

QUESTIONED TEXTS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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Below is a list of forty-one more noticeable places in the New Testament where the text is uncertain. About 80% of the variants occur in historical segments, which is a little less than 60% of the New Testament. Brackets mark the questioned portions. Double parentheses mark the more important and more doubtful of these readings. Quotations are from *The Conversational Version*.

Matthew 6:13b *[because the kingdom, power, and glory
belong to you forever. Amen]*

Matthew 19:9b *[makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman is
committing adultery.]”*

Matthew 27:49b [Another *soldier* took a spear and pierced his side, and water and blood
came out.] (cp. John 19:34)

Mark 9:44 *[where their worm doesn’t die and the fire doesn’t burn out].* (omitted)

Same as 9:48

Mark 9:46 *[where their worm doesn’t die and the fire doesn’t burn out].* (omitted)

Same as 9:48

Mark 10:24 The disciples were surprised he said that. But Jesus said it again;
“Children, it’s so hard *[for people who trust in wealth]* to get into the
kingdom of God.

Bracketed phrase occurs in some late manuscripts

Mark 11:26 *[But if you don’t forgive, your Father in heaven won’t forgive your
trespassers.]* (= Matthew 6:15; 18:15)

Mark 12:23 *[when they rise again]* omitted in many ancient manuscripts

Mark 14:68 [and a rooster crowed]

If this reference to a rooster crowing is included in the text, the account with the other synoptics gets awkward as to when it happened. If Jesus' prediction in Mark 14:30 (crow twice before deny thrice) is taken to mean double-crows (in the same incident) instead of crows twice (as at different times), then this entry should not be here. The crowing a second time in 14:72 is then to be taken as secondly, that is, doubly. Peter would deny Jesus three times before a rooster crowed, that is, double-crowed. The manuscript evidence is quite even for and against including the crowing here. One wonders whether it was deliberately omitted quite often to avoid contradiction with Matthew and Luke; if so, the harder-reading principle would apply, and the entry should be retained. An alternative explanation is that an early copyist put the rooster crowing after the wrong denial—somewhat by memory, and should be left out. *The Conversational Version* opts for the double-crow translation.

Mark 15:28 [The scripture was fulfilled that says, "*He was reckoned with transgressors.*"]
'They considered me a criminal' (= Luke 22:37 < [Is 53:12]).

Mark 16:9-20 [The Longer Ending]

[[⁹After he'd resurrected early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary the Magdalene, that he'd cast seven demons out of. ¹⁰She went and reported it to the ones that had been with him, who were mourning and crying. ¹¹When they heard he was alive and she'd seen him, they didn't believe it.

¹²After that he appeared to two of them in a different form as they were walking to the country. ¹³They went and reported it to the rest. They didn't believe them either. ¹⁴Afterward he appeared to the eleven as they were reclining at table, and chided them for their resistance to believing the ones that had seen him resurrected.

¹⁵He told them,

"Go all over the world and tell everybody the good news. ¹⁶Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever disbelieves will be condemned. ¹⁷These signs will follow the ones that believe:

they'll cast out demons in my name;

they'll speak in new languages;

¹⁸*they'll pick up snakes, and*

if they drink anything deadly, it won't hurt them;

they'll lay hands on sick people and they'll recover."

¹⁹After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up to heaven, and sat down on God's right hand. ²⁰They went out and presented the good news everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message with the signs that followed.]]

[The Shorter Ending]

[[They briefly reported all these instructions to the ones around Peter. After that, Jesus himself sent out through them from east to west the holy and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation. Amen.]]

This substantial variant has all its elements confirmed in the other gospel records of Jesus' post-resurrection ministry plus his Mission of the Seventy in Luke 10:1-20.

Luke 1:28 He went inside and said, "*Hello, favored one; the LORD's with you. [You are blessed among women].*" (cp. Luke 1:48)

Bracketed material added in some late manuscripts

Luke 6:1 Jesus was passing through grain fields on a [second] Sabbath day. His disciples were picking off heads, rubbing them in their hands, and eating the grains.

Luke 8:26 They sailed to the region of the [Gerasenes], across the lake from Galilee.

Manuscripts vary with *Gergesenes* or *Gadarenes* in place of *Gerasenes*.

Luke 8:45 Jesus said, "*Who touched me?*" While they were all denying it, Peter [^aand the ones with him] said, "*Master, the crowd's pressing you and jostling you [^band you say, 'Who touched me?'].*"

^aBracketed phrase added in several ancient manuscripts

^bBracketed clause added in several ancient manuscripts

Luke 9:55b-56a ⁵⁵He turned and rebuked them, [⁵⁶"*You don't know what kind of spirit you are of. The Son of Man didn't come to destroy people's souls but to save them*";] and they went to another village.

Bracketed material added in some later manuscripts

Luke 10:17 The seventy[-two] came back excited.

Most manuscripts omit the bracketed *two*.

