

The Text of the New Testament

Peter J. Gurry

PHOENIX SEMINARY



What are people saying?

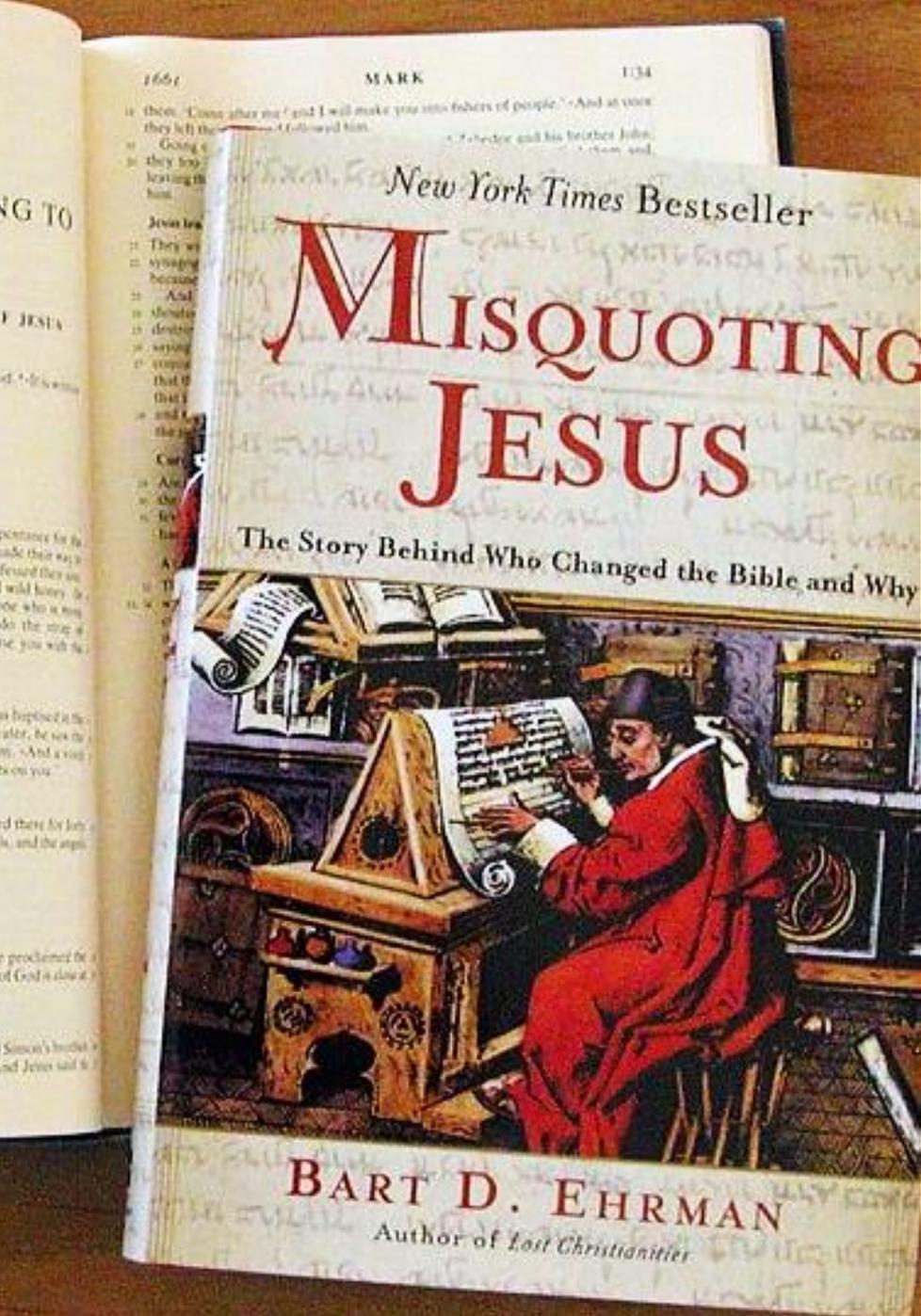




“No television preacher has ever read the Bible ... At best, we’ve all read a bad translation—a translation of translations of translations of hand-copied copies of copies of copies, and on and on, hundreds of times.”

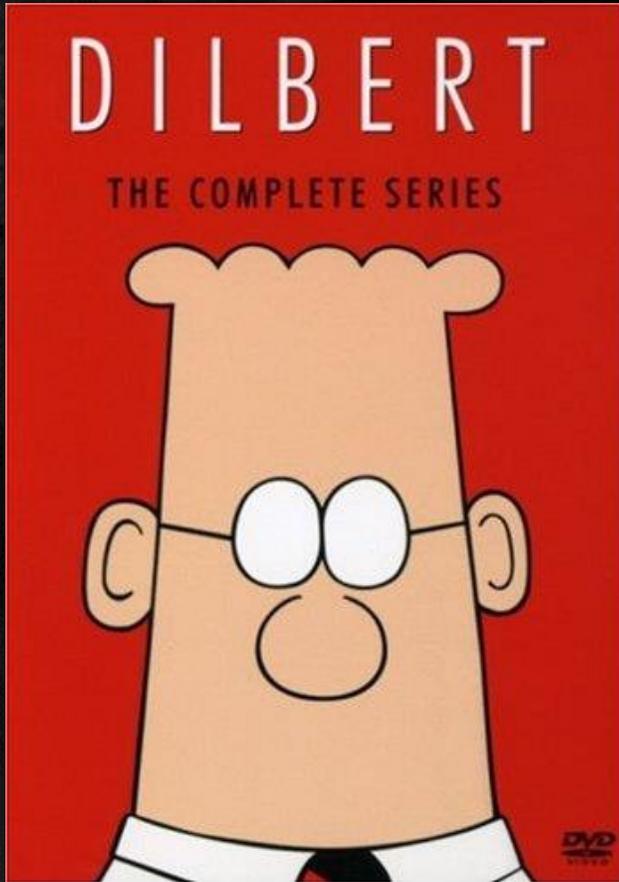
—**KURT EICHENWALD**, *Newsweek* Jan. 2015





“[H]ow does it help us to say that the Bible is the inerrant word of God if in fact we do not have the words that God inerrantly inspired, but only the words copied by scribes—sometimes correctly but sometimes (many times!) incorrectly?”

