# The New Testament



*Both*read*the Bible day and night,*

*But thou read’st black where I read white.*

                              —William Blake, *The Everlasting*

## Gospel

Of course, Blake’s sentiment in the quote above is nothing new.  The New Testament contains enough inconsistencies to have spawned a dizzying variety of interpretations, beliefs and religions, all allegedly Bible-based.  And so, we find one author offering the amusing observation:

You can and you can’t,

You shall and you shan’t,

You will and you won’t,

And you will be damned if you do,

And you will be damned if you don’t.[[1]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftn10220" \o " Dow, Lorenzo. Reflections on the Love of God. )

Why such variance in viewpoints?  To begin with, different theological camps disagree on which books should be included in the Bible.  One camp’s apocrypha is another’s scripture.  Secondly, even among those books that *have* been canonized, the many variant source texts lack uniformity.  This lack of uniformity is so ubiquitous that *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*states, “It is safe to say that there is not one sentence in the NT in which the MS [manuscript] tradition is wholly uniform.”[[2]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftn10221" \o " Buttrick, George Arthur (Ed.). 1962 (1996 Print). The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible. Volume 4. Nashville: Abingdon Press. pp. 594-595 (Under Text, NT).)

Not one sentence?  We can’t trust a single *sentence* of the Bible?  Hard to believe.

## Maybe

The fact is that there are over 5700 Greek manuscripts of all or part of the New Testament.[[3]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftn10222" \o " Ehrman, Bart D. Misquoting Jesus. P. 88.)  Furthermore, “no two of these manuscripts are exactly alike in all their particulars….  And some of these differences are significant.”[[4]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftn10223" \o " Ehrman, Bart D. Lost Christianities. P. 78.)  Factor in roughly ten thousand manuscripts of the Latin Vulgate, add the many other ancient variants (i.e., Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Georgian, Ethiopic, Nubian, Gothic, Slavonic), and what do we have?

## A lot of manuscripts

A lot of manuscripts that fail to correspond in places and not infrequently contradict one another.  Scholars estimate the number of manuscript variants in the hundreds of thousands, some estimating as high as 400,000.[[5]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftn10224" \o " Ehrman, Bart D. Misquoting Jesus. P. 89.)  In Bart D.  Ehrman’s now famous words, “Possibly it is easiest to put the matter in comparative terms: there are more differences in our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament.”[[6]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftn10225" \o " Ehrman, Bart D. The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings. P. 12.)

## How did this happen?

Poor record keeping.  Dishonesty.  Incompetence.  Doctrinal prejudice.  Take your pick.

None of the original manuscripts have survived from the early Christian period.[[7]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftn10226" \o " Ehrman, Bart D. Lost Christianities. P. 49.)/[[8]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftn10227" \o " Metzger, Bruce M. A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament. Introduction, p. 1.)  The most ancient complete manuscripts (Vatican MS. No. 1209 and the Sinaitic Syriac Codex) date from the fourth century, three hundred years after Jesus’ ministry.  But the originals?  Lost.  And the copies of the originals?  Also lost.  Our most ancient manuscripts, in other words, are copies of the copies of the copies of nobody-knows-just-how-many copies of the originals.

## No wonder they differ

In the best of hands, copying errors would be no surprise.  However, New Testament manuscripts were *not* in the best of hands.  During the period of Christian origins, scribes were untrained, unreliable, incompetent, and in some cases illiterate.[[9]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftn10228" \o " Ehrman, Bart D. Lost Christianities and Misquoting Jesus.)  Those who were visually impaired could have made errors with look-alike letters and words, while those who were hearing-impaired may have erred in recording scripture as it was read aloud.  Frequently scribes were overworked, and hence inclined to the errors that accompany fatigue.

In the words of Metzger and Ehrman, “Since most, if not all, of them [the scribes] would have been amateurs in the art of copying, a relatively large number of mistakes no doubt crept into their texts as they reproduced them.”[[10]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftn10229" \o " Metzger, Bruce M. and Ehrman, Bart D. The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration. P. 275.)  Worse yet, some scribes allowed doctrinal prejudice to influence their transmission of scripture.[[11]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftn10230" \o " Ehrman, Bart D. Lost Christianities. Pp. 49, 217, 219-220.)  As Ehrman states, “The scribes who copied the texts changed them.”[[12]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftn10231" \o " Ehrman, Bart D. Lost Christianities. P. 219.)  More specifically, “The number of deliberate alterations made in the interest of doctrine is difficult to assess.”[[13]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftn10232" \o " Metzger, Bruce M. and Ehrman, Bart D. The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration. P. 265. See also Ehrman, Orthodox Corruption of Scripture.)  And even more specifically, “In the technical parlance of textual criticism—which I retain for its significant ironies—these scribes ‘corrupted’ their texts for theological reasons.”[[14]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftn10233" \o " Ehrman, Bart D. 1993. The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture. Oxford University Press. P. xii.)

