OF APES AND MEN: CHROMOSOME 2 IN HUMANS AND THE CHIMPANZEE

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[EDITOR’S NOTE: The following article was written by A.P. staff scientist Will Brooks, who holds a Ph.D. in Cell Biology from the University of Alabama at Birmingham.]

The Evolution of Creationism.

No, you did not misread the statement. This was the title of a symposium that I recently attended at the Experimental Biology 2009 National Conference held in New Orleans, Louisiana (Forrest and Miller, 2009). At this symposium, a couple of the more vocal evolutionists gave a detailed account of how creationists’ thinking has allegedly “evolved” over the last 20 years. The speakers gave a chronological history of landmark court cases regarding the creation/evolution debate and marked how creationists have repeatedly changed their strategies for battling evolutionary thought. (Answering this historical interpretation is beyond the scope of this article, though much could be said in response to this claim.) One of the speakers at this symposium was Dr. Kenneth Miller, a biology professor at Brown University. Miller is a researcher and author, but is well known in large part for his testimony at the 2005 Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District trial (Kitzmiller v. Dover..., 2005). In this well-publicized court case, parents battled the Dover, Pennsylvania School Board over a statement that the school board developed to be read in 9th grade science class when evolution was taught. Led by Kitzmiller, these parents fought to have the statement removed, because it posited intelligent design as an alternative to Darwin’s theory. Within those courts, Miller gave testimony which was designed to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that evolution was the only explanation for the origin of life. One of the key points of Miller’s testimony, which he kindly recounted at the symposium, regarded the then-recent report that human chromosome 2 looks like it is a fusion of two different chimpanzee chromosomes (Wienberg, et al., 1994).

Humans (Homo sapiens) have 46 chromosomes which make up their nuclear DNA genome; this number is known as the diploid number. Half of these 46 chromosomes are always donated by the mother and half by the father. So, mom and dad each contribute 23 chromosomes—the haploid number—to their offspring. Therefore, the 46 nuclear chromosomes, that all humans possess within their cells, are actually 23 pairs of identical chromosomes. (To be more precise, females have 23 identical pairs, while males have 22 pairs that are identical and the sex chromosomes, X and Y, are paired but not identical.) This diploid number of 46 (23 pairs) is, however, unique to humans among their alleged primate relatives. Genetically speaking, those species which have DNA sequences most similar to that of humans are the great apes. Each of the four species of ape (chimpanzee, gorilla, bonobo, and orangutan) possesses 48 chromosomes or 24 pairs, compared to the 46 chromosomes of humans. However, the genetic difference between Homo sapiens and their alleged primate relatives is significant.

Of the four species of great apes, also known as hominids, the chimpanzee (Pan troglodytes) harbors the most simi-
As was discussed by Miller in his court testimony, interestingly, if one takes a close look at the gross physical appearance (karyotype) of both human and chimpanzee chromosomes, one finds that all of the chromosomes can be matched between species, except the human chromosome 2. This chromosome is unique in that it looks like a hybrid or fusion of two chimpanzee chromosomes known now as chromosomes 2A and 2B. The similarities are striking and quite convincing that Homo sapiens chromosome 2 is the counterpart of the chimpanzee chromosomes 2A and 2B. This accounts for the difference in diploid numbers between humans and four species of great ape. Humans have 23 pairs including a single chromosome 2 (46 total), while the great apes have 24 pairs including the distinct chromosomes 2A and 2B (48 total). Miller and a host of evolutionists have jumped on this alleged chromosomal fusion as evidence that humans, the chimpanzee, and other hominids all descended from one common ancestor.

Three explanations could account for this proposed chromosomal fusion. One lends itself to an evolutionist’s view and two to the viewpoint of intelligent design. First, consider the evolutionist’s explanation. Most modern evolutionary biologists do not claim that humans evolved from chimpanzees or any of the other living apes. Instead, it is proposed that humans and the great apes all evolved separately from one now extinct common ancestor through independent evolutionary lines (Figure 1). Allegedly, that one common ancestor of man and the hominids possessed a diploid number of 48. As this species evolved into the chimpanzee, gorilla, and orangutan, the total chromosomal number remained constant at 48. In contrast, as that same common ancestor evolved into a human, two of the 48 chromosomes underwent a genetic malfunction and were fused together to produce a new species with a diploid number of 46.

