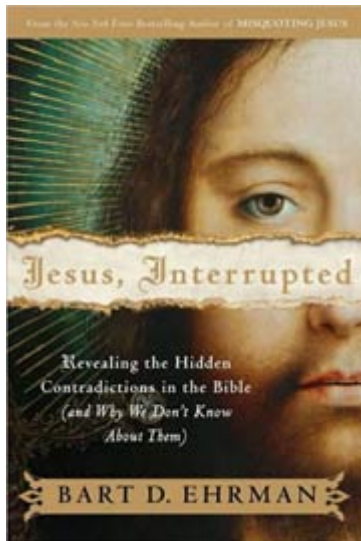


Jesus Interrupted: By Bart D. Ehrman

Book Review: By Naseer A. Tahir



Bart Ehrman Has written more than 20 books, latest one being, *Forged: Writing in the Name of God--Why the Bible's Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are.*

He wrote *Jesus Interrupted* in 2009. His outstanding research into the origin of the Bible is well recognized and it is a just and fair critique of the present day knowledge about the Bible as held by a common Christian.

In the preface of the book, the author mentions about his journey towards spirituality and then his moving away from it. The "born again" experience and passion for the knowledge about The Bible during high school period lead him to the Moody Bible Institute. In 1978 he went to Theological Seminary at Princeton for Doctorate in New Testament studies. Starting his studies as a Bible believing Christian, he finished with changed ideology. He wrote, " It became clear to me over a long period of time that my former views of the Bible as the inerrant revelation from God were flat-out wrong." (P:xi) What changed his ideas is what this book is all about. What caused him to be an agnostic? He details his reasons in the final chapter of the book.

I present the synopsis of his book, *JESUS INTERRUPTED*.

Chapter one: A HISTORICAL ASSAULT ON FAITH

In the first chapter the author describes the massive scholarly endeavors taking place in last 200 years, both due to archaeological discoveries and advances in knowledge of ancient Hebrew and Greek languages in which the books of scriptures were originally written.

Most of the people trained in Bible scholarship at theological institutions approach the Bible from a **devotional** point of view. That approach is concerned about what Bible has to say to a person or society, about God, Christ, the relationship to the world, what to believe, how to act and help make one closer to God.

The other approach is called the **historical-critical** and it has different concerns. Concerns about authorship of the Bible and if the original text is preserved, and about internal contradictions, some of those being irreconcilable. Here are some of the examples of those discrepancies:

The Gospel of Mark indicates that it was the last week of his life that Jesus "cleansed the Temple" and according to John this happened at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry.

In Mark's Gospel Jesus tells Peter that he will deny him three times "before the cock crows twice." In Matthew's Gospel he tells him that it will be "before the cock crows." So what is it--before the cock crows once or twice?

Accounts of Jesus' resurrection according to Mark when the women go to the tomb to anoint the body for burial, they see a man. According to Luke they see two men, and according to Matthew, an angel.

Try to reconcile this from John's Gospel. During his last meal with disciples, Peter says to Jesus (John 13:36), "Lord, where are you going?" Few verses later (John 14:5) Thomas says, "Lord, we do not know where you are going." And then, (John 16:5) Jesus upbraids his disciples, "Now I am going to the one who sent me, yet none of you ask me, 'where are you going?'" "Did Jesus have a short memory span?"

Old Testament is not immune from these problems either.

Not only the creation account in Genesis 1 is very different from the account in Genesis 2, but within each chapter there are problems. Are animals created before humans? Are plants created before human or afterwards? Is woman created with man or separately? Is man the first living creature to be created or last? Was the light created on the first day and the sun, moon and stars on the fourth day and how could there be an evening and morning on each of the first three days?

When Noah took the animals on the ark, did he take seven pairs of all the "clean" animals (Genesis 7:2) or just two pairs (Genesis 9:9-10)?

In Exodus is the mention of the ten plagues brought down by Moses over the Egyptians. The fifth plague killed "all of the livestock of Egyptians" (Exodus 9:5). Few days later the seventh plague, of hail, was to destroy all of the Egyptian Livestock (Exodus 9:21-22). What livestock?

