UNFORGIVEN: THE TEXTUAL PROBLEM
AND INTERPRETATION OF LUKE 23:34a
AND ANTI-JUDAISM IN THE EARLY CHURCH

BY

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Abstract

Jesus’ prayer of forgiveness in Luke 23:34a, one of the “seven words from the cross,” remains disputed among textual critics. Although some scholars argue that external evidence supports the short reading, others see the external evidence as inconclusive. This thesis analyzes the arguments for and against the prayer’s originality, and renders a judgment for the long reading based on a combination of external, internal, and transcriptional evidence. In addition, it suggests a possible explanation for the excision of the prayer, namely, that an attitude of anti-Judaism among some second century scribes, combined with the logion’s interpretation as a prayer for Jews, led some scribes to remove the prayer from a text which originally included it.
Chapter One: Introduction

Jesus’ prayer in Luke 23:34 that God forgive those responsible for his death has played an important role in church history and theology since very early in the development of Christianity. Westcott and Hort’s seminal Greek New Testament,\(^1\) however, excluded it as a later scribal insertion, and their accompanying Introduction explains that “its omission, on the hypothesis of its genuineness, cannot be explained in any reasonable manner.”\(^2\) Since that publication, the originality of the prayer from the cross has been debated intensely, and no scholarly consensus has emerged.

Part of the difficulty associated with this particular textual problem is that even the earliest surviving documents disagree on whether the prayer should be included. Chapter two focuses on the external evidence for and against the originality of the prayer;\(^3\) to summarize here, we may say that the absence of the prayer is attested as early as the second century, as is the inclusion of the prayer. It is also fair to say that the earliest manuscripts in which the prayer is omitted are slightly more geographically diverse than are the earliest manuscripts in which it is included. Those who argue against the originality of the prayer, following Westcott and Hort, tend to emphasize the diversity of the texts which omit the prayer, simultaneously claiming that the manuscripts attesting originality represent solely the Western tradition in the earliest stages, and only diversify

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\(^3\) In this thesis, “originality” means belonging to the original text of Luke’s Gospel, whereas “authenticity” means going back to the historical Jesus. This thesis is not concerned with authenticity, and discusses only the passage’s originality to the Gospel of Luke.
in the fourth century. For example, Petzer summarizes the evidence for the short reading as “broad and diverse early on,” narrowing progressively until the Middle Ages. Correspondingly, he characterizes the evidence for the longer reading as narrow—limited to the Western text—in the early stages, and diversifying later.

On the other hand, the scarcity of manuscripts from this early period—especially those that testify to Luke’s Gospel—means that even narrow attestation is significant. Petzer himself admits this, noting that although the long reading is limited to the Western text before the fourth century, the age of this evidence makes it impressive. Nathan Eubank challenges the “Western” label that has been applied to the longer reading by scholars such as Petzer and Whitlark and Parsons, arguing that they overstate the case by discounting the testimony of Origen and Codex Sinaiticus, two important witnesses to the Alexandrian text-type. He too emphasizes the paucity of pre-fourth-century witnesses to the Lukan text, noting that these are limited to ℃ and a few church fathers. This would hardly seem to represent a satisfactory sample size, so we should have little confidence in the “Western” designation.

Additionally, the patristic evidence provides early attestation to the long reading. References to or quotations of the prayer occur in the second century in Irenaus, Marcion, Hippolytus, and the Diatessaron. The geographic diversity of these citations is important,

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5 Petzer, 201.

6 Ibid, 200.

and will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. Although those who argue against the originality of the prayer typically rely on the manuscript evidence to support their conclusion, I argue that we should instead render a split decision in this theater.

In chapter three I turn to the internal evidence from Luke and Acts, again examining the arguments for and against the originality of the prayer.\(^8\) The primary internal argument for the shorter reading, advanced by Fitzmeyer and others, is that Jesus’ pronouncement from the cross interrupts the flow of the narrative, because the main agents or subjects in the section—both before and after the prayer—are the soldiers.\(^9\) The prayer therefore abruptly breaks into the plot, changing the subject from the soldiers to Jesus and back again, rather quickly and without warning. Proponents of this view suggest that since the prayer does not seem to fit into the narrative, it must have been a later scribal insertion. One explanation for this insertion is quite simple: the prayer circulated as an oral tradition, known to be an authentic saying of Jesus, and was added by a well-meaning scribe. Another explanation suggests that Jesus’ prayer is a harmonization that mirrors Stephen’s dying prayer in Acts 7:60.\(^10\) Yet another, offered by Whitlark and Parsons, claims that the prayer was added for numerological reasons; namely, to increase the total number of sayings from the cross to the ideal number seven.\(^11\) I evaluate and oppose all these proposals in chapter three.

Scholars such as Bart Ehrman, Kim-Haines Eitzen, and most recently Nathan Eubank have supported the longer reading on the basis of the internal evidence, citing

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\(^8\) For the purposes of this paper, I will assume the unity of Luke-Acts.


\(^10\) Ibid.

\(^11\) Whitlark and Parsons, 188-204.
literary elements within Luke-Acts as evidence that the prayer is consistent with Lukan redaction.\textsuperscript{12} Specifically, the longer reading corresponds to the ignorance-forgiveness motif in the Lukan literature, as demonstrated by Eldon Epp and elaborated upon by the two visitations of the prophet theme argued by Luke Timothy Johnson.\textsuperscript{13} Since Epp and Johnson have demonstrated the existence of these motifs without relying on Jesus’ prayer, I argue that those themes provide literary evidence for the originality of the long reading.

Having demonstrated that the prayer from the cross fits well within the Lukan narrative based on the ignorance-forgiveness motif, I turn in chapter four to explaining the origin of the variant. This discussion hinges on transcriptional probabilities, and therefore must be focused within the time period that the text was altered. We must assume that the variant was introduced sometime in the second century, since there is already disagreement within the documentary evidence at this time. For this reason we must examine the way the prayer was interpreted by the early church, in order to understand why it would have been altered.

Patristic interpretation of the prayer generally fits into three categories. I term the first category “Jesus as the ultimate example of forgiveness.” In this category, the prayer is cited by interpreters who encourage their audiences to be compassionate and forgiving, because Jesus endured the ultimate betrayal and yet forgave his murderers. Irenaeus, Pseudo-Clementine Homily III, The Apostolic Constitutions, and The Acts of Philip all reference the prayer with this purpose. The second category includes citations which


teach ignorance as a circumstance which mitigates guilt. These interpreters pick up the ignorance-forgiveness motif from the Lukan material, using Jesus’ prayer as the strongest support. These include Origen in Homily II on Leviticus and Peri Pascha, and the Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions. The third category is a broad group including citations that narrate Jesus’ Passion, such as The Apostolic Constitutions, the Gospel of Nicodemus, Marcion, and the Diatessaron.

With this basic understanding of how early interpreters used the prayer, we examine the explanations that have been offered for the origin of the variant. Since this is such a significant saying of Jesus, no accidental cause will sufficiently explain the variant. Instead, the prayer was either deliberately inserted or excised. Another interpretive question plays a significant role in this discussion: Whom did Jesus wish the Father to forgive with his prayer?

Some who argue for the shorter reading have proposed that early interpreters understood the prayer to forgive the Romans, and inserted it to increase the culpability of the Jews in Jesus’ death. However, there is no evidence that suggests the prayer was interpreted in this way. On the contrary, while many references to the prayer remain ambiguous, those who specify beneficiaries nearly unanimously assign Jesus’ forgiveness to the Jews, including Origen, Archelaus, and Cyril of Alexandria.

Since early interpreters clearly understood the logion as a prayer for the Jews during the pivotal time period for this variant, anti-Judaism would not have been a motivation for insertion, but for excision. I therefore argue that the long reading should be favored, and that early second century scribes removed the prayer as a result of their unwillingness to forgive the Jews. Eldon Epp demonstrates that this is a plausible

14 Petzer, 199-204.
motivation for deliberate tampering with the biblical text in his work on the text of Acts in Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis (D). Following Epp, I will examine several examples of the ignorance-forgiveness motif in Acts, and observe the tendency of Codex D to minimize ignorance as an excuse for Jews.

To further support the thesis of an anti-Judaic excision, chapter five examines some clear examples of Christian-Jewish polemic. Not only was Jewish responsibility for Jesus' death a prominent theme, but the conviction that God allowed the destruction of Jerusalem as a punishment was expressed by leaders such as Origen, Justin Martyr, John Chrysostom, and Melito of Sardis, and may have been a significant motivating factor in the excision of this text. It would make little sense for the gospel to record Jesus praying for forgiveness of the Jews had history proved that God had not forgiven them. Had God refused Jesus' prayer? It would be easier if Jesus simply had not spoken those words.

This thesis synthesizes the variety of views that have been advanced regarding the textual problem of Luke 23:34, and finally concludes that the forgiveness prayer is original to Luke, was interpreted by second century readers as expressing forgiveness of the Jews, and was excised at that time as a result of general anti-Judaic sentiment and the specific conviction that Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed as a divine punishment for the death of Jesus. Although Eubank, cited above, has already arrived at similar conclusions, I did not become familiar with his work until after I had formed my own ideas on the topic. His contribution to the discussion is primarily the analysis of transcriptional probability, drawing attention to the way in which the prayer was interpreted at the time which it was altered. When I encountered his paper I was

disappointed that my work was not as original as I had previously thought, but I was also pleased to have found a relative confirmation of my argument.

Still, Eubank’s and other papers on this textual problem and most other textual discussions are quite short. In this instance, the argument based on the ignorance-forgiveness motif forces the thorough reader to look up several passages in Acts to confirm the existence of the motif and understand the way it operates. The argument from transcriptional probability requires one to look up the citations in the church fathers, which are not easily obtained, especially in the original languages, to see how they interpreted the prayer. I have alleviated this difficulty by including these important texts within my argument.
Chapter Two: External Evidence

The external evidence pertaining to Luke 23:34a has caused much disagreement among text critics. While some have claimed that the external evidence clearly betrays the unoriginality of Jesus’ prayer, others question the strength of this position based on the widespread attestation of the prayer in the patristic literature. This chapter evaluates the arguments on both sides of the debate, including the testimony for the logion in the ancient manuscripts and the church fathers. By way of introduction, scholars who favor the short reading generally argue that the prayer is attested narrowly in the earliest manuscripts. Others have argued that these claims exaggerate the strength of the manuscript evidence against the prayer and ignore the broad and early patristic evidence. This chapter concludes that although the manuscript evidence against the logion is noteworthy, it is not strong enough to warrant a categorical conclusion of unoriginality. Instead, the external evidence as we have it amounts to a draw, and necessitates an examination of internal evidence.

The text in question is found in the midst of Luke’s account of Jesus’ crucifixion. We begin with Luke 23:33:

33.) Καὶ ὅτε ἦλθον ἐπὶ τὸν τόπον τὸν καλούμενον Κρανίον, ἔκει ἐσταύρωσαν αὐτὸν καὶ τοὺς κακοφράγους, ὃν μὲν ἐκ δεξιῶν ὃν δὲ ἐξ ἀριστερῶν. 34.) [[ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἔλεγεν· πάτερ, ἄφες αὐτοῖς, οὐ γὰρ οἶδασιν τί ποιοῦσιν.]] διαμεριζόμενοι δὲ τὰ ἰμάτια αὐτοῦ ἔβαλον κλήρους.1

33.) And when they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified Him and the evildoers, one on the right and the other on the left. 34.) [[But Jesus said, “Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do.]] And they divided His garments by casting lots.

The originality of the words in double brackets is in question because of a complete division in the manuscript evidence. Here is a summary of the significant witnesses on each side of the discussion.2

The following include the prayer:
\[ \text{N}^2, (A) C D^5 L \Psi 0250 33 \text{M} \text{lat sy}^c \text{p,h} (\text{bo}^{pt}); (\text{I}^{\text{lat}}) \]

These manuscripts omit the prayer:
\[ \text{B}^75 \text{N} \text{I} B^* W \Theta 070. 579. 1241 \text{pc a sy}^* \text{sa bo}^{pt} \]

The committee of the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament (NA 27) elected to place the prayer in double brackets. This designation indicates “that the enclosed words, generally of some length, are known not to be a part of the original text. These texts derive from a very early stage of the tradition, and have often played a significant role in the history of the church.”3 Unfortunately, it provides no information regarding how this conclusion was made, or on what basis the passage is “known not to be a part of the original text.”