There are problems with this explanation. First, this hypothesis openly assumes that the chromosomal fusion took place after humans supposedly split from the apes in the proposed evolutionary tree. Allegedly at some point in the past, a human ancestor’s DNA underwent a genetic fusion between two of its chromosomes. This event occurred in no other species. Does this prove evidence that humans share a common ancestor with apes? No. This line of thinking provides no empirical evidence that humans and apes share a common ancestor. All that it really does is suggest that a past human may have undergone this genetic change. In order for this fusion event to demonstrate common ancestry with the chimpanzee, there would have to be some link between the fusion event and the great apes. But no such link exists. The fused-looking chromosome is specific to humans, so it does not directly connect with the great apes. Therefore, it cannot be empirical evidence for a common link between Homo sapiens and the great apes. The only genetic “link” (which is no link at all) between humans and the apes is our close DNA sequence similarity. But this similarity is completely expected given the similar body structure, physiology, and biochemistry that we share with our primate friends. In reality, DNA sequence similarity is just as much evidence for common design as it is for evolution. In actuality, neither viewpoint is proven by the matter of similarity.

For the sake of argument, let us assume that evolutionists are correct and a distant human ancestor with 48 chromosomes did evolve into a new species with 46 chromosomes via the chromosome 2 fusion event. Did this event occur in a single individual or simultaneously in an entire population? Mutations of this nature are certainly rare, but they do occur occasionally. However, the probability that this mutation would occur simultaneously in multiple individuals is so staggeringly low that we can assume its impossibility. At best, the mutation occurred in

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**Figure 1: Evolutionary Map of Proposed Ape and Human Descent. Note the chimpanzee (Pan troglodytes) and the bonobo or pigmy chimpanzee are grouped together.**

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a single individual. How then was it propagated from one individual to his or her offspring and eventually to every human? Chromosomal rearrangements of this nature are not easily passed to offspring. When mutations of this magnitude occur, they pose serious problems for an organism when the process of gamete production occurs. Gametes are the egg and sperm cells used to form a new individual during sexual reproduction. The process of generating gametes is a special form of cell division known as meiosis. During this process, a specific alignment of chromosomal pairs always occurs and is essential for meiosis. This alignment is dependent on the near-identical structure and sequence of chromosomal pairs. If an individual carries a mutation such as a chromosomal fusion, then he or she will often be unable to produce gametes, because meiosis will fail to occur properly due to improper alignment of the now non-identical chromosome pairs. Today, we know chromosomal fusion to be one cause of infertility. In some cases, meiosis can find a way to complete despite non-identical chromosomal pairs. However, the gametes that result, or the offspring produced by fertilization with these gametes, usually have a short lifespan due to genetic problems. Problems associated with chromosomal alignment lead to spontaneous miscarriages and genetic abnormalities such as Down’s Syndrome.

A third problem with the hypothesis of a chromosomal fusion in human ancestry lies in the complete absence of humans with 48 chromosomes. If it were true that a chromosomal split occurred in human evolution, then two distinct human groups would have been generated: one containing 48 chromosomes which were not altered by any genetic change, and a second containing 46 chromosomes including the fusion of chromosome 2 (Figure 2). The problem is, however, that no humans have 48 chromosomes. The only possible historical explanation is that an entire population of 48-chromosome humans became extinct and was replaced by a 46-chromosome human race. For this scenario to have occurred, a very strong positive selection must have favored the diploid number of 46 over that of 48 (Bowers, 2003). Unfortunately for evolutionists, the paradox is that the same selection would be expected for the other apes as well. Apes, however, maintained a chromosome number of 48. Because of the known problems of infertility that go along with large genomic rearrangements, natural selection would actually operate against this proposed chromosomal fusion. The fitness for survival for such individuals would be extremely low. Taken together, no evidence supports common ancestry between humans and chimpanzees via chromosome 2 fusion.

