

Ask Hank: JAH332

## IS JESUS A DUMMY WITH A PAINFULLY SHORT ATTENTION SPAN?

by Hank Hanegraaff

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What New Testament critic Bart Ehrman categorizes as one of his “favorite apparent discrepancies” in the Bible would be relatively easy for him to resolve were he not hopelessly lost in a wooden literal labyrinth of his own making. In his book, *Jesus Interrupted*, he cites the problem as follows:

*In John 13:36, Peter says to Jesus, “Lord where are you going?” A few verses later Thomas says, “Lord, we do not know where you are going” (John 14:5). And then, a few minutes later, at the same meal, Jesus upbraids his disciples, saying, “Now I am going to the one who sent me, yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’” (John 16:5).*

That leaves only two possibilities according to Ehrman: “Either Jesus had a very short attention span or there is something strange going on with the sources for these chapters.”<sup>1</sup>

First, it is instructive to note that were I to take Bart in the woodenly literal sense that he takes the Bible, I would be doing him a grave injustice. As such, it would hardly be fair to suppose that he really thinks it possible that “Jesus had a very short attention span.” Anyone who reads his book in context knows full well that Ehrman is convinced that John—who he characterizes as a “lower-class, illiterate, Aramaic-speaking peasant”<sup>2</sup>—did not write the gospel attributed to him and that the sources that were cobbled together to create the text were decidedly unreliable.

Furthermore, we must be careful not to fall for historical revisionists who, like Ehrman, would have us believe on the basis of Acts 4:13 that John was illiterate and therefore could not have written the fourth gospel. John may have been “unlettered” in the sense that he was not educated beyond the primary schooling available to boys at that time, but he was clearly not illiterate. Not only is it an uncharitable stretch to demean John as illiterate from the standpoint of his formal education, but this characterization neglects the immediate and overall context of the Book of Acts, where the “unlearned” apostles continually astonished the Jewish teachers of the Law with their knowledge and wisdom in much the same way as Jesus himself had—though He, too, was without the prerequisite rabbinic training demanded by Ehrman. Moreover, following the resurrection of the Master Teacher, there is every indication that the apostles devoted themselves to the study and ministry of the Word of God.<sup>3</sup> An entire adult lifetime of such study can easily account for John’s ability to produce an astonishingly sophisticated and subtly nuanced literary masterpiece.

Finally, allow me to underscore what is painfully obvious to anyone who engages Bart’s so-called “problems with the Bible.”<sup>4</sup> Professor Ehrman, it seems, is wholly incapable of comprehending the subtlety of sophisticated literary nuances. Instead, he is bent on forcing the text through a fundamentalist filter. Peter and Jesus obviously utter the words, “where are you going?” with decidedly different drifts. As the venerable New Testament scholar R. C. H. Lenski has well said, “Peter’s question in 13:36 was...only a selfish exclamation which would not hear of Jesus’ going away alone. And the assertion of

Thomas in 14:5 was nothing but an expression of discouragement and dullness of mind....So here Jesus is leaving, his going to his Sender means so much to the disciples, and yet none of them requests one word of this precious information.”<sup>5</sup> Put another way, while the disciples focused on mean earthly vanities, Christ intended to elevate their gaze to eternal verities.

Was Jesus a dummy with a painfully short attention span, as per Professor Ehrman? Or is Professor Ehrman hopelessly lost in a wooden literal labyrinth of his own making? You be the judge.

—Hank Hanegraaff

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#### NOTES

1. Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (and Why We Don't Know about Them)* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 9.
2. *Ibid.*, 106.
3. See Acts 6:2-4.
4. Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted*, 6.
5. R.C.H. Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament: The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001 [originally published 1943]), 1078-79.