

CRITICISMS OF THE RESURRECTION ACCOUNTS AND THE EPISTLES

In the section on the resurrection texts within his recent book, *Jesus, Interrupted*, Bart Ehrman raises a litany of questions concerning consistency of the accounts. For example, he draws attention to the number of women who came to the tomb after the resurrection. He says that John writes that Mary came “alone.”¹ However, John 20:1 does not say whether Mary was alone or not. It simply says she came to the tomb. Other accounts mention other women who were present. It simply depends on what the author wants to focus on in his context. John, for example, wants to single out Mary’s experience among the group. Others focus on the group.

Sequence of the Events of Jesus’ Resurrection

The discussion below irons out all the major difficulties in the order of appearances. In the discussion that follows this one, overwhelming historical evidences for the physical resurrection of Christ are given:

Order of Resurrection Events	Evidence They Provide
1. Mary Magdalene and other women (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1-3; Luke 24:1-10; John 20:1)	Empty tomb
2. The other women (Matthew 28:5-8; Mark 16:6-9; Luke 24:4-9)	Empty tomb, angel(s)
3. Peter and John (John 20:3-10)	Empty tomb, grave clothes
4. Mary Magdalene (#1) (Mark 16:9-10; John 20:11-18)	Angels, heard, saw, touched

Order of Resurrection Events	Evidence They Provide
5. Other women (#2) (Matthew 28:9-10)	Saw, heard, touched
6. Peter (#3) (Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5)	Saw, heard*
7. Two Disciples (#4) (Luke 24:13-31; Mark 16:12)	Saw, heard, ate
8. Ten Disciples (#5) (Mark 16:14; Luke 24:35-49; John 20:19-24; 1 Corinthians 15:5)	Saw, scars, heard, touched,* ate
9. Eleven Disciples (Thomas present) (#6) (John 20:26-29)	Saw, scars, heard, touched*
10. Seven disciples by Sea of Galilee (#7) (John 21:1-23)	Saw, heard, ate
11. Five hundred disciples in Galilee (#8) (1 Corinthians 15:6)	Saw, heard
12. All the apostles in Galilee (#9) (Matthew 28:18-20)	Saw, heard
13. James (#10) (1 Corinthians 15:7)	Saw, heard
14. All the apostles in Jerusalem (#11) (1 Corinthians 15:7; Mark 16:15-20; Luke 24:46-52; Acts 1:3-9)	Saw, heard, ate
15. Paul (#12) (Acts 9:1-8; 1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8)	Saw, heard

*implied

*Harmony of the Postresurrection Order of Events**

1. Early on Sunday morning after Jesus' crucifixion, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Joanna, and Salome went to the tomb with spices to anoint Jesus' body (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1; John 20:1). Finding the tomb empty, Mary Magdalene ran to Peter and John to tell them someone had taken the body of Jesus (John 20:2).
2. The other women entered the tomb, where an angel (Matthew 28:5) who had a companion (John 20:11-12; Luke 24:4) told them Jesus had risen and would meet the disciples in Galilee (Matthew 28:2-8; Mark 16:5-8; Luke 24:4-8). On their hurried return in trembling astonishment (Mark 16:8) yet with great joy (Matthew 28:8), they said nothing to anyone along the way (Mark 16:8) but went back to the disciples and reported what they had seen and heard (Matthew 28:8; Mark 16:10; Luke 24:9-10; John 20:2).
3. Meanwhile, after hearing Mary Magdalene's report, Peter and John ran to the tomb (John 20:3), apparently by a different and more direct route. John arrived at the tomb first (John 20:4). He peered into the tomb and saw the grave clothes but did not enter (John 20:5). When Peter arrived he entered the tomb and saw the grave clothes (John 20:6). Then John entered, saw the grave clothes and the folded head cloth in a place by itself, and believed (John 20:8). After this, they returned to the place the other disciples were staying by the same route (John 20:10) and so did not encounter the women.
4. Arriving after Peter and John had left, Mary Magdalene went into the tomb (for a second time) and saw the angels (John 20:13). *She also saw Jesus (appearance #1)* and clung to Him and worshipped Him (John 20:11-17). She then returned to the disciples (John 20:18; Mark 16:10).
5. While the other women were on their way to the disciples, Jesus *appeared to them (appearance #2)*. They took hold of His feet and worshipped Him (Matthew 28:9-10). Jesus asked them to tell His disciples that He would meet them in Galilee (Matthew 28:10). Meanwhile the guards were bribed and told to say the disciples had stolen His body (Matthew 28:11-15).
6. When Mary and the women found the disciples, they announced that they had seen Jesus (Mark 16:10-11; Luke 24:10; John 20:18). After hearing this,