So, if humans were not a split from the ape lineage in evolutionary theory, there are two other explanations for the appearance of human chromosome 2. The first explanation is that an intelligent designer created humans with 48 chromosomes, but they underwent the fusion sometime following Creation. At first glance, this explanation might appear to be a combination of creation and evolution—but only if “evolution” is defined as microevolution. Let us assume that God created humans with a diploid number of 48 chromosomes, and that they were in all respects the same as humans today except in chromosome number. Later, a fusion occurred between two chromosomes to give humans 46 chromosomes just like ourselves. This would be an example of microevolution. A genetic change occurred, but did not alter the species by creating a new distinct species. Unfortunately, this explanation holds up no better than that of the evolutionist’s common ancestry theory. As described above, the problems of infertility, low survival fitness, and the absence of humans with 48 chromosomes today make this explanation improbable for the appearance of chromosome 2. It could be argued that Noah or his wife contained a fusion of chromosomes 2A and 2B, then their offspring would have a 50% chance of receiving this chromosome. Then, offspring from their sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, would have only a 25% chance of receiving the altered chromosome 2. With each successive generation, the probability of maintaining the altered chromosome would reduce by one-half. These genetic frequencies of passage to offspring, coupled with the likelihood of infertility and genetic syndromes, make the Noah hypothesis unlikely as well.

Atheists have asked why God would purposefully create a human chromosome that “looks” like the fusion of two chromosomes. At this stage of understanding, we do not know. Recall God’s words: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9, ESV). Eliphaz rightly stated: “He catches the wise in their...
own craftiness, and the schemes of the wily are brought to a quick end” (Job 5:13, ESV). We cannot know God’s intentions for creating us as we exist, nor can we know why He created chimpanzees with such close genetic similarities to humans. We can know, however, that despite the close similarities in genetics, anatomy, physiology, and biochemistry between *Homo sapiens* and *Pan troglodytes*, man can think and reason far beyond the chimpanzee or any other living organism. (It is doubtful that genetics will ever solely explain that difference.) But, the greatest difference will always be that man alone has an immortal soul which is yet another created gift from God.

We will continue to learn as we delve deeper into our studies of biology and the living world. We may well discover an explanation. But, there will always be questions which cannot be answered, puzzles which cannot be solved. While God has placed some of His creation beyond our ability to discover, He has left other parts of it for us to ponder. What we can know is that the evolutionists’ “argument” regarding chromosome 2 in no way proves that humans evolved from apes.

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**Was Jesus Misquoted?**

Dewayne Bryant, M.A.

Not all of the enemies of the Faith come from a secularist perspective. While plenty come from a scientific background, one of the newest cast members is a former minister and persecuted biblical scholar. Bart Ehrman, professor of religion at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, is one of the foremost scholars in the country in the area of textual criticism, the art and science of evaluating ancient manuscripts. Trained at Princeton Theological Seminary under Bruce Metzger, a theological conservative and one of the greatest text critics of the 20th century, Ehrman abandoned his former fundamentalist roots and has penned several books questioning the Bible.

**WAS JESUS MISQUOTED?**

Ehrman specializes in textual criticism, the art and science of evaluating biblical manuscripts. Textual criticism is concerned with studying ancient documents in order to determine the original wording of the text. Like all other documents from antiquity, the original autographs of the New Testament writings are no longer extant. While scribes from the ancient world were quite exact in their standards of copying, no scribe was perfect. This means that manuscripts possessed by biblical scholars have slight—though usually meaningless—differences due to copyist’s errors. In his bestselling book *Misquoting Jesus*, Ehrman paints a rather bleak picture of the current state of the study of biblical texts;

Not only do we not have the original copies, we don’t have the first copies of the originals, we don’t even have the copies of the copies of the originals, or copies of the copies of the copies of the originals. What we have are copies made later—much later.... And these copies differ from one another, in many thousands of places.... These copies differ from one another in so many places that we don’t even know how many differences there are (2005, p. 10).