Errors were introduced in the form of additions, deletions, substitutions and modifications, most commonly of words or lines, but occasionally of entire verses.[[15]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftn10234" \o " Ehrman, Bart D. Lost Christianities. P. 220.) [[16]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftn10235" \o " Metzger, Bruce M. A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament. Introduction, p. 3)  In fact, “numerous changes and accretions came into the text,”[[17]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftn10236" \o " Metzger, Bruce M. A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament. Introduction, p. 10.)with the result that “all known witnesses of the New Testament are to a greater or lesser extent mixed texts, and even several of the earliest manuscripts are not free from egregious errors.”[[18]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftn10237" \o " Metzger, Bruce M. and Ehrman, Bart D. The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration. P. 343.)

In *Misquoting Jesus*, Ehrman presents persuasive evidence that the story of the woman taken in adultery (John 7:53-8:12) and the last twelve verses of Mark were not in the original gospels, but added by later scribes.[[19]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftn10238" \o " Ehrman, Bart D. Misquoting Jesus. Pp. 62-69.)  Furthermore, these examples “represent just two out of thousands of places in which the manuscripts of the New Testament came to be changed by scribes.”[[20]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftn10239" \o " Ehrman, Bart D. Misquoting Jesus. P. 68.)

In fact, entire books of the Bible were forged.[[21]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftn10240" \o " Ehrman, Bart D. Lost Christianities. Pp. 9-11, 30, 235-6.)  This doesn’t mean their content is necessarily wrong, but it certainly doesn’t mean it’s right.  So which books were forged?  Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, 1 and 2 Peter, and Jude—a whopping nine of the twenty-seven New Testament books and epistles—are to one degree or another suspect.[[22]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftn10241" \o " Ehrman, Bart D. Lost Christianities. P. 235.)

## Forged books? In the Bible?

Why are we not surprised?  After all, even the gospel authors are unknown.  In fact, they’re anonymous.[[23]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftn10242" \o " Ehrman, Bart D. Lost Christianities. P. 3, 235. Also, see Ehrman, Bart D. The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings. P. 49.)  Biblical scholars rarely, if ever, ascribe gospel authorship to Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John.  As Ehrman tells us, “Most scholars today have abandoned these identifications, and recognize that the books were written by otherwise unknown but relatively well-educated Greek-speaking (and writing) Christians during the second half of the first century.”[[24]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftn10243" \o " Ehrman, Bart D. Lost Christianities. P. 235.)  Graham Stanton affirms, “The gospels, unlike most Graeco-Roman writings, are anonymous.  The familiar headings which give the name of an author (‘The Gospel according to …’) were not part of the original manuscripts, for they were added only early in the second century.”[[25]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftn10244" \o "   Stanton, Graham N. p. 19.)

So what, if anything, did Jesus’ disciples have to do with authoring the gospels?  Little or nothing, so far as we know.  But we have no reason to believe they authored any of the books of the Bible.  To begin with, let us remember Mark was a secretary to Peter, and Luke a companion to Paul.  The verses of Luke 6:14-16 and Matthew 10:2-4 catalogue the twelve disciples, and although these lists differ over two names, Mark and Luke don’t make *either* list.  So only Matthew and John were true disciples.  But all the same, modern scholars pretty much disqualify them as authors anyway.

## Why?

Good question.  John being the more famous of the two, why should we disqualify him from having authored the Gospel of “John”?

## Umm … because he was dead?

Multiple sources acknowledge there is no evidence, other than questionable testimonies of second century authors, to suggest that the disciple John was the author of the Gospel of “John.”[[26]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftn10245" \o " Kee, Howard Clark (Notes and References by). 1993. The Cambridge Annotated Study Bible, New Revised Standard Version. Cambridge University Press. Introduction to gospel of ‘John.’) [[27]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftn10246" \o "   Butler, Trent C. (General Editor). Holman Bible Dictionary. Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers. Under ‘John, the Gospel of’)  Perhaps the most convincing refutation is that the disciple John is believed to have died in or around 98 CE.[[28]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftn10247" \o "   Easton, M. G., M.A., D.D. Easton’s Bible Dictionary. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers. Under ‘John the Apostle.’)  However, the Gospel of John was written circa 110 CE.[[29]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftn10248" \o " Goodspeed, Edgar J. 1946. How to Read the Bible. The John C. Winston Company. p. 227.)  So whoever Luke (Paul’s companion), Mark (Peter’s secretary), and John (the unknown, but certainly not the long-dead one) were, we have no reason to believe any of the gospels were authored by Jesus’ disciples. . . .