Luke 11:11 "*If your son asks for a fish, would you give him a [loaf, he won't give him a stone, will he, or for a] snake?*"

Several later manuscripts add the bracketed wording

Luke 17:36 [*“Two men will be in the field, one taken and the other left.”*]

(= Matthew 24:40)

Luke 22:19b-20 ¹⁹He took a loaf, gave thanks, and handed it to them, *“This is my body [that’s given for you. Do this in my memory.”* ²⁰In the same way, he took the cup after they ate, *“This cup that’s poured out for you, is the new covenant in my blood.”*

The bracketed material and other combinations of 17-20 have varying manuscript support. The origin of the problem was probably created by Luke’s referring to two cups in the statement of instituting the Lord’s Supper.

Luke 22:43-44 [[⁴³An angel from heaven appeared to him to strengthen him. ⁴⁴In agony he prayed more intensely. His sweat became like drops of blood dripping on the ground.]]^{ms}

Some ancient manuscripts omit the two verses.

Luke 23:17 [Now he was obliged to release one prisoner to them at the feast.]

Luke 23:34a [[³⁴Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; they don’t know what they’re doing.”]] They cast lots to divide up his clothes.

Bracketed material omitted in a number of ancient manuscripts. The words of Stephen in Acts 7:60 parallel the ones also attributed to the Lord in the bracketed part of the verse.

Luke 24:6a [*He’s not here. He has resurrected.*] *Remember how he told you when he was still in Galilee*

Some manuscripts omit the bracketed material as found in Mark 16:6.

Luke 24:12 [But Peter ran to the tomb and stooped down and saw only linen wrappings. He went back perplexed.]

A few authorities omit the verse.

Luke 24:36b As they were talking about it, Jesus himself stood among them, [*“Hello.”*]

The bracketed material expressed here in abbreviated form (*The Conversational Version*) is attested in various longer statements in many ancient manuscripts: “*And said to them, ‘Peace to you. It’s me. Don’t be afraid.’*”

Luke 24:40 [He showed them his hands and feet.]

Verse omitted in a few ancient authorities. John 20:20 parallels the wording here.

Luke 23:51b While he was blessing them, he was separated from them [and was carried up into the sky].

Bracketed materials omitted in a few ancient sources.

Luke 24:52 They [worshiped him and]^{ms} returned to Jerusalem full of joy,

Bracketed clause omitted in a few ancient sources.

John 7:53-8:11

[[⁵³And each one went home. **8:1**Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

²Early in the morning he went back to the temple. The people came to him, and he sat down and started teaching them. ³The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery and stood her in front of everybody, ⁴“*Rabbi, we caught this woman in adultery—in the very act.*” ⁵*In the law Moses commanded us to stone a woman like this. What do you say?*” ⁶(They were testing him, so they could accuse him.)

Jesus squatted down and scribbled on the ground with his finger. ⁷When they kept badgering him, he stood up, “*The one of you that doesn’t have any sin, throw the first stone at her.*” ⁸He squatted down again and scribbled on the ground. ⁹They began to go away one by one, starting with the oldest; and left him alone with the woman standing there.

¹⁰Jesus stood up, “*Where are they? Hasn’t anybody condemned you?*”

¹¹“*No, Sir.*”

“*I’m not condemning you either. Go and don’t sin anymore.*”]]^{ms}

This incident about a woman caught in adultery is missing in most of the oldest manuscripts. Sometimes it is included with asterisks or other markings. In a very few sources it appears after Luke 21:28; 24:53; John 7:36, or 21:25. It is carried in some later manuscripts and some versions.

If it is an interpolation, the question is why someone would originate it and insert it in the record. If it was part of the original writing, it is possible to see why an early copyist might omit it as something too lenient on such a significant sin. But the episode in the House of Simon the Pharisee involves something of the same sentiment on Jesus’ part (Luke 7:36-50).

Acts 2:43 Reverence came over them all, and the apostles worked many wonders and signs [in Jerusalem, There was great reverence on everybody.]

The bracketed addition with several variations occurs in a number of later manuscripts.

Acts 8:37 [*Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you’ll be saved.” He answered, “I believe in Jesus the Son of God” or “I believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.”*]

Several of the oldest manuscripts omit the verse. This and some additional variants occur in later manuscripts.

Acts 24:6b-8a ⁶*He even tried to desecrate the temple, and we arrested him [,and wanted to judge him by our law. ⁷But Lysias the chiliarch with great force took him from our hands, ⁸and commanded the soldiers to take him to you.] You can question him yourself, and find out the things we’re accusing him of.”*

⁹The Jews joined in the attack, claiming those things were so.

The portion between the brackets is added with some variations in some later manuscripts.

Acts 28:29 [²⁹When he’d said that, the Jews left having a great dispute among themselves.]

The verse is carried in some later manuscripts.

Romans 16:24 [The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you all. Amen.]

Some late manuscripts add this verse, which equals 2 Thessalonians 3:18 minus the *Amen*. A few late manuscripts position it after 16:27.

