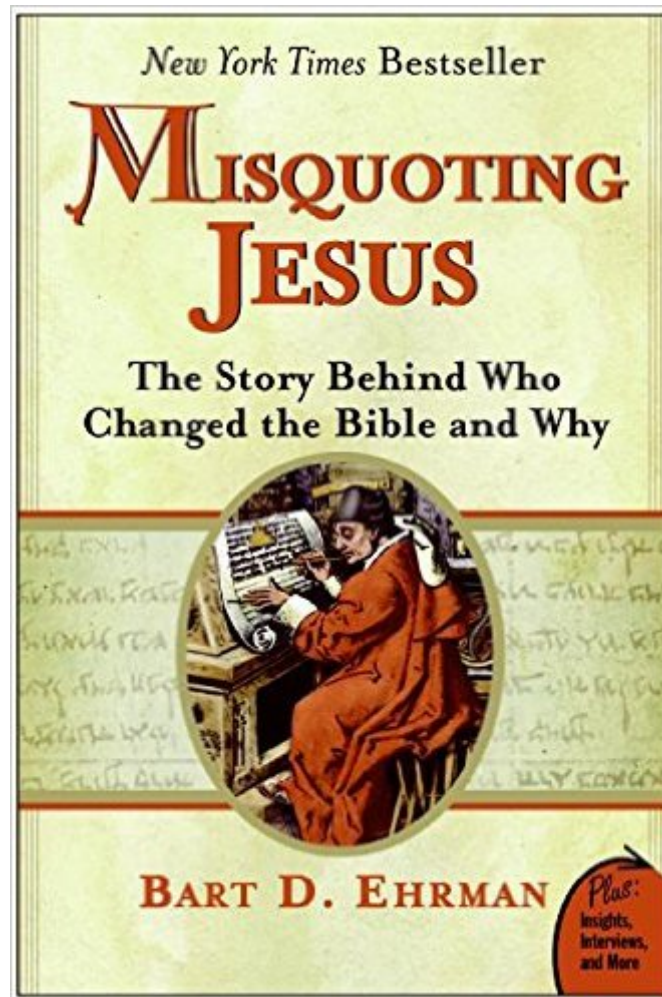


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Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed The Bible And Why



Synopsis

For almost 1,500 years, the New Testament manuscripts were copied by hand “and mistakes and intentional changes abound in the competing manuscript versions. Religious and biblical scholar Bart Ehrman makes the provocative case that many of our widely held beliefs concerning the divinity of Jesus, the Trinity, and the divine origins of the Bible itself are the results of both intentional and accidental alterations by scribes. In this compelling and fascinating book, Ehrman shows where and why changes were made in our earliest surviving manuscripts, explaining for the first time how the many variations of our cherished biblical stories came to be, and why only certain versions of the stories qualify for publication in the Bibles we read today. Ehrman frames his account with personal reflections on how his study of the Greek manuscripts made him abandon his once ultra “conservative views of the Bible.

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Customer Reviews

This is the first book of Ehrman's I have read. I found it interesting and well-written for the average person who has little background in Biblical Textual Studies, (which equates to more than 99% of the population.) I do not have the credentials of Dr. Ehrman, but I do have the equivalent of a degree in Biblical Literature and have worked in the original languages. My Senior Thesis was doing a textual comparison of the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas discovered at Nag Hammadi with the parallel passages of the Kingdom Parables of Matthew 13. To do that I had to teach myself some Coptic Egyptian and do some translating to form a basis for comparison. All that said to establish that I have some background to make an evaluation of what is being said in this book. I also have some

common ground with Dr. Ehrman in life history. I too was trained as an evangelical with a very high view of inspiration and further had to struggle as I became aware of how difficult it is to interact with the text in its manuscript and historical form all while becoming painfully aware of the fact that any view of inspiration must tacitly admit that it is a hypothetical basis of faith because as Ehrman states clearly:1. If the original manuscripts are inspired, we don't have them.2. What we do have, while overall reliable and fairly easily examined for error, still leaves some serious questions of textual manipulation by scribes that makes several key passages difficult to stand upon for important doctrines. This is, in fact, not as great a secret as Ehrman seems to imply throughout his book. There are a great number of books from all backgrounds and degrees of belief that acknowledge these types of issues.

Ehrman's book can be described as an introduction to New Testament textual criticism for the beginners, in which he explains the subject in the context of his own background, relating his journey from being an Evangelical Christian to becoming a world renowned New Testament scholar. Besides D. C. Parker's "Living Text of the Gospels," Ehrman's "Misquoting Jesus" seems to be the only book on textual criticism designed specifically for the non-expert readers. In short, Prof. Ehrman explains the copying practises of the earliest period and how the texts of the New Testament writings were corrupted as they were copied and recopied. He begins by introducing the diverse writings produced by the early Christians, such as gospels, Acts, apocalypses, Church orders, apologies etc. Briefly, the formation of the canon is also discussed and we are informed about the literacy level among the early Christians. Thereafter we are introduced to the world of the copyists and Ehrman explains how the early scribes copied texts and the problems associated with the copying of texts. It is quite interesting to learn that even pagan critics of Christianity, such as Celsus, were quite aware at an early date that the Christian writings were being corrupted by the scribes and even Origen had to complain about the numerous differences between the gospel manuscripts. Marcion, an early Christian, corrupted the text of certain New Testament writings available to him and Dionysius is quoted who complains that his own writings have been modified just as "the word of the Lord" had been tampered. Marcion, of course, accused other Christians of corrupting the texts.

In that it is based on the notion that the Bible was not handed down verbatim from God, Misquoting Jesus is bound to ruffle some feathers among the most fervent religious zealots. But for anyone else, the book is a fascinating, enjoyable, and accessible read. The main point of Misquoting Jesus

is that because of human error, individual agendas, conflicting interpretations, and translation problems, there are literally tens of thousands of versions of the books of the Bible. And since the original versions are for the most part lost to history, there is no clear consensus as to which is the "real" version. Generally, this isn't a problem, since the differences are minor and for the most part rhetorical. But some examples -- author Bart Ehrman argues, for example, that the story of Jesus' warning "let he who is without sin cast the first stone" is almost surely a third-century fabrication -- profoundly challenge the very foundation of the Holy Writ. Mr. Ehrman's points stand to reason, but they are controversial because so much of western culture is based on the lessons taught by these texts. For some people, the Bible is interpreted as a guide to life and ethics to be interpreted as literally as possible. But even for the less fervent it is disconcerting to think that the story of Judas or Lazarus may have at least in part been the product of some forgotten person's imagination. I don't subscribe to the notion that these discrepancies erode the value of the Bible as a spiritual and instructive document. Instead, I think it shows the important vibrant and human side of the most important book ever written. Each of us puts our own spin on the Bible when we read it. Why is it wrong to think others may have put their spin on it while transcribing it?

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