Bruce Metzger, who served on the NA 27 committee, provides some insight into the position of the committee in his *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*.

The absence of these words from such early and diverse witnesses [as have been outlined above] is most impressive…. The logion, though probably not a part of the original Gospel of Luke, bears self-evident tokens of its dominical origin, and was retained, within double-square brackets, in its traditional place where it had been incorporated by unknown copyists relatively early in the transmission of the Third Gospel.4

Metzger’s comments are not particularly helpful, because although he is correct to note the logion’s absence in important manuscripts, he provides no evidence for its dominical origin, and offers no explanation for its insertion.

\[ \text{\textsuperscript{2}} \text{Ibid.} \]
\[ \text{\textsuperscript{3}} \text{Ibid, 50*.} \]
\[ \text{\textsuperscript{4}} \text{Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), 180.} \]
There are some interesting points to be made about the texts of two of these manuscripts. The first is Codex Sinaiticus (א), a mid-fourth century codex of the Septuagint and New Testament. This codex is extremely important in textual criticism, because despite its extensive corrections, it is the earliest full Bible that has survived. In this codex, the passage ὁ δὲ... ποιοῦσιν is included by the primary copyist, but excised by a fifth century editor by means of a semicircular arc in the margin denoting deletion. This mark is barely visible now, because another fifth or sixth century editor removed it, re-asserting the originality of the passage.5 Thus א displays a pattern of inclusion, excision, and re-inclusion of the prayer “Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do,” a process that was played out over two or three centuries.

The second is Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis (D), a fifth or sixth century Greek and Latin diglot (meaning that when the Codex is opened, the left page contains Greek text, and the right page contains the same material in Latin) of the Gospels and Acts. The original scribe of this codex omitted Jesus’ prayer of forgiveness, and a later corrector inserted it. This is the inverse of the process that we see in Codex Sinaiticus. Interestingly, in Codex Bezae verse 33 ends on the last line of the page, and the primary scribe continues verse 34 on the same line, beginning with διαμεριζόμενοι.... This allowed the “corrector” to add the prayer in the margin at the bottom of the page.6

5 Those interested in viewing Codex Sinaiticus may view the entire document at www.codexsinaiticus.org. The curved deletion mark is discernible as an indentation in the paper next to the four lines of the prayer. The site also provides information about the manuscript and the dates of its correctors.

6 Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis may be viewed at the Cambridge University Library website, although the resolution is dramatically lower than that of Codex Sinaiticus’ website. The following web address is for the specific page on which Luke 23:33-34a occurs: www.lib.cam.ac.uk/exhibitions/KJV/codex.php?id=537
These two codices (א and D) demonstrate that sometimes disagreement occurred even within a single document! The omission of the prayer in Codex Vaticanus (B) presents another difficulty, especially since it is in disagreement with א*. Westcott and Hort had concluded that B is the most reliable text, and א is the next best. Thus, they assert that when both א and B agree upon a reading, that reading should be accepted as the true or original reading “until strong internal evidence is found to the contrary, and that no readings of אB can safely be rejected absolutely.”7 Unfortunately, here we have a disagreement between א and B which will be difficult to resolve. Metzger is correct in his assessment of the manuscript evidence that “the absence of these words from such early and diverse witnesses…is most impressive,”8 especially on the testimony of Codex B. The omission of Jesus’ prayer of forgiveness in these witnesses is too significant to ignore.

Scholars who prefer the short reading generally rely on arguments from the manuscript evidence to make their case. These arguments point out the diversity of the evidence for the short reading, especially in the earliest stages of transmission. They particularly emphasize the absence of the prayer in the important early Alexandrian witnesses ג5 and B. In contrast to the “wide basis of diverse evidence” in favor of the short reading, Jacobus H. Petzer asserts that the evidence for the long reading “has a distinctive Western flavor around it especially early in the history…”9 Although Petzer

7 Westcott and Hort, 1988 [1882], 224.
8 Metzger, 180.
9 Petzer, 200.
acknowledges that the long reading is much more diverse from the fourth century on, he assumes that the reading was proliferated from the Western text, in which he claims it was introduced.

Whitlark and Parsons pick up Petzer’s characterization of the prayer as a Western reading and push the case even further. While Petzer had not mentioned Codex $\text{א}$, an important witness to the Alexandrian text that includes the prayer, Whitlark and Parsons discount its testimony by remarking that it is “known to have numerous Western readings in John and in parts of Luke.”\(^{10}\) However, they make no case for why this should be considered one of the parts of Luke in which $\text{א}$ has assimilated to the Western text. In fact, as Eubank observes, $\text{א}$ disagrees with D on every major variant in Luke 23, including this one! Further, with only a few minor exceptions, $\text{א}$ never agrees with D against $\text{ס}\text{ס}$ or B in Luke 23.\(^{11}\)

Codex $\text{א}$, then, is the earliest manuscript that includes the prayer, and there is no reason to discount its status as an Alexandrian witness. The earlier $\text{ס}\text{ס}$ is admittedly a stronger witness, but as noted earlier, the scarcity of pre-fourth century manuscripts makes definite conclusions impossible. On the other hand, the prayer’s attestation in patristic writings provides oft-overlooked early evidence in favor of originality.

Commentators of this passage generally overlook the testimony of the church fathers. According to Kim Haines-Eitzen, “Scholars who have argued against the originality of these words, have typically failed to note the compelling Patristic

\(^{10}\) Whitlark and Parsons, 190. Here they cite Westcott and Hort’s *Introduction*, 151.

\(^{11}\) Eubank, 523.
evidence.”\textsuperscript{12} Although Cyril of Alexandria knows the saying in the fifth century, he claims that the words are not original. As early as the second century, though, the prayer is known by patristic interpreters such as Irenaeus and Origen. In addition, witnesses such as the pseudo-Clementine literature, Hegesippus-Eusebius, Archelaus, \textit{The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles}, \textit{Gospel of Nicodemus}, and the \textit{Acts of Philip} reference the saying. Haines-Eitzen asserts that these documents show that the prayer of forgiveness was known by the second century in Gaul, Alexandria, Palestine, Syria, and Rome. This is an impressive distribution that is difficult to account for if the saying is not original.

Irenaeus attests that the prayer was known in the second century in \textit{Adversus Haereses}, Book 3. The work survives completely only in Latin, with Greek fragments preserved in quotations by other patristic authors.

\begin{quote}
\textit{Et ex hoc autem quod Dominus in cruce dixerit: “Pater dimitte eis, non enim sciunt quid faciunt,” longanimitas, et patientia, et misericordia, et bonitas Christi ostenditur, ut et ipse pateretur, et ipse excusaret eos qui se male tractassent.}\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

And from this fact moreover, that the Lord exclaimed upon the cross, “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do,” the long suffering, patience, compassion, and goodness of Christ are exhibited, since He both suffered, and did Himself exculpate those who had maltreated him.

Although Irenaeus does not specifically associate the saying with any of the gospels, this reference occurs in the midst of an argument for the divinity of Jesus, in which Irenaeus quotes from Paul and the gospels. He expounds the reference to the prayer in the same way as the other quotations, giving them all the same amount of weight. From his attitude toward the prayer from the cross, it is clear that Irenaeus

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{13} Irenaeus, \textit{Adv. Haer.} 3.18.5, in W. Wigan Harvey, \textit{Sancti Irenæi Libros Quinque Adversus Hæreses; textu graeco in locis nonnullis locupletato, versione latina cum codicibus Claromontano ac Arundeliano demuo collata, premissa de placitis Gnosticorum prolusione, fragmenta nee non Graece, Syriace, Armeniace commentatione perpetua et indicibus variis edidit} vol. 2 (Cambridge: University Press, 1857), 99.
\end{footnotes}
considers it authoritative and original. In any event, his mere knowledge of it at this early
date is significant, because it predates the earliest manuscripts, and also predates the
period when New Testament texts were officially recognized as scripture.

In addition to this early witness, the prayer apparently appeared in Marcion’s
Luke, which was compiled around 140 C.E., and preserved for us by Tertullian and
Epiphanius. This citation occurs in Epiphanius’ *Panarion* 42.11.6, which dates to about
375 C.E. Another second century witness to the prayer’s originality is Tatian’s
*Diatessaron*, made known to us by Ephrem’s commentary on the *Diatessaron*.¹⁴

Third century citations include Hippolytus of Rome (*Ben. Is. Jac.* 28.10), and
several quotations by Origen. Origen’s testimony is significant because he provides an
early Alexandrian witness to the long reading. In Homily 2 on Leviticus, Origen
discusses the possibility that an entire congregation can sin, and the remedy that is
prescribed for such community sin. Origen also asserts that it is possible for a
congregation to sin out of ignorance, using Jesus’ prayer as confirmation.¹⁵

*Quod et Dominus confirmat in Evangeliis cum dici: “Pater, remitte illis, non
enim sciunt quid faciunt.”*¹⁶

The Lord also confirms this in the Gospels when he says, “Father, forgive them
for they do not know what they are doing.”

Origen’s testimony is significant not only because it provides a very early witness of
originality (ca. 200-250), but also because he specifically attributes the words to “the
Gospels.” We therefore know that Origen received this saying of Jesus not as an oral

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¹⁴ Ephrem cites the prayer three times in the commentary (10.14; 21.3; 21.18).

¹⁵ Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus*, (Homily 2.1.5) in *The Fathers of the Church*, tr. Gary Wayne Barkley,
(The Catholic University of America Press, 1990), 40.

412.
tradition, but as a written source—specifically a gospel. This written source most likely
dates to the early second century, prior to Origen’s writing and Marcion’s Luke, which
also includes the prayer.

Another citation occurs in Origen’s *Peri Pascha* (43.30-34). This work—of
which only one manuscript exists—likely dates to around 245, near the end of Origen’s
career when he was at the height of his influence.¹⁷

For the sacrifice of this one they made through their ignorance, because they did
not know what they were doing—and for this reason it is also forgiven to them—
for it is good for one man to die on behalf of all of the people.

Origen and Ν* together provide early Alexandrian witnesses for the originality of
the prayer. However, Whitlark and Parsons demote Origen’s testimony in the same way
that they do Ν*, claiming that “his writings evidence many distinctly Western readings.”¹⁹

On the other hand, there seems to be little reason not to consider this an instance of
agreement between the Alexandrian and the Western types. Since Origen and Ν* are
usually considered Alexandrian, asserting that they represent a Western reading here begs
the question that the prayer of forgiveness is Western.


knowledge, this is the only critical Greek edition, which includes a lengthy French introduction and French
translation. Robert Daly’s edition provides an English translation of the same Greek text.

¹⁹ Whitlark and Parsons, 190.
Archelaus also cites the prayer in his *Disputation with Manes*. It is unclear who initially committed the words to writing, whether Archelaus or Hegemonius, but it is clear that it was originally composed in Syriac, and subsequently translated into Greek. A Latin translation was made from the Greek version sometime after Jerome’s time, and it is this Latin version that is preserved, supplemented by Greek fragments. Dating of the written account is made difficult by the existence of these differing versions, but excerpts of the Greek version quoted in Epiphanius provide some guidance. The date of the disputation itself is more discernible, and is assigned to 277 or 278 based on testimony from Epiphanius, Eusebius, and the general time that the Manichaean heresy became widely known.

The quotation of the prayer occurs in Chapter 44 of the *Disputation*, in the midst of an extended comparison of Jesus and Moses. Archelaus alternately references the gospels and Exodus, establishing Moses as an archetype of Jesus. Not only did Moses prophesy the coming of the Messiah; the experience of Jesus also mirrors that of Moses. Both went into and came back up out of Egypt, both miraculously fed people in the wilderness, and both fasted forty days. Likewise, both Moses and Jesus were able to gain deliverance for certain people through prayer when God’s vengeance was imminent:

> There, Moses prayed that Pharaoh and his people might be spared the plagues; and here, our Lord Jesus prayed that the Pharisees might be pardoned, when He said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

The alternating comparisons from the gospels and Exodus continue, pointing out further instances in which Moses’ life anticipated the experience of Jesus. The

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21 Ibid, 220. I have unfortunately been unable to access the Latin text.
significance of these references is great for our discussion, because they are drawn exclusively from Exodus and the Synoptics. It would be peculiar to include a non-textual or spurious passage in an otherwise undisputed group of citations. We can reasonably infer, then, that the author of the Disputation had Jesus’ prayer in textual form, and considered it original and authoritative.