—**BART EHRMAN**, *Misquoting Jesus*, 7



“I never knew that there are about a zillion different versions of the Bible because ... it was copied and recopied by hand, by semi-literate, opinionated morons for hundreds of years.”

— **SCOTT ADAMS**, “Uh Oh” blog (Apr. 14, 2006)

Handwritten text on a piece of parchment or paper, possibly a reference to the Bible or a related topic.

IX 9Marks

Why Trust the
Bible?

Greg Gilbert

There are “400,000-ish variants across some 25,000 manuscripts and quotations covering 600 years. But at the far upper end, this comes out to ... only about 16 variants per manuscript. To put it nicely, that’s really not many.”

—**GREG GILBERT**, “Debunking” *TGC* Feb. 2016





“He ... does the best service to truth, who hinders it from being supported by falsehood. To use a weak argument in behalf of a good cause, can only tend to infuse a suspicion of the cause itself into the minds of all who see the weakness of the argument.”

—**RICHARD PORSON**, *Letters* (1790), xxv





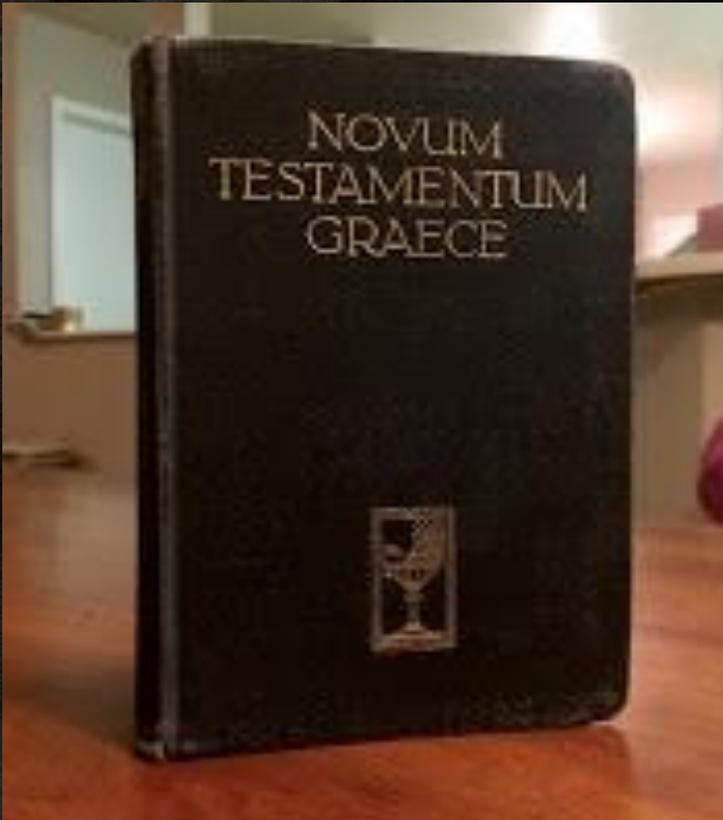
How often
do editors guess?



“...in the New Testament the **abundance**, **variety**, and **comparative excellence** of the documents confines this task of pure ‘emendation’ [guessing] within so narrow limits that we may leave it out of sight for the present...”

—**WESTCOTT & HORT**, *Intro* (1881), 3





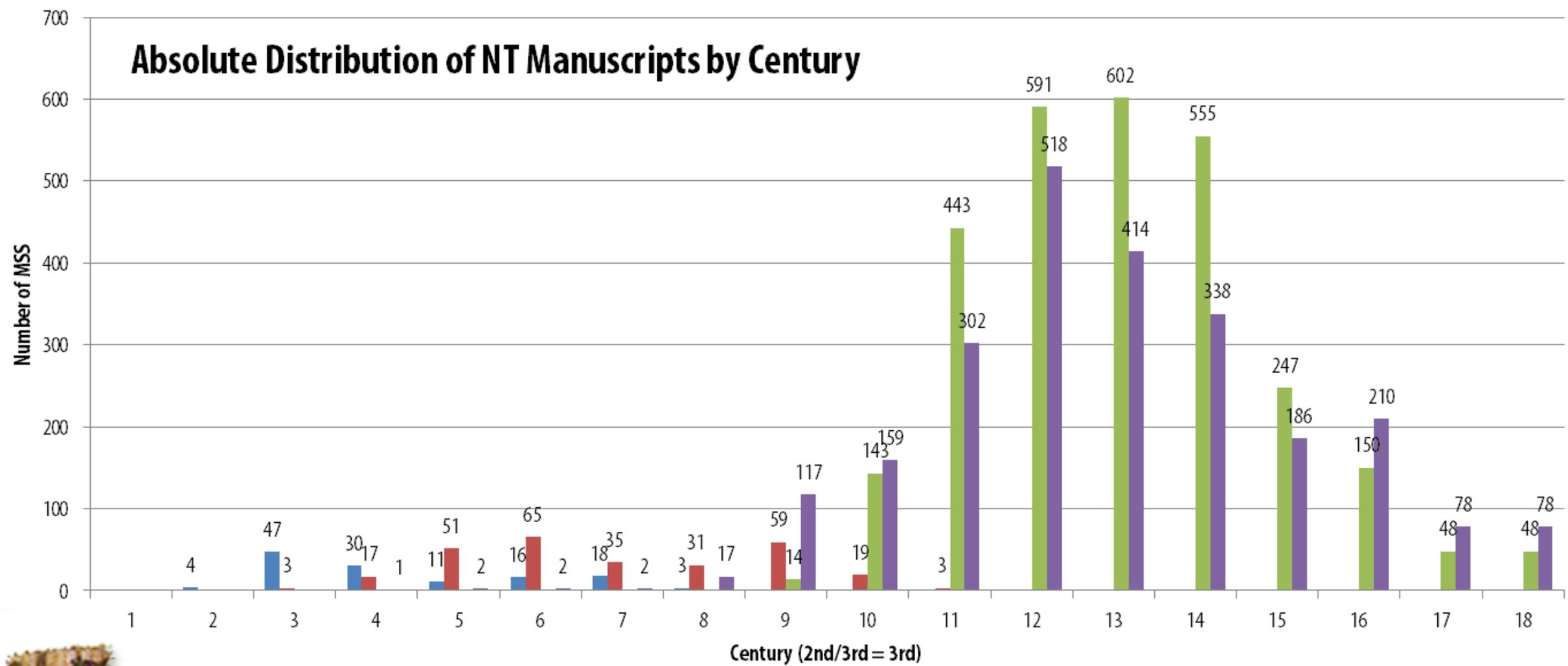
- Westcott-Hort (1881) marked 63 “suspected readings”
- Nestle 13th ed. (1927) has 18 editorial conjectures
- NA 28th ed. (2012) has just 2; TH edition has 0



What kind of evidence
do we have?