It is a historical fact that the original writing of any book of the Bible does not exist anywhere. What we have are the copies made later--centuries later. On page 16 of the book the author writes: "If God wanted us to have his words, why didn't he preserve his words." Here is the confession that the criterion to judge if a book is from divine is that it should be preserved in its originality. Only if the author knew about The Holy Quran that it is preserved in its originality for last fifteen hundred years.

Chapter two: A WORLD OF CONTRADICTIONS

For most of those who read the Bible regularly the contradictions are hard to notice. They read the Bible "vertically" meaning sequentially, reading from beginning to end. The author suggests "horizontal" reading. This to him means reading the same story in different Gospels side by side while making a comparison. Only then the contradictions become apparent. Some of the contradictions are discussed by the author in this chapter:

The Death Of Jesus, as mentioned In Mark and John have major discrepancies.

The Birth and Life of Jesus in four Gospels are described differently.

The Genealogy of Jesus as mentioned in different Gospels, all mention Joseph as father of Jesus. Author writes on page 55:

"Both Mathew and Luke want to insist that Jesus' mother was a virgin: she conceived not by having sex with Joseph but by the Holy Spirit. Joseph was not Jesus' father..."

Interestingly, none of the Gospel mentions Mary in the Genealogy of Jesus.

Discrepancies in the Passion Narratives among Gospels are mentioned by the author and then he takes the issue of Trial before Pilate in details.

Mark's account of the trial is short. The Jewish leaders bring Jesus to Pilate, who asks him if he is the King of Jews. Jesus replies, "You say so." Jewish leaders accuse Jesus of more things; Pilate asks crowd what they want done with Jesus. They reply that he should be crucified. Pilate never declares Jesus innocent in Mark.

In John, on three occasions Pilate declares Jesus innocent and says Jesus should not be punished. The account of trial is different and in John. In this Gospel Jesus declares Jews to be "Children of the Devil." (John 19:12). According to John, Romans agree on Jesus' innocence, and Jewish authorities are guilty of Jesus' death.

All four Gospels agree that Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus. Mark gives no reason. Mathew states he did it for money. Luke indicates he did it because "Satan entered into him" (22:3) and in John, Judas is himself called "a devil."

Similarly, the Resurrection narratives differ in Gospels.

At the end of the chapter, author confesses that this is not an exhaustive treatment of discrepancies, but just a representative example. The author concludes that if looked at historically, the Bible has errors, but still recommends that we should continue to read the Bible but not as an inerrant historical account.

Chapter Three: A MASS OF VARIANT VIEWS

"When talking about discrepancies in the Bible, I want to go on and on--there are so many of them that are both interesting and important." (Page: 62) It is a hard for author to decide what to leave out.

THE DEATH OF JESUS IN MARK AND LUKE

Mark was the first Gospel to be written (around 65-70 CE). Both Mathew and Luke were written fifteen to twenty years later. Together, these three Gospels are called Synoptic Gospels.

In Mark (15:16-39) Jesus is condemned to death by Pontius Pilate, mocked and beaten by the soldiers, and is crucified and Jesus does not say anything. Both of the robbers, Jewish leaders and everyone passing by mocks at him. Only words uttered by Jesus are at the very end, "Eloi, eloi, lama sabachtani." He dies and two things happen: the curtain in the Temple is ripped in half, and the centurion acknowledges, "Truly this man was the Son of God."

Luke's (23:26-49) account is different. Jesus is betrayed by Judas, denied by Peter, rejected by Jewish leaders and condemned by Pilate, but he is mocked by the Pilate's soldiers, but by Herod's soldiers. Jesus is not silent in Luke. While on the way to the cross, he talks with women, later describes the

prophecy of coming destruction, while being nailed to cross he said, " Father, forgive them, for they don't know..." The last words of Jesus are different, "Father into your hands I commend my spirit."

The two Gospels while describing the same incidence are giving different messages.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN JOHN AND SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

It is not that the Synoptic Gospels are identical, but the skeleton of stories as mentioned in them differ strikingly from those in John and the portrayals of Jesus is very different.