The Apostolic Constitutions quote the saying twice. This collection dates to the third and fourth centuries, with the first six books being somewhat earlier than the seventh and eighth. Authorship is debated, and although the name attributes the words to the apostolic age, the work may in fact be a compilation of several later authors. It could represent adaptations of the Didascalia of the third century and the Didache of the second.22

The first citation of Jesus’ prayer occurs in Book II, in a section containing instruction on punishment, repentance, forgiveness, and restoration of a sinner to the congregation.23 The author advises Christians on church discipline, commanding church members to treat an offender sternly, removing him from the community until he is repentant. At this time, the congregation should graciously receive him back, and the deacons should plead on his behalf:

...καὶ εἰσελθόντες ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ σε ἐρωτάτωσαν· καὶ γὰρ ὑπὲρ τῶν ἡμαρτηκότων ὁ Σωτὴρ τὸν Πατέρα ἡξίου, ὡς γέγραπται ἐν τῷ Εὐαγγελίῳ· Πάτερ, ἀφες αὐτοῖς, οὐ γὰρ οἰδασίν, τί ποιοῦσι.24


23 Ibid, 402.

...and when they come in, let them entreat you for him. For even the Savior entreated the Father for those who had sinned, as it is written in the Gospel: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”

In this citation we again find that the author specifically attributes the logion to a written source (ὡς γέγραπται), and a gospel at that (τῷ Εὐαγγελίῳ). Further, the author follows the pattern of others who quote the prayer in using Jesus as the ultimate example of forgiveness, which all other Christians should emulate.

The other quotation of the prayer in the Constitutions comes in an extended narration of the crucifixion. Apparently attempting to provide a chronological account of the crucifixion, the author combines elements of all four gospels, relying especially on Luke. The account includes details such as the dividing of the garments, the criminals on either side, and several of Jesus’ words from the cross. After mentioning Jesus’ lamentation to the Father, “Why have you forsaken me?” the author relates Jesus’ prayer:

καὶ μετ’ ὀλίγον κράξας φωνῇ μεγάλῃ· Πάτερ, ἄφες αὐτοῖς, οὕτως ὀδόσαιν δ’ ποιοῦσιν, καὶ ἑπαγαγόν· Εἰς χεῖράς σου παρατίθημι τὸ πνεῦμά μου....

And after a little while, he cried with a loud voice, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do,” and had added, “Into Your hand I commit my spirit.....”

We saw in the previous passage that the Constitutions attributed the prayer to “the Gospel,” and this quotation of the prayer also provides strong indications that the author considered it original and authoritative. It occurs in the midst of an account of the crucifixion, which is heavily reliant on all four gospels. The placement of this quote


within this narrative among so many other gospel quotations and references provides
strong evidence that the author considered it equally as authoritative.

*The Gospel of Nicodemus*, also known as *The Acts of Pilate*, is a book composed
in Greek that focuses exclusively on the trial, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus.
Some versions also add eleven chapters that narrate the “harrowing of hell.” This
document is dated somewhere between the second century and the sixth century.27 This
apocryphal gospel references Jesus’ prayer from the cross in chapter 10, in a crucifixion
account that bears a striking resemblance to Luke’s:

𝐾άι ἐξῆλθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐκ τοῦ πραιτωρίου, καὶ οἱ δύο κακοῦργοι σὺν αὐτῷ. καὶ
ὅτε ἀπῆλθαν ἐπὶ τὸν τόπον, ἐξέδυσαν αὐτὸν τὰ ἰμάτια αὐτοῦ καὶ περιέζωσαν
αὐτὸν λέντιον, καὶ στέφανον ἐξ ἀκανθῶν περιέθηκαν αὐτῷ περὶ τὴν κεφαλήν·
ὄμοιος καὶ τοὺς δυὸ κακοῦργους ἐκρέμασαν. ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἔλεγεν· πάτερ, ἀφες
αὐτοῖς· οὐ γὰρ οἰδασίν τι ποιοῦσιν. καὶ διεμερίσαντο τὰ ἰμάτια αὐτοῦ οἱ
στρατιῶται.29

And Jesus went out from the praetorium, with the two evildoers also. And when
they came upon the place, they stripped him of his clothes and clothed him in a
linen cloth, and they placed a crown of thorns around his head. Likewise also
they hanged the two evildoers. But Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do
not know what they do.” And the soldiers divided his garments.

Ehrman and Pleše note that the canonical gospels are all used at various points of
the *Gospel of Nicodemus* narrative: Matthew and John are prominent in the trial scene,
Luke in the crucifixion, and the unoriginal final verses of Mark are used in the “Great
Commission” after the resurrection.30 The prayer appears in this document in the same

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document is extremely difficult to date because ancient references to “The Acts of Pilate” make it clear that
there were several different texts called by that name. In addition, the extensive textual variation indicates
that there may have been multiple forms of the tradition circulating orally.

28 Some mss. insert τοῦ κρανίου, “of the skull.”

29 Ehrman and Pleše, 442.

place as it does in Luke’s: after coming “upon the place” (ἐπὶ τὸν τόπον), he was crucified between “two evildoers” (δύο κακούργους), then the prayer appears verbatim from Luke’s account, and then they “divide his garments” (διεμερίσαντο τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ). The similarities between this account and Luke’s crucifixion narrative indicate a literary dependency, which suggests that the author relied on a text of Luke’s gospel that included the prayer of forgiveness. The earlier we date The Gospel of Nicodemus, the stronger its testimony on the originality of the prayer to Luke.

In addition to these, the Pseudo-Clementine literature also cite the prayer (Recognitions 6.5; Homilies 11.20; Homilies 3.19), as does The Acts of Phillip and Cyril of Alexandria. Chapter four discusses these texts in detail because they offer important insights into how the prayer was interpreted by the early church fathers.

Based on this patristic evidence, we see that the long reading has both early and broad support. Kim Haines-Eitzen rejects the idea that scribes in such diverse regions added the same verse coincidentally and independently. Instead, she concludes that the early and diverse patristic attestation indicates their reliance on a common source. We can see how divided history has been on the originality of Jesus’ prayer of forgiveness from the cross. On one hand, the manuscript evidence slightly favors a conclusion that the saying is not original, based primarily on the testimony of $\Psi$. On the other, the prayer’s wide attestation by the second century in the patristic literature is impressive and favors originality. Contrary to those who argue that the external evidence favors the short reading, we have seen that a split decision is most appropriate. What may be done when a textual discussion reaches such an impasse? The next chapter answers that

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31 Haines-Eitzen, 120.
question by examining some Lukan literary elements that are applicable to this logion.

Since the external evidence is inconclusive, the internal evidence will help determine the originality of Jesus’ prayer.
Chapter Three: Internal Evidence

Because the external evidence fails to provide a final conclusion on the originality of Luke 23:34a, we turn to examine the internal evidence to see if the prayer fits with known Lukan literary themes. Scholars on both sides of the discussion have put forward arguments based on the internal evidence. On one hand, those who support the short reading base their case primarily on external evidence, and make internal arguments secondarily. On this side, some have suggested that the prayer interrupts the narrative flow of the crucifixion scene, and that its similarity to Stephen’s dying prayer in Acts 7:60 indicates scribal insertion to harmonize Jesus’ death with that of Stephen. On the other hand, those arguing for the long reading find the external evidence inconclusive and turn to internal evidence to settle the matter. These scholars see the similarity between Jesus’ and Stephen’s prayers as an original parallel, in addition to evidence for an ignorance-forgiveness motif that is especially apparent in Luke’s work. This chapter sorts through the arguments on both sides, evaluates their usefulness for the textual question at hand, and suggests that the literary motif of the ignorance-forgiveness in Luke-Acts supplements the external argument for the originality of Jesus’ prayer.

Narrative Discontinuity

The primary argument against the prayer based on internal evidence is the suggestion by Fitzmyer and others that the prayer interrupts the narrative flow of the crucifixion scene.1 This is based on the observation that the subject, or acting agents, of the verses surrounding Jesus’ prayer are the Roman soldiers. Immediately preceding the

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prayer, the Roman subjects “crucified him and the evildoers.” Immediately following the prayer, the Romans “divided his garments by casting lots.” Therefore, the change of subject from the Romans, to Jesus (speaking the prayer), and back again to the Romans is unexpected and abrupt. Fitzmyer argues that this awkward transition betrays secondary redaction, and thus that the prayer is a later insertion. Others, including Nathan Eubank, have responded that even if the prayer represents editorial activity, Luke’s redaction of the Markan narrative easily accounts for this perceived redaction.² Thus, one can perceive a secondary nature in the prayer and attribute it not to scribal insertion, but to Lukan redaction. In other words, one may maintain that the prayer is original to the final form of Luke’s Gospel by explaining that any narrative discontinuity resulted from Luke’s redaction of Markan material, not from scribal redaction of Lukan material.

**Parallels to the Stoning of Stephen**

One of the most interesting pieces of internal evidence is found in a similar story in Acts 7:60, an account of the stoning of Stephen. The death of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, is the only execution that Acts describes in detail. As he was dying, Acts relates that he uttered a prayer of forgiveness that is similar to Jesus’ in Luke.³ Some scholars, including Fitzmyer, Evans, and Marshall, have argued that Jesus’ prayer is a scribal insertion in an effort to harmonize the words of Jesus and Stephen at their deaths (after all, it might be an awkward situation if Stephen was more forgiving at his

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² Eubank, 524.

³ The Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions reads Stephen’s prayer in parallel with Jesus’ in Book VI Chapter 5, which is discussed in Chapter Four.
death than Jesus was at his!). 4 This is an interesting assertion, and merits a look at the text of Acts 7:60.

θείς δὲ τὰ γόνατα ἔκραξεν φωνῇ μεγάλῇ κύριε, μὴ στήσῃς αὐτοῖς ταύτην τὴν ἁμαρτίαν. Καὶ τὸ τούτο ἐπών ἐκοιμήθη.

Then falling on the knees he cried out with a great voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And after he said this he fell asleep.

Bart Ehrman is not convinced by the suggestion that Jesus’ prayer is a harmonizing scribal insertion. He argues that “Whenever scribes try to bring texts into harmony with each other, they tend to do so by repeating the same words in both passages.”5 Kim Haines-Eitzen agrees: “When scribes harmonize they do so by repeating the same words verbatim, not by echoing a concept.”6 Indeed, Jesus’ prayer not only varies slightly from Stephen’s, the two prayers share not a single word in common.

**Examples of Harmonizing Alterations in the New Testament**

A few key examples illustrate the assertion that harmonization usually occurs verbatim with two examples. The first is an example of harmonization across the synoptic gospels. Luke 11:11 contains a question from Jesus which has a parallel in Matthew 7:9. The Luke text reads:

Τίνα δὲ ἔξ ὑμῶν τὸν πατέρα αἰτήσει ὁ υἱὸς ἰχθύν, καὶ ἀντὶ ἰχθύος ὁφιν αὐτῷ ἐπιδώσει;

Now suppose a certain son asks one of you fathers for a fish; instead of a fish will he give him a snake?

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6 Haines-Eitzen, 120.
Significantly, several important manuscripts, including Ξ A C W, insert the following words before ἰχθύν (fish):

...ἄρτον, μὴ λίθον ἐπιδώσει αὐτῷ; ἢ καί...

...bread, will he give him a stone? Or also...

This insertion harmonizes the Luke text perfectly to Matthew 7:9, with the result:

Τίνα δὲ ἐξ υμῶν τὸν πατέρα αἰτήσει ὁ υἱὸς ἄρτον, μὴ λίθον ἐπιδώσει αὐτῷ; ἢ καὶ ἰχθύν, καὶ άντὶ ἰχθύος δφιν αὐτῷ ἐπιδώσει;

Now suppose a certain son asks one of you fathers for bread; will he give him a stone? Or also a fish; instead of a fish will he give him a snake?

Metzger explains that a majority of the committee preferred the shorter reading, concluding that the longer reading in Luke resulted from scribal assimilation to Matthew.7

Having seen an example of harmonization across two gospels, let us now examine an example of harmonization within a single gospel; indeed, this example plays out completely within only four verses. Mark 9:48 contains a reference to Isaiah 66:24 as a warning against sin. Verse 47 concludes with a warning from Jesus against being cast into hell, and 48 continues:

ὅπου ὁ σκώληξ αὐτῶν οὐ τελευτᾷ καὶ τὸ πῦρ οὐ σβέννυται.