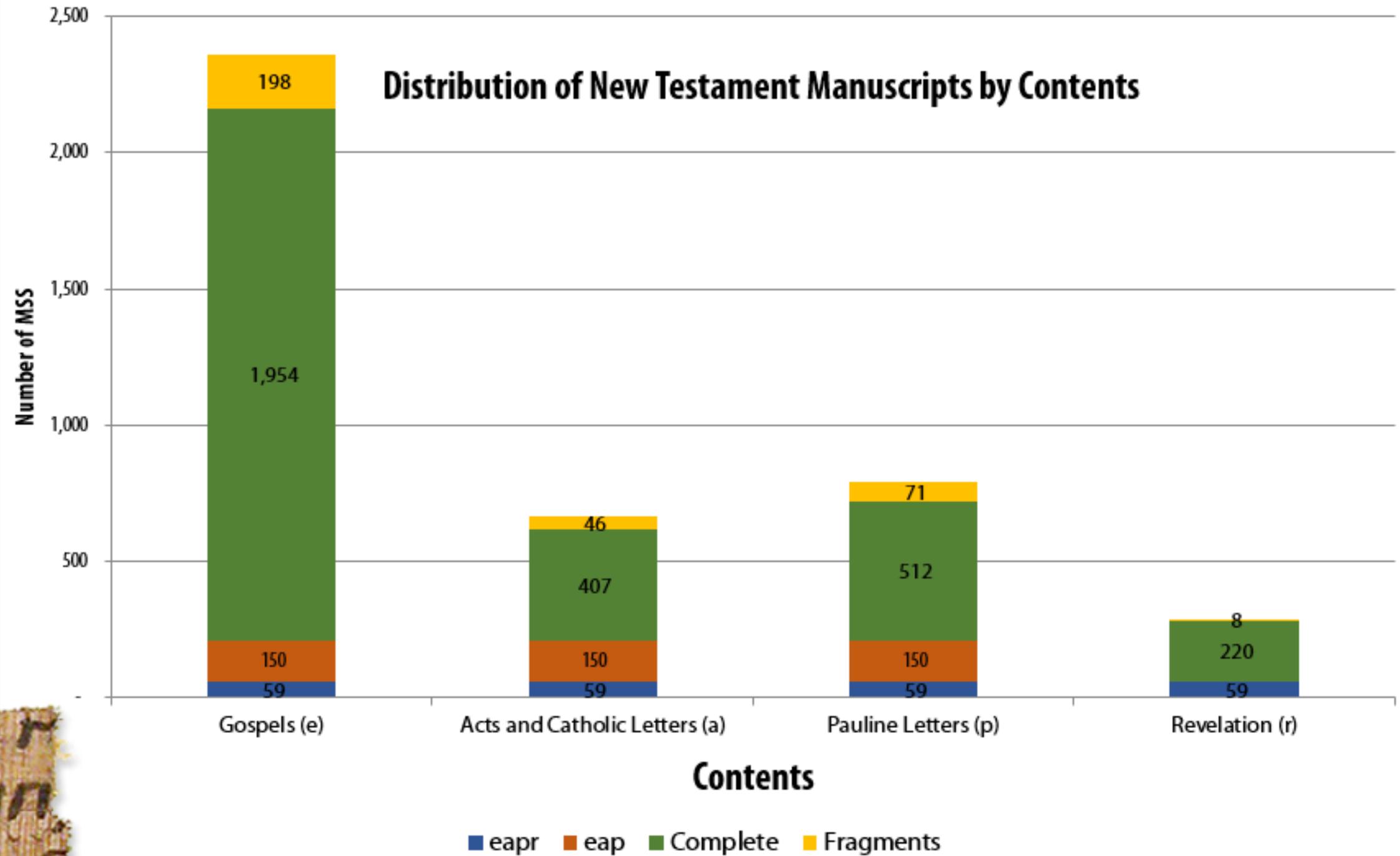
Absolute Distribution of NT Manuscripts by Century