Luke and Mark begin with Jesus being born in Bethlehem to a Virgin. The first major event in all three is the baptism of Jesus by John. Jesus then goes into the wilderness to be tempted by Devil. He comes back and preaches the message that the "kingdom of God" is soon to appear, teaching in parables, Performing miracles, and casting demons out of those possessed. He then experiences the transfiguration and continues his ministry until he goes to Jerusalem in the last week of his life. He cleans the temple and has the last supper, is put on trial and comes to the familiar end.

None of these stories are to be found in John. There is no reference of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem; no mention of mother being a virgin, no explicit mention of baptism, no temptation in wilderness, Jesus never cast a demon. There is no transfiguration and he does not clean the temple. He does not have any kind of official trial.

John has a lot of stories not found in Synoptic Gospels. Like the description of Word of God, which became a human being, and that is who Jesus Christ is: the Word of God made flesh. The miracle he performed are called signs, and those signs include the favorite miracles known to a Bible reader: turning water into wine, healing the blind, and raising Lazarus from the dead. He preaches about himself rather than coming kingdom of God.

The orthodox Christian doctrine as accepted for centuries is that he is preexistent divine being, equal but not identical to God the Father, and that he became "incarnate," became a human being through Virgin Mary. But, this doctrine is to be found in John only.

All these differences are remarkable enough for the author to call them irreconcilable.

WHY DID JESUS DIE?

According to mark it is about atonement for sin. "The son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45)

Not so according to Luke. There the view is that the salvation comes by forgiveness that comes from repentance.

Chapter four: WHO WROTE THE BIBLE

Author writes on page 102, "for over a century there has been a broad consensus among scholars that many of the books of the New Testament were not written by people whose names are attached to them." The books called Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John were not written by Mathew, a disciple who was tax collector; John, the "beloved" disciple; Mark, the secretary of Peter; or Luke, the travelling companion of Paul.

Jesus could read, but author is not sure if he could write as well. The estimated literacy rate at that time and that part of the Roman Empire was 10% at best. It is a far to assume that most probably, most of the twelve disciples were illiterate, and unfit to be the authors of the Bible. An account in Acts (4:13) calls Peter and John to be unlettered. Jesus and his followers were speakers of Aramaic, and certainly were not Greek. The authors of the Gospels must have been highly educated Greek speaking scholars. Although some have thought that the Bible was written in Aramaic, overwhelming consensus today, for lots of linguistic reasons, is that the Gospels were all written in Greek.

Chapter five: LIAR, LUNATIC, OR LORD? FINDING THE HISTORIC JESUS

The author mentions that C.S. Lewis's arguments in favor of Jesus' divinity are very clever. Lewis wrote: Since Jesus had called himself God, there were only three logical possibilities: he was a liar, a lunatic or the Lord. Lewis's thinking was that if Jesus was wrong in his claim, he either knew it or he did not know it. If he knew he was not God and claimed he was, then he was a liar. If he did not know then a lunatic or crazy. Lewis then reasons out that he was neither a liar nor lunatic, so he must be divine.

However, according to author, the weakness in this line of thinking is the fact that Jesus did not put forth a claim that he is God. "If Jesus claimed he was a divine, it seemed very strange indeed that Matthew, Mark, and Luke all failed to say anything about it. Did they just forget to mention it?" (page 141)

Only John mentions Jesus to be divine. "I had come to realize that Jesus' divinity was part of John's theology, not a part of Jesus' own theology." (Page: 142)

OUR EARLY SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT JESUS

Gospels are full of discrepancies and were written decades after Jesus by authors who had not themselves witnessed the life of Jesus and in a language different from that of Jesus.

What do Greek and Roman sources have to say about Jesus? The answer is breathtaking. They have absolutely nothing to say about him. His name is not mentioned in pagan sources till 112 CE, by Pliny the Younger, a Roman governor. He wrote in a letter to the emperor about "Christians" as some group meeting illegally and he wanted to know how to handle them. More information is provided by a friend of Pliny, the Roman historian Tacitus in year 115. Famous Jewish historian Josephus wrote a twenty volume book in 90 CE and he mentioned Jesus in passing remarks only. If we want to know about life of historic Jesus, we are more or less restricted to using the four Gospels. They are books written decades after the facts and full of contradictions.