* There are some key verses on the order of the resurrection events. First Corinthians 15:5-8 lists the order of separate appearances in regard to Peter, the Twelve, 500 brethren, James, all the apostles, and Paul. Luke 24:34 asserts that Jesus appeared to Peter before He appeared to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and before He later appeared to the Eleven (Luke 24:33-36). John 21:1-13 declares that the appearance to the seven apostles at the Sea of Tiberias (Sea of Galilee—John 6:1) was the third appearance to His disciples as a group (John 21:14). Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all say the women were at the empty tomb first. Mark 16:9 reports that the first appearance was to Mary Magdalene. John 20:11-18 implies this also.

Peter probably rushed to find Jesus, and *Peter saw Him (appearance #3)* that day (1 Corinthians 15:5; see Luke 24:10).

7. The same day Jesus *appeared to Cleopas and another unnamed disciple (appearance #4)*—perhaps Luke—on the road to Emmaus (Mark 16:12; Luke 24:13-31). He revealed Himself to them while eating with them, and He told them He had appeared to Peter (Luke 24:34; see 1 Corinthians 15:5). [Luke 24:34 may mean either that the two told the Eleven that Jesus had appeared to Peter, or that when the two saw the Eleven, the latter were saying the Lord had appeared to Peter.]
8. After Jesus left the two men, they returned to Jerusalem, where Jesus *appeared to the Ten disciples (appearance #5)* (Thomas being absent—John 20:24), showing His scars and eating some fish (Mark 16:14; Luke 24:35-49; John 20:19-24).
9. After eight days, Jesus *appeared to the Eleven (appearance #6)* (Thomas now present). He showed His wounds and challenged Thomas to believe. Thomas exclaimed, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28).
10. Jesus *appeared to seven of His disciples (appearance #7)* who had gone fishing in the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1). He ate breakfast with them (John 21:2-13), after which He restored Peter (21:15-19).
11. Then He *appeared to 500 brethren* at one time (*appearance #8*) (1 Corinthians 15:6).
12. After this He *appeared to all the apostles (appearance #9)* in Galilee and gave them the Great Commission (1 Corinthians 15:7; Matthew 28:18-20).
13. Then, He *appeared to James (appearance #10)* (1 Corinthians 15:7), probably in Jerusalem.
14. Later in Jerusalem, He *appeared to all his apostles (appearance #11)* (1 Corinthians 15:7), presenting many convincing evidences to them (Acts 1:3), including eating with them (Acts 1:4). He answered their last question (Acts 1:6-8) and then ascended into heaven (Mark 16:15-20; Luke 24:46-52; Acts 1:9-11).
15. Several years later, on the road to Damascus, Jesus *appeared to Saul of Tarsus (appearance #12)* (Acts 9:1-8; 1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8), later known as the apostle Paul.

In regard to the above, note first that the initial three events involved no appearances of Jesus, only angels and an empty tomb. Second, Mary Magdalene was the first to see the resurrected Christ. The other women were next, and Peter was third. Third, in all, counting Paul, there were 12 separate appearances. Fourth, the first nine events (1 through 9) were all in and around Jerusalem. Events 10, 11, and 12 were in Galilee, and 13 and 14 were back in the Jerusalem area. The last one (involving Paul) was in Syria, near Damascus (Acts 9:3).

The Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection

In all 12 appearances the persons involved saw (with the naked eye) and heard (with their physical ears) Jesus. Four times they saw Him eat. Four times He was touched. The empty tomb was seen at least four times. Twice the grave clothes were seen, and twice His crucifixion scars were viewed. His first 11 appearances occurred over a 40-day period to different groups—including women, the apostles, a doubting apostle, other disciples, an unbelieving half-brother, and over 500 people at the same time. During this time period, Jesus talked with them, taught them, ate with them, and gave them many “indisputable evidences” (Acts 1:3) of His physical resurrection. He literally exhausted the ways in which He could prove to them that He had been physically raised in the same body in which He had died.

One apparent problem is that Luke 24:12 appears to conflict with John 20:3-10. Luke 24:12 mentions only that Peter ran to the tomb after all the women were there and came back and told the apostles. But John says it was both Peter and he who were there, just after Mary Magdalene had been there alone.

However, there is a reasonable response. Assuming that Luke 24:12 is reliable, Luke may have mentioned only Peter because he was the leader of the two men. Likewise, Mary Magdalene may have been singled out because she was the one who spoke first. This seems to be the case also when Matthew mentions only one angel at the tomb (Matthew 28:5) and John mentions two (John 20:12). The “we” (John 20:2) implies that others were with Mary Magdalene. However, Luke 24:12 may be an early copyist error since it is not in some early manuscripts. The RSV omits it. The NASB brackets it and adds, “Some ancient manuscripts do not contain verse 12.” The Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament lists many old Italian manuscripts and some old Syriac manuscripts, as well as Marcion, Tatian’s *Diatessaron*, and Eusebius (second to fourth centuries) as omitting verse 12.

The Resurrection of the Saints in Matthew 27:52-53

Though not explicitly treated by Ehrman, the historicity of the resurrection of the saints recorded in Matthew’s Gospel has been challenged by critical scholars. And of late, this criticism has been endorsed by some Evangelical scholars. Michael Licona’s massive (718-page) resource *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach*² is a defense of the bodily resurrection of Christ, but unfortunately it also denies or casts doubt on the historicity of the resurrected saints mentioned in Matthew 27 and other passages.³

The text at issue for Licona is in Matthew 27:50-53, which affirms that when Jesus died, He

cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many (ESV).

Licona speaks of the resurrected saints passage as a “strange little text” and calls it “poetic” or a “legend.”⁴ (He appears to include the angels at the tomb [Mark 16:5-7] in the same category.)⁵ He speaks of the event reported in Matthew as similar to Roman legends that employ “phenomenal language used in a symbolic manner,” asserting that “it seems to me that an understanding of the language in Matthew 27:52-53 as ‘special effects’ with eschatological Jewish texts and thought in mind is most plausible.”⁶ He believes that by this legend “Matthew may simply be emphasizing that a great king has died.” Licona further writes, “If he has one or more of the Jewish texts in mind [that contain similar legends], he may be proclaiming that the day of the Lord has come.” He concludes that “it seems best to regard this difficult text in Matthew as a poetic device added to communicate that the Son of God had died and that impending judgment awaited Israel.”⁷

Then Licona addresses the obvious problem: “If some or all of the phenomena reported at Jesus’ death are poetic devices, we may rightly ask whether Jesus’ resurrection is not more of the same.”⁸ This is a very good question, since the two events are connected in the same text. However, his answer is disappointing for many reasons. Most importantly, there exist no good grounds for not taking Matthew 27:51-53 as historical. In fact, there are many reasons that this text in this context should be taken as historical and not as a legend.

Support for the Historicity of the Matthew 27 Resurrection of the Saints

First of all, in this very text the resurrection of these saints occurs in direct connection with two other historical events—the death and resurrection of Jesus (verses 50, 53). There is no reason here to take the resurrection of Jesus as historical and the resurrection of the saints as a legend. Hence, to borrow the subtitle from Licona’s book, it appears that this “new historiographical approach,” which employs extrabiblical sources to determine the meaning of this text, has led him astray in this case.

