

**The New Testament:**  
***We Don't* Have What They**  
**Originally Had**

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# Problem #1

- All scholars agree *no* manuscript reflects the original, and *all* are quite divergent from it
- The text in modern bibles is a **hypothetical** creation of 20th century scholars
- But scholars are often wrong in their judgments (*many* of their decisions are dubious or debatable)
- In fact they often disagree with each other and admit to being uncertain about countless of their textual decisions
- The NT text is therefore a product of fallible human opinions

# **Problem #2**

- **This means for ~ 2,000 years Christians had the wrong bible, a NT full of errors & distortions**
- **Modern bibles are better but still print readings we know are false (and fail to mention hundreds of cases where the original reading is uncertain or disputed)**
- **And you can't just assume the reconstructed text is the correct text because scholars remain in disagreement and uncertain about many points**
- **So you have to be very suspicious and careful when arguing from the text of the New Testament**

200 Years (4 Average Lifetimes)

100 Years (2 Average Lifetimes)



*Time to First  
Complete  
Bible (NT)*

*Time to First  
Significant  
Manuscript*

*300 A.D.*

*200 A.D.*

**NT Written & Copied  
Many Times**

**Only a Few  
Tiny Scraps**

**A Few Whole or  
Partial Books**

**First Complete  
Bibles**

**(50 - 120 A.D.)**

**(120 - 200 A.D.)**

**(200 - 300 A.D.)**

**(300 - 400 A.D.)**

**(400 - 500 A.D.)**

( only 24 scattered verses, plus  
the 1st chapter of Revelation )

( 2 Greek,  
3 Latin )

( 4 Greek,  
5 Latin )