The author insists again that Jesus did not teach that he was divine. He taught about God and the Kingdom of God soon to appear, and not about his divinity.

Is Jesus' crucifixion a miracle? Not according to the author. The only miraculous aspect of Jesus' death involves its theological interpretation that he died for the sins of others. In Jesus' day there were many who claimed to perform miracles. There were Jewish holy men like Hanina ben Dosa and Honi the circle drawer. There were pagan holy men such as Apollonius of Tyana, who healed the sick, cast out demons, and raise the dead. He was supernaturally born and ascended to heaven.

Except for the mention in Gospels, historians cannot show that any of the miracles, including resurrection, ever happened. And even in Gospels, the first record of them is decades after the facts by

those who had not witnessed them. All of the records came from biased oral traditions, biased because those stories were created with a purpose: to convince others to believe in Jesus.

Chapter six: HOW WE GOT THE BIBLE

In his early student life the author, like most Christians, believed in Bible to be the Word of God. A belief that got eaten away as his knowledge of the New Testament increased. First thought that caused his views to change was the simple question: which Bible is the word of God? If Kings James version is the inspired word of God then what about time before the English translation of Kings James Bible? Did Christians not have access to God's Words before that? Why were not the original text in Hebrew and Greek not preserved? "Why would God have inspired the words of the Bible if he chose not to preserve those words for posterity?" (Page 182) The author had no answers for these questions.

His previous book *Misquoting Jesus* had stirred up a hornet's nest. Even though all he said is noncontroversial and well accepted knowledge:

- We don't have the original of any of the books of the New Testament.
- The copies were made much later, centuries later.
- Thousands of those copies in Greek are available.
- All of these copies contain mistakes.
- The number of mistakes appears to be in hundreds of thousands, more than there are words in the New Testament.
- Majority of the mistakes are of insignificant nature.
- Some of the mistakes matter, as they affect the interpretation of the verses.
- The task for the scholars is to figure out what the author of original text meant to say and also why the scribes changed it later.
- The scholars have worked diligently on this and yet vast difference of opinion exists.

To this, some conservative evangelicals objected saying that the variations in the Bible are known to all and are minor and insignificants because they are not about any important theological doctrine.

Author's response is on page 186:

"It simply isn't true that important doctrines are not involved. As a key example: the only place in the entire New Testament where the doctrine of Trinity is explicitly taught is in a passage that made it into the Kings James translation (1 John 5:7-8) but is not found in vast majority of the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. I would suggest that the Trinity is a rather important Christian doctrine."

The belief that Bible has always existed in its present form for all times is naive. The debate over which books to include in the Bible was long and hard and never accepted by all churches. Slightly different canons of scriptures existed for churches in some countries. The wide diversity of the early Christian Church existed at about a hundred and fifty years after Jesus' death. Who were those groups?

The Ebionites: Christians who were converted Jews and insisted on maintaining their Jewishness.

The Marcionites: They followed Marcion, a famous preacher from Asia Minor who understood Paul as the great hero of the faith.

Various groups of Gnostics: They believed in many divine beings and heavenly realms.

The Proto-Orthodox Christians: Author uses this term for the group that would ultimately win and dominate as the Orthodox Christians. With the Roman emperor Constantine converting to Christianity, this form of Christianity became the dominant form of Christianity. They claimed themselves to be right and others to be heretics. Being dominant and powerful, it is only their writings and teachings that were to dominate and survive, and ultimately represent Christian Orthodoxy.