Indeed, there are many reasons in the text itself to take these resurrections as literal events, including such terms as “earth,” “quake,” “temple,” “veil,” “rocks,” “tombs,” “bodies,” “asleep” (dead), “raised,” and “appeared”—all of which speak of physical events elsewhere in the New Testament. Indeed, the crucial word associated directly with the resurrection of these saints (“raised”—*egiro*) is also used of Jesus’ resurrection in 1 Corinthians, when Paul speaks of Jesus dying for our sins and being “raised” (*egiro*) again (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). And the word for “appeared” (Matthew 27:53), speaking of the saints after this resurrection, is an even stronger word than usual, meaning “become visible, appear . . . make known, make clear, explain, inform, make a report esp. of an official report to the authorities.”⁹

Second, there is a direct connection between the resurrection of these saints and Jesus’ resurrection. For the text is careful to mention that they did not come out of the tombs until “after” Jesus’ resurrection (verse 53). Indeed, Paul calls Jesus’ resurrection “the first fruits” (1 Corinthians 15:23), so, it is only proper that He should emerge from the dead first. Thus, speaking of the resurrection of these saints after Jesus’ resurrection

and as a result of it makes no sense if their resurrection, unlike Jesus' resurrection, is a mere legend.

Third, the Matthew text lists the same kind of evidence for the resurrection of these saints as is listed elsewhere for Jesus' resurrection (namely in 1 Corinthians 15): 1) the tombs were opened; 2) the tombs were empty; 3) the dead were raised; 4) there were physical appearances; 5) many people saw these resurrected saints. In brief, if this is not a physical resurrection, then neither was Jesus' resurrection (which preceded and prompted it) a physical resurrection. Or, conversely, if Jesus' resurrection was physical, then so was the resurrection of these saints in Matthew 27. Thus, denying the physical resurrection of these saints undermines belief in the physical resurrection of Jesus.

Fourth, as *Ellicott's Commentary* puts it, "The brevity, and in some sense, simplicity, of the statement differences it very widely from such legends, more or less analogous in character. . . and so far excludes the mythical element which, as a rule, delights to show itself in luxuriant expansion."¹⁰ In brief, the typical characteristics of a myth as found in Apocryphal and other literature of that time are not found in this text.

Fifth, some of the elements of this account are confirmed by two other Gospels. Both Mark (15:38) and Luke (23:45) also mention the rending of the veil in the temple (Matthew 27:51) as a result of Jesus' death. Luke's writings in particular have been historically confirmed in nearly 100 details,¹¹ and there is no reason to believe he is any less historically accurate in mentioning this detail. And if this part of the story is factually confirmed, there is no good reason to reject the rest of it, which Matthew adds.

Sixth, not only is there evidence within the text itself for its historicity; the earliest Fathers of the Christian church took it as historical. Some even used it as an apologetic evidence for Jesus' resurrection. Ignatius of Antioch (c. AD 35–107), a contemporary of the apostle John, referred to the resurrection of these saints as a historical event. Irenaeus (second century), who knew the apostle John's disciple Polycarp, and even Origen (third century), who had a strong propensity to allegorize, considered Matthew 27 to be a literal raising of these saints from the graves.¹² Jerome (fourth century) and Thomas Aquinas (thirteenth century) also held to its historicity.¹³

In short, the cumulative evidence for the historic and nonlegendary nature of this text is strong. In fact, the story is interwoven with the historical evidence surrounding the death and resurrection of Christ in such a manner that the denial of the resurrection of these saints undermines the historicity of the resurrection of Christ reported in the same text.

Paul's Epistles as Forgeries?

