; I mean there's a full discussion of it in Metzger's book on the Manuscripts of the New Testament.

**Dr. White** And you would consider this to completely change the meaning of the text?

**Dr. Ehrman** No.

**Dr. White** Okay, all right.

**Dr. Ehrman** It changes the meaning of the text. I think anybody who thinks that the words of the New Testament are inspired has to think that that words matter. And so if the words change, that matters.

**Dr. White** All right, Dr. Ehrman, since you disagreed with—evidently—Kurt Aland on the issue of tenacity; could you list for us some variations in the New Testament where you are willing to assert that **none** of the extant readings in the manuscript tradition could possibly be the original?

**Dr. Ehrman** No, I think there's always a possibility; it's not a question of possibility, it's a question of probability. Of course anything could possibly have been original. The original author might have written nonsense—I mean why not, it's possible—and then later scribes might have corrected that nonsense. So one has to weigh probability. It's interesting that Westcott and Hort, the two giants in this field in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were quite insistent that most of the text of the New Testament was preserved in Codex Vaticanus and yet they resorted to conjectural emendation on a large number of occasions.

If you want an example, if you want just one example—I mean I don't know how much sense it will make in English but—one common one that my teacher Bruce Metzger used to talk about as being possibly a strong case for emendation is 1 Peter 3:19. Which follows a creedal statement about Christ, the Greek text—well I guess I'd better read it in English—says “Christ suffered for sins once and for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order that He might lead us—lead you (textual variant there)—to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but having been made alive in the spirit,” and then the next verse says, “*en ho kai tois en phulake pneumasin poreutheis ekeruxen*,” “In which also He preached, having gone to—having gone forth He preached to the spirits who are in prison.”

Boyer and others including Harris have those emendations at this point because—well for grammatical reasons—but also because they think that in fact it might be a mistake, that in fact this is talking about the old early Christian tradition about Enoch who was preaching—the preaching of Enoch according to some of the Apocryphal materials. So, I mean, it strikes me that that's a plausible place where they might—you might need an emendation.

**Dr. White** So, what percentage do you believe of the New Testament is impacted by viable, meaningful textual variants?

**Dr. Ehrman** I've never put a percentage on something like that, because I'm not sure that a percentage actually means anything. I mean, for example, if I speak a sentence in a hundred words, and I change only one of the words, but the word that I change is whether I say the word “not” or not, the entire sentence is reversed in meaning. But it would only be a 1% change [laughing] but it would be really important; so I don't think percentages—I've never really tried to calculate percentages because I don't think they matter.

**Dr. White** You have often said that there are verses where variants change the meaning of an entire book. Could you give us some examples?

**Dr. Ehrman** A verse changing an entire book? Yeah, sure. I think that—I actually do think that Hebrews 2:9 said that Jesus died apart from God, that there's no place in Hebrews, then, where Jesus is said to have died by the grace of God. And that the meaning now—I think—a root [uncertain of preceding word] for Hebrews means that Jesus died like a full flesh and blood human being, without any Divine comfort or support.

If the reading is not "*choris theou*" but "*charis theou*" that He did by the grace—*chariti theou*—died by the grace of God, then in fact you do have the teaching that Jesus' death was an act of divine grace in Hebrews, which otherwise you do not have.

**Dr. White** And yet when you argued that point in *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, did you not argue that "*choris theou*" is consistent with the theology of Hebrews?

**Dr. Ehrman** Yeah, the variant changes it.

**Dr. White** How can you argue that it is consistent with the theology of Hebrews if—

**Dr. Ehrman** I'm not saying *choris*, I'm saying *charis*—depending on which variant you have, the meaning of the book changes.

**Dr. White** So, nowhere else in the book do you have this idea of Jesus' death that would be presented in Hebrews 2:9, based upon reading one 10<sup>th</sup> century manuscript and Origen's manuscripts, at least some of Origen's manuscripts. You said the majority, but I don't know where Origen actually said that.

**Dr. Ehrman** I'm sorry I don't understand your question.

**Dr. White** So, your assertion, then, is that the Book of Hebrews would not present that view of the atonement of Jesus unless you have that reading in Hebrews 2:9; elsewhere it just doesn't—

**Dr. Ehrman** Nowhere else does Hebrews say that Jesus died by the grace of God. This is the one place.

**Dr. White** I understand that, but you believe that the original is *choris* because that is consistent with the writing of Hebrews—with the theology of Hebrews.