THE CANON

There were a lot of books considered to be sacred by one group or other: Gospels of Peter, Mary Magdalene, Judas, James and many others. The decision about which books should make up the canon was not made until the end of fourth century, some three hundred years after most of the books of the New Testament were written. The debates had gone on, and the twenty seven books of the New Testament emerged as the winners. With the domination of proto-orthodox group emerged the relationship of orthodoxy and heresy. Fourth century Orthodox Church father, Eusebius wrote *The Church History* in ten volumes. It tells us about the progress of the early Christianity to the time of Constantine. Eusebius promoted views that not only the orthodox Christians' views were right but were the views of Jesus and his apostles. All other views were views of heretics. This ultimately emerged as the Roman Christianity or Roman Catholic Christianity.

According to author, Jesus was a Jewish teacher who taught his disciples the Jewish Bible and it was the original Christian canon. However, after Jesus' death, his followers took Jesus' words as Gospels. Authors like Paul were producing writings for other reasons and without knowing that he was writing the Bible. And thus Gospels—Jesus' words, and the writings of apostles came into being. With so many books claiming to be writings of Apostles, how to decide which were authoritative became a problem and this led to development of a criteria to be followed:

- *Antiquity*. They must be ancient going back to original decades.
- *Catholicity*. Only those books which were widely used were to be considered.
- *Apostolicity*. The book must be written by an apostle or companion of an apostle.
- *Orthodoxy*. The book must conform to the proto-orthodox theology.

The first time the twenty-seven books of the New Testament are counted as the only books of the canon was in 367 CE by Athanasius, the famous bishop from Egypt who had participated in the Council of Nicaea. That council was called by Constantine to resolve important theological issues in the church.

Chapter seven: WHO INVENTED CHRISTIANITY?

The author has already seen canon as human creation in previous chapters, in this chapter he proposes the Christian faith to be a human creation as well. He wrote: "My thesis here is that not only is the Bible a very human book, but that Christianity as it has developed and come down to us today is a very human religion." (Page: 227)

THE SUFFERING MESSIAH

The term "Messiah" is Hebrew equivalent of the Greek term "Christ," and not the last name of Jesus as someone might think. The concept of suffering Messiah is a totally Christian concept, and Jews had a different concept about Messiah. The Christians quote Isaiah 53 and Psalms 22 which mention about suffering, but Jewish scholars differ, according to them there is no mention of suffering of Messiah but that of someone else suffering.

Jews were waiting for a Messiah who was to be a great and powerful and warrior-king in the line of David and he will be son of God. He will crush enemies of God with his grandeur and rule with rod of iron. The expectation is visible in Jewish writing of the time. (Psalm 2:1-9, and Psalms of Solomon 17:21-32)

Keeping this concept of Jews in mind the author wrote: "And who was Jesus? A virtually itinerant preacher from the hinterland of Galilee who got the wrong side of the law and was crucified...Romans crushed him like a gnat. Calling Jesus the Messiah was for most Jews beyond laughable" (Page: 233)

And on page 236, the author wrote: "In reality, the idea that Jesus was the suffering Messiah was an invention of the early Christians. It is no wonder that the apostle Paul writing decades after Christians had come up with this idea, indicates that it is the greatest 'stumbling block' for Jews." (1 Corinthians 1:23) Their logic was impeccable. Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus suffered and died. Therefore, the Messiah had to suffer and die.

What about other prophecies that Jesus was said to fulfill: that his mother would be a virgin, that he would be born in Bethlehem etc. We must remember that these accounts were written many years after the fact based on orally transmitted stories about Jesus already in circulation for decades. The story about Jesus was told with predictions of scriptures in mind and being told by story tellers.

ANTI-JEWISH TEACHINGS:

According to author, Jesus was a Jew and his message and his mission were not against Judaism. He was an apocalyptic prophet anticipating God to overthrow the forces of evil and establish His Kingdom on earth. He told Jewish people to follow what God had commanded them to do. He appears to have no intention to start a new religion. His was the religion of Jewish people.

