

Reconstructing the Original New Testament: A Critical Analysis of Bart D. Ehrman's Arguments on Textual Errors and Manuscript Transmission

Abdullah Muslich Rizal Maulana*

Universitas Darussalam Gontor

Email: amrizalm@unida.gontor.ac.id

Mudawamatul Muajahah*

Universitas Darussalam Gontor

Email: mudawamatul.muajahah@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aimed to discuss the thought of Bart D. Ehrman, an American New Testament Scholar, regarding this idea of the contradiction in his research into the New Testament in many of his books, which was considered controversial and initiated a heated debate among theologians and other scholars. This research employed a library research method by analyzing various written sources such as books, articles, and scientific journals that discuss Bart D. Ehrman's thoughts on the contradictions in the New Testament. The nature of this research is qualitative, where the researcher analyzes and interprets textual data to understand Ehrman's thoughts and their implications for New Testament studies. Ehrman affirmed that since its initial copying process, the Bible had been using the hand-copying method, resulting in many errors in the manuscript. Up to the number of copyists who copy back the wrong copy and make new mistakes; eventually, many copies of the New Testament exist today, but none of these copies are

* Jl. Raya Siman, Dusun I, Demangan, Kec. Siman, Kabupaten Ponorogo, Jawa Timur.

known to be copies of the original book, nor copies of the first copies. Instead, they are copies of copies of other copies that have been scattered long after the original writing period. Which undoubtedly contains very many errors and differences in each copy. Mistakes that arise because they are intentional or unintentional. This study concluded that, according to Ehrman, it has been very tough to reconstruct the original text of the New Testament. Nevertheless, even so, he still stated that it was a big mistake deciding to stop learning the texts of the New Testament.

Keywords: Authenticity, Bart D. Ehrman, New Testament.

Abstrak

Studi ini bertujuan untuk membahas pemikiran Bart D. Ehrman, seorang sarjana Perjanjian Baru Amerika, mengenai gagasan tentang kontradiksi dalam penelitiannya terhadap Perjanjian Baru dalam banyak bukunya, yang dianggap kontroversial dan memicu perdebatan sengit di antara para teolog dan sarjana lainnya. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode studi pustaka dengan menganalisis berbagai sumber tertulis seperti buku, artikel, dan jurnal ilmiah yang membahas pemikiran Bart D. Ehrman mengenai kontradiksi dalam Perjanjian Baru. Sifat penelitian ini kualitatif, di mana peneliti menganalisis dan menginterpretasikan data tekstual untuk memahami pemikiran Ehrman dan implikasinya terhadap studi Perjanjian Baru. Ehrman menegaskan bahwa sejak proses penyalinan awal, Alkitab telah menggunakan metode penyalinan tangan, yang mengakibatkan banyak kesalahan dalam manuskrip. Hingga jumlah penyalin yang menyalin salinan yang salah dan membuat kesalahan baru; pada akhirnya, banyak salinan Perjanjian Baru ada saat ini, tetapi tidak ada satupun dari salinan ini yang diketahui sebagai salinan dari buku asli, atau salinan dari salinan pertama. Sebaliknya, mereka adalah salinan dari salinan-salinan lain yang telah tersebar jauh setelah periode penulisan asli. Dimana salinan itu tidak diragukan lagi mengandung banyak sekali kesalahan dan perbedaan dalam setiap salinannya, baik kesalahan yang disengaja atau tidak disengaja. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa, menurut Ehrman, sangat sulit untuk merekonstruksi teks asli Perjanjian Baru. Meskipun demikian, ia tetap menyatakan bahwa

merupakan kesalahan besar untuk berhenti mempelajari teks-teks Perjanjian Baru.

Kata Kunci: Autentisitas, Bart D. Ehrman, Perjanjian Baru.

Introduction

After writing his book *Misquoting Jesus* (2005), Bart D. Ehrman succeeded in galvanizing and shaking the Christian faith, which had previously been loosened by several other works such as Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (2003), then James Tabor's *The Jesus Dynasty* (2006) and Simcha Jacobovichi's documentary film *The Lost Tomb of Jesus* (2007). These works seem to be a termite that gnaws the heart of the Christian faith centered on the teachings of Jesus witnessed by the Gospels.¹ *Misquoting Jesus* is Ehrman's work discussing the origin of the New Testament and the contrasts found about the authors of copies that sometimes change them;² As Jatmiko (2017) asserted, the study of biblical textual criticism shows many textual errors in the various copies of both the Old or New Testaments.³