**Dr. Ehrman** That's right, and the variant changes that.

**Dr. White** Away from it; okay, I understand what you're saying.

On the *Unbelievable?* radio program in London, you discuss the length of time that exists between the writing of Paul's letter to the Galatians and the first extant copy, that

being 150 years. You describe this time period as “enormous,” that’s a quote. Could you tell us what term you would use to describe the time period between, say, the original writings of Suetonius or Tacitus or Pliny, and their first extant manuscript copies.

**Dr. Ehrman** Very enormous.

**Dr. White** So *ginormous* would be a good one?

**Dr. Ehrman** Ginormous.

**Dr. White** Ginormous, okay.

**Dr. Ehrman** Ginormous doesn’t cover it. The New Testament we have much earlier attestation than for any other book or manuscript would be. What you can’t do is, then say, “Well, then you can’t trust any book from antiquity.” Okay? Yes, right. That’s right.

**Dr. White** So, it would be correct to write a book called *Misquoting Seutonium*?

**Dr. Ehrman** Absolutely! Scholars do this.

**Dr. White** And—

**Dr. Ehrman** Scholars write books all the time about how you don’t know the word—what Plato actually wrote, or what Homer wrote, or Suetonius, or Tacitus, Euripides—this is just what scholars do. Of course; there are scads of books on just these topics.

**Dr. White** And so, when you cite them in your works, you will say, “According to the best sources, and we’ll question the reliability of Suetonius or the Gospel of Thomas—”

**Dr. Ehrman** There is no—there is no scholar who is an expert in Suetonius or Cicero or the Gospel of Thomas who would tell you that we absolutely know what these texts originally said.

**Dr. White** So, when they—when you—say you know what these texts originally said, but they will believe that we have a sufficiently clear knowledge to quote Suetonius; you quote Suetonius, don’t you?

**Dr. Ehrman** Yes, of course I quote the manuscript tradition of Suetonius. I mean, it’s just understood among scholars what you’re quoting.

**Dr. White** And so you say in your books, “I’m not really quoting Suetonius, I’m just—this isn’t really what he said?”

**Dr. Ehrman** I’m saying that we don’t have the original text for any writing from the ancient world; the New Testament is no different. Just as you can’t establish the original text of the New Testament because you don’t have sufficient evidence, you can’t establish the original text of Suetonius because you don’t have the original—for some of these authors, the manuscript tradition is pathetic. I mean, for some very important works

from antiquity we have one manuscript that's a palimpsest. And so, yes, absolutely we have the same problem. And when you say that, "Well nobody goes on about the Gospel of Thomas"—absolutely wrong. Scholars of the Gospel of Thomas talk about this all the time. I mean, this is a major issue of scholarship.

**Dr. White** I'm sorry, I didn't say that they don't discuss such things, but, anyway. Peter Williams of Cambridge suggested that if you were to edit an edition of the Greek New Testament using all of your own decisions regarding textual variants, that it would differ less than from the Nestle-Aland/UBS platform than the Textus Receptus does. Would you agree?

**Dr. Ehrman** Yes.

**Dr. White** So you would say, if you included all of your own readings, such as depending on Codex Bezae and Mark 1:41 for the reading of anger, would you put that in your text?

**Dr. Ehrman** Yeah, I would.

**Dr. White** Okay. And yet the resultant text would be less different than the King James is from the New American Standard, if it was translated?

**Dr. Ehrman** I'm sorry, you lost me there, because I thought we were talking about Greek...

**Dr. White** Well, yes, but I'm trying to give an illustration to the people in the audience. The King James is translated from the TR, the New American Standard is translated from the NA27—or actually NA25, I think the last one was, or 26—but the point is, that the differences in readings would be less than you have if you're sitting there with a King James verses a New American Standard. Would that be correct?

**Dr. Ehrman** I don't know. I've never actually thought about it. I mean it seems to me it would make a big difference whether you wanted to say Jesus got angry at a leper or whether He loved him. I mean, it seems pretty significant.

**Dr. White** Okay, and looking at that particular one, you do believe that *orgestheis* is the original there?

**Dr. Ehrman** That's right.

**Dr. White** Would you comment on what has been said by Dr. Parker, for example, where he says the more he studied Codex Bezae Cantabriginesis the more he's become convinced that its unique readings, especially when they're alone, are insignificant if you're searching for the original reading. Or Dr. Aland's assertion that any of the readings of Bezae when they do not have earlier attestation should be looked at somewhat askance.