It is amazing that a book about textual criticism made it onto the New York Times bestseller list, but there is one major difference that makes its popularity unsurprising. The very fact that it attempts to discredit the Bible is a major selling point. Members of the mod-
ern militant variety of atheism have used Ehrman’s book as a rallying point. Christopher Hitchens lists *Misquoting Jesus* as essential reading in the book *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (2007). Sam Harris, another of the new atheists, lists Ehrman’s work on his Web site as recommended reading.

Ehrman’s basic approach is one of despair. He asserts the original text is irrecoverable and virtually unknowable. According to Ehrman, the text was written long after the events they purport to record, by “orthodox” scribes who intentionally altered the text itself. He describes this secretive alteration of the text as something akin to a conspiracy. These alterations changed the face of Christianity as we know it. He says, “It would be wrong…to say—as people sometimes do—that the changes in our text have no real bearing on what the texts mean or on the theological conclusions that one draws from them…. In some instances, the very meaning of the text is at stake, depending upon how one resolves a textual problem” (p. 208).

In short, the Christian Faith practiced by millions today is unlike that practiced in the first century. Not only is it different, it is inaccessible because agenda-driven scribes have corrupted the very documents that serve as a window to the early church. Short of the invention of time travel, no one can know precisely how early Christianity was practiced—according to Ehrman.

**THE STATE OF THE TEXT**

According to scholars and critics like Ehrman, the New Testament documents were transmitted in poor fashion. In one of the greatest hoaxes ever, liberal scholars like Ehrman perpetuate the misconception that the transmission of the biblical text is like a game of “broken telephone” or “Chinese whispers.” According to the rules of the game, a line of people take turns whispering a phrase into the ear of the next person in line. They must whisper it so softly that the person on the other side of their neighbor cannot hear it, and they are not allowed to repeat themselves. When the message gets to the end of the line, it is usually nonsensical and garbled beyond recognition, much to the delight of the participants.

The “broken telephone” analogy is a popular one, but woefully incorrect. Distorting the message to the point of incomprehensibility is the point of the game. That was not the point of the biblical scribes who copied what they believed to be the very Word of God. It is a well-known fact that Old Testament scribes copied the text with a level of fidelity nearly inconceivable by moderns. Scribes developed a highly sophisticated method of counting words, letters, the middle word of a book along with its middle letter, and everything else imaginable to ensure that the copy of the text was a perfect reproduction of the original manuscript. For that reason, the vast number of copyist errors in the Old Testament manuscripts consists of nothing more than a single letter, usually one that looks similar to another in the Hebrew alphabet. Using rules of textual criticism, scholars are able to classify and correct the error quite easily.

While the Old Testament scribes were quite sophisticated in their efforts, what about the scribes who copied the New Testament documents? Unfortunately, New Testament scribes were not always as faithful as their Jewish counterparts. But this hardly means that their work is suspect. Let us return to the broken telephone analogy. Scribes copying the documents were not copying for an audience of one. Their work could be checked and verified by many others who read the copies, or heard them read aloud in the first churches. Furthermore, they were under no rules that limited their ability to communicate their message or forbade them from correcting anyone else. The sheer gravity of copying the words of the apostolic writers, not to mention those of Christ Himself, would have involved the entire Christian community.

To his discredit, Ehrman uses the broken telephone argument when he surely knows better. Trained at Princeton Seminary, a premiere school for New Testament studies, Ehrman knows that scribes did not transmit the biblical documents in this manner. While scribes in the New Testament world did not have the same checks and balances used by Jewish scribes, it does not mean that their efforts were slack or
their standards lax. Copying the biblical documents was not for an audience of one, but for the entire Christian community. Others would have been able to check the documents and note any errors that the scribes might have made.