Bart D. Ehrman is a theologian who graduated from one of Chicago's best Christian Theologian schools, the Moody Bible Institute. In his study of Biblical theology at the school, he had a problem with a statement that the Bible was word-inspired, and those at Moody do not have the original New Testament writings. They have copies of them, but none are entirely accurate because the copyists accidentally or intentionally altered some parts of the New Testament. The changes and alterations he found within those copies raised great doubt and confusion.⁴ In *Misquoting Jesus*, Ehrman commenced his paragraph showing his college assignment supervised by Professor Story -he was one of the lecturers who

¹ Teguh Hindarto, *Cracking Misquoting Jesus: Tanggapan Kritis Atas Serangan Dr. Bart D. Ehrman Mengenai Reliabilitas Kitab Perjanjian Baru*, n.d., 2.

² Bart D Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus. The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), x.

³ Yudi Jatmiko, "Konsep Otoritas Alkitab di Hadapan Fakta Kesalahan Tekstual: Sebuah Diskusi Teologis," *Veritas: Jurnal Teologi dan Pelayanan* 16, no. 1 (June 1, 2017): 2, <https://doi.org/10.36421/veritas.v16i1.7>.

⁴ Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus. The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*, xvi.

taught at Princeton Theological Seminary-as Ehrman found an oddity in the text of the New Testament. As Ehrman observed, Mark 2's story differs from Book 1 Sam. 21: 1-6. In Mark, It is reported that while the people were starved, King David visited the temple of God when Abiathar was high priest and distributed sacrificial food; while in it is written in Book 1 Sam. 21 that King David did this not when Abiathar served as high priest, but when Abyatar's father, Ahimelech, served as high priest.⁵ Another inaccuracy he discovered, albeit it is a minor one in Mark 4, that says the mustard seed is "the tiniest seed in the world," he decided it is not like that, implying that the mustard seed is not the smallest in the world.⁶ Ehrman used these instances of the error to enlighten his reader in the beginning that the Bible is not error-free but contains errors. His Awareness of these mistakes increased as his research on The New Testament manuscripts deepened; he later stated that the current Bible manuscript is far from the original as it is not even a copy of the original manuscript but rather a manuscript made very long after the age of Jesus Christ.⁷

Research on Bart D. Ehrman's Thought on the Authenticity of the New Testament is of great importance for several reasons. First, Ehrman is a renowned New Testament scholar with extensive publications that have sparked heated debates among theologians and other experts. His works, such as "Misquoting Jesus," challenge traditional beliefs about the origin and reliability of the New Testament, and therefore need to be thoroughly researched and analyzed. Second, Ehrman's thought has significant implications for New Testament studies and Christian theology. His criticisms of textual transmission and the authenticity of the New Testament open up important questions about how we understand and interpret the sacred texts. Research on his thought can help theologians and scholars better understand the complexity of the biblical texts and develop more sophisticated methodologies for studying them. Third, research on Ehrman's thought can help bridge the gap between the academic world and the public. His works have attracted the

⁵ Ehrman, xxii.

⁶ Ehrman, xxiii.

⁷ Ehrman, xxiv.

attention of many laypeople who are interested in questions about the origin and reliability of the Bible. Systematic and objective research on his thought can help the public better understand these complex issues and make informed decisions about how they view the sacred texts. Overall, research on Bart D. Ehrman's thought is of great importance for advancing New Testament studies, Christian theology, and the dialogue between academia and the public. This research can help us better understand the biblical texts, develop more sophisticated methodologies for studying them, and bridge the gap between the academic world and the public.

The New Testament and Bart D. Ehrman

The New Testament comprises 27 works created for various Christian groups and individuals by 14 or 15 early Christian writers. The oldest surviving book was composed in the first century A.D. All the volumes were initially written in Greek, the common language of the early Roman Empire. Additionally, the New Testament includes writings attributed to the apostles of Jesus.⁸ As the most essential text, the New Testament has affected the conduct and experiences of countless men and women over 2,000 years. Non-Christians may learn about the ancient roots of Christianity by reading this book. Only for around 300 years has it been exposed to academic inquiry, frequently with strong historical critique that has confounded the church and theology and has become a feature of contemporary civilisation.⁹ Then, there is no longer any doubt that this book is the most significant book or collection of books in the history of Western civilisation. It was the best-selling book ever since its publication. However, many individuals today lack a fundamental understanding of the New Testament, particularly its contents.¹⁰

Today we know more about twenty-seven short writings from small religious subcultures in the Roman empire. Nevertheless, they risk being forgotten because the relationship with Christian

⁸ Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to The Early Christian Writings*, 2nd ed (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1.