Romans 16:25-27

²⁵Now to him who can establish you by the good news I’m announcing, the presentation about Jesus Christ, according to the mystery held unrevealed from times eternal,
²⁶revealed now in the scriptures of the prophets by the commandment of the eternal God,
made known to all the Gentiles, and
leading to an obedience *rooted in* faith—

²⁷to the only wise God through Jesus Christ *be* glory forever! Amen.

These three verses appear in four different places at the end of Romans:

here (the most frequent location),

here and after 14:23;

after 14:23 only;

after 15:33;

omitted altogether

The variants probably came about because 16:1-23 is a list of salutations, a list much more extensive than his other epistles except for Colossians. The large number may have something to do with the fact that Paul had not yet been to Rome; enumerating so many known from elsewhere may have served to explain for his writing to a group of Christians he had not originated on site.

Copies without them may have originated for use in the public reading of scripture. Perhaps Paul's autograph copy had the salutations on a cover sheet.

1 Corinthians 7:33b a married man feels a need to concern himself with this world's things—how to be pleasing to his wife, [and there's a difference also between a wife and a virgin. One who is single is concerned] about the things of the Lord . . .

The bracketed materials have several variants in the manuscripts.

1 Corinthians 14:34-35 Verses located here. Some sources put them after 14:40.

1 Corinthians 14:38 ³⁸If he disregards *that*, he's disregarded.

An alternate reading is, "let him be ignored."

Ephesians 1:1 Paul, apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will, to the saints and faithful in Christ Jesus [in Ephesus]^{ms}.

The bracketed phrase is missing with its space not filled in a few ancient manuscripts. Some scholars have theorized that early copies may have been blank at this point because Ephesians is Paul's missing Letter to the Laodecians mentioned in Colossians 4:16. If that letter was an encyclical sent originally to Laodecia, it may have circulated along the old Roman Post Road, which ended in Ephesus. At each church the reader could have added the name of that church's city where "in Ephesus" appears in today's traditional copy. The historical prominence of Ephesus could then account for the manuscript tradition that carries "in Ephesus" in 1:1.

1 John 5:7b-8a ⁷There are three witnesses [in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. ⁸There are three witnesses on earth]: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and they agree. (The Three Witnesses Passage)

The bracketed materials appear in a very few late Greek manuscripts and in manuscripts that Jerome used to produce the Latin Vulgate.

Observations

No legitimate doctrinal matter stems from any of these examples. An exception might be Mark 16:18 in regard to “picking up snakes.” The passage has prompted some to practice religious snake handling—but not poison drinking (!), as the next clause promises. The point of the promise is surely not to “tempt God” (Deuteronomy 6:16 < Matthew 4:7 = Luke 4:12), but to provide protection. Jesus’ commission to The Seventy includes the same provision (Luke 10:19). Paul’s experience on Malta (Acts 28:3) serves as a like example of Jesus’ prediction.

Perhaps an apologetic matter stems from the Mark 16 textual issue. A prominent suggestion is that someone, using the other gospels, put Mark 16:9-20 together later by someone besides Mark to fill out what was a rather obvious missing portion. If these verses are indeed not original, its accuracy is not guaranteed by inspiration. That does remove a possible difficulty. Mark 16:12-13 recounts evidently the same event as Luke 24:13-35 about two men meeting Jesus unknowingly on the way to Emmaus. Mark 16:13 says the people in Jerusalem did not believe their report when the two went back to tell what happened. Luke 24:34 does not sound like the people in Jerusalem disbelieved. They did not believe the early report from the women, but nothing like that is said about the Emmaus report.

The Mark 14:68 variant does relate to a more substantial issue because of a possible contradiction with Matthew and Luke about the timing of the rooster crowing in relation to Peter’s denials. So its significance lies in the area of Christian apologetics. See comments at the Mark 14:68 entry above as well as other explanations apologists have offered.

Quite a number of variants come from verbal additions found elsewhere—like the sentiment in Luke 1:28, perhaps lifted from 1:48 (“calling Mary blessed”). Such entries may have originated from the manner in which an early manuscript was produced: a scribe had a memory lapse and added the familiar idea into the related material he had just looked away from reading.

A later copyist might suppose a previous marginal comment was an omission from an original text, and add it in his own copy. An element like Luke 11:33 (“or under a bushel”) might originate that way.

Many additional variant readings are detailed in the critical apparatus of edited texts of the canonical books. They do not appear here because, for the most part, they are too short to alter the Christian message. Quite a number of “differences” are not even content matters like

spellings, abbreviations (ΘC for θεός), reversal of wordings (metatheses), alternative grammatical constructions, double entries (dittographies). Critical apparatuses do not even note many of them.

The forty-some variants cited above are rather few, given the size of the New Testament literature (about 850 pages, including textual notations in the American Bible Society's edition). From a purely mechanical point of view, such a level of accuracy compares quite favorably with other writings of equal antiquity. (See F. F. Bruce, for some detailing of that point.)

For the most part, the original text underneath the variants is sufficiently retrievable. Omissions are particularly so, as in cases of homoioteleuton, where material between the same wordings gets left out by the slip of a copyist's eye as he looks back and forth from text to his copy.

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