P<sup>52</sup>

οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ

οὐδὲν ἴκανον

πεντηκοντα

εἰκοσιεξ

πεντηκοντα

καὶ εἴκοσι

ἑξήκοντα

John

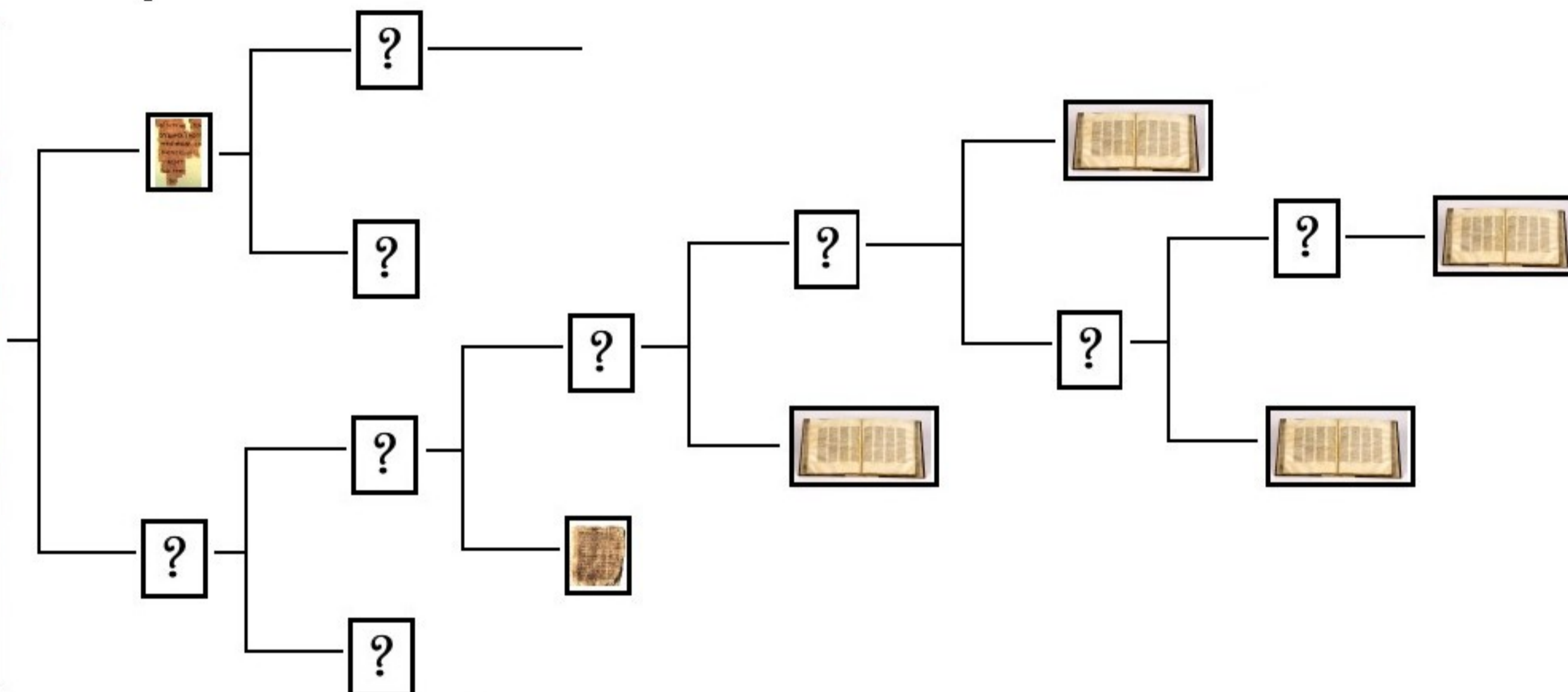
# Problem # 3

- Rate of error and distortion in visible period (~ 200-600 A.D.) is *very high* (by 600 A.D., 5-10% of the text is wrong).
- Rate of error *behind* the curtain can be expected to be no less (there is no evidence otherwise).
- Therefore, there *must* have been many changes *behind* the curtain that won't show in any surviving manuscripts.
- In fact the minimum rate of distortion would be 1% per century, so for the first 100 years *at least* 1 in 100 verses will have been distorted before we get any manuscripts to detect them by.



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# Problem # 4

We know *most* changes to a text occur in the first century of its transmission, because...

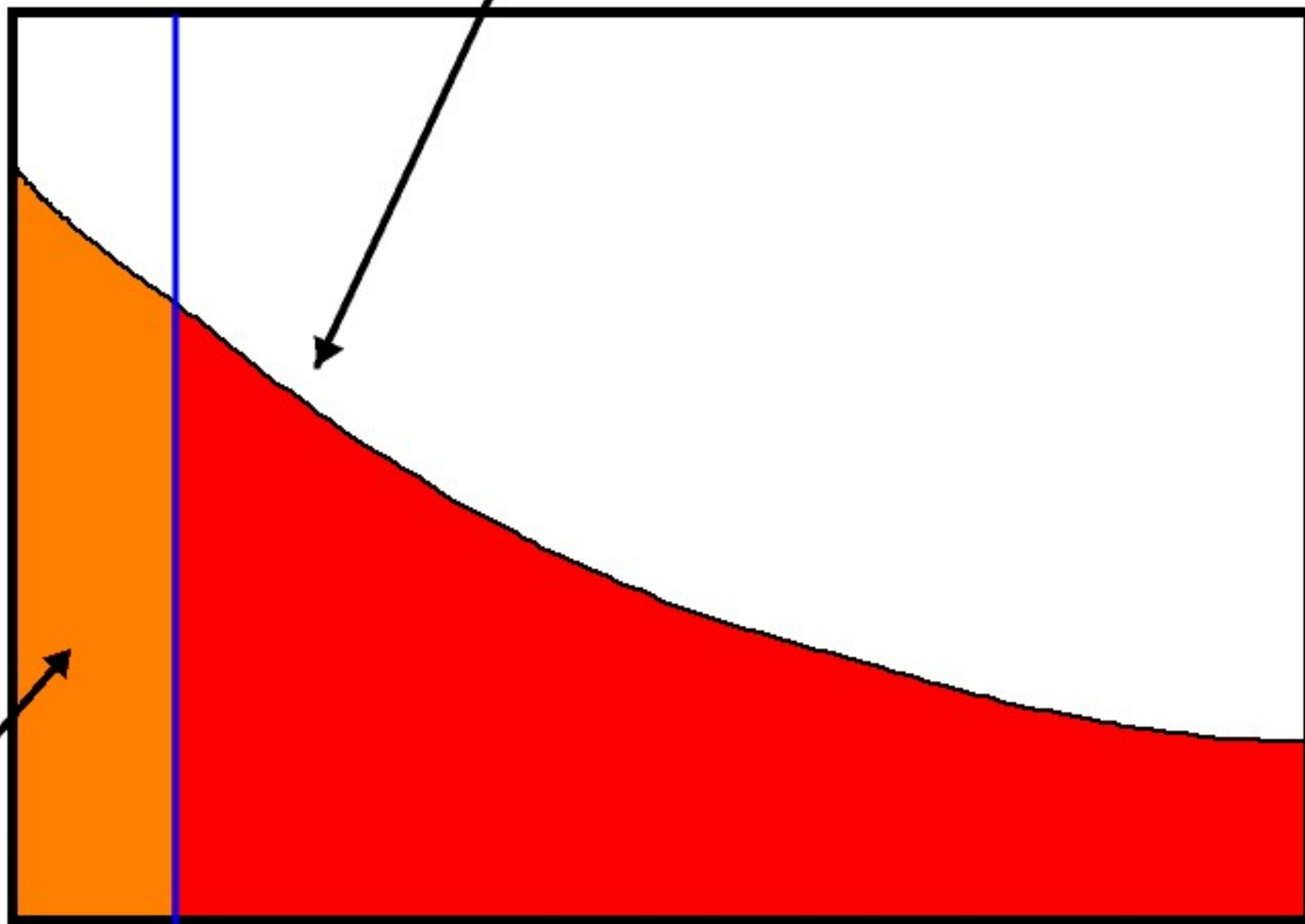
(1) It is then much easier to get away with it (or to make an error that goes unnoticed and uncorrected)