An inconvenient truth for Ehrman, and others favorable to his views, is the witness of authorities in the early church. The early church fathers began quoting the New Testament very early. In his De Praescriptione Haereticorum 36.1, Justin Martyr indicates that on Sunday the apostolic writings would be read publicly. Tertullian echoes Justin’s sentiments, saying, “Come now, you who would indulge a better curiosity, if you would apply it to the business of your salvation, run over to the apostolic churches, in which the very thrones of the apostles are still pre-eminent in their places, in which their own authentic writings are read, uttering the voice and representing the face of each of them severally”.

As New Testament scholars Darrell Bock and Daniel Wallace point out, “What is at issue here is the meaning of ‘authentic’ writings. If this refers to the original documents, as the word in Latin (authenticae) normally does, then Tertullian is saying that several of the original New Testament books still existed in his day, well over a century after the time of their writing” (2007, p. 45, italics in orig.). Tertullian specifically references Paul’s letters to the churches at Corinth, Philippi, Thessalonica, Ephesus, and Rome. Although this point is not entirely certain, it is an interesting thought. Tertullian’s statement provides evidence of a concern for preserving the manuscripts accurately. Given human fascination with historical relics and our interest in preserving them, it is possible that the early churches would have mirrored Tertullian’s concerns, preserving the letters written by the apostles themselves.

Bock and Wallace make a powerful argument concerning two of the earliest manuscripts known today. Citing p75 and Codex Vaticanus (also known as B), they argue that the two manuscripts have an exceptionally strong agreement. And they are among the most accurate manuscripts that exist today. P75 is about 125 years older than B, yet it is not an ancestor of B. Instead, B was copied from an earlier ancestor of P75. The combination of these two manuscripts in a particular reading must surely go back to the very beginning of the second century (2007, p. 47).

The state of the New Testament text is much better than the situation of despair found in Misquoting Jesus. As a world-class text critic, Ehrman must be fully aware of this material, yet chooses not to cite any of it in his work. In fact, he rarely cites scholars who disagree with him, leaving the inaccurate impression that he represents a vast majority of scholars who hold the same viewpoint. This borders on academic dishonesty.

That Ehrman knows the ancient scribes were conscientious about serving as custodians of the textual tradition is revealed in admissions throughout the text of Misquoting Jesus. He says, “Far and away, the most changes are the result of mistakes, pure and simple—slips of the pen, accidental omissions, inadvertent additions, misspelled words, blunders of one sort or another” (p. 55). The truth finally comes out that the massive majority of errors in the New Testament manuscripts are the result of a copyist’s error, not a deliberate alteration. What Ehrman downplays is that textual critics are well-schooled in how to detect and qualify copyists’ mistakes. By referring to the 400,000 errors in the manuscripts, Ehrman is leaving a false impression with his readership. Some of the errors are easily correctable, and others are downright absurd. As Bock and Wallace explain, “What exactly constitutes a textual variant? Any place among the manuscripts in which there is variation in wording, including word order, omission or addition of words, and even spelling differences is a textual variant. Thus, the most trivial alterations count as variants” (p. 54).

Ehrman does reserve some qualified praise for the ancient scribes. He writes: The scribes—whether non-professional scribes in the early centuries or professional scribes of the Middle Ages—were intent on conserving the textual tradition they were passing on. Their ultimate concern was not to modify the tradition, but to preserve it for themselves and for those who would follow them. Most scribes, no doubt, tried to do a faithful job in making sure that the text they reproduced was the same text they inherited (p. 177).

Indeed, scribes in the ancient world were expected to copy texts faithfully, despite Ehrman’s assertions that they deliberately altered the New Testament documents. His understanding of ancient scribal custom is made clear by his inclusion of a humorous story about a scribe who deliberately modified the wording of a passage in a copy of the Bible (Codex Vaticanus). A later scribe came along and changed the word back to its original reading, adding the marginal note: “Fool and knave! Leave the old reading, don’t change it!” (p. 56).