⁹ Gerd Theissen, *The New Testament: History, Literature, Religion* (London: T & T Clark, 2004), ix, <http://www.myilibrary.com?id=851420>.

¹⁰ Bart D Ehrman, *The History of the Bible: The Making of the New Testament Canon* (USA: The Great Courses, 2005), 1.

history they have influenced is severed, partly because many of our educated contemporaries come from other religious and cultural traditions. Some of the results of critical-historical research are so complex that many people are deterred from trying to understand them.¹¹

1. The Fifth Earliest Book of the New Testament

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, known as the Canonical Gospels since their adoption at the end of the second century, make up the first four books of the New Testament.¹² The term "Synoptic Gospels" was first used by J. J. Griesbach to refer to the three canonical Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke).¹³ Those three Gospels, in addition, are very similar and different from John; The first three relate similar tales, often in the same sequence, using words that may be put next to one another in paragraphs and carefully compared. This is why the first three Gospels are called Synoptic Gospels.¹⁴ However, although it is said to be very similar, still Matthew and Luke provide other stories that are untold in Mark, as well as those found in Luke, some are untold in Matthew because the authors of each book also take other sources to write their books, such as the Gospel of Q.¹⁵ John, nevertheless, is a distinct Gospel and is most different from the three Gospels stated above. Jesus is characterized less as a human messiah and more as a heavenly person who came to earth to impart the information essential for redemption in this Gospel. Therefore, the Gospel of John is regarded as the most spiritual Gospel.¹⁶

Since ancient times, the fifth book of the New Testament has been known as Acts, yet this term is not contained in the book itself.

¹¹ Theissen, *The New Testament*, ix.

¹² François Bovon, "The Synoptic Gospels and the Noncanonical Acts of the Apostles," *Harvard Theological Review* 81, no. 1 (January 1988): 19, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816000009937>.

¹³ D. A Carson and Douglas J Moo, *An Introduction to The New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2009), 77.

¹⁴ Bart D Ehrman, *A Brief Introduction to The New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 60.

¹⁵ Ehrman, 61.

¹⁶ Ehrman, 112.

The Codex Sinaiticus, one of the oldest copies, simply named the book Acts, without identifying the apostles. The narrative is a brief historical account of the twelve disciples' ministry. For over three decades, the 'beloved healer' Luke wrote. This book contains vital teachings for the church at all ages. The book chronicles the history of early Christianity, starting with the events immediately after Jesus' crucifixion and focusing on how religion was spread across the Roman Empire, to Gentiles and Jews, particularly via the apostle Paul's missionary activity.¹⁷

2. The Twenty-one Epistles of Apostles

Twenty-one of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament are letters, accounting for 35% of the total content. Paul is the most renowned letter writer, having written thirteen legitimate letters.¹⁸ Paul wrote his letters for about fifteen years to churches and individuals thousands of miles apart. These letters began to be collected because many experts thought Paul's letters were ignored after they were sent. Another theory says that these letters were first collected about fifty years earlier¹⁹ and were expressly recognized by ancient Christians, revealed as the Epistles of the Apostles.²⁰

The first letter is addressed to Romans. City of Rome is Paul's longest and most theologically important letter, regarded as the "purest gospel." A theological letter that begins with the normal provisions and gratitude and concludes with a transitional statement from the letter's theme: the Gospel is a revelation of God's truth, a truth that can only be experienced by faith. This is the first main section of the letter.²¹

Furthermore, there are two Corinthian epistles, letters addressed to certain people and motivated by concrete problems, sometimes called tract letters.²² The letter to Galatians, containing

¹⁷ Ehrman, 3.

¹⁸ Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to The New Testament*, 331.

¹⁹ Carson and Moo, 335.

²⁰ Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Works, His Epistles and Teachings* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 255.

²¹ Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to The New Testament*, 391.

²² Carson and Moo, 415.

the affirmation of his status as an apostle sent by God, the greeting at the beginning of this letter reminds the reader that Christ gave himself up for the deliverance of his followers from the so-called 'age of evil today.'²³ Letters to Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, the Pastoral Epistles, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1,2, and 3 John, and Jude are among the others.

