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# Jesus and the Leper: A Text-Critical Study of Mark 1:41

## *Jesus e o Leproso: Um Estudo Crítico-Textual de Marcos 1:41*

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The Gospels of the New Testament are full of stories featuring Jesus and the performance of healing miracles. One of these accounts shows up in the opening chapter of Mark where Jesus is approached by a leper begging him to be healed. Jesus is profoundly touched by such an earnest request and “moved with pity, stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him: I do choose. Be made clean” (Mk 1:41, NRSV). However, this story might not be as lovely as it meets the eyes. That is due to a textual variant that instead of saying that Jesus was “moved with pity” says that he was “angry”. As neither emotion appears in Matthew nor in Luke, the parallel accounts, a great problem is posed to the considerations of this Markan story. After analyzing the external and internal evidence for the text, this study proposes that “angry” is the most likely original variant. Jesus’ anger would have been due to the boldness of the leper in approaching him without believing he would come away restored.

**Keywords:** Mark 1:41; Textual Variants; Textual Criticism; Jesus; Leper.

Os Evangelhos do Novo Testamento estão repletos de histórias que envolvem Jesus e a realização de milagres de cura. Um destes relatos aparece no primeiro capítulo de Marcos, quando Jesus é abordado por um leproso que lhe roga para ser curado. Jesus

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fica profundamente sensibilizado pelo seu pedido e “profundamente compadecido, estendeu a mão, tocou-lhe e disse-lhe: Quero, fica limpo!” (Mc 1:41, ARA). No entanto, esta história pode não ser tão bela como parece. Isso é devido a uma variante textual que em vez de dizer que Jesus estava “compadecido” diz que ele estava “irado”. Como nenhum dos adjetivos aparece em Mateus nem em Lucas, os relatos paralelos, um grande problema se apresenta para as considerações desta história Marcana. Depois de analisar a evidência externa e interna referentes ao texto, este estudo propõe que “irado” é a variante mais provável de ser a original. A ira de Jesus teria sido devido a ousadia do leproso em aproximar-se dele sem crer que sairia restaurado.

**Palavras-Chave:** Marcos 1:41; Variantes Textuais; Crítica Textual; Jesus; Leproso.

## Introduction:

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The Gospel of Mark is a fascinating account of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Its succinct and fast-paced style of writing (see CARSON; MOO, 2005, p. 169)<sup>3</sup> as well as its sheer emphasis on the deeds performed by Jesus present a vivid portrayal, which has “held the interest of biblical scholars and popular readers alike” (HURTADO, 1989, p. 1). Though Mark narrates the ministry of Jesus under a distinct perspective, numerous similar accounts can be found elsewhere in the other Gospels, especially in Matthew and Luke. Those similarities are so striking that many interpreters think that some kind of literary dependence among them must be postulated. Thus, the majority of NT scholars have proposed that Mark, being the first Gospel written down, functioned as a major source of information for the composition of Matthew and Luke (see BLOMBERG, 1997, p. 87-90).

Among other features, the Gospel of Mark also stands out by the massive amount of stories recounting the healing miracles performed by Jesus throughout his ministry (BLOMBERG, 1997, p. 116). One of these episodes appears right in the beginning of the book. Jesus runs into a leper who pleads to be cured. Before such an earnest request, Jesus demonstrates the most profound affection and compassion for the ill as he touches him and says: I do choose. Be made clean (Mk 1:41, NRSV). However, this account poses enormous difficulties from the textual standpoint. Though the traditional reading *σπλαγχνισθεῖς* “feeling compassion” is largely attested in the documental tradition, the same story narrated in Matthew and Luke omits

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<sup>3</sup> The Marcan Jesus is constantly on the move. *εὐθὺς* “immediately” is a standard linking word that indicates the rapid shifting of scenes in the Gospel.



this participle. Moreover, an early variant, present in the codex D (*Bezae*) and in a few other manuscripts, indicates that Jesus actually did not feel compassion toward the leper, rather, in that very moment he was “angry”, rendering of the Greek word ὀργισθεῖς. Given that this early variant suggests an alternative reading of this story and thus, may probably explain the absence of ὀργισθεῖς in Matthew’s and Luke’s descriptions, the questions that arise are: What was the reaction of Jesus at that moment? Was he felling compassion or anger? If Jesus was angry, what would account for it? This paper aims to tackle these issues by trying to determine, according to the reasoned eclecticism method (see EHRMAN; HOLMES, 1995, p. 336-360), what is the most likely original wording of this verse. It also seeks to find an explanation for the emotion, either compassion or anger, that Jesus manifested in this episode.