Where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

Verses 43 and 45 both contain warnings similar to the one in verse 47. The same quotation has been inserted at both 44 and 46 as a harmonization to verse 48. Metzger

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7 Metzger, 157.
explains that the insertion is absent in notable manuscripts such as Ν B C L W, concluding that it was added by copyists from verse 48.⁸

Based on the evidence that scribes copied harmonizing insertions verbatim from the donor text, we may reasonably reject the explanation that Jesus’ prayer is a harmonization with Stephen’s prayer in Acts 7:60. Since harmonization cannot explain the similarities between the prayers of Jesus and Stephen, Luke probably intentionally constructed these two prayers from dying men as parallel accounts. Charles Talbert demonstrates that the Gospel and Acts utilize multiple parallels in which the apostles in Acts frequently imitate the actions and experience of Jesus in Luke.⁹ In this case, we should read Stephen’s death as an intentional imitation of Jesus’ death, and the two forgiveness prayers as intentional Lukan parallels. The similarity between Stephen’s dying words and Jesus’ prayer from the cross is no longer evidence against originality, but for it. This is because there are many other parallels between the accounts of Jesus’ death and the account of the martyrdom of Stephen.

δέξαι τὸ πνεῦμά μου ("Lord Jesus, receive my spirit"). Since the entire accounts of the death of Jesus and the stoning of Stephen correspond at so many points, we can confidently view the prayer of forgiveness as another legitimate parallel.10


There is other evidence within Acts that suggests that Jesus’ prayer is original to Luke. Throughout Acts a theme of ignorance-forgiveness emerges, which Eldon Epp demonstrates in his work on the text of Acts in Codex Bezae.11 Multiple passages in Acts (for example, 3:17, 17:27-30) and Luke (12:47) demonstrate that wrongdoing may be excused or minimized in situations of ignorance. It is interesting to note that each of these examples occurs in the context of a speech: Acts 3:17 is Peter’s speech in Solomon’s Porch, Acts 17:27-30 occurs in a sermon of Paul, and Luke 12:47 is part of a long section of Jesus’ teaching. These contexts correspond to the speaking aspect of both Jesus’ and Stephen’s prayers of forgiveness—the vocative is used by both Jesus and Stephen (κύριε for Stephen and πάτερ for Jesus).

In Acts Chapter 3, after Peter and John have healed a lame beggar, Peter delivers a speech at Solomon’s Porch attributing the miracle to the power of Jesus, even the same Jesus whom the Jews handed over to Pilate (v. 13: παρεδόκατε), the author of life whom they put to death and God raised from the dead (v. 15a: τὸν δὲ ἄρχηγὸν τῆς ζωῆς ἀπεκτείνατε δὲν ὁ θεὸς ἤγειρεν ἐκ νεκρῶν). Following this indictment, Peter

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10 Haines-Eitzen, 120.

acknowledges that there was a mitigating circumstance which excuses the Jewish people, and even the rulers, for their accountability in Jesus’ death.

17.) And now, brothers, I know that you acted according to ignorance just as your rulers… 19.) repent therefore and return, in order for your sins to be wiped away.

Luke makes it clear that Peter is addressing a Jewish audience with his speech. The speech takes place at the Temple, and Peter begins his speech by specifically addressing the Jews in verse 12: ἀνδρεῖς Ἰσραήλ ... “Men of Israel....” He also evokes the Israelite lineage when he introduces God in verse 13: ὁ θεὸς Ἀβραὰμ καὶ ὁ θεὸς Ἰσαὰκ καὶ ὁ θεὸς Ἰακώβ, ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν... “The God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, the God of our Fathers....” Thus, with the sentence that follows, Peter accuses the Jews of betraying Jesus to Pilate and putting him to death (v. 13b: Ἰησοῦν δὲν ὑμεῖς μὲν παρεδώκατε καὶ ἥρνησασθε κατὰ πρόσωπον Πιλάτου, “Jesus, whom you handed over and denied before Pilate,” and v. 15a τὸν δὲ ἄρχηγον τῆς ζωῆς ἀπεκτείνατε, “but you put to death the author of life”) and he intends to place the majority of the responsibility for Jesus’ death upon the Jews. But (Luke’s) Peter has not given up hope for the Jews. Just as clearly as the Jews are responsible for Jesus’ death, since they acted in ignorance, this liability may be wiped away if they will repent.

The ignorance-forgiveness motif in Acts does not only apply to Jews. In Acts 17 when Paul is in Athens, he speaks to diverse groups of people in an attempt to win them to Christ and the God of Israel. He had spent time in the synagogues reasoning with Jews and God-fearers (v. 17: διελέγετο μὲν οὖν ἐν τῇ συναγωγῇ τοῖς Ἰουδαῖοις καὶ τοῖς
σεβομένοις) as well as in the market. He had also spoken with some philosophers of the Epicurean and Stoic schools (τινὲς δὲ καὶ τῶν Ἑπικουρείων καὶ Στοϊκῶν φιλοσόφων).

Having cultivated some interest among the Athenians, Paul takes the opportunity to deliver a speech atop the Hill of Ares (Ἀρειος πάγος). Paul has noticed that the people of Athens are very religious, but to him they seem confused, worshiping idols and multiple gods in earthly temples. He even found an altar dedicated to an unknown god (v. 23: Ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ), which he takes to refer to his God, the God of Israel, who created all things. Paul wishes to inform the Athenians about this God so He will no longer be “unknown,” and the Greeks will turn away from their idolatry (v. 23b: ὃ οὖν ἄγνοοντες εὔσεβείτε, τοῦτο ἐγὼ καταγγέλλω ὑμῖν, “Therefore what you worship ignorantly, this one I proclaim to you”). Luke emphasizes the ignorance of the Athenians throughout the speech, leading up to the climactic statement of forgiveness in verse 30.

Τοὺς μὲν οὖν χρόνους τῆς ἄγνοιας ὑπεριδὼν ὁ θεός, τὰ νῦν παραγγέλλει τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πάντας πανταχοῦ μετανοεῖν….

Therefore since God overlooked the time of ignorance, now He announces for all people everywhere to repent….

For (Luke’s) Paul, God is willing to forgive the time that the Gentiles have spent in idolatry, since they were ignorant of Him. God has sent them a messenger—Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles—to make God known to them, and if they repent, God will forgive their previous ignorant idolatry.

The ignorance-forgiveness motif is not limited to Acts; Luke also exhibits the theme in his Gospel. In Luke 12, as part of a long section of instruction, Jesus tells a parable of a master who goes away, leaving a trusted slave in charge of all his property. Jesus warns that the master may return at any time, and the slave should be prepared for
the master’s return, lest he be punished when the master returns to find him acting disobediently. At this point, Jesus introduces the idea that the slave’s knowledge of the master’s will is significant (12:47).

47.) Ἐκεῖνος δὲ ὁ δοῦλος ὁ γνοὺς τὸ θέλημα τοῦ κυρίου αὐτοῦ καὶ μὴ ἐτοιμάσας ἢ ποιῆσαι πρὸς τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ δαρήσεται πολλάς· 48.) ὁ δὲ μὴ γνοὺς, ποιῆσαι δὲ ἄξια πληγῶν δαρήσεται ὀλίγας.

47.) But that slave who knew the wish of his master and does not prepare or act according to his wish will be flogged many times; 48.) but the one who did not know, and did things worthy of beating, will be flogged few times.

In this parable, we have Jesus Himself endorsing the idea that ignorance is an excuse for misbehavior. The parable is usually interpreted as a warning to human beings (the slaves) to be obedient to the will of the master (God) while He is away, so that we will not be caught unprepared at the judgment (when the master returns). Although the master will punish poor behavior, he will treat the ignorant slave leniently, while he will deal severely with the slave who knowingly defied his will.

These three examples from Luke and Acts demonstrate the ignorance-forgiveness motif in Lucan literature. We might add Stephen’s aforementioned prayer in Acts 7:60 to the evidence for the theme—although “ignorance” is not specifically mentioned—by considering the reason that Stephen was brought before the Council. Acts 6:10 relates that they were not able to oppose the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke (καὶ οὐκ ἵσχυν ἀντιστῆναι τῇ σοφίᾳ καὶ τῷ πνεύματι ὃ ἐλάλει). Since we have already demonstrated that Luke probably intended Stephen’s dying forgiveness prayer to function in parallel with that of Jesus, and the entire death account as a literary parallel to that of Jesus, the ignorance-forgiveness motif becomes even more important. If Stephen’s prayer plays on the motif, and we read Jesus’ prayer of forgiveness as a Lukan literary
parallel, then his forgiveness prayer fits neatly into this theme that is woven throughout Luke-Acts, a fact which strongly supports its claim of originality.

**Two Visitations of the Prophet**

Luke Timothy Johnson couples the ignorance-forgiveness theme with the "prophetic structure" of Luke-Acts. According to Johnson, Stephen’s portrayal of Moses in his speech provides a motif of two visitations by the prophets of God, a theme which parallels the experiences of Jesus and the apostles. In this motif, God sends the prophet once to save Israel, but the people reject him out of ignorance. They exile the prophet, and God empowers him to return to the people a second time. If the people reject the prophet a second time God will reject and exile them in turn.

Following this motif, God sends Jesus just as he sent Moses in Egypt. Israel rejects Jesus just as they rejected Moses: out of ignorance and misunderstanding. This ignorance allowed for the possibility of a second chance, and God empowered both Jesus and Moses to return. According to Stephen’s speech, Moses provided evidence in the form of “wonders and signs,” (τέρατα καὶ σημεῖα, Acts 7:36) which correspond to the resurrection of Jesus and the miracles that the apostles perform in Acts. If the people reject the gospel message a second time, despite this evidence, God will reject them as He rejected those who defied Moses in the wilderness when they worshiped the Golden Calf.

Luke emphasizes this prophetic pattern in Stephen’s speech, a placement that further demonstrates the importance of the prophetic pattern and ignorance-forgiveness.

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theme in these books. The use of the motif in Stephen’s speech provides a lens through which to read the death of Jesus and probably of Stephen himself. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus was sent to save, but was rejected out of ignorance. In Acts, the apostles constitute the second visitation (enabled by Jesus’ resurrection), providing a second chance at salvation and forgiveness, but ignorance will not be an excuse this time. To summarize, Luke utilizes the combination of the ignorance-forgiveness motif and the theme of two visitations of the prophet in both his gospel and its sequel to explain the events that befall both Jesus and the apostles, as well as to maintain hope for the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles. The existence of these themes in Luke and Acts is strong testimony for the originality of Jesus’ prayer of forgiveness.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the internal evidence relating to Jesus’ prayer of forgiveness in Luke 23:34a. We have seen that scholars have generally made two arguments for the short reading based on internal evidence. The first is the observation that the prayer’s awkward placement within the crucifixion narrative suggests that it is a secondary addition to the text. The second suggests that a scribe inserted Jesus’ prayer in an attempt to harmonize Jesus’ death with Stephen’s in Acts 7:60. Because we showed both of these arguments to be lacking, the discussion turned to a consideration of other internal evidence. This included a discussion of Luke’s use of literary parallels, which led us to read the death of Stephen as an imitation of the death of Jesus, and correspondingly, the Stephen’s forgiveness prayer as an imitation of Jesus’ original forgiveness prayer. It also included a demonstration of the ignorance-forgiveness
motif—as well as the accompanying theme of two visitations of God’s prophets—in both the Gospel of Luke as well as Acts. This literary motif provides an important framework for Jesus’ prayer of forgiveness. While internal evidence cannot resolve the impasse created by the inconclusive nature of the external evidence, taken together, one can make a plausible, if not certain, case for the originality of the prayer.
Chapter Four: Patristic Interpretation and Transcriptional Probability

If we accept the previous chapter’s suggestion in favor of the prayer’s originality, we are left to wonder why a scribe might have removed it from Luke’s text. Joel Delobel notes that none of the usual causes of accidental addition or omission can have caused this variant.¹ It is indeed inconceivable that a saying of such significance might be altered—whether inserted or deleted—accidentally and without notice. Instead, “addition or omission of this kind constitutes a deliberate change to the model.”²

Any textual discussion must account for transcriptional probability; in other words, a textual theory must explain how and why the text was altered. This means that those who argue for the short reading must explain why scribes inserted the prayer, and those who argue for the long reading must conversely explain why scribes removed the prayer. This chapter discusses the proposed explanations for the existence of the variant on both sides of the conversation. In order to accomplish this goal, it is essential to gain an understanding of the way that ancient authors interpreted and used Jesus’ prayer. This chapter concludes then, that many second and third century church fathers knew Jesus’ prayer of forgiveness in Luke 23:34a—that is, they quoted it and expounded it in their writings—and read it as a petition for the forgiveness of the Jews’ role in Jesus’ crucifixion. Based on this interpretation, I suggest that some scribes intentionally excised the prayer.