3. The Book of Revelation

The Book of Revelation is nothing more than a book of prophecy than Luke or John and perhaps less prophesied than Daniel and Ezekiel. The first five words in Revelation give the true purpose of its content: the *revelation* of Jesus Christ.²⁴ The author is John, and the letter is written from the little island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, some 37 miles south and west of Miletus on Asia Minor's west coast.²⁵ This book is intended so a Christian can find himself as a Christian. Hiding the trumpet that declares to everyone that Jesus Christ is God and King, and His victory is their victory.²⁶ Revelation provides a glimpse into what is happening in heaven right now and what is happening in the believer's ongoing life.²⁷ Beginning with a declaration validating John's vision as truly of God given in the chain of command via Jesus and the angelic messenger, and concluding with a series of revelations containing the book coming from God and that those who hear it will be blessed, this book details the future events leading up to the destruction of this world concerning the peak of the Christian age.²⁸

The New Testament did not exist as a comprehensive and well-established collection of writings soon after the death of Jesus. Years passed before Christians decided on which book should

²³ Carson and Moo, 456.

²⁴ Lynn Hiles, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: An Open Letter to the Church from a Modern Perspective of the Book of Revelation* (No Place: No Publisher, No Date), 7.

²⁵ Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 11.

²⁶ Hiles, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 7.

²⁷ Hiles, 10.

²⁸ Ehrman, *A Brief Introduction to The New Testament*, 4; Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 37–39.

constitute their scriptures, with discussions over the outlines of the 'Canon,' or a lengthy and sometimes harsh collection of holy works. In part as a result of the numerous writings accessible, all authored by Christians, several writers claimed to be the original Apostles of Jesus, but supported a vastly different perspective than the one represented in the canon. These variations are not merely related to seemingly minor problems, such as whether a person is clothed as a child or an adult or if lay elders or ordained priests, bishops, and popes will lead the church.²⁹

Biography of Bart D. Ehrman

Beginning in the mid-1950s, he was born and reared in a conservative location and time, on October 5, in Lawrence, Kansas, the nation's heartland.³⁰ Attending Campus Life Youth for Christ group sessions profoundly impacted his perspective at the time of Christianity, as he was persuaded to be 'born-again' Christians and enroll them in serious Bible study, prayer groups, and other activities.³¹ Later, the Dallas Morning News referred to Ehrman as a "new breed of biblical scholar" and theologian who leads the Religious Studies Faculty at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. He got his M.Div. in New Testament from Wheaton College and his Ph.D. from Princeton Theological Seminary under the tutelage of the renowned New Testament scholar Bruce M. Metzger. Bart D. Ehrman also serves as President of the Southeast Region of the Society of Biblical Literature. He was a well-known speaker, delivering many presentations annually for prestigious groups such as the Carolin Speakers Bureau, the UNC Program for the Humanities, the Biblical Archeology Society, and others.³²

Before he entered Princeton Theological Seminary, he had doubts, knowing that Princeton was a Liberal seminary that did not hold to the literal interpretation and verbal inspiration of the Bible.

²⁹ Bart Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It Into The New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1.

³⁰ Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus. The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*, 1-2.

³¹ Ehrman, 4.

³² Ehrman, *The History of the Bible: The Making of the New Testament Canon*, i.

Nevertheless, he was still committed to engaging with liberal thought in their superficial view of the Bible. As a good evangelical, he was prepared to fend off all attacks on the biblical faith he believed. Finally, his study did not go according to what he had planned, as Princeton instead made his mind about the Bible change. It was hard to change his mind before that, as Ehrman thought he was truly committed to God.³³ He said that none of this material was authored by New Testament and early Christian studies-trained academics who taught in approved theology seminaries, divinity schools, universities, or colleges in North America, Europe, or elsewhere. None of the hundreds of Christian intellectuals who lectured at these institutions questioned Jesus' existence. However, the case is discussed in published works, some of which are quite intellectual and well-informed.³⁴

The Authenticity of the New Testament According to Bart D. Ehrman

Early Christians had access to several gospels, not simply Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, which are known to New Testament readers today. Although the majority of the other Gospels have vanished from public view, several were very influential in Orthodox communities during the Middle Ages. These will include, for example, Thomas' fascinating childhood Gospel, which tells of Jesus' miraculous and often mischievous deeds as a boy between the ages of five and twelve, and the Proto-Gospel of James, which chronicles the events of Jesus' birth by recounting His miraculous birth, early life, and His mother, the Virgin Mary's engagement. The other Gospels were significant in one or more communities in ancient times, but they were lost and only known by name until contemporary times, when they were found by professional archaeologists looking for them or by chance.³⁵

³³ Bart D Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (And Why We Don't Know About Them)* (Australia: Harper Collins, 2009), 5–7.

³⁴ Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*, First (USA: Harper One, 2012), xii.