■ Papyrus ■ Majuscule ■ Minuscule ■ Lectionary

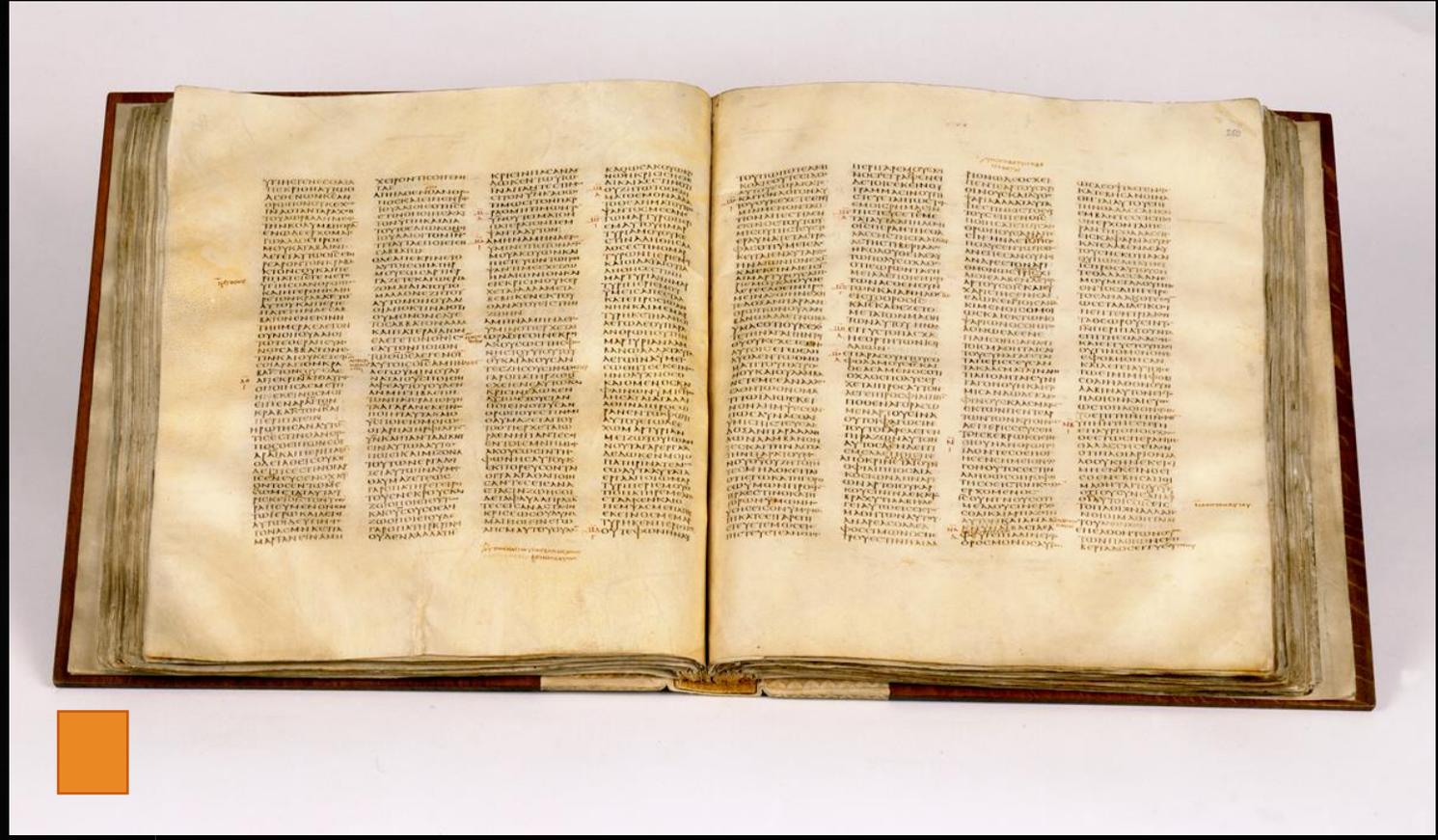


Distribution of New Testament Manuscripts by Contents





Tiny but important
P137 (2nd/3rd c.)



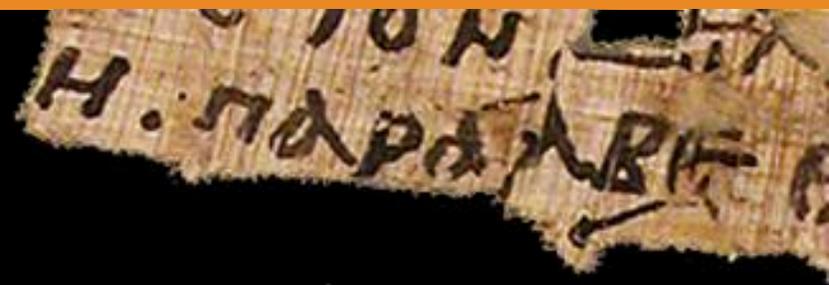
Large and important
01 Codex Sinaiticus (4th c.)

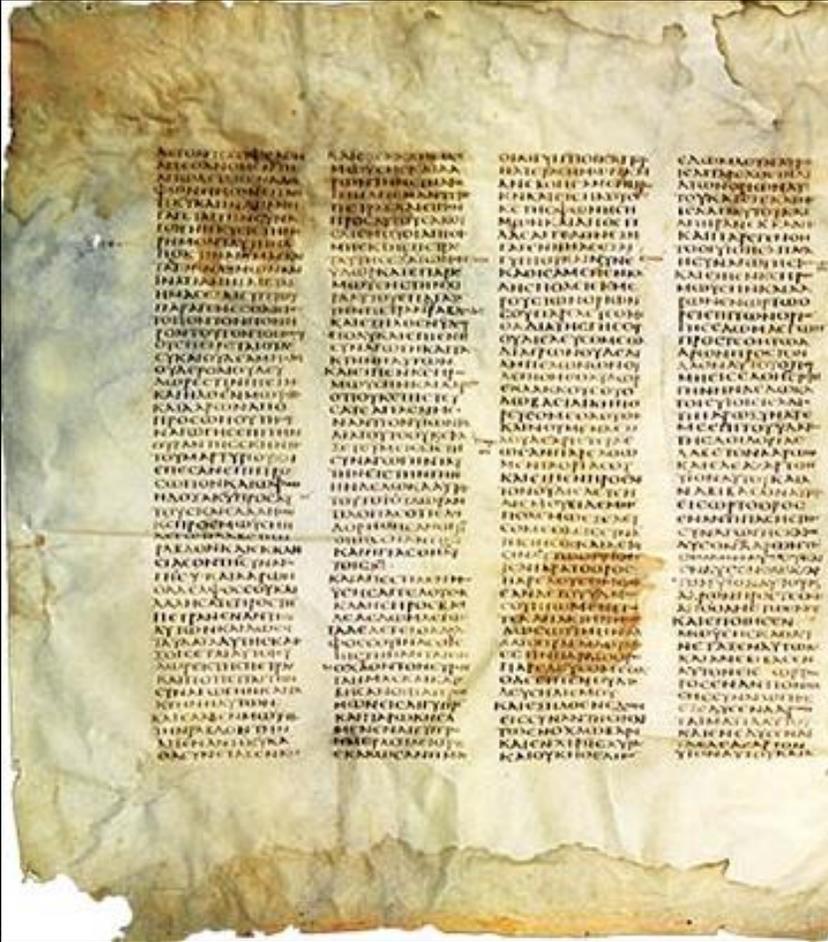


March 7, 2019

“Some **twenty New Testament** inedita [unedited manuscripts] have been identified, none of them apparently earlier than the late 2nd to early 3rd century AD. . . . There may be more small fragments still unidentified because . . . their identity only emerges from much more detailed study than is feasible when cataloguing. . . . and **over eighty Septuagint** and related texts are currently known to us and will gradually be assigned and published.”