**Dr. Ehrman** Yeah, well Aland doesn't like Codex Bezae; Parker loves Codex Bezae, but he does have a suspicion about it. But I believe Parker agrees with me on Mark 1:41, doesn't he?

**Dr. White** I have no idea what he says about 1:41, he didn't comment on it in Codex Bezae—in his book on it.

**Dr. Ehrman** Yeah, I know, it's a great book; but I think he agrees with me on Mark 1:41

**Dr. White** However, is it not true that Scrivener, Metzger—in the book you have right there—in commenting on Bezae, they all recognize that Codex Bezae is incredibly free in its—

**Dr. Ehrman** Oh yeah, no, I think so too. I think that a lot of it's in fact very strange indeed. It shows that how early manuscripts differ so widely from one another, and this is a case in point.

**Dr. White** So, if Codex Bezae has all sorts of commentary, the number of steps Paul stepped down, the timeframe he lectured in Acts, all these things are added; why wouldn't it be more likely, given that there is no earlier manuscript support for that reading, that the writer of Codex D saw the very same strong language that you yourself have pointed to in your argumentation—He casts him out, He strongly upbraids him—and made a change as he did in so many other places and in his writings—

**Dr. Ehrman** Yeah, that's a standard argument. That's what people have said for years. I disagree with it, I think that in fact on internal grounds, there's solid reasons for thinking that it was *orgestheis*. My principle reasoning has nothing to do with the value of Codex Bezae, as you probably know, you've read my articles on it; I assume you've read my article on Mark 1:41—

**Dr. White** I have.

**Dr. Ehrman** So that is, it's not—Codex Bezae is to some extent, neither here nor there. It provides us with a reading, but it isn't the strong argument for the reading being original.

**Dr. White** Okay, and would that be one of the readings that you feel changes the entire meaning of a book?

**Dr. Ehrman** Well, no, I wouldn't put it that way with that reading; I would say that reading provides a different nuance. Jesus gets angry a couple times in the Gospel of Mark and it's interesting to try and see why He gets angry in the Gospel of Mark, and this would be another place where He gets angry in Mark. I mean it struck most scribes as a little bit odd for Him to get angry at this point, I mean this leper comes up and wants to be healed, and it says, "Jesus got angry," and so that's a little hard to figure out. No wonder they changed it to, "He felt compassion for the man." It makes sense that they would make the change. But, in fact, it probably said, "He got angry," and then the task of the exegete—the interpreter—is to try and make sense of why it is, now it says, "Jesus got

angry,” when this leper approached Him. So it changes the meaning of the book to the extent that it gives you a fuller understanding of why Jesus gets angry, in the Gospel of Mark—by the way, He doesn’t get angry in Matthew or Luke.

**Dr. White** When you repeatedly say that we don’t know what the original writings of the New Testament said, given that there are entire sections of text where there is no variation, basically at all, would you agree that we know what those sections of the New Testament said?

**Dr. Ehrman** Okay, let me explain why; because I don’t think I’ve explained it very well. Let’s say Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians, and they got a copy. And then somebody made a copy of that original, and made a couple of mistakes. And then somebody copied that copy and made a few mistakes. And then the original was lost, and the first copy was lost. And then all other manuscripts ultimately derive from that third copy; in other words that third copy—the original wasn’t copied anymore, the first copy wasn’t copied anymore, the second copy was copied twice and both of those was copied five times, then each of those were copied twenty times, then each of those—so that they all go back in a genealogical line to the third copy, rather than to the original. All you can reconstruct is what was in the third copy. And all manuscripts when they agree 95% of the time or whatever number you want to put on it, when they agree 95% that just shows that they all go back to that copy. It doesn’t show that they go back to the original.

**Dr. White** And so, this kind of perspective—I want to make sure we’re all understanding exactly what you’re saying—this is why you would say that if anything was ever inspired, in essence we’d have to have the original for it to be inspired?