³⁵ Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*, 8.

So, how and where did the writers acquire their Jesus accounts for the New Testament? Some of the facts are clear since one of the writers is intimately involved in this matter. Luke begins his Gospel by recalling an earlier recorded account of Jesus' life and stating that he and his predecessors learned about Him through Christians who recounted tales about Him. These works are based on oral traditions, and tales shared among Christians from the time Jesus died until the Gospel authors recorded them. Nobody knows when Jesus died, although scholars believe it was approximately A.D. 30.³⁶ Most historians, on the other hand, believe Mark was the first Gospel composed in the mid-60s and early 70s. Matthew and Luke were most likely created 10 to fifteen years later, at 80 or 85. John was most likely written ten years later, around 1990 or 1995. Within a few years, most experts will concur on this.³⁷ Copies of the fourth-century Greek Bible were produced at the Vatican Library between 1868 and 1872. By the end of the nineteenth century, the discovery of new manuscripts had swamped the market.³⁸

The identity of people who relayed Jesus' tales are still unknown in great detail. The tales are transmitted by word of mouth in many regions, for various causes, and even in a language other than Jesus' Aramaic.³⁹ According to most academics, many of their accounts about Jesus are attributed to Matthew and Luke.⁴⁰ The authors Matthew and Luke took the source of their writing from the first book, Mark. From there, they changed a lot, omitting and condensing many of the stories in Mark. Such treatment would not have happened if they (the authors Matthew and Luke) had assumed that God inspired Mark or that Mark's words were words of absolute truth.⁴¹

³⁶ Ehrman, *A Brief Introduction to The New Testament*, 47.

³⁷ Ehrman, 47.

³⁸ Robert W. Funk and Roy W. Hoover, *The Five Gospels: The Search for The Authentic Words of Jesus* (USA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 8.

³⁹ Ehrman, *A Brief Introduction to The New Testament*, 49.

⁴⁰ Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 76.

⁴¹ Muhammad Mustafa Al-A'zami, *The History of The Qur'anic Text from Revelation to Compilation A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testament* (Leicester: UK Islamic Academy, 2003), 282.

The gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were not the only ones proclaimed by early Christians. They were just four persons who were later included in the New Testament. It is noteworthy that the author of one of them, Luke, informs out that he had many predecessors who authored accounts about what Jesus said and did before him.⁴² Much of the Gospel from early Christianity has been irreparably lost without being repaired anymore.⁴³ The absence of many Gospel texts makes the New Testament a less accurate book of authenticity. Intentionally or not to, insert these texts because one or two things must be hidden and can reduce confidence if it arises. The same or different opinions are also found about the existence of these texts. Here are some gospel texts, especially the lost New Testament, which researchers can summarize; Some Christians viewed Jesus' teachings to His Apostles to be authoritative towards the beginning of the second century.

Nevertheless, there is a fierce debate as to which apostle was faithful to Jesus' teachings and several writings claimed by the apostles are considered by some Christians to be a forgery. Our New Testament developed through strife among Christian factions, and the supremacy of the stance that eventually "prevailed" resulted in establishing the Christian right as we know it today. It is no accident that the Gospel regarded heretical is incorrect: the Gospel of Peter or the Gospel of Philip, for example, do not appear in the New Testament. This does not imply that the right to scripture was fully established by the end of the second century. Indeed, it is a historical fact that, while the four gospels were widely regarded authoritatively by proto-Orthodox Christians at the time, as were the stories of the apostles, most of Paul's epistles and some common letters were not completed until much later during the second until the fourth century. Orthodox Christians are still debating several more works.⁴⁴

The only way to find out what someone from the past said and did is to look at the sources from that period. Most today's sources are works of literature authored by writers that allude to the

⁴² Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 179.

⁴³ Bart D. Ehrman, *The Lost Gospel of Judas Iscariot: A New Look at Betrayer and Betrayed* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), viii.

