



Lost In Transmission?: What We Can Know About the Words of Jesus

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Bart Ehrman, in his New York Times bestseller, *Misquoting Jesus*, claims that the New Testament cannot wholly be trusted. Cutting and probing with the tools of text criticism, Ehrman suggests that many of its episodes are nothing but legend, fabricated by those who copied or collated its pages in the intervening centuries. The result is confusion and doubt. Can we truly trust what the New Testament says?

Now, Wheaton College scholar Nicholas Perrin takes on Ehrman and others who claim that the text of the New Testament has been corrupted beyond recognition. Perrin, in an approachable, compelling style, gives us a layman's guide to textual criticism so that readers can understand the subtleties of Ehrman's critiques, and provides firm evidence to suggest that the New Testament can, indeed, be trusted.

Lost In Transmission?: What We Can Know About the Words of Jesus Details

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Edward says

Why did I want to know about this book's "words of Jesus", at least words that are available elsewhere? I just happened to randomly find it in the Spokane Library and it looked promising. The book is not so much about individual words as such, but rather is an even-handed reply to Bart Ehrman's best-selling MISQUOTING JESUS (2005), The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why which sees the New Testament as a hopeless mishmash of mangled translations and nearly thirty other "gospels" about Jesus. Elaine Pagels comes to some of the same conclusions in her Gnostic Gospels. All of this throws doubt on the accuracy of the New Testament.

I say "even-handed" because Perrin, an intelligent and conservative defender of just four gospels, admits that both of these views (four gospels vs. thirty) are conjectures. But he argues that his conjectures make a lot more sense than the views of Ehrman and Pagels. He says they buy into essentially a "conspiracy" theory of orthodox authorities clamping down on free-ranging views about what Christ said and meant. His notion is that there was always a broad consensus about Christ's essential teachings, and that the four gospels generally accepted are valid because they're the earliest ones.

Does any of this even matter, or is it all academic and theological nitpicking? Perrin thinks it's important - a genuinely practicing Christian has to use his head to decide what he really believes, and he thinks it's too easy to get carried away by the theories of Ehrman, who in a way is headed in the same direction as the hugely entertaining, but ultimately intellectually frivolous Dan Brown and his DA VINCI CODE fantasies.

Taylor Lovins says

This is essentially Nicholas Perrin's rebuttal to Bart Ehrman's biblical criticism. I think his arguments (as well as Ehrman's) miss the point of what it means to believe in the Christ. I wouldn't recommend this book: it is a waste of time. Perrin takes language on holiday, here, and his arguments are really ad hoc, I think. Although he and Ehrman are wrong, they are wrong in uninteresting ways. Not even their mistakes have much to teach us. It would be better to simply ignore them altogether.

Jonathan P. says

I found this book accessible to the general reader as well as informative as it deals with a subject that is grappling the Christian world, namely on the reliability of the gospels. I liked how Perrin weaves his testimony with scholarly issues. And what's more it is easy to grasp. Bart Ehrman is a scholar and his writings will cause a stir but as readers will find in Perrin's book; there are ample evidence as well as balanced scholarly studies that will eventually come to the contention of any reader that our gospels are reliable. Perrin does not undermine the difficult issues and tensions popping up in the gospels, he acknowledges them and gives explanation where explanations are needed. I find this helpful because the tendency to spiritualize as well as having a handle on every issue on the gospels and somewhat the things that puts down people. In the end we are left with the text and the person Jesus, we decide whether to follow him or not.

Elizabeth says

I'm torn between giving this book two stars or three. It was written as a rebuttal to Bart Ehrman's "Misquoting Jesus" and gives a historical explanation and defense of the reliability of the Gospels and church teachings about them.

Although at times the author uses poor argumentation and a few logical fallacies, the overall arguments in the book are strong and work as good support for Christian faith in the New Testament. However, reading it isn't an extremely enjoyable experience because it is written in the form of one giant 200-page essay.

Here is a section of the book that I particularly liked:

"Ehrman's recounting of how the words of Jesus have been lost in transmission reminds me of another story. It's the familiar story of the hero who, through applying methods and reasoning, is able to unmask the prejudices and superstitions of parochial folk who have never properly taken the time to explore the matter properly and scientifically, or even to think for themselves. Once, however, such superstitions are debunked, once it is again demonstrated that there is no 'other side' to break through to, society will be free indeed. Free to do what we want to do. It's an old and tired Enlightenment script, underpinning countless other narratives, ranging from the French Revolution to just about every episode - for those old enough to remember the show - of Scooby Doo.

"But I have another script that draws its principles not from the Enlightenment but from a theological understanding of God's Word. This is not so much my script as the way in which the church has traditionally understood things. You might say it is a scriptural understanding of history. It goes like this: Jesus Christ came into the world as the embodiment of God. As God, his nature was unchangeable, for God does not change. But as man, he grew in wisdom and in stature (Luke 2:52). The revealed Son of God is both eternal and dynamic. As it is with Jesus Christ the Word of God, so it is with God's Word contained in Scripture. It is eternal and will never pass away (Mark 13:31), but there is a dynamic element as well. As we in the church continue to pass along God's Word, preserving it and interpreting it, we continue to grow in our understanding. We are not alone in this process. God sends his promised Holy Spirit to guide us. Down through the ages God superintends the transmission of his own Word and works among those in the church who have been authorized as Scripture's interpreters. Even as we have very good historical grounds for believing that we have Jesus' words preserved in transmission, there are also theological grounds as to why this might be: God was not sovereignly at work only in the Christ-event. Through the Spirit, God has also been active in the interpretive recording of that event and the transmission of that record down to this day."