**Dr. Ehrman** No, I told you long ago that this was not going to be a debate about my doctrine of inspiration. I’m not saying anything has to be one way or the other. God could have inspired the originals and then decided to let scribes change the originals. God could have inspired all of the textual variants. If you’re saying it’s impossible then—when you’re talking about God, nothing is impossible. The church father Origen maintained that all of the textual variants were inspired by God—that He inspired the scribes. So, well, that’s perfectly fine, if that’s what you want to think. I simply don’t think so. My view is that if God wanted us to have His words, He wouldn’t have allowed His words to be changed so that we don’t know what the words were.

**Dr. White** So, the standard, then, that would have to exist for you to have maintained the position that you held, would have been either the originals or some perfect copy thereof?

**Dr. Ehrman** Why would God not allow the originals to be preserved? I used to ask myself that question. I mean, if He inspired Mark to write down this book, why wouldn’t He let it—I mean it wouldn’t be impossible for it to be preserved, there are other books that are

preserved that long—why wouldn't He tell Christians, you know, keep that book so that you have something to judge the copies by. But He didn't do that. We don't have the original. So it made me suspect that maybe God wasn't that interested in giving us His words. If He was, why didn't He give them to us? That was my question.

**Dr. White** So, clearly that's not the perspective of the apostles themselves, who themselves did not have access to any originals of the Old Testament, and yet they quoted freely from the Old Testament based upon even translations of the Old Testament—

**Dr. Ehrman** That's not—it was not their view.

**Dr. White** I'm sorry? "That is not their view?"

**Dr. Ehrman** That's right, it was not their view, no.

**Dr. White** Right, so as you are thinking about this, then—

**Dr. Ehrman** I should say, though, when they quote the Old Testament it is a very interesting thing, because they quote it in different forms. And in the form they quote it often is not the form that we have it. Matthew, for example, quotes the Old Testament sometimes, he would give a quotation of Scripture that you can't find in the Bible [laughs]. Why is that? Because he had a different form than we have.

**Dr. White** So, to apply your standard, then, how could there have been any revelation given without the ability for perfect copying down through the ages?

**Dr. Ehrman** They didn't have to be perfectly copied. God could have just preserved the originals.

**Dr. White** So if there is any claimed Scripture from antiquity that does not have the originals—the Qur'an has textual variations in it—they can't possibly come from God, then?

**Dr. Ehrman** I'm not drawing that theological conclusion. And I don't really appreciate you likening me to a Muslim.

**Dr. White** I didn't.

**Dr. Ehrman** Both in your speech and just now. I'm not making any stand about the Qur'an; I don't know anything about the Qur'an. I'm simply making a very basic point. And I'm not making this as a normative point for everybody; I'm saying for me it doesn't make sense to say that God inspired the words because He wanted us to have His words, if He didn't give us His words. We don't have His Word because the originals don't exist and accurate copies don't exist. There are places where we don't know what the originals even said.

**Dr. White** So, your standard for accurate copy is perfection, is it not?

**Dr. Ehrman** Perfection. I think if I copied the word *ego*, and instead of writing *ego*, I write *autos*, then in fact that is an imperfect copy. A perfect copy would be a copy that copied *ego* as *ego*.

### **Mike O'Fallon—Moderator**

Thank you, Dr. Ehrman and Dr. White, for this engaging cross-examination period. [applause] Dr. Ehrman now has 10 minutes for his final statement.

### **Final Statement—Dr. Bart Ehrman**

Well, thank you very much; I've enjoyed very much this lively exchange. I hope you have as well. So, one of my tasks as a teacher at a research university, is when I teach my undergraduate students I try to teach them to think. And I try to force them to think. I try to force them to think logically. I try to get them to accept points of view not because some authority has told them these points of view, but because they've seen the power of the arguments themselves. The arguments are much more important than the people who make them, in my opinion. And so it is with what has turned into the key argument in this debate.

How do we know that we have the original text among the hundreds of thousands of variations that are found in the textual tradition of the New Testament? Kurt and Barbara Aland's book indicated that in fact the original text is always preserved somewhere among our variants, so we can rest assured that we have the original. But is this a view that makes logical sense? That's the question. Scholars have gotten away from thinking this. If you do like authority, then let me tell you the authorities for the other side. It is virtually every scholar who is actively pursuing this in the field, except for a few Evangelical scholars. Now why would this be a theological point of view? Isn't this a historical question? Why is it that only people of a certain theological persuasion would take a certain historical view? Do they have some kind of theological reason for wanting this to be true? If they have a theological reason, fair enough. But what is the logic behind it?