⁴⁴ Ehrman, *A Brief Introduction to The New Testament*, 7.

person's words and actions. However, sources like these are not always defensible since eyewitnesses are usually conflicting and sometimes incorrect.⁴⁵ There are also many differences between Bible books and inconsistencies in some books, a problem that history critics have long regarded as the fact that gospel writers use different sources in their accounts; even when these sources are connected, they will contradict each other.⁴⁶

Since early Christian manuscripts were not copied by professional copyists, roughly at the beginning of the second and third, and only by educated Christian church members, it can be concluded that copying errors were numerous, especially in the earliest copies. There is strong evidence that this happened because the Christians who read the manuscripts tried to find out what the original author said, sometimes complaining about it. The testimony of the Church Father named Origen from the third century; he once complained about the copies of the Gospels he had.⁴⁷ The following is what he said:

"The differences among the manuscripts have become great, either through the negligence of some copyists or through the perverse audacity of others; they either neglect to check over what they have transcribed, or, in the process of checking, they make additions or deletions as they please."⁴⁸

Al-Azami (2003) said that if we take these four Gospels as an honest depiction of the life of Jesus and the events surrounding his death, then what is read about His disciples can weaken the reader's faith in the text. This is the first portrait of Christianity. Likewise, there is ample evidence of external influences to challenge the Gospel record, that the depictions of the disciples were

⁴⁵ Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 194.

⁴⁶ Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (And Why We Don't Know About Them)*, p. 7.

⁴⁷ Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus. The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*, 52.

⁴⁸ Ehrman, 52.

inaccurate, and the disciples were incompetent, or that they could have been competent, but that they were portrayed as dishonest by subsequent gospel writers.⁴⁹

Ehrman grouped the errors arising in the New Testament into two parts; Intentional mistakes and unintentional mistakes. An example of the intentional mistakes in copying the manuscript can be seen in one of the best old manuscripts that Christians have today, the Vatican Codex, created in the fourth century. In the opening of the Book of Hebrews, a passage that most manuscripts say, "Christ *supports* (Greek: PHERON) all things with His powerful word." In the Vatican Codex, the early copyists' copies in slightly different words, containing verbs that sound very similar in Greek, which read, "Christ *explains* (Greek: PHANERON) all things with His powerful word."⁵⁰

While unintentional errors are sometimes caused by the fact that all Greek manuscripts are written with minimal punctuation, even without punctuation, most or even spaces between similar words are often misrepresented with each other. In 1 Corinthians 5:8, for example. In the tale, Paul instructs his readers that they must eat Christ, the Passover lamb, and not "old leaven, the leaven of iniquity and evil." In Greek, the word 'evil' is spelled 'PONERAS,' which looks like the term "sexual immorality," 'PORNEIAS.' The change in meaning is not significant, but it is notable that in certain surviving manuscripts, Paul reminds us of sexual offenses rather than evil in general. Most unintended mistakes occur when two duplicated phrases conclude with the same letter or when two words sound identical. This domination arises when a scribe is dictated to while copying his manuscript.

Erhman explains one of the most prominent challenges faced by New Testament manuscripts in his book, *A Brief Introduction to The New Testament*. One theologian has used various texts in the

⁴⁹ Muhammad Mustafa Al-A'zami, *The History of The Qur'anic Text: From Revelation to Compilation* (Leicester: UK Islamic Academy, No Year), 272; Al-A'zami, *The History of The Qur'anic Text from Revelation to Compilation A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testament*, 272.

⁵⁰ Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus. The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*, 56.

New Testament to establish the Trinity, particularly the Triune God (Three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who are together in one God); However, save in the last few copies of one noteworthy paragraph, the teaching of the Trinity is never explicitly stated in the Bible: 1 John 5: 7-8.⁵¹ It is finally here! The Trinity is a doctrine. This sentence, however, is only preserved in Latin manuscripts, not Greek ones. When the first version of the Greek New Testament was released in 1516, its editor, the scholar Erasmus, removed this line, much to the chagrin of his theological opponents, who believed he had eliminated the Trinity from the Bible. Erasmus said that he could not locate the paragraph in any of the Greek manuscripts he was familiar with.⁵²

Translation errors are also a problem that cannot be allowed. Changes in manuscript translation are often overlooked, even to the end of a tradition. Any expression that cannot be kindly and properly heard in the listener's ear, like the original manuscript, is reviewed and revised, not once but many times. As every translator seeks to make the Greek Gospel of Mark seem acceptable and familiar to the ears of Modern America as if it were the original, particularly to the initial readers, the translation is always a compromise, and some even claim a betrayal. Finally, they continue to translate many cultural anachronisms into the text so that it may eliminate the original for the reader's benefit.⁵³

Another difference occurs as described by Ehrman in his book *Jesus Interrupted; Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (and Why We Don't Know?)*. In this book, Ehrman reveals a difference in the Gospels of Mark and John regarding the story of Jesus' death.⁵⁴ The verse tells of Jesus, and his disciples asked where they should prepare their Easter meals with Jesus. Then Jesus told them the instructions for the place and how they prepared it. Then in the evening, Jesus came with his 12 disciples to have Passover dinner.⁵⁵ Jesus then took the food symbolizing Easter and inspired them. He

⁵¹ "The Holy Bible, New King James Version," n.d., v. 1 John: 7-8.