—**EGYPT EXPLORATION SOCIETY**

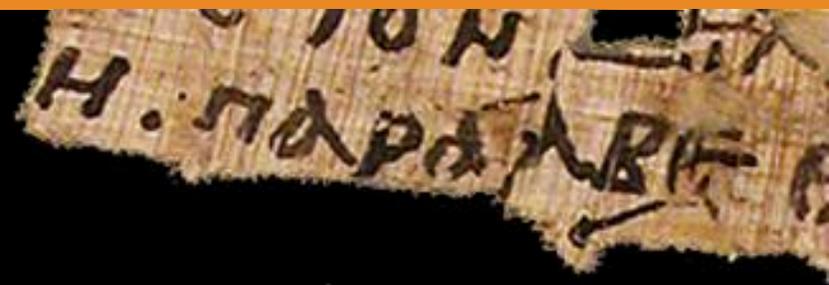




1. Greek manuscripts

2. Early translations

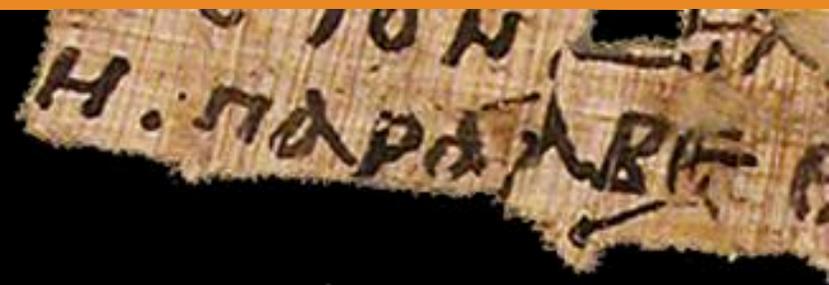
3. Citations



Comparing with ancient works

Work	Written	Manuscripts*	Earliest copy
Herodotus's <i>History</i>	440 B.C.	50	ca. 1st c.
Tacitus's <i>Annals</i>	30 A.D.	2?	16th c.
Mark's Gospel	50 A.D.	2000+	2nd/3rd c.
Josephus's works	80–90 A.D.	130+	4th c.

* Secular author numbers taken from LDAB in April 2019 or from Peter Head



“[I]f the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt.”

—**F.F. BRUCE**



“No other Greek text is handed down so richly and credibly as the New Testament.”

—**GIORGIO PASQUALI**

How well were
manuscripts copied?





“In the earliest centuries, the vast majority of copyists of the New Testament books were not trained scribes. ... The striking and disappointing fact is that our earliest manuscripts of the New Testament have far more mistakes and differences in them than our later ones. The earlier we go in the history of copying these texts, the less skilled and attentive the scribes appear to have been.”

— **BART EHRMAN**, *NT Introduction* (6th ed.), 25





BRON

OR

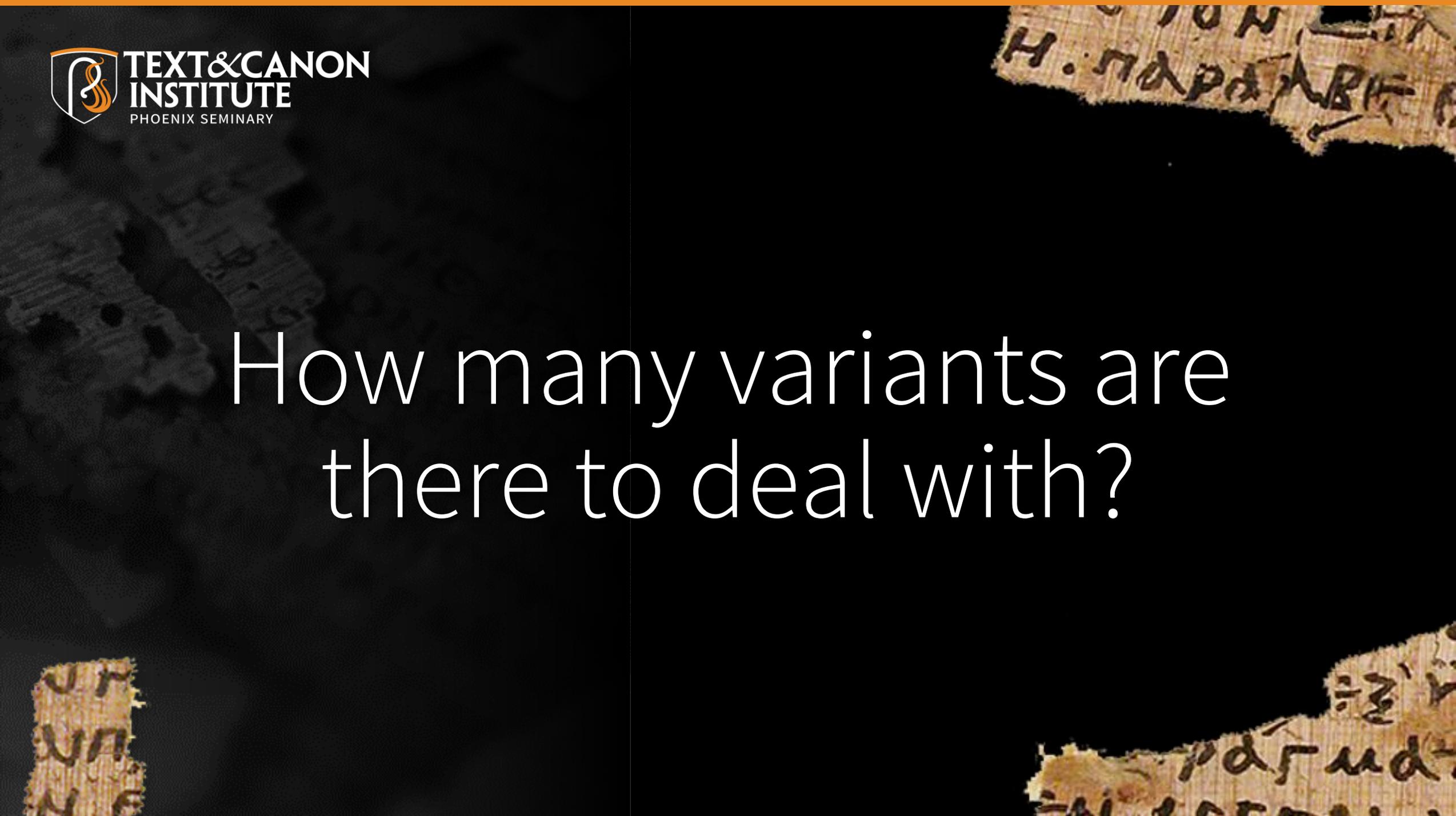
MJ?