Ebionites, the earlier followers urged that Jesus never intended to abrogate the law. Gospel of Mathew tells of similar views and expects followers to keep the law better than the leaders of heaven. (Mathew 5:17-20)

Paul's views were different and Ebionites saw him as the archenemy. Paul claimed no role for the law in having a right standing before God, and for him only the death and resurrection of Jesus mattered. The historical Jesus taught the law. Did Paul and Jesus advocate the same religion? Later Christians pushed Paul's view even further, and for them the Law became a thing for Jews only and only for their damnation. Salvation came through Jesus' death and not through the law. It is clear from letters of Barnabas that he saw the Old Testament as a Christian, not a Jewish, book:

"Watch yourself now and do not become like some people by piling up your sins, saying that the covenant is both theirs (the Jews) and ours (the Christians). For it is ours. But they permanently lost it...when Moses had just received it." (Letters of Barnabas, 4:60-7)

To Barnabas, the Jews had always misinterpreted their law. Abraham was misinterpreted by Jews as indicating that they were to cut off the foreskin. To him, the circumcision meant that a person had to believe in the cross of Jesus.

With time Christian anti-Judaism got worse and worse, and villainous blames became common. Jews were accused of killing Jesus who was now considered divine and thus they had killed their God. The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE was God's Judgment on Jews for killing their Messiah. Eventually, the rhetoric changed into actions when Christian gained majority and power when Roman Empire

converted to Christianity. Ironically, the profoundly Jewish religion of Jesus became viciously anti-Jewish religion of later times. The author concluded: "Anti-Semitism as it has come down to us today is the history of specifically Christian reactions to non-Christian Jews. It is one of the least savory inventions of the early church." (Page: 245)

DIVINITY OF JESUS

John is the only Gospel speaking of Jesus as divine, the standard Christian doctrine today. The other three Gospels do not call Jesus God and this was not the original belief of Jesus or his followers. Some of the speeches of the apostles in the book of Acts represent views held by Jesus' followers years before Luke wrote them down. In none of these speeches in Acts is Jesus spoken of as divine. In old Christian faith it is at the time of resurrection that Jesus is raised in status and: "*Today*, I have begotten you," indicates that. Later on it was reasoned that Jesus must have been Son of God all along.

For ancient Jews being the "son of God" did not mean being divine, and in old testament it can refer to different kinds of individuals.

After discussing different possible ways which might have led to the development of this idea the author calls it: "one of the most enduring theological creations of the early Christian church." (Page: 254)

THE DOCTRINE OF TRINITY

To reconcile the belief of divinity of Jesus with Christianity being monotheistic theology became a problem. If Christ is God and God is God then there are two Gods? The idea developed slowly and took many shapes and forms before emerging as the Doctrine of Trinity.

The Ebionites were adamant that there is only one God and Jesus was not God but Messiah. Marcionites took the opposite view: Jesus was not human and he was God. Evidently they did not believe Jesus and God to be two different Gods. Various groups of Gnostics declared that Christ was divine, for them there were lots of divine beings and Christ was one of them.

All of these earlier approaches were eventually rejected as being heretical, but the problem remained: how to remain monotheistic and insist on deity of Jesus. From the writings of Hippolytus and Tertullian, we know that from earliest times the most popular belief was always the oneness of God, and Jesus and God were not considered as two different entities. Jesus was incarnation of God. This is what is meant by "modalism." The one God has different modes of existence. But Tertullian disagreed: it meant that when Jesus died it was the God the Father who himself died on the cross. ("Patricianism" which means "the Father suffers") This led Tertullian and others to develop the idea that God the father is a different person from God the son, yet God is one. For the author this concept is an enigma. How can it be? It is a mystery. Nonetheless, it became the Orthodox teaching.

What about the third part of the Trinity?

Jesus in Gospel of John speaks of the Holy Spirit coming to earth as "another Advocate." (John 14:16) The Spirit is also God and there is a "triune" God. Sounds confusing? here is the argument as presented by Tertullian, for many an impeccable argument:

"A father must have a son, in order to be father; so likewise a son, to be son, must have father. It is, however, one thing to have, and another thing to be. For instance, in order to be a husband, I must have a wife; I can never myself be my own wife." (*Against Praxeas*, 10)

The fourth century theologian Arius had the idea known as Arianism which was popular at its time. According to that, Christ did not exist from eternity but came into being at some time and was subordinate to God the Father. But Athanasius from Alexandria was a big opponent of this idea.