⁵² Ehrman, *A Brief Introduction to The New Testament*, 10.

⁵³ W. Funk and W. Hoover, *The Five Gospels*, xvi.

⁵⁴ *The Holy Bible, New King James Version*, bk. Mark: 14: 12-17.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, bk. Mark: 14: 22-25.

broke the bread and said that it was the implication of his body, his body had to be broken for salvation. Then he took the cup of wine and said that it was his blood that should be shed just as his body for the comfort of many people.⁵⁶

After dinner, they went to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane. And then Judas Iscariot brought an army to commit his betrayal. Jesus was taken before the Jewish rulers for trial. After spending the night in jail, Jesus was tried the following day by the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, who judged him guilty and condemned him to death by crucifixion. That day, at nine o'clock, he was crucified. So in the Gospel of Mark, it is clearly and straightforwardly explained that Jesus died on The Day of Passover, the morning after the breakfast of Easter was eaten.⁵⁷

Then we turn to the story of his death in the Gospel of John. In the Gospel of John, Jesus went to Jerusalem on the last Sunday of his life to celebrate Passover and the final trial, betrayal, before Pilate and crucifixion. However, there is little difference in the initial story before the final trial, an explanation of his students asking where to prepare Easter dinner.⁵⁸

The Gospel of John is not told the same as in the Gospel of Mark. In the Gospel of John, the disciples of Jesus did not ask Him where they should prepare the dinner for Easter. Jesus also said nothing about the bread and the wine he ate at the meal. On the contrary, he washed the feet of his disciples. In the next verse, Jesus was crucified on the day of preparation for Passover instead of Easter, and it was almost noon. So Jesus in the Gospel of John died the day before Easter, unlike the one described in the Gospel of Mark that Jesus died right on Easter.⁵⁹

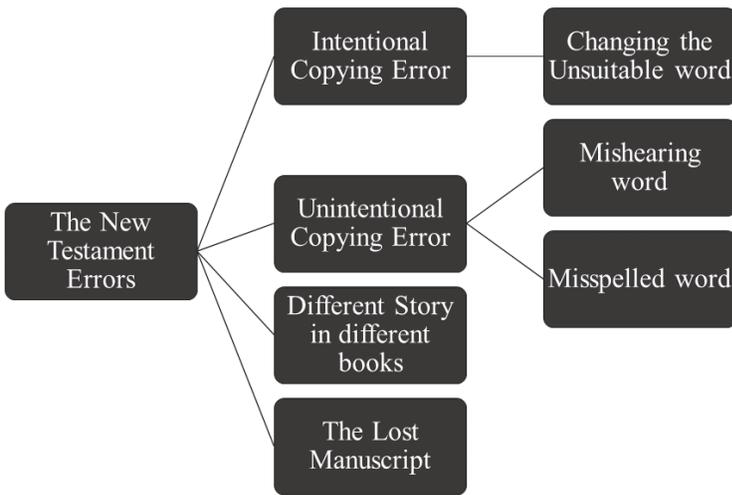
⁵⁶ "The Holy Bible, New King James Version," bk. Mark: 15: 25-26.

⁵⁷ Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (And Why We Don't Know About Them)*, 26.

⁵⁸ Ehrman, 27.

⁵⁹ "The Holy Bible, New King James Version," bk. John: 19: 14.

Many people never think of this as a worrying problem, but it is a very big problem. We all know from personal experience how many news changes in retelling in just a matter of hours, let alone days, weeks, months, years and decades. Is the story of Jesus excluded from the process of change and discovery that we experience ourselves all the time?



NEW TESTAMENT ERRORS ACCORDING TO BART D. EHRMAN

Type of an Error	The Error	Cause of an Error
Intentional Copying Error	Changing word of "PHERON" from Hebrew text that means support to "PHANERON" means explain, in Vatican Codex.	Thinking that the second word is the suitable word for that text.