Χαίροις πάντες ἄγιοι

Γύου τὸν θυ.

Ἄρχη

ἄρχη τοῦ ἀσπελίου ἰσχυρῶς ἔστραψεν
σώπρωτον· εὖ καλασμένον τὴν ὁδὸν
ὁδοῦ κυ· ἀθάνατος ποιῶν τε τὰς ῥίβους αἰ
μοίαν εὐδὲφ ἰσχυρῶν μαρτυρῶν· καὶ εὖ π
σφίζοντο πάντες ἐν τῷ ἰορδάνη ποταμ
χασ καμηλοῦ καὶ ζώων πλείονος ὄφω



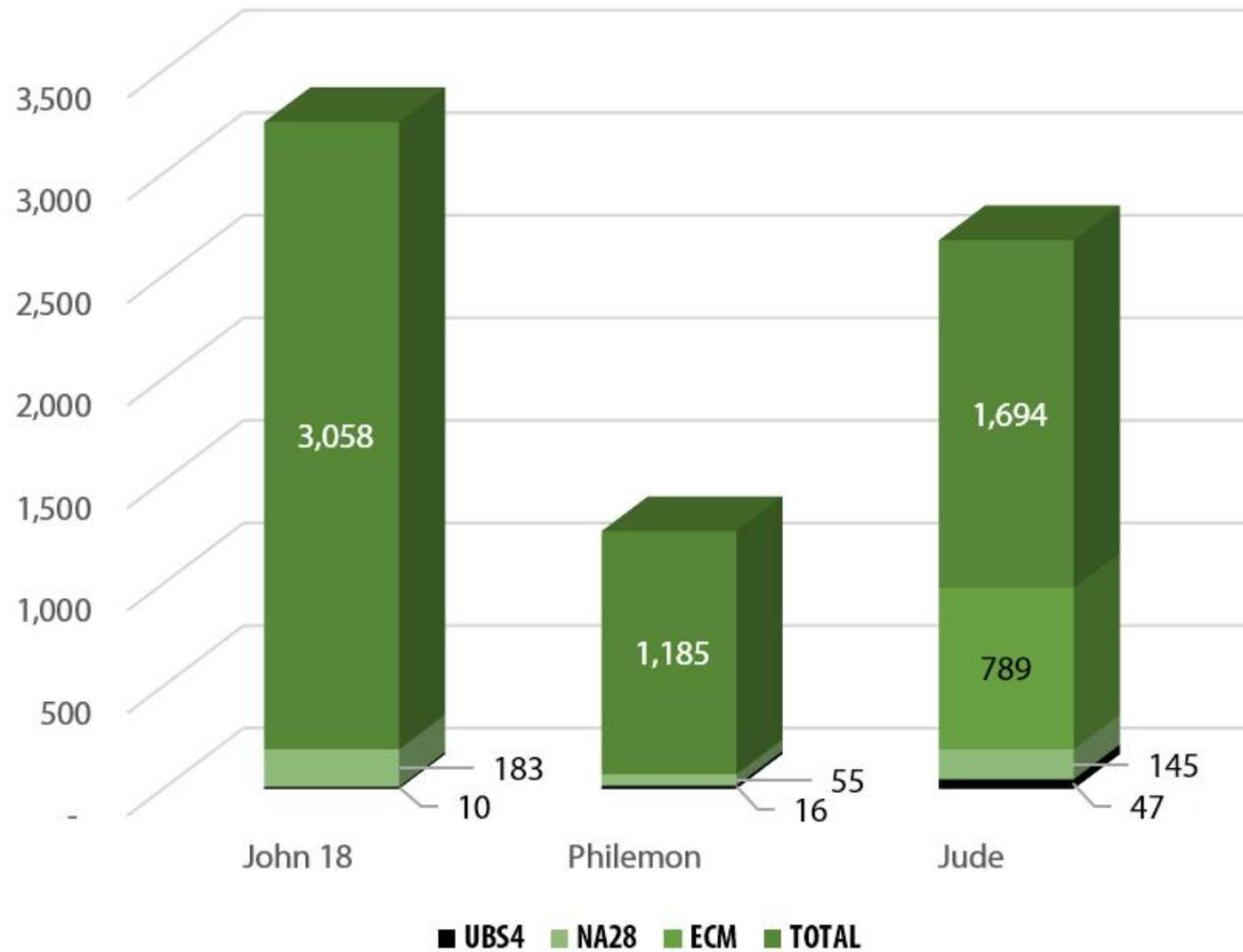
How many variants are
there to deal with?



