



Bart Ehrman

Bart Ehrman celebrated his 67th birthday a few days ago. He is the James A. Gray Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a well-known New Testament scholar specializing in textual criticism (the Greek manuscript tradition of the New Testament), the historical Jesus and the history of early Christianity [1] [2] [3] [4]. His journey from a fundamentalist evangelical (by own admission) to a secular Professor of Religious Studies is an interesting, but not a unique one. As Mark Twain said "The best cure for Christianity is reading the Bible". Studying the origins of the Bible, its history, the history of Christianity and the history of its dogmas is an even more effective cure, as many of us can testify.

Bart Denton Ehrman was born on 5 October 1955 in Kansas where he completed school in 1973. He then received a 3-year diploma from the Moody Bible Institute, before receiving a bachelor's degree from Wheaton College in 1978, followed by his M.Div in 1981 and his PhD in 1985, both from Princeton Theological Seminary.

He taught at the Department of Religion of the Rutgers University from 1984 - 1988 and has been teaching at the University of North Carolina ever since. He became Professor in 1999 and served as Chair of their Department of Religious Studies from 2000 - 2006.

Bart was raised in the Episcopal Church of the United States, but became a born-again evangelical as a teenager. The discrepancies and contradictions in the Bible became a problem for his faith during his post-graduate studies at Princeton:

"I did my very best to hold on to my faith that the Bible was the inspired word of God with no mistakes and that lasted for about two years ... I realized that at the time we had over 5,000 manuscripts of the New testament, and no two of them are exactly alike. The scribes were changing them, sometimes in big ways, but lots of times in little ways. And it finally occurred to me that if I really thought that God had inspired this text ... If he went to the trouble of inspiring the text, why didn't he go to the trouble of preserving the text? Why did he allow scribes to change it?" [4].

He consequently left evangelism and returned to the Episcopal Church for another 15 years, before leaving religion altogether, but continued his career as a secular academic studying the New Testament from a historical perspective.



Bart Ehrman, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill [Image credit: Wikimedia Commons]

He wrote numerous books, both popular and academic. Some of the most interesting ones are:

- *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*
- *Jesus Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (And Why We Don't Know About Them)*
- *Forged: Writing in the Name of God - Why the Bible's Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are*
- *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*
- *How Jesus Became God. The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee*
- *Jesus Before The Gospels*
- *Heaven and Hell: A History of the Afterlife*, of which he said:

"My most recent popular book is *Heaven and Hell: A History of the Afterlife* (Simon & Schuster, 2020). In it I explore the still widespread views of the afterlife, arguing that neither the Old Testament nor Jesus taught that at death a person's soul goes to heaven or hell. The book explores why that became the standard Christian view, down till today." [3]

Despite his expertise, his measured and evidence-based approach and his respectful tone (which we highly value here at The CSF), Christian apologetics attack him mercilessly and pastors regard him as very dangerous [5]. Comparing Bart Ehrman to Richard Dawkins, pastor Stephen Bedard writes “Having read from both authors, my conclusion is that Bart Ehrman is the greater threat to the Church” [6]. In my view that is quite a compliment.

Bart runs a very useful blog, to which I subscribe and which I can recommend without hesitation:

[The Bart Ehrman Blog - The Bart Ehrman Blog](#)

Here is an example of one of his YouTube videos in which he discusses some of the contradictions and inaccuracies in the New Testament with a church audience, and also spends time on his personal journey:

[Are the Gospels Historically Reliable? The Problem of Contradictions](#)

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Next Secular Thinkers article

Carl Sagan by JJ Brits, scheduled for 2 Dec 2022

Sources

[1] Link: <https://www.bartehrman.com/barts-biography/>

[2] Link: <https://www.bartehrman.com/curriculum-vitae/>

[3] Link: https://religion.unc.edu/_people/full-time-faculty/ehrman/

[4] Link: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bart_D._Ehrman

[5] Link: [Bart Ehrman is a Grave Danger to Christianity](#)

[6] Link: [Richard Dawkins or Bart Ehrman: Who is More Dangerous?](#)