Paul Froehlich says

In his attempt to refute New Testament scholar Bart Ehrman, Nicholas Perrin agrees with Ehrman on various points, such as that Luke made changes in Mark's account. Perrin also concedes that each gospel writer had his own interpretation, though he deprecates the significance of minor differences and argues by analogy more than by using historical evidence. Perrin again agrees with Ehrman that the gospels should be understood separately, not melded together to achieve a desired meaning.

Perrin admits ignorance regarding some discrepancies between the gospels and doesn't specifically try to explain the vast majority; if he could have, he probably would have. He contends there's "a remarkable continuity" in how Jesus is depicted. A difference is not necessarily a contradiction, and Perrin argues there are no real contradictions between the gospels.

Perrin dismisses differences as "variations." He explains the four versions of who went to Jesus' tomb by concocting a fifth theory. Perrin asserts that both Mark and Luke are accurate because Luke used eyewitnesses and did his own synthesis.

Perrin's tone is somewhat defensive, and he concedes more than he refutes. Perrin is persuasive addressing the massive changes from the original text. He is weaker, however, when it comes to the Biblical contradictions.

Robert Murphy says

A more conversational rebuttal of Bart D. Ehrman ... though the footnotes have all the scholarly stuff you might want. Quick, easy good read. Give it to all your friends who give Dan Brown or Elaine Pagels the time of day.

J. Wallace says

Good book that discusses the transmission (and copying) of the gospel accounts. I also discuss this topic in my book, "Cold Case Christianity" (Chapter 13: Were They Accurate?)

Cold-Case Christianity: A Homicide Detective Investigates the Claims of the Gospels

James Korsmo says

Do the words of Jesus that we see in our Bibles today resemble the words that were actually spoken two millennia ago? Or have the Bible's authors, copyists, and translators played fast and loose with them? Bart Ehrman, in his book, *Misquoting Jesus*, makes a case for the (often systematic) corruption of Jesus' words and of the whole text of the Bible from the earliest times on down to the present. For him, the Bible isn't trustworthy: Jesus words and those of the earliest apostles have been lost in transmission. It is into this discussion that Nicholas Perrin, professor of NT at Wheaton College, enters with this new book.

Let me start by saying that this book is decidedly not academic, by design. Perrin, a NT scholar, could certainly mount academic responses to Ehrman and others on these issues, and other authors have in fact done so. Perrin, on the other hand, seeks to both respond in a way that can be understood, but more than that he seeks to put forth a compelling vision of what our New Testament is and why it's worth paying attention to. This whole discussion is encased in a testimony of sorts, as Perrin talks about his own upbringing and his first exposures to the Bible. His journey of discovery makes a great storyline within which these issues can

be explored.

I recommend this book quite highly. He makes a lot of current research in a number of areas, from Jesus studies to textual criticism, highly understandable. His chapters on Jesus and his Jewishness are worth the price of the book, and his summary of the quests for the "historical" Jesus is one of the clearest I've read. Beyond that, he also (selectively and rather quickly by design) refutes a number of Ehrman's central points, and, probably more important, points toward more fruitful lines of inquiry and more authentic approaches to questions of the Bible's integrity.

Perrin's work is full of insights, such as the important assertion that Jesus intended his words be remembered by his disciples, and that, in their Jewish context, it is highly plausible that they would have done so with care. He also makes clear that God chose to impart his revelation into a human context and process, deeming it a sufficient and appropriate vehicle for the intended message. We shouldn't necessarily expect a wooden, flawless, perfect textual tradition, and this fact doesn't lessen the power of God's revelation or diminish its call on us. In the end, he concludes that "even if that transmission [of Jesus' words] was less than completely perfect, it was faithful" (187). This book has clearly done a service to the church in making some of these discussions accessible. If these are issues that interest you, this book is a great place to start.

Heath Salzman says

Great book. Offers helpful insight into the various objections of Ehrman to our receipt of Scripture. I'm sure this book will prove to be a useful resource throughout the years. Perrin also weaves personal story into his project to illustrate his goals, which is very helpful.

Orville Jenkins says

Keeping It Real: the Logic Behind Biblical Skepticism

Perrin takes a scholarly but personal approach to the historical factors in considering the reliability of the early documents of the Jewish movement that became known as Christianity in the Roman Empire. The currently-available 2009 edition is the paperback version of the 2007 hardback edition I own.

The author discusses the question of the transmission of the words of Jesus and the stories of the events that provide the context for those words. He thinks through some of the factors involved in the culture and technology of the time since the first writings. Perrin reflects on the oral nature of the culture of the time, how the original teachings would have been presented and learned then preserved by the oral community and shared with other communities. He helps us think through the possibilities, how the texts were preserved, copied, stored and honoured.

He examines the logic of some popular skeptics and the questionable logic he finds there. But this is not a theoretical discussion about an ideology of the Scriptures. The real-world focus here is admirable. This is a

historical investigation that rediscovers some established but ignored clues.

Perrin does not present an academic, abstract and theoretical discussion. He focuses on the real-life situations of the Roman Empire and the cultures of the first century. He places the historical insights in their firm cultural settings and timeframes, attempting to refocus the rather free-flowing and vague innuendos of some current writings. A factor in his insights is his own intellectual and emotional struggles with the components of the Jesus story.

He looks back to his high school and college experiences, when he was considering the truths of life. He refers to the people and circumstances that facilitated his doubts, insights and growth on his journey of faith and life. These personal testimonials help us keep a real-world perspective as we evaluate the logic and perspective brought to the discussion of history by various writers or schools of thought.

This will be a rewarding read for most readers, and will provide some fresh insights by reminding us of some factors that are often overlooked in the modern dismissal of anything that is not new.

Dmccconkey says

Great read - author response to Ehrman as he does in an autobiographical way as he traces his journey in coming to terms who Jesus really is and that his words are true.