The situation is the one that I outlined a minute ago. When Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians, he wrote a letter that was sent through the ancient equivalent of the ancient mail. Paul did not know he was writing the Bible, and the people who got the book didn't know they were receiving the Bible. It was a *letter*, sent from one Christian authority to other Christians. They read the letter, probably some of them liked it, a couple of them probably didn't like it, somebody decided to copy it. Well they copied it and they didn't know they were copying the Bible; they were just copying a letter. And somebody else copied that copy, and somebody else copied that copy, and of course there are multiple lines of tradition. Absolutely, I've spent a good part of my career on this talking about the multiple lines of tradition that come away from the book of Philippians and all of the other books. Various copies are made, many of them different—they all differ from one another—and then those things were copied and copies were copied all over the place.

The originals were lost, the first copies were lost, the copies of the copies were lost, and the copies of the copies of the copies were lost. What guarantee is it that the entire tradition goes back to some kind of original rather than to a copy? What's the argument for that? What's the logic behind that? Most scholars today simply don't see that as a tenable point of view. That's why leading scholars in America, England, Germany, France, everywhere where textual criticism is done—that's why the leading scholars in this field (by whom I mean people who go to the Society of Biblical Literature and read papers on the topic and who go to the international meetings and who are members of the Society of New Testament Studies) the people who do this for a living—that's why there is a very strong movement away from even talking about the original text.

If you think God inspired the originals, why don't you have the originals? And why is it that we don't know what the originals said in places? The differences in these manuscripts do matter. It does matter whether the Gospel of John calls Jesus *ho monogenes theos*, "the Unique God." That's very different from that saying Jesus is divine; if Jesus is *the* Unique God, well, that's a very high statement that you find nowhere else in the Bible.

Well, did he say it or not? It depends on which manuscript you read. Is the doctrine of the Trinity explicitly talked about in the Bible? It seems to me that should matter. Well, it depends which manuscript you read. I know that James has dealt with these issues in his writings. It doesn't, though, mean that they're not important issues. When Jesus was going to His death in the Gospel of Luke did He become so distressed that He began to sweat drops as if of blood (the passage that we get the term "sweating blood" from)? It depends which manuscript you read, and it matters a lot to your understanding of Luke's gospel, whether Jesus went through that experience or not.

Did the voice at Jesus' baptism in Luke's gospel say that on *that day* of His baptism is when God adopted Him to be His Son? "You are my Son, *today* I have begotten you." Depends which manuscript you read and it matters a lot. I understand the arguments of people like James and Dan Wallace, but sometimes, you know, they don't make sense to me, even though I intellectually understand them. Dan Wallace, whom he keeps quoting, insists that in fact differences don't matter in the manuscript. Well if the differences don't matter, why is it that he is undertaking a major project dealing with Greek manuscripts—a project that is going to cost hundreds of thousands of dollars?

If the differences don't matter, what does he tell these people that he's trying to raise money from? Well, we'd like you to donate \$50,000 to our cause because the differences don't matter. Of course they matter! And if they don't matter, it is shameful to be spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on this in a world where people are starving to death if the differences don't matter. Well, the differences do matter, in my opinion.

One issue that has continually come up, not from me, is the issue of preservation. And James has, I think, fairly asked why is it that every time I talk about textual criticism the issue of preservation comes up; and my view of inspiration comes up. The reason it comes up every time is for the same reason it came up this time: It wasn't an issue that I raise; it was an issue that James raised. And when I had my interview with Pete Williams on London radio a few weeks ago, it was an issue that Pete Williams

wanted to talk about. And when it was an issue at the debate in New Orleans with Dan Wallace, it was an issue that Dan Wallace wanted to talk about. This is not an issue that I am really all that hot and bothered about. I simply talk about it at the beginning and ending of my book because it's the issue that at one time made me interested in knowing: Do we have the original text?

I wanted to know that because I was a Bible-believing Evangelical Christian who believed that God had given us the words of the text, and I became bothered by the fact that it appeared we didn't have them. And so that's what got me interested, it's what made it interesting to me at the time. Well, I think it's an issue that continues to be interesting. I raise it, though, simply as an issue I'm interested in, not as something I'm that interested in debating about. You can have your own view of inspiration, and I'm happy to tell you mine. My view is that if God wanted you to have His words, He would have given you His words. He didn't give you His words because His words, in places, are not preserved. So why do you think He inspired the words in the first place? That's my point of view.