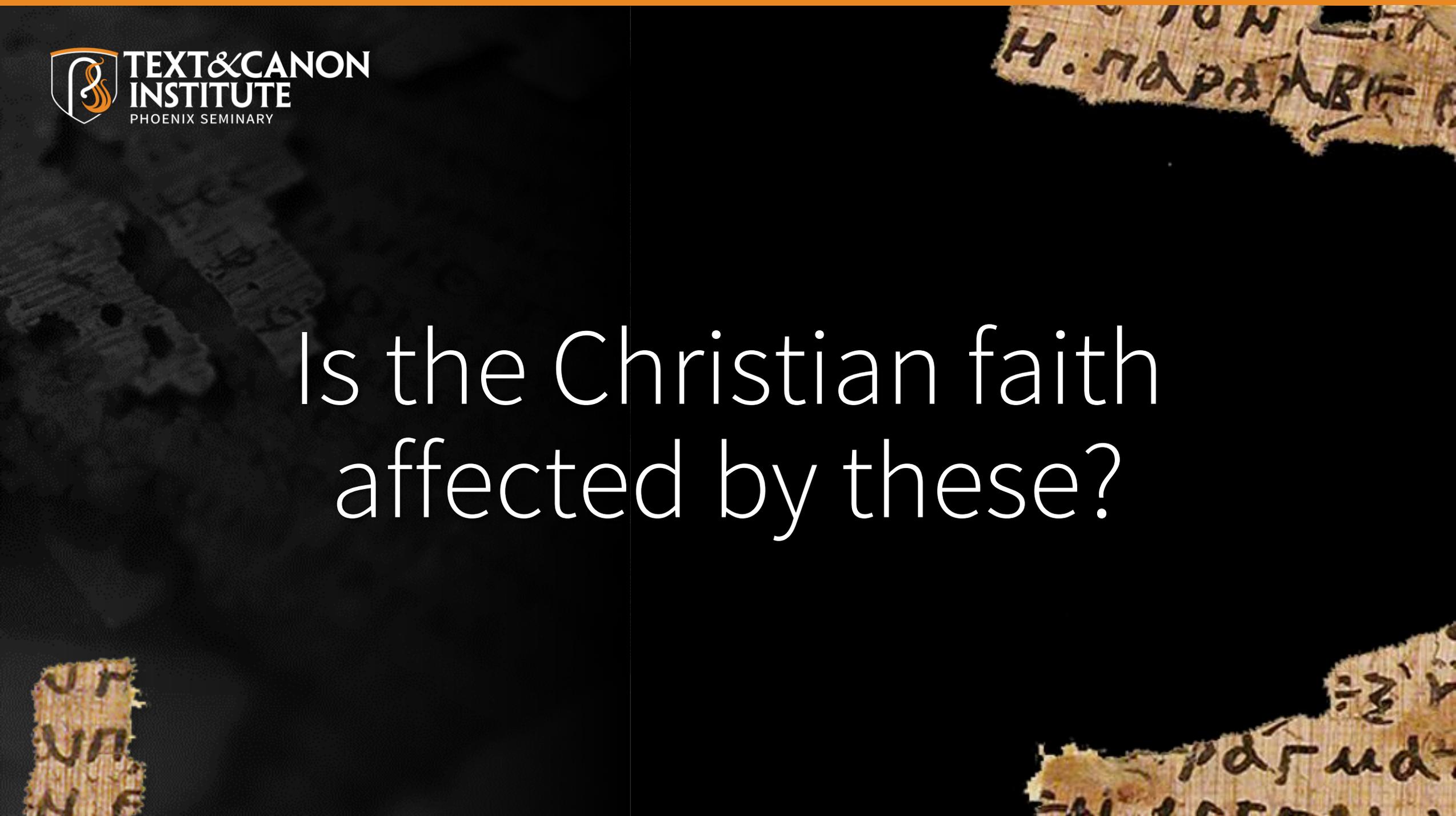
Consider John 18

- About 1,600 continuous Greek manuscripts
- 3,058 variants; 434 per word! (45% are nonsense)
- 800 words in Jn 18 = 1,300,000 words copied!
- 1 variant per 434 total words copied; none are footnoted in ESV, NIV, NRSV, NET

Number of Variants by Greek New Testament



Source for totals: Peter J. Gurry, "The Number of Variants in the Greek New Testament: A Proposed Estimate," *NTS* 62.1 (2016): 97-121.



Is the Christian faith
affected by these?