When the Roman emperor Constantine converted to Christianity, he called a meeting, the famous Council of Nicaea in 325 CE. The council voted unanimously in favor of Athanasius's position: there are three persons in the God-head. They are distinct from each other. But each one is equally God. All three are eternal beings. This is the doctrine of Trinity.

There is no explicit mention of Trinity in the New Testament. The later scribes of the New Testament found absence of it disturbing and an explicit reference to Trinity was inserted into John. (John 5:7-8) An amazing happening for author: "within three hundred years Jesus went from being a Jewish apocalyptic prophet to being God himself, a member of Trinity. Early Christianity is nothing if not remarkable." (Page 260)

In conclusion of this chapter, the author summarizes: "Christian religion represents a human invention--in terms of its historical and cultural significance, arguably the greatest invention in the history of Western civilization."

Chapter eight: IS FAITH POSSIBLE?

The author does not see the material in his book as an attack on Christianity or the Bible. It is not new and is well known historical knowledge for all of the Biblical scholars, and it does not lead them to become non-believers.

Summarizing all that he writes: (Page 273-274)

- He saw discrepancies in books of the New Testament.
- Different authors of the Gospels have different understanding of important issues.
- Many books of the New Testament are not written by those whom they are attributed to.
- The Gospels do not provide actual facts, but contain stories that had been in circulation for decades before they were written down, making it difficult to know as to what Jesus actually said, did, and experienced.
- There were many other Gospels available to early Christians, and not included into canon.
- Canon was not the only invention by the Christians, but a whole range of theological perspective was invented. This was done as the Church grew and transformed into a new religion.

The author did not leave faith due to reasons mentioned above. He writes:

"I left the faith for ... an unrelated reason: the problem of suffering in the world."

MY REMARKS ABOUT THIS BOOK

I found this book a scholarly work and one can use some of that in favor of the Holy Quran. I feel sorry for the author, all his struggle and efforts gone in vain. His hard and long journey was to lead him to be "born again," but it resulted in the demise of his faith. If he had studied Islamic scripture with the same intention he would have had a different experience. The space does not allow for a full comparison of the Quran with the Bible, but here are some points for him to ponder:

There are absolutely no discrepancies or contradictions in Islam. Not only the Holy Quran but the entire universe is completely harmonious:

Who has created seven heavens in harmony? No incongruity canst thou see in the **creation** of the Gracious *God*. Then look again: Seest thou any flaw? (Holy Quran 64:7)

It is a cause of great concern to the author that if the Bible is inspired word of God then why is it not preserved by God. I invite him to this challenge from the Holy Quran:

Indeed, We Ourselves have sent down this **Exhortation**, and most surely We will be its Guardian. (HQ 15:10)

It is a well established fact, and both Muslims and non-Muslims scholars agree, that the Holy Quran exists in its originality, without additions or subtractions. No human hands have interfered with it, it is well preserved from its beginning.

The authorship of the Holy Quran is historically well known. It was revealed in 23 years by God to the founder of Islam, and immediately preserved in writing. There were many who memorized it in its entirety and in every age thousands continue memorizing it.

There is only one way to read the Holy Quran. One does not need invention of "horizontal" or "vertical" readings. I assure the author that it will withstand both "devotional" as well as "historical-critical" reading equally.

The question of "suffering" which the author counts as the main cause for his departure from his faith and the change of his views are well explained in Islamic theology. I invite him to read the chapter on this topic:

http://www.alislam.org/library/books/revelation/part_2_section_6.html

If the author is really looking for truth--he certainly started out to be, the Holy Quran has stated this everlasting principle:

And *as for* those who strive in Our path — We will surely guide them in Our ways. And verily Allah is with those who do good. (Holy Quran 29:70)

With his life time of study, expanding over decades, Bart Ehrman has discovered only part of the truth: 'the present Bible is not the literal word of God.' To complete his journey and reach the destination, I invite him to study the Quran. He will find the true and the original teachings of the Bible in the Holy Quran.