James wants to talk about this as some kind of hard core standard that I have to apply across the board, and with respect to—for example—the Qur'an. I don't know anything about the Qur'an, I don't know very much at all about Islam, I'm not connected with Muslim apologists, that he's in contact with. I do know that they use my work, and I'm sorry that—if people don't appreciate the fact that they use my work. It's not really my fault, I haven't given my work to anybody, I simply write the books and let people read the books. The books, in fact, make very different points from—points about inspiration. The books make points about whether we have the original text of the New Testament. Our topic of debate was: "Does the Bible (or Did the Bible) Misquote Jesus?" And the answer is yes.

Remember that for most of history, the Bible was not the printed edition that you read today. For most Christians throughout history, the Bible was whatever manuscript happened to be available to them; what manuscript was available to the Christians and their churches. All of these manuscripts have mistakes in them; including mistakes in the words of Jesus. All Bibles misquote Jesus.

Thank you.

### **Mike O'Fallon—Moderator**

Thank you, Dr. Ehrman. Now Dr. White will give his closing arguments.

### **Final Statement—Dr. James White**

First of all, let me thank you all very much for being here this evening. I would like to thank those who have made it possible for us to have this encounter. Mike O'Fallon, of course, is primarily responsible for bringing us together. There have been many others. Rich Pierce back in Phoenix; some of you who are here: Alan Kurschner, down here. Someone who's not with us this evening: Rosie Moskerelli [uncertain spelling] who has been very helpful to me in preparation for this debate. Many have made it possible for us to be here, and I hope you have found it to be a scintillating discussion.

I believe that people will be amazed at comparing what I specifically and clearly said and what Dr. Ehrman has represented me as saying, especially on specific issues this evening. That's why I hope people will go back and they will listen again, and again, and again, and check the facts for themselves.

We were just told that scholars are getting away from this; yes, postmodernism is creeping in. I think it is a tragedy, there are many who have spoken out against it, but I would like to point out to you I am not one of those people that believes in authorities. If you were in Germany back in the 1800's you would have believed on the basis of authority that John was a 2<sup>nd</sup> century document, written toward the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century around 170. If you would have believed even what Dr. Ehrman believes about the dating of John back then, they would have laughed at you as being out of step with modern scholarship. Then, this little manuscript P52 comes along and all of sudden we have a bit of a problem.

Dr. Ehrman says, "Well, some evangelicals—they've got their theological reasons." I would like to submit to you that everybody has their theological reasons. Even those who call themselves "happy agnostics" still have a theological set of presuppositions whether they know those presuppositions are there or not. What is the logic of believing we have the New Testament? It is the logic that Tischendorf and many others have accepted all along. That is, if there was that major corruption in that earlier period, why do we have only one New Testament text coming out? Are there variants? Yes! But is it still the same text? Is it still Philippians, is it still Galatians, is it still the presentation of the same theology? Yes, it is. No one questions that. In fact, in the paperback edition of Dr. Ehrman's book, he says, "The position I argued for in *Misquoting Jesus* does not actually stand at odds with Professor Metzger's position: That the essential Christian beliefs are not affected by textual variants in the manuscript tradition of the New Testament."

What he means by that, I think, is that even if one or two passages that are used to argue for a belief have a different textual reading, there are still other passages that could be used to argue for the same belief. For the most part, I think that's true. And so we need to understand, that when Dr. Ehrman talks about changes, scribes changing things, we don't know what the original text was, the standard that is being used is *not* the standard that has been used down through the centuries; because to adopt that standard means that we have to become ultra-skeptical about everything that happened before at least the printing press and even then, I would argue, into the modern era.

I don't think that there is any logic in that, I don't think there's any logic in looking at the manuscript tradition and saying, "Yeah, this extremely unified manuscript tradition going back closer than anything else we have clearly demonstrates that we don't have any idea what it originally said." That is not what the vast majority of people have come to, and whether postmodernism takes us there or not, I don't know.

I never compared Dr. Ehrman to a Muslim, anyone who goes back and listens can tell that. All I was saying was this: It is a documented fact that there are textual variants in the manuscripts of the Qur'an, therefore, logically if you apply Dr. Ehrman's standards he would have to be able to write a book called *Misquoting Mohammad*. That's all I was saying. That would be true of everyone in the ancient world. So why does *Misquoting Jesus* wind up on *The New York Times' Bestseller List*? I think it's because we live in an age where many people are looking for a reason not to believe. That is why.

