

Preliminary Submission of PhD Thesis for Ryan F. Smith
to MF Norwegian School of Theology

Title of Thesis: Beyond Difficult: The Text-Critical Problem at Matt 27:49b (the Pre-Mortem Spearing of Jesus) and the Challenge to Legitimately Ascertain the Initial Text of the New Testament

Abstract: The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate how Matt 27:49b, a textual variant portraying the pre-mortem spearing of Jesus, represents a thus far missed opportunity for New Testament, text-critical scholarship to fulfill its primary purpose of ascertaining the initial text. This missed opportunity is due to scholarly analysis of this variation-unit being based not on some of the most highly regarded and reliable criteria in the discipline, many of which Matt 27:49b meets, but on reasoning that either defies these criteria, attempts to bypass them, or has nothing to do with them or any other true text-critical criteria. The importance of the correct application of text-critical criteria transcends this single variation-unit. At stake is the legitimacy of modern text-critical practice as a reliable means of identifying the initial text.

In evaluating the scholarly response to this variation-unit, I will compare it with the scholarly analysis of other, similar variation-units, i. e., those involving a longer and shorter reading in which Codex Sinaiticus (Ⲁ 01) and Codex Vaticanus (B 03) both supported one or the other and for which a high percentage of scholars went against the testimony of these two majuscules, just as they did at Matt 27:49b. The objective will be to compare the various text-critical arguments for why scholars preferred one reading over the other at the other variation-units and compare these to the reasons why they rejected Matt 27:49b in order to judge their consistency.

This thesis will consist of seven chapters. Chapter One will examine the history of research of Matt 27:49b. This history will span from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day. This history will introduce the issues with this variation-unit as addressed by many scholars, most of whom rejected the longer reading, but a few of whom accepted it. Chapter Two will examine the significance of the testimony of Codex Sinaiticus (Ⲙ 01) and Codex Vaticanus (B 03) in favor of Matt 27:49b, beginning with a brief section on the crucial role that these manuscripts played in the publication of Westcott and Hort's text and the high regard with which scholars continue to hold their combined text as a witness to early readings. I will then introduce the variation-units for comparison with Matt 27:49b as well as identify the scholars from the history of research I will focus on in terms of making these comparisons. The remaining chapters will focus on scholars grouped together in terms of whether they tended to favor longer or shorter readings, as well as whether they tended to favor transcriptional probability or be balanced between transcriptional and intrinsic probability. These chapters will also more or less proceed chronologically through text-critical scholarship since Westcott and Hort.

The bottom line will be that no matter whether scholars favored shorter or longer readings, whether they favored transcriptional probability almost exclusively or were balanced with intrinsic probability, the scholars of this thesis all rejected the longer reading of Matt 27:49b for reasons that were inconsistent compared to their analyses at the other variation-units of this study. The demonstration of this consistency will further corroborate the evidence that text-critical scholarship has not fulfilled its purpose at Matt 27:49b, raising the question of whether there is a problem with the criteria scholars use to evaluate readings or a problem with the application of these criteria by the scholars.