(2) The quality of scribes at work on the Bible in its first two centuries has been proven to be substantially inferior to the professional quality of later centuries (cf. [Barbara Aland](#)).

(3) A curve showing the stability of the NT text over the first twelve centuries shows stability increasing every century, which entails its stability was *worse* in the first century than in *any following century*—precisely the century invisible to us.



*Rate of Errors & Changes*



**First 100  
Years**

*Centuries*

*NOTE: I only present three of several general categories (others include deliberate and accidental omissions, etc.)*

# General Trends That Discredit Reliability

## (1) Harmonizations

- Scribes often changed one Gospel to agree with another (e.g. making Matthew agree with Luke, or Luke with John).
- We've caught hundreds of cases occurring in the 1st two centuries *after* the curtain; how many occurred *behind* it?
- This can't be said to be trivial. It matters a great deal if the Gospels originally disagreed with each other.
- If the Gospels have all been harmonized to some extent, then we can't claim that we have what they originally had.

# Example

- Many early manuscripts (including our earliest Bibles, both **Codex Vaticanus** and **Codex Sinaiticus**) have Matthew agree with John that Jesus was (a) **struck by a soldier's spear** and (b) **out came blood and water**. (Mt. 27:49)
- We have manuscripts showing this was an insertion
- But how many such edits were made *behind* the curtain?
- We can identify at least a hundred such harmonizations in the first five hundred years for which we have manuscripts
- Therefore there must be **at least twenty more** made in the first hundred years that's invisible to us.

*It follows that any time you argue from the fact that two Gospels agree, you can't really know if that agreement was in the originals or fabricated later.*

# General Trends That Discredit Reliability

## (2) Interpolations

- The number of passages “added” to the NT by later editors is huge compared to most other ancient books.
- Christians clearly had no scruple at all against doing this and did it frequently.
- Four examples out of maybe a hundred *we know of*:

John 7:53-8:11 (“let he who is without sin cast the first stone”)

John 5:3-4 (an angel stirring the pool of Bethesda)

Luke 22:43-44 (Jesus sweating blood)

Luke 23:53 (tomb had “a door that took twenty men to open”)



# Case in Point: **The Ending of Mark**

**(1) Earliest copies end at verse 16:8**

- **describes no appearances of the risen Jesus**
- **says those who saw the empty tomb never told anyone**

**(2) Two different endings were added on later:**

- **a short ending (Mark 16:9a)**
- **a long ending (Mark 16:9b-20)**
- **scholars have proved neither was in the original**

**(3) Scholars can't agree whether we've *lost* Mark's original ending, or Mark ended at 16:8.**

**(4) So experts don't know if we're missing major part of Mark or not. And if we are, *then we don't have what they had.***



*Some copies of Mark by the 4th century had also added this ...*

**Jesus reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen. And they defended themselves saying, “This world of lawlessness and unbelief is under Satan, who does not allow the unclean things that are under the spirits to comprehend God’s true power. Because of this, reveal your righteousness now!” They said these things to Christ, and Christ replied to them, “The term of years of the authority of Satan has been fulfilled, but other dreadful things are drawing near, even to those for whose sake as sinners I was delivered up to death so they might return to the truth and no longer sin, and might inherit the spiritual and incorruptible glory of righteousness which is in heaven. So go unto the world and preach the gospel to all creation.”**