A few weeks ago I debated Dr. Zulfiqar Ali Shah, an Islamic scholar and apologist at Duke University. The subject was a comparison of the Bible and the Qur'an. Two of the four books on Dr. Shah's desk were by: Dr. Bart Ehrman. At one point Dr. Shah informed us that all we had for the New Testament were

copies of copies of copies; I had to smile. If you listen to men like Richard Dawkins or Christopher Hitchens, you will often hear Dr. Ehrman's name cited as the final authority in the scholarly demonstration of the corruption and other unreliability of the New Testament. I don't think either man really has a clue what Bart is actually talking about, but that does not stop them from invoking his authority.

A few years ago, my daughter ran into an anti-Christian zealot teaching in the Phoenix area, Lee Carter, who in the midst of giving the highly scholarly advice to "Google the authorship of the Gospels," invoked Dr. Ehrman's name as part of his anti-Christian diatribe as well. I do not believe Dr. Carter has any meaningful understanding of the field of textual criticism, but he is representative of many in academia today, who are more than happy to blast the New Testament and smugly proclaim to 18-year olds that, "Scholars have proven it to be an unreliable document."

Bart Ehrman cannot control the use of his words. As far as any of these have misused his comments, the responsibility lies with them. But the fact is, Dr. Ehrman has had many opportunities to correct these misapprehensions and strangely, he doesn't. I have listened to NPR interviews where the interviewer is going on and on and on, and instead of correcting their many misapprehensions, Dr. Ehrman allows them to go on, unchallenged. The fact of the matter is, if you are going to tell people repeatedly that we don't know what the New Testament originally said, while at the same time you admit that the manuscript tradition of the New Testament is earlier, fuller, and better than any other relevant ancient document, then you need to be fair and honest and balanced and at least inform you listeners that the majority of those who have studied this field believe the original readings do continue to exist—at least up until postmodernism—in the manuscript tradition to our day, even in the relatively small number of viable, meaningful variants. To do otherwise is to use bare sensationalism; and such is unworthy of this important topic.

At the same time, there is a vital need for education amongst believing Christians, about the history and transmission of the text of the Bible. I have been beating this drum since the mid-1980's so I can at least honestly claim consistency here. The Christian ignorant of the history of this sacred text is the Christian who will be shocked at the mere presentation of historical facts and who will then easily follow false lines of reasoning to faithless conclusions.

The history of the Bible, including a serious dose of basic textual critical principles should be part and parcel of our most basic instruction for those new in the faith. This is especially true in regards to our young people. We send them off to university with almost no foundation upon which to stand, and when then they end up in Bart Ehrman's New Testament introduction class—they need to hear about John 7:53-8:11 (the woman taken in adultery) and the longer ending of Mark in the community of faith first, a Christian with a sound, balanced understanding of how ancient documents were transmitted, and how God preserved the text by having it explode around the Mediterranean so that no one could ever control its text and alter its message—will not be moved by the observation that the *Pericope Adulterae* is not original. The weapons used against the faith in this instance are provided by ourselves when we refuse to educate our own people on these matters.

As I said in my opening this evening: you have heard from two men, who upon studying the same materials have come to polar opposite conclusions. One has seen in the lack of the original copies of the Scriptures together with his difficulties with the problem of evil, an end of faith. The other has found in those same materials the plain evidence of God's providence and concern for His people, and the words contained in the Scriptures a compelling, satisfying, soul-anchoring assurance of His purposes in creation including the existence of evil and of redemption in Christ. It is truly my hope this evening that you have been able to see that there is a consistent, sound, compelling answer to be offered to the skepticism of Bart Ehrman, and that this evening's encounter will spur the Christian on to deeper study of the great heritage of faith found in the Christian Scriptures. And if you come this evening skeptical about the reliability of the New Testament, I trust that you will dig deeper and ask yourself if you are really able to embrace the kind of radical skepticism that would require you to abandon any reasonable certainty of history itself, to an unreasonable and unworkable standard of knowledge.

The Bible does not misquote Jesus: Textual variants are not misquotations. Instead, we have seen that the Bible gives us every reason to believe we know what the apostles taught, what Jesus proclaimed, and as a result each of us by God's grace has access to His life giving Gospel.

Thank you for your time and for your hearing this evening. [applause]