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The above excerpt is taken from Dr. Brown’s forthcoming book, *MisGod’ed*, which is expected to be published along with its sequel, *God’ed*.  Both books can be viewed on Dr. Brown’s website, [www.Leveltruth.com](http://www.leveltruth.com/).  Dr. Brown can be contacted at [BrownL38@yahoo.com](mailto:BrownL38@yahoo.com)

**Footnotes:**

[[1]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftnref10220" \o "Back to the refrence of this footnote) Dow, Lorenzo. *Reflections on the Love of God*.

[[2]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftnref10221" \o "Back to the refrence of this footnote) Buttrick, George Arthur (Ed.). 1962 (1996 Print). *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*. Volume 4. Nashville: Abingdon Press. pp. 594-595 (Under Text, NT).

[[3]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftnref10222" \o "Back to the refrence of this footnote) Ehrman, Bart D. *Misquoting Jesus*. P. 88.

[[4]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftnref10223" \o "Back to the refrence of this footnote) Ehrman, Bart D. *Lost Christianities*. P. 78.

[[5]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftnref10224" \o "Back to the refrence of this footnote) Ehrman, Bart D. *Misquoting Jesus*. P. 89.

[[6]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftnref10225" \o "Back to the refrence of this footnote) Ehrman, Bart D. *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*. P. 12.

[[7]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftnref10226" \o "Back to the refrence of this footnote) Ehrman, Bart D. *Lost Christianities*. P. 49.

[[8]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftnref10227" \o "Back to the refrence of this footnote) Metzger, Bruce M. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. Introduction, p. 1.

[[9]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftnref10228" \o "Back to the refrence of this footnote) Ehrman, Bart D. *Lost Christianities and Misquoting Jesus*.

[[10]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftnref10229" \o "Back to the refrence of this footnote) Metzger, Bruce M. and Ehrman, Bart D. *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*. P. 275.

[[11]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftnref10230" \o "Back to the refrence of this footnote) Ehrman, Bart D. *Lost Christianities*. Pp. 49, 217, 219-220.

[[12]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftnref10231" \o "Back to the refrence of this footnote) Ehrman, Bart D. *Lost Christianities*. P. 219.

[[13]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftnref10232" \o "Back to the refrence of this footnote) Metzger, Bruce M. and Ehrman, Bart D. *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*. P. 265. See also Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*.

[[14]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftnref10233" \o "Back to the refrence of this footnote) Ehrman, Bart D. 1993. *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*. Oxford University Press. P. xii.

[[15]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftnref10234" \o "Back to the refrence of this footnote) Ehrman, Bart D. *Lost Christianities*. P. 220.

[[16]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftnref10235" \o "Back to the refrence of this footnote) Metzger, Bruce M. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. Introduction, p. 3

[[17]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftnref10236" \o "Back to the refrence of this footnote) Metzger, Bruce M. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. Introduction, p. 10.

[[18]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftnref10237" \o "Back to the refrence of this footnote) Metzger, Bruce M. and Ehrman, Bart D. *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*. P. 343.

[[19]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftnref10238" \o "Back to the refrence of this footnote) Ehrman, Bart D. *Misquoting Jesus*. Pp. 62-69.

[[20]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftnref10239" \o "Back to the refrence of this footnote) Ehrman, Bart D. *Misquoting Jesus*. P. 68.

[[21]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftnref10240" \o "Back to the refrence of this footnote) Ehrman, Bart D. *Lost Christianities*. Pp. 9-11, 30, 235-6.

[[22]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftnref10241" \o "Back to the refrence of this footnote) Ehrman, Bart D. *Lost Christianities*. P. 235.

[[23]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftnref10242" \o "Back to the refrence of this footnote) Ehrman, Bart D. Lost Christianities. P. 3, 235. Also, see Ehrman, Bart D. *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*. P. 49.

[[24]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftnref10243" \o "Back to the refrence of this footnote) Ehrman, Bart D. *Lost Christianities*. P. 235.

[[25]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftnref10244" \o "Back to the refrence of this footnote) Stanton, Graham N. p. 19.

[[26]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftnref10245" \o "Back to the refrence of this footnote) Kee, Howard Clark (Notes and References by). 1993. *The Cambridge Annotated Study Bible, New Revised Standard Version*. Cambridge University Press. Introduction to gospel of ‘John.’

[[27]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftnref10246" \o "Back to the refrence of this footnote) Butler, Trent C. (General Editor). *Holman Bible Dictionary*. Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers. Under ‘John, the Gospel of’

[[28]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftnref10247" \o "Back to the refrence of this footnote) Easton, M. G., M.A., D.D. *Easton’s Bible Dictionary*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers. Under ‘John the Apostle.’

[[29]](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/556/" \l "_ftnref10248" \o "Back to the refrence of this footnote) Goodspeed, Edgar J. 1946. *How to Read the Bible.* The John C. Winston Company. p. 227.