*Other copies of Mark by the 3rd century had also added this ...*

**The women were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” Then all of a sudden, at the third hour of the day, there was darkness over the whole earth, and angels descended from heaven and as he rose up in the splendor of the living God they ascended with him, and immediately it was light.**

**That means within two or three centuries four different interpolated endings had been added to Mark’s text:**

- **the short ending**
- **the long ending**
- **the Satanic powers ending**
- **the angelic miracle ending**

*Mark's ending isn't the only example.*

**There are a hundred or so other cases.**

**I've listed several already.**

**But the most infamous, after Mark, is Luke and Acts, which accumulated so many interpolations that in each case many manuscripts have a text that is 10% longer than our present version.**

*This shows Christians were adding whole material to their Bible with a readiness and frequency almost unprecedented for any other ancient text.*

- And if this was occurring *after* the curtain, we should expect it was also occurring *behind* the curtain, when such changes would have been even easier to make.
- We've detected at least 100 of these insertions in the first five centuries for which we have manuscripts.
- So, statistically, there must have been **at least twenty more** made behind that curtain of the first hundred years, where we will have no manuscripts to detect them by.

**Many experts believe [1 Corinthians 14:34-35](#) is one of those**

**This passage has Paul command:**

**“let the women keep silence in the churches: because it is not permitted for them to speak; but let them be in subjection, as also the law says. And if they would learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home: for it is shameful for a woman to speak in the church.”**

- **directly contradicts what Paul says in the very same letter (he gives rules for when women speak in church in ch. 11)**
- **Paul teaches we aren't under the Jewish law in this way, so he wouldn't cite it as a precedent for forbidding women to speak**

**Another example is where Paul refers to the end of the Jewish nation and its national cult, even though that occurred at least a decade after he is supposed to have died.**

**This is in [1 Thessalonians 2:14-16](#), where Paul is made to say:**

**“in Judea...the Jews killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove out us, and pleased not God, and are contrary to all men; forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved; to fill up their sins always: but the wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.”**

- **Paul never blames the Jews for the death of Jesus elsewhere.**
- **Paul never talks about God’s wrath as having come, but as coming only at the future judgment. (Rom. 2:5, 3:5-6, 4:15)**
- **Paul teaches the Jews *will be saved*, not destroyed. (id. 11:25-28)**



# Significance

- I agree with many leading experts that these two passages are interpolations, therefore *we do not have what they had*.
- Yet all surviving manuscripts have them, thus our modern reconstruction does *not* reconstruct the original text.
- Not all interpolations will be so sloppy or obvious—in fact we should expect editors to have more commonly been smarter than that, so there must be *other* interpolations made behind the curtain that we *can't* detect.

# General Trends That Discredit Reliability

## (3) Spelling Errors

- The most common errors (numbering in the thousands) are spelling mistakes.
- Given the rate of spelling mistakes accumulated over the centuries, there must have been **hundreds** made behind the curtain which are therefore undetectable to us now.
- Spelling errors are *not* trivial. They make substantial differences to the meaning of the text.

# **“Peace on Earth and Goodwill Toward Men”**

- **You all know this line (spoken by the angel at the nativity)**
- **It was never in the original (Luke 2:14).**
- **The original said “**peace on earth for men whom God pleases**” a much less lofty (& more ominous) declaration**
- **The famous (but bogus) line resulted from a simple spelling error: a single letter (a sigma) was accidentally dropped**
- **In this case we got lucky, we just happened to have manuscripts showing the original**
- **What if the mistake had been made years before that—then we wouldn’t even know about it!**
- **Statistically, must be *many* such errors behind the curtain.**

# Spelling Errors That Aren't Trivial...

Is the number of the beast 666, or 616? We don't know.  
(Rev. 13:18)

Did Paul teach the Corinthians the “**mystery**” of God or the “**salvation**” of God or the “**testimony**” of God? We don't know.  
(1 Cor. 2:1: *mustêrion / marturion / sôtêrion*)

Did Paul say “**When justified by faith, we *have* peace with God**” or “**When justified by faith, *let us* have peace with God**”?  
We don't know. (Rom. 5:1)

# Conclusion...

(1) The rate of **significant spelling errors** in the first three centuries of the manuscripts we have entails many such errors will have occurred behind the curtain and thus remain unknown to us now.