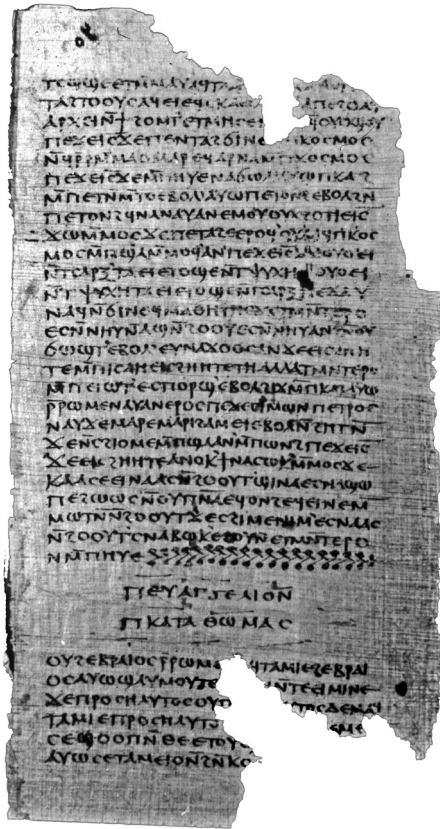
Bart Ehrman also makes the claim, in his recent book *Forged*, that many of the books in the canon of the New Testament are forgeries, written under the name of New Testament authors such as Peter and Paul. Ehrman addresses in particular the issue of the authorship of Paul's pastoral epistles, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. He mentions the works of Friedrich Schleiermacher in bringing suspicion on these allegedly Pauline epistles. Schleiermacher contends that the ideas presented in these pastoral epistles are in

conflict with ideas Paul presents in his other letters. He also notes that the false teachings Paul is refuting in 1 Timothy are connected with the Gnostic teachings that came about in the second century AD, which he believes places the letter in a time period later than Paul; Schleiermacher notes that the “myths and genealogies” opposed by Paul sound much like the mythologies put forth by these second-century AD Gnostics.¹⁴

While some scholars who doubt Paul’s authorship of the pastoral epistles believe that 2 Timothy is distinct from the other two, and some even attribute authorship to Paul, Ehrman believes that, due to the remarkable similarities found between 1 and 2 Timothy, the same forger who wrote 1 Timothy also wrote 2 Timothy. He contends that the phraseology (such as “promise of life,” “from a pure heart,” and Paul’s office of an “apostle, herald, and teacher”) used in 2 Timothy is very similar to that of 1 Timothy.

Ehrman states that the reason so many scholars reject the authorship of Paul in these epistles has to do with the vast differences in vocabulary and writing style, which are found to be unique to these letters. Further, the vocabulary used by the writer reflects word usage that was becoming more common after the life of Paul. He points out that, statistically, over one-third of the words of the pastoral epistles do not occur anywhere in the other Pauline letters of the New Testament.

Ehrman does not base his argument on statistics alone, however. There are numerous other factors that form the foundation of his belief in the forgeries of these pastoral epistles. One reason he identifies is the way in which the alleged



This manuscript is a portion of the Gospel of Thomas (composed about AD 140 to 170), which was discovered among the Nag Hammadi (Egypt) manuscripts in 1945. It contains 114 secret sayings (logia) attributed to Jesus, allegedly written by Thomas. Some critics such as the Jesus Seminar have placed the text on par with the four canonical Gospels. However, this is mistaken for several reasons: 1) it contains second-century Gnostic beliefs; 2) it was written in the mid to late second century AD, and the canonical Gospels were written in the first century AD; 3) second-century Church Fathers supported the canonical Gospels, not Thomas; 4) the basic New Testament canon was formed in the first century AD; and 5) Thomas is dependent on truths found in the canonical Gospels, not the reverse. (Photo by Zev Radovan.)

author employs the same words usually used by Paul, but with different meanings. For instance, Ehrman says that the term *faith*, as used in Paul's other epistles, has a connotation of a relationship with another; trusting "in" Christ. In Titus, he points out, the author employs the term *faith* to refer to the body of teachings that form the foundation of Christianity.