² Ibid, 30.
Patristic Interpretation

To gain an accurate comprehension of the transcriptional probabilities, we must first understand how the prayer was interpreted at the time that the alteration occurred. We learned from the external evidence that some copyists questioned the originality of the prayer as early as the second century, so we must conclude that some scribes had altered the passage by this time. For this reason, this chapter begins with a look at the ways that early Christian thinkers used and interpreted Jesus’ prayer.

Patristic interpretation of the prayer generally fits into three categories. The first cites Jesus as the ultimate example of forgiveness, and urges Christians to follow this ideal model. In a second category, early interpreters used the prayer to advocate the forgiveness of transgressions committed in ignorance, picking up the ignorance-forgiveness motif demonstrated above in chapter three. Finally, the forgiveness prayer appears in narratives of the crucifixion scene, some of which parallel the Lukan tradition, suggesting literary dependence.

Jesus as the Ultimate Example of Forgiveness

In the first category, commentators cite Jesus’ prayer as the ultimate example of forgiveness that should be followed by all Christians. These authors extol forgiveness as a virtue, and they use Jesus’ prayer as the strongest possible evidence for this position. The earliest example of this use occurs in the citation by Irenaeus, in *Adversus Haereses*, Book 3. In this passage, Irenaeus emphasizes the suffering which Jesus endured, exemplifying his teaching to “love your enemies, and pray for those who hate you.” Irenaeus repeatedly notes Jesus’ predictions of persecution and mistreatment that will

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3 Quoted above in Chapter Two, as part of the discussion on external evidence.
befall his followers, encouraging his readers to exhibit the same patience, endurance, and forgiveness that Jesus exhibited on the cross.

Book II of the *Apostolic Constitutions* also cites the prayer, emphasizing Jesus’ forgiving example and the importance of its application in the church.\(^4\) Since Christians do not completely stop sinning at conversion, it is important that the church forgive sin when it occurs. Even members who continue in habitual sin do not lose the possibility of returning to the fellowship of the congregation if they repent.

Another reference in this category occurs in the Pseudo-Clementine Homily III, Chapter 19 in the context of an enunciation of the reign of Christ. The author proclaims Jesus’ power over the whole world, his opposition to and victory over the adversary, and rejoices at the knowledge that was delivered to the worthy and his compassionate treatment of all souls.\(^5\)

> Καὶ τὸ μέγιστον ὅπερ ἀυτὸν λίαν ἔλυπει ἔστιν τοῦτο ὅτι, ὑπὲρ ὧν ὡς τέκνων τὴν μάχην ἐποιεῖτο, ὑπ’ αὐτῶν ἀγνοίας αἴτια ἐπολεμεῖτο. Καὶ ὁμως ἡγάπη καὶ τοὺς μισοῦντας καὶ ἐκλαῖε τοὺς ἀπειθοῦντας καὶ εὐλόγη τοὺς λοιδοροῦντας, ἤμχετο ὑπὲρ ἐχθραινόντων.\(^6\)

And the thing which greatly grieved him is this, that on behalf of those for whom, as sons, he did battle, by these he was opposed on account of their ignorance. And yet he loved even those who hated him and mourned the disobedient and blessed the slanderers, and prayed on behalf of those who were in enmity.

The author observes the irony that Jesus was put to death by the very people he had come to save. Having been crowned King of the coming age, Jesus was executed by those he defended from the ruler of the present kingdom (that is, the devil). Jesus’

\(^4\) Also quoted above in Chapter Two.


example is again the most significant point for the author who references the prayer. The author follows this allusion with an assertion that Jesus clearly meant for his disciples to behave in the same way, since he “taught his disciples to do the same,” dealing with others—even enemies—as though they were brothers. 7

Our final example in this category comes from Acts of Phillip, which narrates an episode in Hierapolis of Asia, where Philip, Bartholomew, and Mariamme were beaten and imprisoned as magicians for converting the wife of the city’s proconsul. Local officials stripped Philip and Bartholomew, stretched and nailed Bartholomew’s hands to the wall of the temple, and hanged Philip upside down from an opposing tree by pierced ankles. When John arrived, he spoke out against the city’s leaders, denouncing their ignorance, and they sought to execute him as well, but their hands were paralyzed. With this advantage, John released Philip and Bartholomew, and Philip vowed to destroy his persecutors. John, Bartholomew, and Mariamme restrained him, citing Jesus’ forgiving example:

Our Master was beaten, was scourged, was extended, was made to drink gall and vinegar, and said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” And this he taught, saying, “Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.” 8

This is another occasion where Jesus provides the ultimate example of forgiveness. For John, Bartholomew, and Mariamme in this story, the Christian is not only expected to admire or praise Jesus’ compassion, but also to imitate it. That Jesus

7 Ibid: τοῖς αὐτῶ ποιεῖν ἔδιδασκεν.

expected his followers to emulate His example is clear from the sentence that follows the quotation of His prayer, asserting that He also exhorted his disciples to “learn.”

Forgiveness on Account of Ignorance

Interpreters in the second category tend to emphasize that ignorance is a circumstance which makes forgiveness appropriate. This usage provides us two important insights. First, these commentators pick up the ignorance-forgiveness motif that we discussed in the previous chapter, which indicates that we were correct in our assessment of the internal evidence. Second, this verse seems to have been a sort of “proof-text” for certain authors who were concerned with ignorance in general.

The first interpreter in this category is Origen, who twice references the prayer with emphasis on ignorance as a noteworthy consideration. In his second homily on Leviticus (Homily 2.1.5), cited in Chapter Two, Origen engages in a discussion of communal sin, which apparently causes guilt for the entire congregation. In this instance, Origen is primarily concerned with expounding the text of Leviticus and its sacrificial provisions for sin. According to Origen’s interpretation of Leviticus, the prescribed procedures for dealing with sin vary according to whether the sin is of an individual nature or involves a community, and whether the parties involved acted consciously or were in a state of ignorance. Citing Leviticus 4:13, Origen asserts that just as it is possible for a congregation to sin communally, it is also for communal sin to result from ignorance. For final confirmation of this point, Origen turns to Jesus’ prayer, which provides the ultimate authority on the matter.
Origen also cites the prayer in his treatise on the Passover, the text of which also appears in Chapter Two. *Peri Pascha* is intended to be a treatise, commenting on the nature and the meaning of the *pascha* (Greek πάσχα).\(^9\) Origen recognizes the relationship between the terms for “Passover” and “passion,” but maintains that they should be understood separately.

The allusion to the forgiveness prayer is found in the midst of a discussion on the nature of the Passover sacrifice and the ignorance of the Pharaoh in Exodus. Whereas Origen argues against the association of the Passover with the Passion of Christ, he cannot resist casting the Paschal lamb as a typology of Jesus’ sacrificial death. In this way, the ignorance of Pharaoh in the Exodus narrative corresponds to the ignorance of the Jews who put Jesus to death.

The Pseudo-Clementine literature references the prayer twice with emphasis on ignorance as a relevant factor for forgiveness—once in the *Recognitions* and once in the *Homilies*. Although the authorship and date of the Pseudo-Clementine material remain unconfirmed, scholars consider these books supremely important for the history of Christianity. The Tübingen school assigns them particular importance. Opinions as to the date of the works range from the first through fourth centuries. The Greek of the *Recognitions* does not survive, so the text we have is a Latin translation from Rufinus of Aquileia (d. 410 C.E.).\(^{10}\)

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\(^9\) This Greek term is a transliteration of the Hebrew word פסח for the Passover, and plays an important role in Origen’s argument. The term refers to the Passover in Egypt, as well as the yearly commemorative celebration in Jerusalem. It coincidentally resembles the term πάσχειν, “to suffer,” which resulted in the identification of the Passover as a typological precursor to Christ’s Passion. Origen denies this interpretation, emphasizing that the corresponding Hebrew verbal root translates not as passion or suffering but as passage or passing over.

In the *Recognitions*, Book VI, Chapter 5, the author addresses the situation of a believer who has unbelieving family members. The believer is to pray for the conversion of the relatives, and to bear persecution from them, following the example set by Jesus when He prayed for His own murderers. Since ignorance causes the vice, the believer who possesses the knowledge of truth should seek to share it with everyone:

...etiam cum his qui oderunt eos et persequantur sciunt enim quia peccati ipsorum causa ignorantia est. propterea denique ipse magister, cum ab his qui ignorabant eum duceretur ad crucem, orabat patrem pro interfectoribus suis et dicebat “Pater, remitte eis peccatum, nesciunt enim quid faciunt.”

...even with those who hate and persecute them, for they know that the cause of their sin is ignorance. Wherefore indeed, the Master Himself when He was being led to the cross by those who did not know Him, prayed to the Father for His murderers, and said, “Father, forgive their sin, for they know not what they do.”

The Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*, on the other hand, are preserved in Greek. There is much overlap between the *Homilies* and the *Recognitions*, and the prayer is quoted in Homily XI Chapter 20, which corresponds closely with the passage from the *Recognitions* above. We once again see a discussion of believing and unbelieving family members, of ignorance and persecution. Once again, the believer is to follow Jesus’ example, praying for enemies in recognition of their ignorance.

Αὐτὸς γὰρ ὁ διδάσκαλος προσηλωθεὶς ηὐχέτο τῷ πατρὶ τοῖς αὐτῶν ἀναιροῦσιν ἀφεθήναι τὸ ἀμάρτημα εἰπόν· Πάτερ, ἄφες αὐτῶις τὰς ἀμαρτίας αὐτῶν, οὐ γὰρ διδάσκιν ἄ ποιοῦσιν.

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11 English translation in ibid, 154.


For the teacher himself, being nailed, prayed to the father for those who murdered him to be forgiven their sin saying, “Father, forgive them their sins, for they do not know that which they do.

In these Patristic citations, forgiveness is the ultimate goal, but the ignorance of the offender is an essential component in this process. We must assume that offences committed knowingly and intentionally are not as easily forgivable, which probably coincides with our own sense of justice. Although there may be many other circumstances which call for the forgiveness of wrongdoing, ancient Christian authors consistently cite the ignorance of the offending party as sufficient reason for forgiveness, and they also consistently point to Jesus’ prayer as the supreme example.

**Crucifixion Narratives**

The final category of patristic citations includes instances where the forgiveness prayer is included in extra-canonical Passion accounts. Commentators in this category include *Constitutions* Book 5 and *The Gospel of Nicodemus*, both discussed in chapter two. Since the focus of these documents is not on interpreting the prayer, they require little comment in this section. It is sufficient to say that these authors were primarily concerned with recounting the crucifixion scene, and Jesus’ prayer appears in its normal place in the narrative.

**Transcriptional Probability**

With this basic understanding of how early church authorities interpreted and utilized the forgiveness prayer, we may move forward to attempt to explain the existence of the variant. This discussion must account for the historical facts as we have seen them
so far: copyists must have altered the text intentionally because of the prominent nature of the prayer, and they must have made the change by the end of the second century because the textual problem is evident in third century documents. Therefore, we seek to explain the intentional alteration of a text by using what we know about the period in which the change occurred.

Scholars have offered several explanations for the introduction of the variant, and this section examines the ability of each to explain the variant’s existence. Initially, we focus on the explanations offered by scholars who prefer the short reading, and who therefore must explain why the prayer was introduced into a text that did not originally include it. We subsequently turn to scholars who prefer the long reading, and suggest why some scribes might have removed the prayer from a text which originally included it.