A weakness of Ehrman’s argument is that, while he argues that scribes deliberately altered the text, one must ask how he knows it was altered; the charge presupposes that the original reading is still accessible in some way. One cannot argue that the words of Jesus or the teaching of Paul has been changed if one does not know what they actually said, which Ehrman repeatedly confesses. Rather, the very fact that scholars know that the text was altered on occasion means that they have a good idea of what the original reading was. This makes Ehrman’s arguments relatively inconsequential, since he depends upon later examples of change to make his points.
The criticism of *Misquoting Jesus* has come fast and furious. In the age of the Internet, substantial criticisms of the work have appeared en masse. Not only do Ehrman’s ideas fail to convince those who have studied the issue, New Testament scholars have posted devastating critiques of his work on-line in venues ranging from academic blogs to seminary Web sites. Academic heavyweights such as Darrell Bock, Craig Blomberg, and Craig Evans have all provided measured criticism of Ehrman’s work, although he appears to have paid little attention. Indeed, Ehrman fuels the controversy when interviewed, choosing to rehash the same arguments each time when they have been answered by other scholars in a variety of media venues. In interviews, Ehrman generally tends to overlay the nature of the manuscript errors and attributes much more importance to them than is warranted.

Ehrman’s book *Orthodox Corruption* is a scholarly version of the popular-level *Misquoting Jesus*. Of this book, New Testament scholar Gordon Fee writes, “Unfortunately, Ehrman too often turns mere possibility into probability, and probability into certainty, where other equally viable reasons for corruption exist” (1995, 8:204). Some critics of Christianity are notorious for failing to incorporate the criticisms of their peers in their own work and making adjustments where necessary. In this Ehrman is no exception, as *Orthodox Corruption* generally states a similar case as the one found later in *Misquoting Jesus*, even after fellow scholars offered criticism that appears to have gone largely unheeded.

Ehrman’s work resonates in a post-Christian culture where Christianity is viewed as secretive and even deceptive. His description of the state of the text is bleak, but it is just as inaccurate. Scholars have great confidence in the Greek text that lies beneath modern English translations, and for good reason. Ancient scribes believed they were copying the very words of God, and treated their duties with a commensurate level of care. They knew that God, and His Word, deserved no less.

**CONCLUSION**

Bart Ehrman has made something of a career out of selling the idea that the New Testament is not only full of inconsistencies, inaccuracies, and outright contradictions, but that some of those discrepancies were deliberately inserted into the text. He is something of a theological celebrity, enjoying airtime in a number of different radio and television interviews. As one of the foremost New Testament textual scholars in America, Ehrman should be taken seriously. At the same time, his criticism of the Faith is questionable, and, at times, laughable.

Ehrman excels at selling a packaged version of Christianity that is supposedly authentic but falls short. He matter-of-factly describes the supposed difficulties with Christianity almost as if they are trade secrets of the Faith. On the popular level, it is likely that many of his readers have never heard of these criticisms of the New Testament from a scholar writing for a lay audience. At the same time, scholarly treatments of these issues are readily available. Many fine works written by both the scholar and non-scholar alike have answered all of the objections Ehrman raises. From that standpoint, Ehrman’s exploration of these issues gives an appearance of disingenuousness.

Unlike less scholarly, more popular authors such as Dan Brown (*The Da Vinci Code*), Peter Baigent (*The Jesus Papers*), and Simcha Jacobovici (*The Jesus Family Tomb*), Ehrman must be taken seriously. He is a widely respected scholar who has produced a number of contributions to the field of New Testament studies. At the same time, he also appears to have little interest in resolving the problems he raises. An honest seeker will try to resolve difficulties he uncovers, if for no other reason than to explore the mystery itself. Ehrman seems to have little interest in finding solutions, preferring instead to emphasize what he considers to be problems in the text. The Christian must be aware that the overwhelming majority of those difficulties often have rather simple solutions, offered by scholars bearing the same level of credentials as Ehrman himself.

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