



Bart Ehrman's Latest Con Job: *Is Forged* a Fraud?

By Jeffrey Breshears

Bart Ehrman, a New Testament scholar in the Religious Studies Department at the University of North Carolina, is one of the most influential critics of Christianity on the scene today. While not as well-known as the Oxford evolutionary biologist and atheist provocateur, Richard Dawkins, Ehrman sells far more books. In addition, he's more clever: he's not nearly so strident and dismissive of the Bible and Christianity as the pompous Dawkins, and therefore he comes across as less polemical and more scholarly – which of course makes him all the more dangerous.

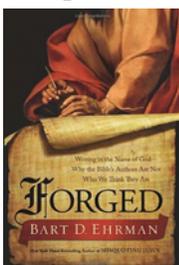
Ehrman has made a fortune writing critiques of the Bible and Christianity such as *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* (1996), *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It Into the New Testament* (2003), and *Misquoting Jesus: The Story of Who Changed the Bible and Why* (2005). Ehrman is erudite and articulate, and he knows how to write interestingly and effectively for a popular audience. All he lacks is intellectual honesty.

Ehrman also knows how to capitalize on the general public's (and most Christians') ignorance of the Bible and Christian history. Often addressing issues that should be common knowledge (especially for Christians), but which instead have been cloistered in the hallowed halls of seminaries and rarely mentioned in churches, Ehrman is forcing Christians and Christian leaders to deal seriously and substantively with issues such as theological orthodoxy, biblical canonicity, and biblical textual criticism. For that, I suppose we

owe him a debt of gratitude.

Forged: Writing In the Name of God – Why the Bible's Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are

(Harper/Collins, 2011) is Ehrman's



latest contribution to the burgeoning field of biblical deconstructionism. Those familiar with his past work will find *Forged* rather predictable. The sensationalistic title, the skeptical presuppositions, the methodology, the subtle rhetorical deceptions, and the dubious conclusions are all familiar.

In a nutshell, Ehrman's thesis is that most of the books of the New Testament were forgeries – i.e., deliberate deceptions written by someone other than the attributed authors. Of course, every persuasive lie contains at least some elements of truth, and in fact forgeries *were* common in ancient

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The Areopagus Calendar

— Upcoming Forums —

**Three Christian Views
On Creation and Evolution:
Clarifying the Issues and
Controversies in the
Creation/Evolution Debate**

An Areopagus Forum with

Dr. David Mapes

Young Earth Creationism

Dr. Rod Nave

Old Earth/Progressive Creationism

Dr. Mark Whorton

Theistic Evolution

Thursday, May 19th

7:00 PM

Perimeter Church

There are four basic views on creation and evolution. The dominant view in the mainstream science and educational establishments, as well as in the media and popular culture, is Darwinian Naturalism – a theory that denies the active involvement of God in the creation of the universe and the origins of life. Christians rightly reject this view because of its anti-supernaturalist bias and materialist worldview.

However, although Christians agree that God is the Originator and Sustainer of all creation, there are three distinct views that Christians hold when it comes to *when* and *how* God created the universe and its various life forms.

Our Areopagus Forum in May presents these three views on creation and evolution. **Dr. David Mapes**, the chair of the Theological/ Historical Studies Department and an Associate Professor

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Bart Ehrman's Latest Con Job

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times – as exemplified by the many pseudepigraphal Christian and Gnostic “gospels” and “epistles” and “acts” that circulated in the first few centuries A.D. We also know that until the NT canon was officially set in the late 4th century, the authorship and authenticity of several books were questioned by Christian scholars – as any reliable book on biblical canonicity reveals. And now, in keeping with the general increase in biblical skepticism, the controversy has been revived with scholars vigorously debating the authorship of various books even in conservative scholarly circles such as the Evangelical Theological Society.

But in lieu of any real evidence, it's unwarranted – not to mention irresponsible – to conclude that just because forgeries were common in ancient writings, and the NT is a compilation of ancient writings, therefore most of its books are probably forgeries unless they can provide conclusive evidence to the contrary.

This is the fundamental flaw in radical biblical revisionism, where scholars operate on the assumption that the texts are guilty unless they can prove themselves innocent. This is an unreasonable standard of proof that historians and literary analysts rarely if ever apply to any other ancient works.

Furthermore, how does Ehrman *know* that most New Testament books were forgeries? Well, actually, he doesn't. What's the evidence? Scanty,

conjectural, and unconvincing. Even the liberal *Library Journal*, in its review of the book, noted that “many readers may wish for more evidence of the charge [of forgery].”

Most of Ehrman's arguments are based on stylistic variations – a “problem” that can usually be rectified once we account for the fact that many NT epistles were written by secretaries – each in his own style. And although Ehrman admits that “Virtually all of the problems with what I've been calling forgeries can be solved if secretaries were heavily involved in the composition of the early Christian writings,” he fails to treat the issue seriously.

Remarkably, the case for *Forged* is even weaker than the arguments Ehrman put forth in *Misquoting Jesus*, which were less than convincing. Rhetorical dexterity can be impressive, but it's no substitute for real facts and evidence – not to mention, intellectual honesty.

Bart Ehrman is a gifted scholar and writer. But he is also an intellectual con artist with an agenda, and *Forged* is essentially a pseudo-scholarly fraud. The man is shamelessly profiteering off the religious illiteracy of the American public. Why anyone takes him seriously is mystifying. Well, actually, it's not all that puzzling. Scripture warns us that there will always be a market for this kind of thing because many people prefer lies to truth (ref. Rom. 1:18ff; II Tim. 4:3ff; etc.) But then of course, according to Ehrman, most of Scripture is *Forged* – so why should we pay it any heed?

The Areopagus Calendar

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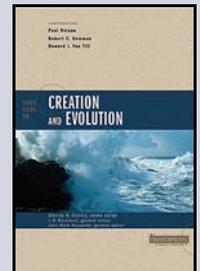
of Theology at Luther Rice University, will present the case for Young Earth Creationism (YEC); **Dr. Rod Nave**, an Associate Professor of Physics at Georgia State University, will represent the Old Earth/Progressive Creation model (OE/PC); and **Dr. Mark Whorton**, an aerospace engineer and the Director of Systems Development for Teledyne Brown Engineering, Inc., is an advocate of Theistic Evolution (TE). Despite their differences, all three panelists are committed Christians who hold a supernaturalist view of creation.

Why does this issue matter?

Because truth *always* matters – and because the credibility of the Bible and the legitimacy of the Christian faith depend upon the extent to which

they correspond to truth and reality.

For background information on the key issues in this debate, we recommend **J. P. Moreland and John Mark Reynolds, *Three Views on Creation and Evolution*** (Zondervan, 1999).



— May Workshop —

Writing Your Spiritual Autobiography

Instructor: Dr. Jeffrey Breshears

Wednesdays, May 4 - June 1

7 - 8:30 PM

Mt. Bethel Community Center

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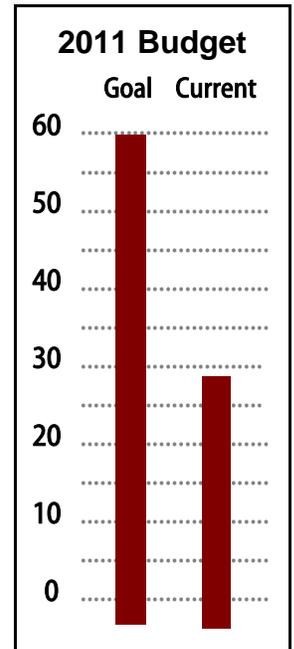
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