Ehrman goes on to explain that some of the ideas and theological statements made in the pastoral letters seem to contradict those of the rest of Paul's letters. He mentions that when Paul confronts the wrong ideas of justification in his letters, he rebukes those who were performing "works of the law" (referring to the Jewish law) in order to gain right standing before God. These works cannot contribute to one's justification; only through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ can one attain salvation. In the pastoral epistles, however, it seems to Ehrman that the Jewish law is no longer an issue that is dealt with. The author now seems to turn his focus on "good works"—doing good to others. Ehrman states that the author is concerned with the issue that merely being a morally upright person does not earn a person's salvation. He believes that this is completely uncharacteristic of the apostle Paul in his writings, simply because his other letters emphasized correcting those who were trying to use the Jewish law as a means of salvation, not those who were just doing good deeds. On the issue of the doctrine of salvation in these letters, Ehrman goes so far as to refer to 1 Timothy 2 as the author's offer of a way to salvation to women through childbearing.

Additional Evidence to Consider

As an initial critique, D.A. Carson and Douglas Moo are correct in showing that such arguments as Ehrman's fail when we take additional evidence into consideration. The words shared between the pastoral epistles and second-century AD writings are also found in other writings, which date as far back as AD 50.¹⁵ It is virtually impossible to argue that Paul did not know about this kind of vocabulary, because it was apparently used during his time; and it is not at all likely that he simply made up these words.

Now, it is not disputed that there is definitely a change in the way the pastoral epistles are written when compared with Paul's earlier letters. It's just a matter of how to account for it. It must be understood that Paul is writing from a prison cell and awaiting imminent execution; so it is not in the least bit far-fetched to come to the conclusion that these and other circumstances contribute to the way in which he writes—with a sense of urgency not found in his other letters. The issues he addresses in these letters are going to be much different than the ones addressed in his previous ones.

Moreover, the fact that Paul is not addressing an entire church directly but individual church leaders would understandably cause him to use diction that would be different. For instance, a letter that someone writes to their employer requesting time off or inquiring about a raise is going to be vastly different from a letter written to their best friend requesting a small favor. These would be two distinct letters written by the same person, but with different recipients and requests, resulting in different diction and tone. The same can be said of the pastoral epistles: They are a group of letters written under

more stressful circumstances than his others, and the requests (or in this case commands) made in these three letters are understandably much different.

In addition, it is important to acknowledge that Paul has written over the course of approximately 25 years and is nearing the end of his life. He is now able to employ years of accumulated wisdom and knowledge gained from his ministry years in ways he would not have been able to in his earlier letters. Paul was continually growing in wisdom and knowledge in the Scriptures and in ministry, so it would be unreasonable to assume that all of his letters, written at different points, would remain the same in terms of rhetorical style, theological articulation, and historical context. It would simply be unreasonable to demand that all of Paul's letters conform to a systematic outline in order to be considered his own writings, for he continually grew intellectually as well as spiritually.

Different Styles and Terminology at Different Times

In light of these factors it is not unreasonable to conclude that the apostle Paul used different rhetorical styles and slightly different terminology at different times. The fact that some of the terms in the pastoral epistles are used in a way that varies slightly from other places may be warranted in light of his unique situation while writing them; these variations would be characteristic of anyone who is writing in different situations. The way in which the term *faith* is used in Titus would be entirely legitimate within this context. Ehrman's difficulty is not legitimate because issues like these have been presented before and dealt with before regarding the passage in 1 Timothy 1:8-9. Here Paul states that the law is not for the righteous but for the lawbreaker. While C.F.D. Maule interprets this passage in such a way as to come to the conclusion of an author other than Paul, Theodor Zahn comments on the same passage, concluding that Paul's theology comes through and is consistent with what he teaches in his other letters. It is not sufficient to draw conclusions of pseudepigraphical authorship of the pastoral epistles from passages of Scripture like these. There is definitely a continuity in Paul's theology that can be shown in the variety of ways he employs his words. It seems that Ehrman does not take these circumstances into account when formulating his argument.