(2) The rate of **interpolations** in the first three centuries of the manuscripts we have entails many more will have occurred behind the curtain and thus remain unknown to us now.

(3) The rate of **harmonizations** in the first three centuries of the manuscripts we have entails many more will have occurred behind the curtain and thus remain unknown to us now.

**Therefore**

**What We Have Is Not What They Had**

*It may be most of it, but not all of it, and since we can't know what changes were made behind the curtain of its first hundred years, we can't trust the New Testament as an inerrant guide or source.*



# Additional Slides

...

*Prepared for but not used during the live debate, I provide them here for their educational use.*

1. Most interpolations won't be so stupid as to completely contradict the author being edited
2. Therefore there must be more smart interpolations than stupid ones
3. If there are more smart interpolations than stupid ones, and there are two stupid ones behind the curtain (as I showed there are), then there are **more** than two smart interpolations behind the curtain as well.
4. Because smart interpolations behind the curtain are undetectable, it follows there are many interpolations in the NT that we can't detect. Any passage we name could be one of them.

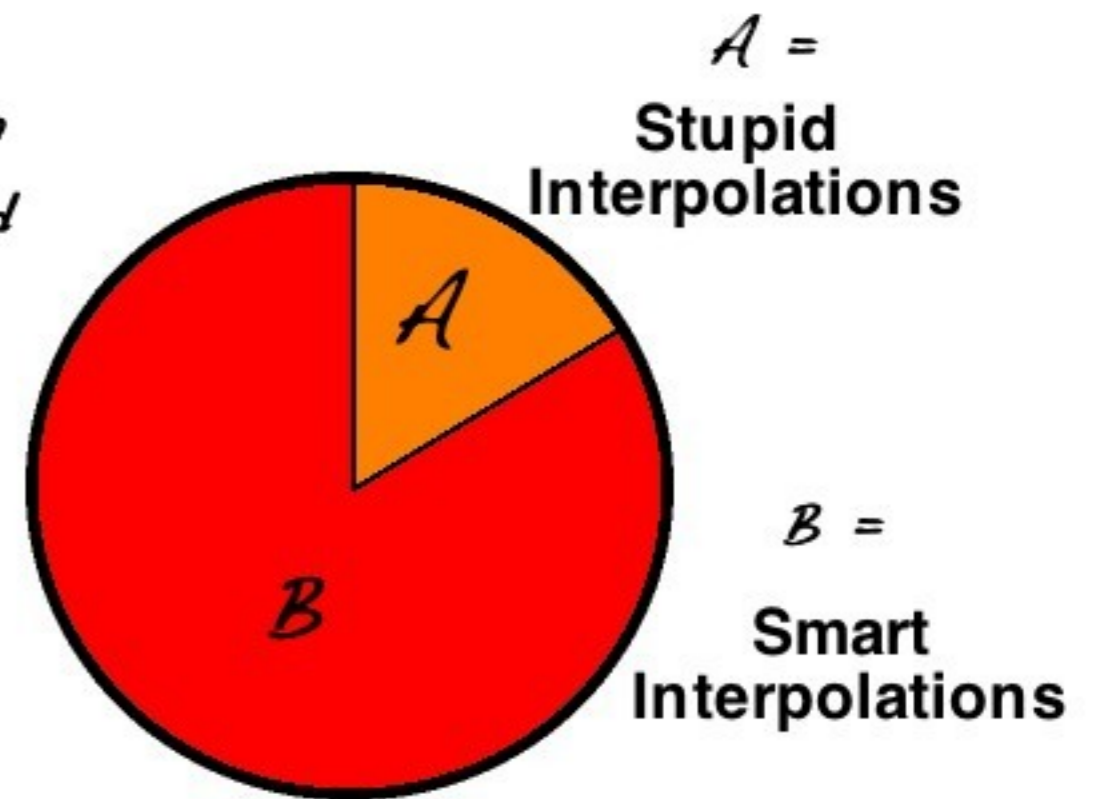
Conclusion: Therefore we do not have what they had and we can never reconstruct exactly what they had.