**If the Prayer is not Original, Why Might Some Scribes Insert it?**

As noted in chapter two, scholars who argue for the short reading draw their conclusions primarily from the external evidence. Some explanations of the introduction of the prayer to Luke’s Gospel therefore tend to be secondary in nature. That is, they conclude that the prayer is unoriginal based on their analysis of the external evidence, and only speculatively offer explanations for the prayer’s insertion. The explanation of the origin of the variant, then, often functions as a justification of the conclusion already drawn. Other scholars focus their papers on their transcriptional suggestions. These arguments take the unoriginality of the prayer for granted, offering short external arguments to preface their main interest: the reason that a copyist introduced the prayer to a text which did not originally include it.
The simplest explanation for the later insertion of Jesus’ forgiveness prayer is also the strongest. Suggested by Westcott and Hort, this position claims one cannot reasonably explain the intentional omission of the prayer, and posits that the prayer circulated widely as an oral tradition, and that scribes inserted it into Luke’s Gospel because they knew it was an authentic saying of Jesus. The simplicity of this position is its strength. Westcott and Hort admit that the prayer is probably an authentic saying of Jesus, and would certainly have been remembered and passed on by His followers, and conclude that the significance of the prayer as a saying from the cross provided strong enough reason for a scribe to insert it into the crucifixion scene.\footnote{Westcott and Hort, \textit{Introduction} (1988) [1882], \textit{Notes on Selected Readings}, 68.}

Jason Whitlark and Mikeal Parsons have suggested that scribes inserted the prayer as a result of the emergence of gospel harmonies, in which the sayings from the cross numbered six.\footnote{Whitlark and Parsons, 197.} The insertion of the prayer thus increased the total from “the problematic six” to the ideal number seven. Although the argument of Whitlark and Parsons that the prayer of forgiveness was inserted for numerical reasons is intriguing, they do not prove that numerology was a motivating factor in introducing variants to New Testament texts. To be sure, they go to great lengths in establishing the significance of the number seven in the early church, and demonstrate that it may have been a factor at the compositional level of New Testament documents. However, there is not a single instance in which another textual variant can be conclusively demonstrated to have arisen from numerological concerns.

Finally, Jacobus Petzer cites early Christian anti-Judaism to propose that scribes introduced the prayer with the intention that it would forgive the Roman soldiers, thereby
increasing the guilt of the Jews. He supports this claim by arguing that the Western text is known to introduce anti-Judaic alterations, especially Codex D. His logic fails though, when he claims that Codex D is one of the manuscripts which inserts the prayer, establishing the connection between anti-Judaism and the insertion of logion. In fact, as I show in chapter two, the original hand of Bezae omits the prayer, and the insertion is made in the margin by a much later editor. For this reason, the later insertion is irrelevant for our purposes: we know that the text was altered by the end of the second century, so the original absence of the prayer in Codex Bezae is more significant than any subsequent changes. Furthermore, Petzer’s claim that the prayer was intended to forgive the Romans also falls flat, because he fails to provide any evidence that this is how the prayer was understood at any point in history.

**Jews as the Recipients of Forgiveness**

Contrary to Petzer, the Patristic evidence indicates that the prayer in Luke 23:34a was unanimously interpreted as forgiving the Jews. Nathan Eubank notes that this reading dates to the earliest exegetes, including Hippolytus, Origen, Archelaus, and the Didascalia. We may demonstrate this interpretation based on two commentators, one from the third and one from the fifth century, who specify the Jews as the recipients of Jesus’ forgiveness. The first of these is Archelaus, who, citing the prayer in the

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17 Petzer, 199-204.

18 This part of Petzer’s argument is based on Epp’s work on Codex Bezae, which will play an important role in my argument below.

19 Eubank, 528. It is also useful to note here that the intention of Jesus, who allegedly spoke the prayer, is irrelevant for this question. What is important is how the prayer was read at the time the text was altered.
Disputation with Manes (text of the reference appears in chapter two), specifies that Jesus’ prayer was for the Pharisees. Archelaus thus provides important witness not only to the originality of the logion, but also to its ancient interpretation as a prayer for the Jews.

Cyril of Alexandria provides the second example that indicates that the prayer was for the Jews. He references the prayer in the fifth century C.E. in “Against Julian,” Book 13. Although this text is not extant, Oecumenius quotes from Cyril in his “Commentary on the Apocalypse,” which dates to around 600 C.E.  

It was probable that not only the believers fled but also those who in ignorance and treachery worked together to the cross of the Lord (i.e. to crucify the Lord). Concerning whom he said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” And although Cyril in the thirteenth book against Julian says, “This prayer of the Lord is not found in the gospels,” among us however, it is read.

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20 Throughout this thesis, I translate the verb ἀφίημι “forgive.” David Konstan, Before Forgiveness: The Origin of a Moral Idea, (New York: Cambridge, 2010) argues that the modern concept of ‘forgiveness’ did not exist in the ancient world, thus complicating our translation. Konstan begins by defining the modern sense of forgiveness as an interpersonal process that requires the involvement of two agents, and one must have wronged the other. The offender must admit wrongdoing, exhibit sincere repentance, and request forgiveness, while the forgiver must agree to forego vengeance of the offense precisely on account of the offender’s repentance. Konstan argues that the use of ἀφίημι in the New Testament is more aptly understood in relation to the remission of debts, in which case an offense has not occurred. Similarly, cases of ignorance excuse the offense forthwith: forgiveness is not needed from the victim because no intentional offense occurred. Notably, the prayer in Luke 23:34 receives individual attention from Konstan on the significance of ignorance in moral culpability (121). This understanding of the New Testament’s use of ἀφίημι provides a framework for understanding the ignorance-forgiveness motif described above. In the event of ignorance, the offender’s guilt is removed: he does not need forgiveness. Luke’s use of the motif in Luke-Acts squares perfectly with this understanding of ἀφίημι, as does Jesus’ prayer in the Gospel.

21 H. C. Hoskier, “The Lost Commentary of Oecumenius on the Apocalypse,” The American Journal of Philology, Vol. 34, No. 3 (1913), 300-314. There are apparently only ten books and some fragments of Cyril’s work against Julian that have survived. This quotation by Oecumenius therefore provides unique information.

22 Ibid, 303.
This passage from Oecumenius indicates that Cyril’s omission of the prayer in his commentary on Luke’s Gospel is deliberate, and not indicative of Cyril’s ignorance of the prayer. Instead, it indicates that Cyril knew of the logion, but nevertheless rejected it. His knowledge of the prayer is still telling, because he apparently knows that it has been attributed to one or more of the gospels, and that it is a spurious reading. Hoskier concludes that the reading existed prior to 350 C. E. (as evidenced by Irenaeus and his contemporaries, discussed above), “was questioned between about A. D. 350 and 500, but that by 600 A. D. the matter had been quite laid aside, as Oecumenius informs us.”23 Hoskier considers Cyril’s testimony parallel to that of א₁ (the first editor who excised the prayer, discussed above), since they both represent a contemporaneous Alexandrian tradition. Further, Oecumenius’ testimony in this matter is strengthened by the fact that his text is also Alexandrian, lending authority to his reinstatement of the prayer.24

More important for this section though, is that Cyril provides an antecedent for Jesus’ prayer. He introduces the prayer with “concerning whom He says” (Περὶ ὧν ἐλέγεν), the antecedent of which is clearly those who in “ignorance” (ἀγνοία) and “treachery” (ἀπάτη) are responsible for Christ’s death. The term “treachery” could only apply individually to Judas Iscariot, but could collectively include the Jewish leaders and could even be stretched to encompass all Jews. “Treachery” could not, however, be construed in any way to describe the Romans.

This understanding of the prayer’s ancient interpretation is essential because it is in this period that the alteration must have occurred. Additionally, any transcriptional

23 Ibid, 304, Hoskier’s emphasis.

24 Ibid, 303.
argument must account for this interpretation. In this way, Petzer’s suggestion that
scribes inserted the logion as a prayer for the Romans fails to consider the historical
evidence that suggests precisely the opposite.

If the Prayer is Original, Why Might Some Scribes Remove it?

Although the internal evidence indicates that Jesus’ prayer is consistent with the
theme of ignorance-forgiveness and fits with the parallel accounts of the deaths of Jesus
and Stephen, one wonders why anyone might ever remove such an amazing saying. As
has already been noted, we cannot attribute the alteration of this passage to any accidental
cause. The prominence of a saying of Jesus on the cross means that a mistake would
hardly have been overlooked; this was either a deliberate insertion or a deliberate
excision.25

Bart Ehrman finds it plausible that a second or third century scribe might have
excised the text as a result of anti-Judaic sentiment. He lists two problems that a
Christian scribe would have with the prayer forgiving the Jews. The first involves
disbelief that Jesus would pray for “this recalcitrant people who had willfully rejected
God Himself.” In addition, it was clear to many Christians by the second century that
“God had not forgiven the Jews because…they believed that He had allowed Jerusalem
to be destroyed as a punishment.”26 In the next chapter, we see specific examples of
early Christian authors who charged the Jews collectively with deicide, and who
explicitly associated that crime with the destruction of Jerusalem. These authors would

25 I do not explicitly argue for the deliberate nature of this variant in this thesis. Instead, the first paragraph
of this chapter follows Joel Delobel on this point, who discusses the implausibility of an accidental cause
for this variant.

26 Ehrman, 193.
have found it difficult to reconcile these convictions with Jesus’ forgiveness prayer. To them, it would make little sense to think that God had refused the forgiveness that Jesus had sought on behalf of the Jews.

Westcott and Hort had already rejected this explanation. “Wilful excision, on account of the love and forgiveness shown to the Lord’s own murderers, is absolutely incredible: no various reading in the New Testament gives evidence of having arisen from any such cause.”27 This rejection is founded on their assumption that intentional alterations to the text were not made by scribes for ideological or dogmatic reasons.

Although Westcott and Hort’s position had previously been challenged and refuted, Eldon Epp convincingly demonstrates that ideological alterations do occur in the early manuscripts. In *The Theological Tendency of Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis in Acts*, Epp provides specific examples of intentional dogmatic bias in the text of Acts in Codex D. In particular, many of these alterations exhibit an especially Anti-Jewish bias. According to Epp, the anti-Judaic tendencies of Codex Bezae in Acts fall into three categories. The first is the portrayal of the Jews’ relations with Jesus, the second involves the interactions of the Jews, Gentiles, and Christianity, and the third involves the relations between the Jews and the apostles.28

It is useful to discuss a specific circumstance to demonstrate the types of anti-Judaic alterations that Codex D consistently makes. Since the ignorance-forgiveness motif is so important to this paper, and we have already discussed passages in Acts that contribute to that theme, it is most expedient to examine the alterations that D makes to

27 Westcott and Hort, 1988 [1882], *Notes on Select Readings*, 68.

Peter’s speech at Solomon’s Porch in Acts 3:17. Here we compare the D text to the text that the NA27 committee chose, which happens to coincide with Codex Vaticanus (B).

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<tr>
<th>Vaticanus (B)</th>
<th>Bezae (D)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Καὶ νῦν, ἀδελφοί,</td>
<td>Καὶ νῦν, ἀνδρεῖς ἀδελφοῖ,</td>
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<tr>
<td>οἶδα</td>
<td>ἐπιστάμεθα</td>
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<tr>
<td>δτὶ</td>
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<td>κατὰ ἀγνοιαν</td>
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<td>ἐπράξατε</td>
<td>ἐπράξατε πονηρόν</td>
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<tr>
<td>ὡσπερ καὶ οἱ ἀρχοντες ὑμῶν</td>
<td>ὡσπερ καὶ οἱ ἀρχοντες ὑμῶν</td>
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None of the other major manuscripts attest the D additions.29 The first notable alteration is the change from the singular οἶδα, “I know,” in B to the plural ἐπιστάμεθα, “we know,” in D. This change works with the emphatic ὑμεῖς, “you all,” to demonstrate the contrast between the apostles and the Jews, and to sharpen the accusation against the Jews and their leaders. The most significant alteration is the addition of πονηρόν, “wickedly,” to describe the actions of the Jews and the leaders. This addition maintains that although the Jews acted in ignorance, what they did was nevertheless wicked. In this place, anti-Judaism in Codex Bezae nearly eliminates ignorance as an excuse for the Jews.30

The occurrence of πονηρόν in Peter’s speech is especially interesting when compared to the D text of Luke 23:41. Only a short time after Jesus’ prayer of forgiveness, one of the evildoers crucified with him confesses that his own suffering is just, but that Jesus has done nothing “out-of-place” (οὗτος δὲ οὐδὲν ἐτοπον ἐπραξεν), according to B. Codex D substitutes πονηρόν for ἐτοπον. This results in a D-reading

29 Epp 1962 provides a full treatment of the witnesses on page 54.
that sharpens the contrast between the Jews’ evil deeds and the assertion that Jesus
committed no evil.  