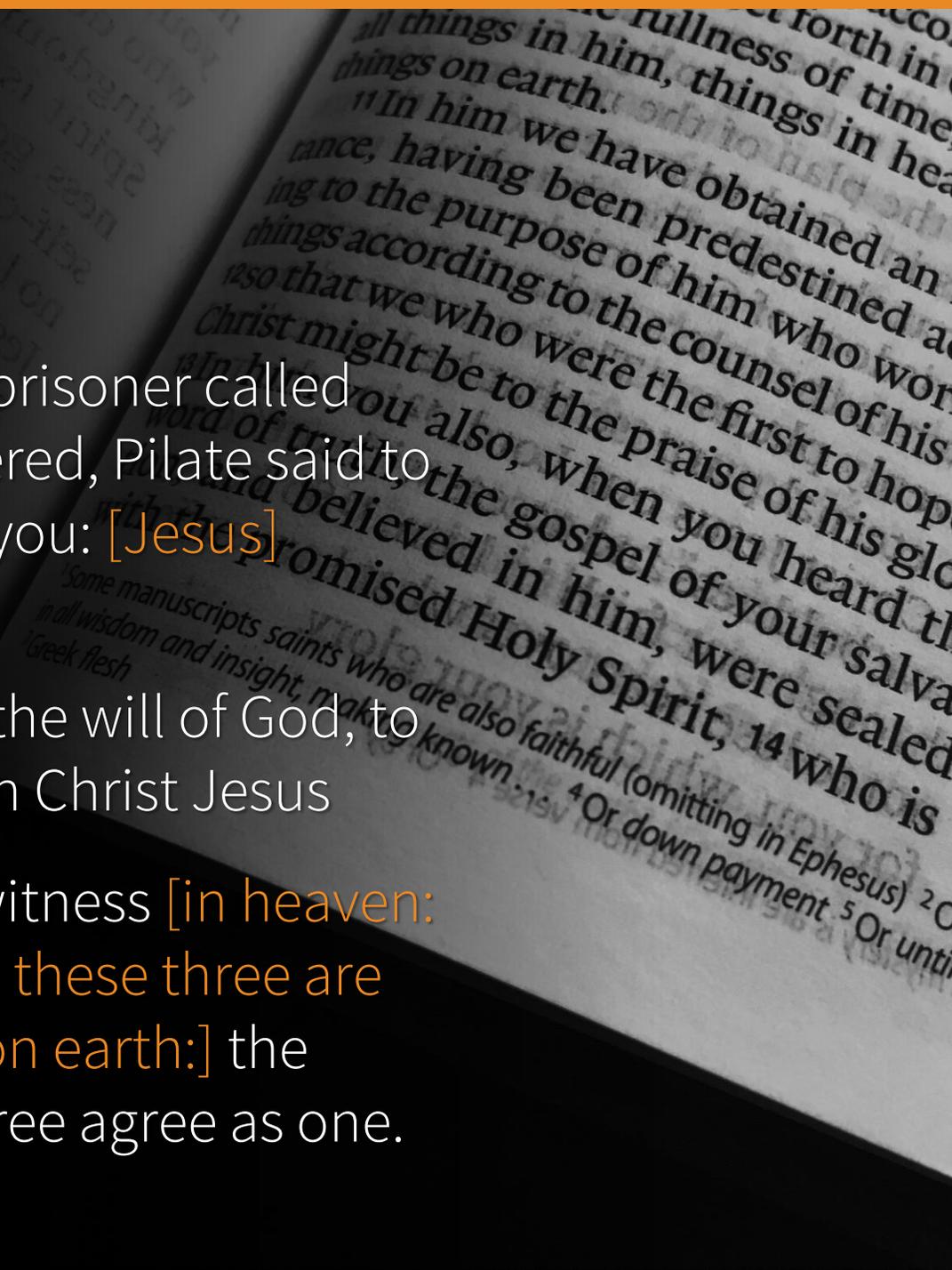


Acts 13:33

“And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to _____ by raising Jesus...”

(a) us, their children; (b) our children; (c) us, the children

- **Matt. 27.26:** And they had then a notorious prisoner called [Jesus] Barabbas. 17 So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, “Whom do you want me to release for you: [Jesus] Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?”
- **Eph. 1.1:** Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints who are [in Ephesus,] and faithful in Christ Jesus
- **1 John 5.7–8:** For there are three that bear witness [in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. 8 And there are three that bear witness on earth:] the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.





“In the final analysis, it is best to admit that, in relatively rare cases, variants do **touch on** some important doctrines and ethical practices of the Christian faith, but that, just the same, none of these doctrines or ethical practices is **established** from these disputed texts.”

—ME





“Scripture is highly redundant, in a good way” such that “the doctrines of the Christian faith are never derived from a single text.”

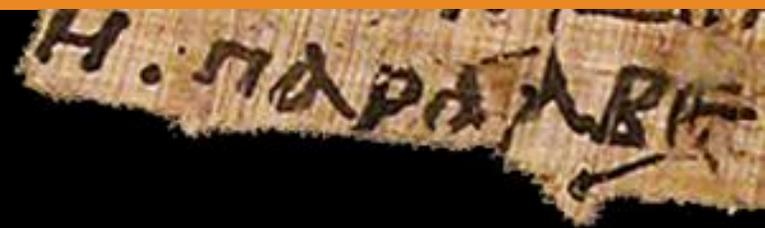
—**JOHN FRAME**, *Doctrine of the Word of God*, 248



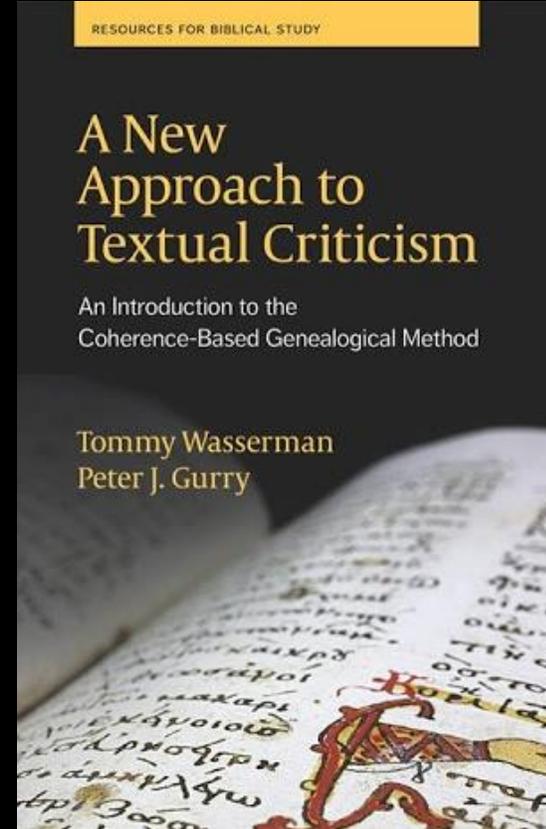
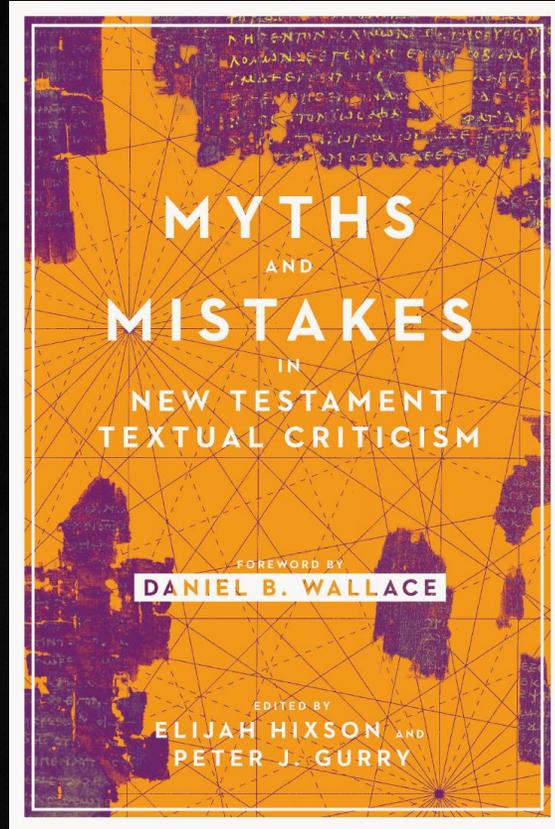


“God’s testimony concerning his Son Jesus Christ is truly abundant and worthy of our respect: the main thrust of what God wants us to learn never hangs on one single particle or word. The faith of the saints, accordingly, rests on sure and true foundations. But in the same way that a grain of gold, no matter how small, is nonetheless gold, **so the smallest portion of the word which comes from the mouth of God is divine....** For this reason, whoever holds in reverence whatever comes from the mouth of God will be bound ... to seek out the most accurate reading of the New Testament Scripture as well.”

—**JOHANN ALBRECHT BENDEL**, *Novum* (1734), 372



For
more ...



OUT NOV. 5