$$B > A$$

$$\text{If } A = 2$$

$$\text{Then } B > 2$$

$$\text{Therefore } B > 2$$



# Comparison with Secular Literature

## The *Weights and Measures* of Epiphanius

- so heavily interpolated within a single generation we don't know what the original looked like

## The *Annals* of Tacitus:

- we have just two primary manuscripts (and for most of the text only one)
- yet it contains over 2,000 discrepancies and errors

## The *Jewish Antiquities* of Josephus:

- where we know there are interpolations and errors, yet we have no manuscripts showing the original
- number of known variants & garbled readings throughout the best manuscripts is in the thousands

## **The *Aeneid* of Virgil:**

- **over 1,000 discrepancies among the primary mss.**
- **including many places where we can't reconstruct what the original said**

## **The *Lives of the Philosophers* of Diogenes Laertius,**

- **from quotations we know our manuscripts are missing entire sections**
- **among the best manuscripts there are around 3,000 variants or garbled text**

# Why Is It Not Such an Issue?

- (1) The pressures on the Bible were different than on most secular literature (e.g. harmonization, interpolation), and the competence of early scribes was lower.**
- (2) Historians don't need these texts to be inerrant to extract *probable* conclusions from them.**
- (3) We just don't draw conclusions where a text is uncertain, or we declare only tentative conclusions.**
- (4) Missing text is common but nothing we can do about it.**
- (5) We routinely allow conjectural emendations.**

## For Example...

Strabo's *Geography* 3.1.5:

- Posidonius attributed apparent enlargement of moon near horizon to refraction as through *aulôn* (flutes).
- We're sure he said *ualôn* (glasses filled with water), a single transposition of two letters.
- If this happens routinely with other texts, it must be allowed to happen with the NT.

- besides various whole or partial books, the oldest bibles (NT's) are:

### **4th century (300-400 A.D.)**

Codex Sinaiticus

Codex Vaticanus

#### **Latin:**

Codex Vercellensis

Codex Sangallensis

Codex Bobiensis (just Mt. & Mk.)

### **5th century (400-500 A.D.)**

Codex Alexandrinus

Codex Ephraemi

Freer Codex (Washingtonianus)

Codex Bezae

#### **Latin:**

Codex Curiensis

Codex Veronensis

Codex Veronensis

Codex Veronensis

Codex Corbiensis II

Codex Bezae

# Spelling Mistakes Matter...

What did Paul say about the resurrection? Christian scribes couldn't decide...

“We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed”

or

“We shall not all sleep, *nor* shall we all be changed”

or

“We *shall* all sleep, but we shall *not* all be changed”

or

“We shall all sleep, *and* we shall all be changed”

or

“We shall all be *resurrected*, but we shall *not* all be changed”

(1 Cor. 15:51)



# **Was 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 Interpolated?**

- I'm open to the possibility of experts being wrong—because they often are (that they all disagree about a thousand things entails every expert *is* wrong about several things, because they can't all be right about everything)**
- And if experts can't agree, we can't trust their reconstructed text either (since it's a product of the same fallible opinions and meets with all the same disagreements)**
- But in this case attempts to defend its authenticity simply make no sense—they require us to believe too many improbable things...**

# 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 Is Very Unusual

- It's *very unusual* in several ways (not in any of Paul's 20,000 words, and dozens of discussions of the Jews, is anything like it)
- Paul blaming the Jews for the death of Jesus is unprecedented.
- Paul *never* talks about the Jews as if he wasn't one of them.  
(Gal. 2:15; 1 Cor. 9:20; Rom. 9:1-5, 11:1; Philip. 3:4-5)
- Paul acknowledged Jews as members of his own church, so he wouldn't damn them *as a group* like this, and never does.  
(1 Cr. 1:24, 12:13; 2 Cr. 11:12; Rm. 9:24, 10:12)

- **Instead, Paul says things like...**

**“Did God cast off his people? God forbid! For I also am a Jew, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.” (Rom. 11:1)**

**“Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I.” (2 Cor. 11:22)**

*(That Paul taught the Jews would be saved, not damned ...)*

**Romans 11:25-28:**

**“For I would not have you ignorant of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own conceits, that a hardening *in part* hath befallen Israel, *until* the fulness of the Gentiles be come in; and so all Israel *shall be saved*: even as it is written...and as touching the gospel, they are enemies for your sake: but as touching the election, *they are beloved* for the fathers’ sake.”**