The significance of the anti-Judaic alterations of the ignorance-forgiveness motif
in Codex Bezae is two-fold. First, they demonstrate that variants have been intentionally
introduced into certain texts for ideological reasons, which include anti-Judaism. Second,
D is one of the manuscripts that omits Jesus’ prayer in Luke 23:34a. Read in this context,
the excision of Jesus’ prayer seems to be a deliberate anti-Judaic alteration of the text at
least in Codex D. This instance might point to what might have occurred in other
manuscripts, or even in a single early manuscript upon which the others are dependent.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the importance of understanding the historical
interpretation of Jesus’ prayer in Luke 23:34a for painting an accurate picture of the
transcriptional probabilities concerning this logion. We have seen that patristic exegesis
of the prayer generally falls into one of three categories: “Jesus as the ultimate example
of forgiveness,” “forgiveness on account of ignorance,” and “crucifixion narratives.”
Furthermore, we have seen that the early commentators overwhelmingly read the verse as
a prayer for the Jews. The demonstration of Codex Bezae’s penchant toward anti-Judaic
textual variants, coupled with its initial omission of the prayer, provides an example of
what might have happened in other manuscripts that omit the prayer.

31 Ibid, 55-56.
Chapter Five: Anti-Judaism in the Early Church

The previous chapter demonstrated that early Christian interpreters unanimously applied Jesus’ prayer of forgiveness to the Jews. It further postulated that, based on this interpretation, scribes excised the prayer during the second century as a result of their unwillingness to forgive the Jews. Eldon Epp’s work on anti-Judaism in Codex Bezae supports this explanation of the variant’s cause.

The present chapter provides specific examples of patristic writings which demonstrate the anti-Judaism that permeated early Christianity. I focus specifically on two themes: the charge of deicide against the entire Jewish nation, and the destruction of Jerusalem as punishment for that crime. This evidence provides an important context for the suggestion that anti-Judaic sentiment from the second to fourth centuries may have been strong enough to motivate the excision of the prayer of forgiveness from Luke’s Gospel.

Anti-Judaism in the Early Church

There was no question among the ancient church fathers that the Jews were responsible for Jesus’ death. This was an early and consistent theme that permeated the patristic writings, making Jesus’ apparent forgiveness of the Jews in Luke 23:34a quite unpalatable. Furthermore, the siege and destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and the subsequent exile of the Jews from the city provided evidence for many interpreters that God was punishing the sin of deicide.
Justin Martyr

Justin provides an early version of the deicide charge in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, an apology against Judaism which provided form arguments for many later works in the *Adversus Judaeos* genre. Trypho, whether or not representing an actual person, becomes in the *Dialogue* a stock Jewish character, allowing Justin to skillfully outmaneuver his arguments.

In Chapter 32 of the *Dialogue*, Trypho objects that Jesus cannot have been the Messiah that Jews anticipate because he experienced the curse of crucifixion. Justin replies that there will be two comings of Christ, and firmly affixes the blame for Jesus’ crucifixion on the Jews.

Καὶ δύο παρουσίας αὐτοῦ γενήσεται ἐξηγησάμην, μίαν μὲν, ἐν ἧ ἐξεκεντήθη ὑφ’ ὑμῶν, δευτέραν δὲ, ὅτε ἐπιγνώσεσθε εἰς δὲν εξεκεντήσατε, καὶ κόψονται αἱ φυλαὶ ὑμῶν, φυλὴ πρὸς φυλὴν...²

And I explained that there will be two of his comings, one in which he was pierced by you all, and the second, when you all will recognize him as the one whom you pierced, and your tribes will mourn, tribe by tribe…

Justin, although replying to a single opponent, indicates that the entire Jewish nation bears responsibility for Jesus’ crucifixion with the use of plural pronouns and verbs throughout the indictment. In addition, there is no portion of Jews that escape guilt: at the second *parousia*, Jews will mourn *tribe by tribe*.

In Chapter 67, Justin attempts to reduce the amount Jesus may be identified with Judaism. When Trypho points out that Jesus was circumcised and observed the Mosaic

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¹ I follow no particular order in discussing these four figures, except that I intentionally finish with Melito since he most extensively develops the theme.

Law, Justin does not deny the point, but claims that Jesus submitted to this—as if a punishment—only to complete the plan of redemption.

Καὶ γὰρ τὸ ἀποθανεῖν σταυρωθέντα ὑμολογῶ ὑπομεῖναι αὐτὸν, καὶ τὸ ἄνθρωπον γενέσθαι καὶ τοσαῦτα παθεῖν ὅσα διέθεσαν αὐτὸν οἱ ἀπὸ τοῦ γένους ὑμῶν.₃

For I also confess that he became man, was crucified and died after enduring the suffering those of your own race inflicted upon him.

Once again, Justin makes the point perfectly clear with the use of the second person plural pronoun (ὑμῶν) that the entire Jewish race bears responsibility for the sin of the crucifixion.⁴ For Justin, Jesus only submitted to Jewish religious practices such as circumcision and Torah observance as a necessary part of salvation history, not as any indication that those practices provide justification.

John Chrysostom

John Chrysostom shares the conviction that the Jews committed a grave crime in putting Jesus to death. In his first homily against Judaism, he labels the Jews as Christ killers in order to emphasize the mutual exclusivity of Christianity and Judaism.

Ὅπου Χριστοκτόνοι συνέρχονται, ὅπου σταυρὸς ἐλαίνεται, ὅπου βλασφημεῖται Θεὸς, ὅπου Πατὴρ ἀγνοεῖται, ὅπου Υἱὸς ὑβριζέται, ὅπου Πνεῦμας ἀθετεῖται χάρις...Ἐὰν γὰρ σειμαὶ καὶ μεγάλα τὰ ᾿Ιουδαῖαν, ψευδὴ τὰ ἡμέτερα, εἰ δὲ ταῦτα ἀληθῆ, ἀσπέρ ὅν καὶ ἀληθῆ, ἐκεῖνα ἀπάτης γέμει.⁵

Where Christ-killers are together, there the cross is persecuted, there God is blasphemed, there the Father is unknown, there the Son is insulted, there the grace of the Spirit is rejected….For if the things [rites] of the Jews are holy and great, ours are false, but if ours are true, just as they are true, theirs are full of deception.

₃ Greek text from ibid, 136.

⁴ This use of the plural is most interesting when compared to the changes made by Codex D, discussed on page 49.

⁵ John Chrysostom, Adversus Judaeos 1.6, Greek text from PG vol. 48, 852.
Chrysostom does not even bother to argue Jewish responsibility for Jesus’
execution. Rather, it is assumed, and Chrysostom applies the Christ-killer label
(Χριστοκτόνοι) to anyone who participates in Jewish customs and rites. Furthermore,
these people and their way of life are utterly incompatible with God and Christianity.

Chrysostom makes the connection between deicide and divine punishment in
Principium Actorum IV. After citing Jesus’ prayer, he explains that it did not achieve
forgiveness for the Jews, but rather allowed them a forty year opportunity to repent.

Οὐ γὰρ εὐθέως ἐπήγαγεν ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς τὴν κόλασιν καὶ τὴν τιμωρίαν, ἀλλὰ
tεσσαράκοντα καὶ πλείονα ἐτη διέληπε μετὰ τοῦ σταυροῦ. Αὐτὸς μὲν γὰρ ὁ
Σωτὴρ ἐπὶ Τιβερίου ἐσταυρώθη, ἢ δὲ πόλις αὐτῶν ἐπὶ Οὔσπασιανὸ καὶ Τίτου
ἐάλω....Βουλόμενος αὐτοῖς δοῦναι καιρὸν μετανοίας....Ἐπειδὴ δὲ καὶ προθεσμίαν
μετανοίας λαβόντες ἔμενον ἀνιμώς ἔχοντες, ἐπήγαγε λοιπὸν αὐτοῖς τὴν κόλασιν
καὶ τὴν τιμωρίαν....

For he did not immediately bring upon them the punishment and the retribution,
but forty years and more he waited after the cross. For the Savior was crucified
under Tiberius, and their city was taken under Vespasian and Titus….He wanted
to give to them a season for repentance….But since, even after receiving an
appointed time for repentance, they remained incurable, he led to them the
punishment and the retribution….

This explanation from Chrysostom demonstrates just how troubling Jesus’ prayer
was to early anti-Judaic Christians, who needed to reconcile the forgiveness prayer with
their conviction that God had not forgiven the Jews. Instead of forgiving the Jews,
Chrysostom provides a new interpretation of the prayer, one which simultaneously retains
the omniscience of Christ as well as the guilt of the Jews. Less creative interpreters who
faced the same problem would have been forced to remove the prayer.

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6 John Chrysostom, In Principium Actorum IV. Greek text from PG vol. 51, 111.
Origen

Origen provides another early example in *Contra Celsum*, an apologetic work which defends Jesus and Christianity against charges of irrationality and illiteracy apparently made by intellectuals such as Celsus.\(^7\) In Book Four, Origen answers several criticisms made by Celsus, one of which was evidently a criticism of the idea that the Jews had suffered divine judgment as a result of their liability for the death of Jesus.

Origen retorts abruptly to Celsus’ criticism:

...ἀνάστατον τὸ πάντων Ἰουδαίων ἔθνος γεγένηται, οὐδὲ μετὰ γενεάν ὀλην μίαν τοῦ ταῦτα πεπονθένα ὑπ’ αὐτῶν τὸν Ἱσσοῦν. Τεσσαράκοντα γὰρ ἔτη καὶ δύο, οἷς, ἢρ’ οὖ ἐστάτωσαν τὸν Ἰσσοῦν, γεγονέναι ἐπὶ τὴν Ἱεροσολύμων καθάρεσιν….θαρροῦντες δ’ ἔρθοσαν, ὅτι οὐδ’ ἀποκατασταθήσονται. Ἄγος γὰρ ἔπραξαν τὸ πάντων ἀνοσιώτατον, τῷ Σωτῆρι τοῦ γένους τῶν ἄνθρωπων ἔπιστασαν ἐν τῇ πόλει, ἐνθα τὰ γενομένα σύμβολα μεγάλων μυστηρίων ἐποίου τῷ θεῷ. Ἐχήν οὖν ἐκείνη τὴν πόλιν, ὅπου ταῦτα πέπονθεν Ἰσσοῦς, ἀρδὴν ἀπολωλέναι, καὶ τὸ Ἰουδαίον ἔθνος ἀνάστατον γεγονέναι....\(^8\)

...the whole Jewish race became overturned, not even after one whole generation, for these things which had been inflicted by them upon Jesus. For it was forty-two years, I believe, from when they crucified Jesus, until the destruction happened upon Jerusalem...and we say confidently that they will never be restored. For they committed the most accursed wickedness of all, when they conspired against the Savior of the human race, in the city where they performed to God the lawful rites which were symbols of great mysteries. Therefore that city, where Jesus had suffered these things, had to be utterly destroyed, and the Jewish nation became overturned.

Origen provides clear evidence of both themes that played a critical role in the excision of Jesus’ forgiveness prayer. Not only does he emphatically confirm that the Jews were responsible for Jesus’ death, but that their actions demonstrated their wickedness. Furthermore, this sin led directly to divine punishment in the destruction of Jerusalem, *and the Jewish nation has no hope of restoration.*

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\(^8\) Origen, *Contra Celsum* 4.22. Greek text from PG Vol. 11, 1056-1060.
Melito of Sardis provides perhaps the most developed version of the Christ-killer myth in his homily on the Passover, *Peri Pascha*. In this treatise, Melito picks up on a major theme from Origen’s work of the same name, that the death of Jesus constituted the final and ultimate Passover sacrifice. Thus, for Melito, Jesus’ Passion represents the sacrifice of the paschal lamb, rendering the ancient Jewish Passover celebration obsolete. However, while Origen allowed that the sacrifice was made by the Jews in ignorance—as we saw above in Chapter Four—Melito charges the Jews with murder.

(71) οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἁμνὸς ὁ φονευόμενος....
(72) Οὗτος πεφόνευται· καὶ ποῦ πεφόνευται; ἐν μέσῳ Ἰερουσαλήμ. ὑπὸ τίνων; ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἰσραήλ.

(71) This is the lamb who is being slain....
(72) This is he who has been murdered. And where has he been murdered? In the midst of Jerusalem. By whom? By Israel.