The Different Story	The difference between Mark and John in telling about Jesus story before his death.	-
Unintentional Copying Error	Turning word "PONERAS" in Greek that means evil to "PORNEIAS" that means sexual immorality in 1 Corinthians 5: 8	Misspelled word when it was dictated due to the same letter in the end of this word and sound very similar.
	Turning word "LUSANTI" in Greek that means released to "LOUSANTI" that means washed in Rev. 1:5	Mishearing word when it was dictated due to the same letter in the end of this word and sound very similar.
Lost Manuscripts	Many books did not make into the New Testament, and such are: The Gospel of Thomas, The Gospel of Judas Iscariot, The Book of Q, The Gospel of Ebionites, and The Gospel of Nazarenes.	-
The Other Mistake/Error	Misattributed Writings	-
	Homonymous Writings	
	Pseudopigraphic Writings	

Conclusion

Bart D. Ehrman arrived to study the New Testament. Following his aim to further his Bible study as a completely Christian, he discovered several questions concerning the contents of the New Testament. He dared to write writings that criticized Christian ideas. As a result, his many writings were controversial, prompting him to face harsh criticism from other Bible specialists who still believe in the validity and authority of the New Testament Bible as the Holy Book of Christianity today. Following the first formulation of the problem, it can be concluded that no one currently

owns an original copy of the New Testament Bible, according to Bart D. Ehrman. Today, every Christian owns only a duplicate of the original manuscript. Because the manuscripts were written by hand, it took the early scribes a long time to distribute them. As a result, inaccuracies in New Testament copies occurred. Sometimes the copies clash with each other.

In the many books he wrote, some sources of error can be summarized in the copying of the New Testament Bible as follows; Ehrman divided the qualification of this error into two parts, errors that arose from intentional and unintentional. First, unintentional errors arise because all Greek manuscripts are written with a minimum punctuation mark, sometimes even without punctuation. So, there are many copycats because they are missed. Writing may produce different meanings due to errors in viewing. Then, the next unintentional error is the mistake of listening. One of the earliest methods of copying the Bible before the printing press existence to speed up copying the scribes copied it by dictating the text. One dictated, the other wrote, and the other checked back to the original copy. However, not infrequently because the number of similar words outwits the author's hearing.

This is also the case in most copies of the New Testament text. Copying and changing New Testament manuscripts is no longer considered a fatal mistake. Many Christians do not realize this. Many manuscripts were deliberately not included in the New Testament based on Ehrman's *The Lost Scriptures* and *The Lost Gospel of Judas Iscariot*, such as *The Gospel of Nazarenes*, *The Book of Q*, *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, and several others.

In addition, it can be concluded that its authenticity needs to be questioned of the various errors contained in the New Testament. Referring back to what Ehrman found that the early copyists of the Bible were not professionals, he concluded that the earliest copies of the New Testament led to more errors. However, he also said that some of these copyings are not done by copyists only based on their self-interest, nor do they concern theology and ideology. Except it is only the fault and transparency of the copyists.

Thus, according to Ehrman, it is irrelevant to say that the present New Testament Bible is purely from God's revelation or that

the New Testament is an inspired book. Because those inspired words have been much changed and even lost in the rest of the world, he argued that if God had inspired the texts, God would have miraculously kept them from change and error. It is concluded that New Testament is no longer authentic because of the many changes and errors caused by the negligence of its copyists, the early copyists until now.

References

- The Holy Bible, New King James Version.
- Ehrman, Bart D. 2005, *Misquoting Jesus. The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*, New York: Harper Collins.
- _____. 2nd ed edition. 2000, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to The Early Christian Writings*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- _____. 2005, *The History of the Bible: The Making of the New Testament Canon*, USA: The Great Courses.
- _____. 2003, *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It Into The New Testament*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- _____. 2009, *Jesus, Interrupted : Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (And Why We Don't Know About Them)*, Australia: Harper Collins.
- _____. 2017, *A Brief Introduction to The New Testament*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- _____. 2006, *The Lost Gospel of Judas Iscariot: A New Look at Betrayer and Betrayed*, Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hindarto, Teguh. *Cracking Misquoting Jesus: Tanggapan Kritis Atas Serangan Dr. Bart D. Ehrman Mengenai Reliabilitas Kitab Perjanjian Baru*.
- Jatmiko, Yudi. vol. 16, no. 1. 2017, "Konsep Otoritas Alkitab di Hadapan Fakta Kesalahan Tekstual: Sebuah Diskusi Teologis", *Veritas: Jurnal Teologi dan Pelayanan*.
- Mustafa Al-A'zami, Muhammad. No Year, *The History of The Qur'anic Text: From Revelation to Compilation*, Leicester: UK Islamic Academy.
- Theissen, Gerd. 2004, *The New Testament: history, literature, religion*, London: T & T Clark.

W. Funk, Robert and Roy W. Hoover. 1993, *The Five Gospels: The Search for The Authentic Words of Jesus*, USA: HarperSanFrancisco.