*(God’s wrath as coming only at the future judgment:*

**Rom. 2:5, 3:5-6, 4:15; esp. **1 Thess. 1:10**)**

**“For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God *which are in Judaea* in Jesus Christ, for you also suffered the same things from *your own countrymen* as they did from the Jews who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove out us, and pleased not God, and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, to fill up their sins for evermore—but the wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.”**

- **Paul is writing to *pagan* converts (as he also says in 1:9) being persecuted *by pagans*, not by Jews (this is what he means in the authentic part of 2:14), so why would he suddenly break into a tirade against “the Jews” here?**
- **This makes no sense in context and violates the entire thread of his argument, that the Thessalonians are awesome for having withstood a *pagan* persecution.**
- **So any other explanation is improbable: it just doesn’t fit the facts**

# Can It Mean Anything Else?

- Says God's wrath has come upon them **“to the uttermost”** (lit. **“to the end”** / **“with finality”**).

- Refers to something that affected the Jews *in Judea*

**“For you became imitators of the churches of God *which are in Judaea* ... for you also suffered the same things *of your own countrymen* as they did *of the Jews* who [killed Jesus and the prophets in Judea, and drove us out of Judea, etc.]...”**

- The only thing a **“final judgment”** on **“the Jews”** in **“Judea”** can possibly be is the end of Judea itself (as a province) and the end of the Jewish cult (in the destruction of the Temple), universally recognized by Christians as God's final abandonment of the Jews.
- No other event makes any sense. (... and Paul was dead by then)

# Was 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 Interpolated?

- **Everyone concurs that the passage contradicts Paul's teachings in the very same letter (about women *and* the law)**
- **In 1 Cor. 14:36 the exclamation "What!?" is not in the Greek. (that's a modern translator's conjecture)**
- **The word there is simply "or" (and so translated everywhere else)**
- **Nor is indirect speech indicated: no grammatical structure indicating Paul is quoting opponents, unlike other passages where he *does* (7:1, "concerning what you wrote..."; 15:12, "some among you say..."; 15:35, "some say..."; in 6:12 he's not quoting his opponents but repeating his own teaching: cf. 10:23)**
- **Therefore the "quoting others" argument has no basis in the text itself**

# The Original Reading of 1 Cor. 14:31-37

**“For you all can prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be exhorted, and the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets, for God is not a God of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. [...] Or did the word of God originate with you, or come only to you? If any man thinks himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him take knowledge of the things which I write unto you, that they are the commandment of the Lord.”**

- We know, because in some mss. *this is exactly what Paul says*: the insertion about the women is moved to the end of the chapter, so:
  - (a) it was understood to be a separate unit and
  - (b) the “challenge” question was understood as directed at those promoting ‘confusion’ rather than ‘peace’, *not* the issue of letting women speak. (Thus he mentions *his* rule *does* come from God and is found in *all* the churches, so Corinthians can’t act like they received special instructions from God)



# The Clincher...

*(\* and I only just learned this yesterday, illustrating (a) how hard it is to claim you know what the original text said when you can't possibly have studied all the literature on every single verse! and (b) interpolations were once proven by manuscripts we no longer have)*

**Philip Payne, "Fuldensis, Sigla for Variants in Vaticanus, and 1 Cor 14:34-5," *New Testament Studies* 41 (1995): pp. 240-50.**

- **Ms. shows Bishop Victor of Capua in A.D. 546 ordered rewrite to omit verses 34-35 in bottom margin of Codex Fuldensis**
- **Bishop Victor's other corrections of the text in Codex Fuldensis reflect his awareness of mss. with the readings he advised**
- **Therefore Victor knew of a manuscript lacking vv. 34-35**
- **So we once had mss. proving vv. 34-35 an interpolation (†)**

Recommended  
reading to learn  
more...

**Bart Ehrman** : *Jesus Interrupted*  
: *Misquoting Jesus*

**Robert Stewart** : *The Reliability of the New Testament:*  
*Bart D. Ehrman & Daniel B. Wallace*  
*in Dialogue*

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**Bart Ehrman** : *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*

**Wayne Kannaday** : *Apologetic Discourse & the Scribal*  
*Tradition*

*(Evidence of the Influence of*  
*Apologetic Interests on the Text of*  
*the Canonical Gospels)*