Melito’s indictment of the Jews allows no ignorance excuse for the crime of deicide. The Jews committed the crime with full knowledge of their actions.

(74) …Ἐγὼ μὲν, φησίν Ἰσραήλ, ἀπέκτεινα τὸν κύριον. διὰ τί; ὅτι ἐδεί αὐτὸν ἄποθανεῖν.
(74) …“I did,” says Israel, “kill the lord. Why? Because it was necessary for him to die.”

To increase the guilt of the Jews, Melito has Israel rhetorically admit to the murder, as an unrepentant defendant at trial. He also points out the Romans’ collective innocence for the murder, citing the gospel tradition of Pilate’s handwashing.

(92) ἐφ’ ὅ καὶ Πιλάτος ἐνίψατο τὰς κείρας, σὺ τοῦτον ἀπέκτεινας ἐν τῇ μεγάλῃ ἕορτῇ.

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over whom even Pilate washed his hands, 
that one you killed at the great festival.

To complete the arraignment against the Jews for Jesus’ murder, Melito 
emphasizes the heinous nature of the crime, its occurrence in Jerusalem, the city of law, 
of prophets, and of justice, and its occurrence in broad daylight.

You killed your lord in the midst of Jerusalem. 
an unprecedented murder has happened in the midst of Jerusalem… 
and who was murdered? Who is the murderer?… 
and now in the middle of the street and in the midst of the city 
at the middle of the day where all may see 
has happened the unrighteous murder of a righteous man.

Melito’s emphasis on the occurrence of the murder in the midst of Jerusalem and 
even in the middle of the street is curious, given that the gospel tradition (and all other 
traditions) maintain quite the opposite. It is clear that both Jewish and Roman laws 
required that executions take place outside the city walls, and the presence of tombs 
nearby quite settles the matter. Why then Melito’s focus on the murder inside the city?

A. E. Harvey suggests that Melito had apparently visited Jerusalem, and that a 
combination of building projects had expanded the city’s walls, and shifted the city center 
to approximately the spot of Golgotha.10 Whether or not this argument holds true, Melito

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10 A. E. Harvey, “Melito and Jerusalem,” Journal of Theological Studies, vol. 17 (1966), 401-404. Herod had built the “third wall” in C.E. 41-44, expanding the city to the north and enclosing Golgotha within the city walls. The rebuilding of Jerusalem in 135 as Aelia Capitolina shifted the city center northward. The tombs and Golgotha sat in a valley, and Hadrian had it filled with dirt to create a large public area. Thus, when Melito visited Jerusalem and was shown the traditional crucifixion site, it was buried underground at the city center.
clearly intended the rhetoric in this section to explain the subsequent destruction of Jerusalem.

(99) ...οὐκ ἐδέξατο τὸν κύριον,
      οὐκ ἠλεήθης ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ·
      ἡδάφισας τὸν κύριον,
      ἡδαφίσθης χαμαί.

(100) καὶ σὺ μὲν κεῖσαι νεκρός,
      ἐκεῖνος δὲ ἀνέστη ἐκ νεκρῶν

By juxtaposing the Jews’ actions with divine consequences, Melito unmistakably portrays the destruction of Jerusalem as the natural consequence of Jesus’ murder. In particular, Melito’s vocabulary is often used to describe the razing of cities (ἡδάφισας: you dashed down; you razed to the ground), directly associating the killing of Jesus with the razing of Jerusalem. For Melito, though, Jesus and God prevail, because while Jesus was raised from the dead, Israel remains dead at the hands of Rome and of the Lord.

Conclusion

The examples provided by Justin Martyr, John Chrysostom, Origen, and Melito of Sardis demonstrate two common convictions among ancient Christians. First, they overwhelmingly agreed that the Jews alone bore responsibility for the heinous crime of deicide. Second, the sack of Jerusalem constituted divine punishment for that crime, and proved that God had not forgiven the sin. Combined, these two convictions posed a significant problem for interpreters who read Luke 23:34a as a prayer for the Jews. Had
God ignored Jesus’ intercession? Had Jesus ever spoken the words at all? How could the interpreter maintain the divinity of Jesus in the face of the evidence that God had not heeded Jesus’ prayer of forgiveness? Chrysostom solved the problem by explaining that the prayer procured a period for Jewish repentance. Others simply excised the prayer from the gospel.
Chapter Six: Conclusion

This paper has sifted through the variety of views on the textual problem of Luke 23:34a, rendered a judgment on its originality, and posited an explanation for the variant’s introduction. We saw that Westcott and Hort originally sparked the discussion by judging the variant unoriginal. Many have since agreed with this judgment on the basis of the external evidence. The most recent of these specifically classify the prayer as an exclusively Western reading prior to the fourth century. We have successfully challenged that decision, and demonstrated that the evidence for the long reading is equal to that of the short reading in both geographical diversity and antiquity. For these reasons, this paper finds that the manuscript evidence favors neither the short nor the long reading, but rather necessitates a close look at the internal and transcriptional evidence.

The internal evidence heavily favors the long reading. Stephen’s martyrdom in Acts 7:60 provides evidence that Luke intended for the deaths of Jesus and Stephen to function in parallel, which in turn demonstrates that Jesus’ dying prayer of forgiveness corresponds to Stephen’s undisputed dying prayer. Furthermore, the ignorance-forgiveness motif and the theme of two visitations of God’s prophets in Luke-Acts demonstrate how Jesus’ prayer corresponds to Luke’s original thought and theology. This correspondence gives us confidence that Luke’s gospel originally included Jesus’ forgiveness prayer, and that it in fact provided the first and ultimate example of the ignorance-forgiveness motif, which the apostles subsequently imitated in Acts.

We then turned to explaining the introduction of the variant. After evaluating some arguments that suggest later scribal insertion of the prayer—the most recent of which suggests that scribes inserted the prayer to forgive Romans, thus increasing the
guilt of the Jews—we rejected this suggestion on transcriptional grounds. The patristic evidence demonstrates that those authors never interpreted Luke 23:34a as a prayer for the Romans. Instead, they nearly unanimously applied it to the Jews, an interpretation which renders the suggestion of an anti-Judaic insertion implausible.

On the other hand, the fact that early interpreters read the prayer as an intercession for the Jews makes an anti-Judaic excision highly probable. Eldon Epp’s work on Codex D supports this thesis, demonstrating the presence of anti-Judaic alterations in Codex D, including most notably the removal from the text of Luke-Acts of the ignorance-forgiveness motif as an excuse for Jews. The fact that Codex D omits the prayer increases the probability that we are dealing with an anti-Judaic excision of Jesus’ forgiveness prayer.

Finally, the previous chapter provided further evidence of anti-Judaism in the pivotal period during which this alteration occurred. This discussion serves two purposes. First, it demonstrates the sharp polemic that had developed within Christianity toward the Jews and Judaism. These authors exhibit two significant convictions: that the Jews were collectively responsible for the execution of Jesus, and that God had punished this crime by allowing the destruction of Jerusalem. These two convictions caused a crisis in dealing with Jesus’ apparent forgiveness of the Jews. If Jesus had prayed for the Jews, why had this prayer gone unanswered? Were His prayers not effective? Had God ignored Jesus’ intercession? Instead of facing these difficult theological questions, many scribes solved the problem by excising the prayer from the gospel. Unfortunately, in solving a theological problem, early Christian scribes ignored the moral and ethical problem that caused the crisis in the first place: the accusation of collective deicide.
against the Jews, and the conviction that on this basis violence against the Jews could be justified.

There is no question that this saying of Jesus has played a significant role in the history of the church. The prayer of forgiveness is so important that even those who argue against its originality advocate its being retained within the text in its traditional place. Westcott and Hort even indicate that although they consider the saying to be unoriginal to Luke, it was probably an authentic saying of the historical Jesus:

Few verses of the Gospels bear in themselves a surer witness to the truth of what they record than this first of the Words from the Cross: but it need not therefore have belonged originally to the book in which it is now included. We cannot doubt that it comes from an extraneous source. Nevertheless…it has exceptional claims to be permanently retained, with the necessary safeguards, in its accustomed place.¹

The significance of this saying is clear. Jesus’ words forgiving those responsible for His death are undeniably beautiful. Beyond textual criticism, literary criticism, or any other – ism, perhaps the most appropriate response to these words is the emulation of Jesus’ example of forgiveness.

¹ Westcott and Hort, 1988 [1882], *Notes on Selected Readings*, 68.
Bibliography


Appendix I

The textual problem of Luke 23:34 presents a difficult and unique problem for textual scholars. Ideally, “lower-critical” problems would rely only on “lower-critical” methods—manuscript evidence—to arrive at conclusions. Some scholars adhere strictly to this rule, while others are more comfortable with using “higher-critical” methods—internal evidence based on literary elements—to help produce decisions on textual problems. While I agree that a decision based primarily upon manuscript evidence should be preferred, this is not always possible. Indeed, the textual problems which may be decided in this fashion largely have been decided, and would make for a rather uneventful paper.

On the other hand, in the absence of conclusive manuscript evidence relating to the problem at hand, we have found the literary evidence quite informative. Some might charge that using literary themes as evidence of originality produces an exercise in circular reasoning: for example, the existence of the ignorance-forgiveness motif begs the question of the prayer’s originality, and the two rely on each other circularly to prove the originality of the other. I am sympathetic to this complaint; I made a similar charge in chapter two against those who characterize the prayer as an exclusively Western reading. However, we have conclusively proven the originality of the ignorance-forgiveness motif to the Lukan literature without relying on Jesus’ prayer. Thus, we begin with the independent presence of the motif, and conclude that Jesus’ prayer is a component of that motif. Since the motif’s existence does not rely on the originality of the prayer, the argument is not circular.
Having arrived at a conclusion of originality and later anti-Judaic excision of the forgiveness prayer in Luke 23:34a, I wish to move beyond the textual question to advocate a new approach to textual criticism of the New Testament. New Testament textual criticism has historically been completely occupied with the pursuit of the “best” text. Scholars have pursued this goal at the expense of other valuable knowledge production. I suggest that intentional alterations to the text of the New Testament provide us specific insights into the concerns of the church at the time of the alteration. New Testament scholarship has completely overlooked these insights in their attention to determining the “original” text. I propose that rather than belaboring the search for the text of the autographs—an endeavor which has long been considered futile—scholars should recognize the low-hanging fruit that lies in intentional (and especially ideological) alterations to New Testament documents.

Intentional changes to New Testament texts afford the textual scholar a unique glimpse into the concerns of the scribe who introduced the variant. The inquisitive scholar should ask, “What could motivate the intentional corruption of Holy Scripture?” The answer to this question might in some cases be merely speculative, but in other cases, such as when paired with historical inquisition like that in the fourth and fifth chapters of this thesis, the answer might provide valuable insight into the concerns of the early church.

This thesis provides a clear example in Luke 23:34a. I would like to briefly discuss one other example. The ending of Mark’s Gospel provides one of the clearest examples of intentional tampering in the New Testament. The most influential manuscripts end with 16:8, and there have been no recent serious attempts to argue for
any of the extant endings. The work surrounding this problem has focused on whether Mark intended to end his gospel at 16:8, if some interruption prevented its completion, or if the gospel originally included an ending that has since been lost.

I propose that this textual problem could be used to learn specific things about early Christianity. For example, the consensus against the originality of any of the extant endings demonstrates that no less than three individuals took it upon themselves to provide the gospel with a more suitable ending. Within the content of those inserted endings lies specific information about the concerns of those individuals. Obviously, the appearance of the risen Jesus comprises the primary content. We might safely surmise from this that early Christians were particularly concerned to clarify that the tomb was empty in Mark 16:6 because he had been resurrected. Jesus’ appearances to his various followers constitute the most significant part of the added ending. However, the Great Commission also figures prominently, and clearly emphasizes that the Gospel should go to the whole world. We know that the early church gradually shifted its focus to the gentile mission, but dating that shift has been notoriously difficult. The inclusion of the Great Commission in the inserted ending suggests that the event held an important theological and missiological position at the time.

Text-critical methods may help us determine the historical significance of these intentional alterations to Mark’s text. If we may determine the date and place of composition of each of the added endings, we will be rewarded with the specific knowledge that these issues were significant in that place and time. When combined with the historical knowledge we already have, our understanding of the history of Christianity may be greatly advanced.
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