One of the biggest issues preventing Ehrman from accepting the Pauline authorship of the pastoral epistles is that he posits seemingly different historical situations and then takes them for granted. From there he assumes these situations would influence Paul's writing styles in his first ten epistles as well as the pastoral epistles. Ehrman posits that, because Paul thought that Christ would return during his lifetime, it affected the way in which he wrote his letters, even affecting his views of ecclesiology. For instance, Ehrman comes to the conclusion that there is no institution of church leadership in the church at Corinth simply because Paul does not address it specifically. And this, Ehrman assumes, is because Paul saw no need to create such a church government if indeed believers were here in the short term and the Lord would be returning so soon, within his lifetime. However, Ehrman continues, in the pastoral epistles we see the author specifically addressing the leadership of the churches he is writing to, indicating a change in mindset—that the church was here long-term, so leadership needed to be instituted.

These claims put forth by Ehrman are at odds with the accounts of elder leadership

appointed in early churches that Paul and Barnabas founded (Acts 14:23). There is also a salutation given to the overseers (or bishops) and deacons in the opening verse of the letter written to the church of Philippi (Philippians 1:1). There is also an extensive account recorded in Acts 20:17-35, where Paul addresses the elders at the church in Ephesus as he is about to leave for Jerusalem; he warns them to guard against the false teachers that will rise up among the church, attempting to bring in false doctrine. It is clear that Paul did in fact have in mind an ecclesiological structure early on in his ministry. Contrary to what Ehrman claims, Paul actually did appoint leaders in the churches that he planted. It is interesting that Ehrman fails to address these instances found in the text.

Ehrman's arguments to support his claim that Paul did not write any of the pastoral epistles are found wanting. Each of his objections can be explained through an understanding of the context of Paul and his writings.

Did Scribes Really Change the New Testament?

Many textual scholars have made the accusation that the scribes who copied the texts of the New Testament actually altered the text to one degree or another, thereby altering the meaning of crucial passages. Again, Bart Ehrman has made his preference for this view clear. The thesis of his book *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (2005) affirms this very accusation. Ehrman claims that, although some of the scribal variations found in the manuscripts are accidental—careless mistakes on the part of the scribe—there are many instances where scribes actually purposefully altered portions of Scripture in order to satisfy their own agendas.

He argues that these alterations were driven by the scribes' desire to emphasize what they themselves believed on subjects such as the nature and deity of Christ, the role of women in the church, and so on. He points out that the copyists themselves were Christian and that their belief in Jesus Christ created a bias that manifested itself in the preservation of particular doctrines within the Scriptures by altering parts of the text. (It is interesting, however, that he does not provide any evidence for these claims.) The implications this contention has for belief in the inerrancy of the Scriptures are made clear at the outset of *Misquoting Jesus*. Ehrman asks, "How does it help us to say that the Bible is the inerrant word of God if in fact we don't have the words that God inerrantly inspired, but only the words copied by scribes...?"¹⁶

On the surface this question appears formidable, but upon closer examination one could apply the same way of thinking to Ehrman's books. Namely, *Misquoting Jesus*, *Forged*, and *Jesus, Interrupted* are only publisher's *copies* and not the words that the author originally penned!

In addition, as we have seen, Ehrman has charged that the New Testament manuscripts are full of errors and that we do not have the originals (autographs). Yet, he forcefully argues based on manuscript evidence that various passages of Scripture were not in the original text.¹⁷ Thus he is essentially arguing his case based on what he considers faulty and unreliable manuscripts, which, he believes, give him assurance of what was, and was not, included in the original text. The question for Ehrman is clear, "If we do not have reliable manuscripts, then how does he know what was in the original text?"

Ehrman's error is actually a very simple fallacy that makes it unnecessary to go through a page-by-page critique of each of his examples.

Finally, as we established in chapter 7, "The Transmission of the New Testament," intentional doctrinal alteration—though a phenomenon that did occur in the ancient world—is only to be used as an explanation for textual variation when other more common unintentional errors cannot explain the data. Yet every single error (we checked!) that Ehrman calls an intentional doctrinal alteration can be easily assessed according to one of the more standard judgments of the canon of textual criticism, such as accidental errors of the eye and human frailty.