## External evidence

A list including the testimonies which preserved this text can be arranged as this: 1) support *σπλαγχνισθεῖς* (feeling compassion):  $\aleph$ , A, B, C, L, W, D, 0130, 0233, *f*<sup>1</sup>, *f*<sup>13</sup>, 28, 33, 157, 180, 202, 565, 579, 597, 700, 892, 1006, 1010, 1071, 1241, 1243, 1292, 1342, 1424, 1505, 2427, *Byz* [E, F, G, S] *Lec* *it*<sup>aur, c, e, f, l, q</sup>, *vg syr*<sup>s, p, h, pal</sup>, *cop*<sup>sa, bo, arm, eth, geo, esl, Basil, Ambrose</sup><sup>vid</sup>. 2) Support *ὀργισθεῖς* (angry): D, *it*<sup>a, d, ff2, r1</sup> (Diatessaron) (see ALAND et al., 1993).

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The external support for the traditional variant is indeed remarkable. Not only do codices  $\aleph$ , A, B support this reading but also a series of minuscules as well as early NT versions evince that Mark 1:41 was widely read as portraying a graceful Jesus. The angry variant only shows up in several Old Latin mss and in the codex D, representing the so-called “Western” text, which has been regarded as of less accuracy when compared to Alexandrian text. The issue on whether Codex D represents a reliable stream for the NT textual tradition has concerned scholars over the years. Gordon Fee (2012, p. 98), for example, cautions that the homogeneity found in other types of texts lacks in the western tradition and being so, this text is at least a bit suspicious. He says:

In spite of this early and wide attestation to such a text, these various witnesses lack the homogeneity found in the Egyptian and later Byzantine witnesses. The textual relationships are not consistently sustained over large portions of text. On the contrary, ‘Western’ describes a group of MSS headed by Codex D, obviously related by hundreds of unusual readings, sometimes found in one or several, sometimes in



others, but apparently reflecting an uncontrolled, sometimes 'wild' tradition of copying and translating (FEE, 1993, p. 7).

Robertson (1926, p. 80) puts it even more fiercely as he objects that "there is no problem connected to the textual criticism of the New Testament more perplexing than the value of the Western type of text?". Problems with Western readings generally include (1) long paraphrases and additions, (2) tendency to harmonize parallel texts and (3) inclusion of extra-canonical sources (PAROSCHI, 2012, p. 98). Perhaps the most intriguing feature of this type of text occurs in the book of Acts where its version is 8,5% longer than the Alexandrian one. For Westcott and Hort (1988, p. 194), it cannot help but conclude that "certain peculiar omissions excepted, the Western type of text is probably always corrupt as compared with the Non-Western text". Accordingly, this lack of adequate external support for the angry reading combined with the inherent difficulties in the Western tradition makes some text critics feel reluctant to accept ὀργισθεῖς as the original variant.

However, despite its many flaws, there are good reasons for not dismissing the Western text altogether. Westcott and Hort themselves (1988, p. 113), the great champions of the "Alexandrian" text, assume that "the text used by all Anti-Nicene Greek writers, not being connected with Alexandria, who have left considerable remains, is substantially Western. Hatch (1937, p. 6) also acknowledges the broadness of the Western text as he describes it as the most widely disseminated text of the New Testament in the second century. He asserts:

Since the Old Syriac and the Old Latin versions were made from the 'Western' text and since the leading Christian teachers of the second and early third-centuries quote it regularly in their works, it seems reasonable to conclude that the 'Western' text was the official and generally recognized text in every part of the Christian world in that period.

Mark Proctor (1999, p. 21) corroborates it by saying that "the discovery of new documentary evidence in the decades since the turn of the twentieth century has confirmed the antiquity of the Western text and therefore also its continuing importance for text-critical inquiry". Thus, scholars argue that the great age and geographical distribution of the 'Western' tradition should undermine attempts to play it down as a text of little or no importance for textual criticism. In any event, though Codex D per se is from the fifth century, its text seems to date all the way back to the second century and hence it is valuable for the task of reconstructing the

text. It is not reasonable, then, discount any variant just for coming from the Western tradition. Each case should be analysed individually (PAROSCHI, 2012, p. 98).

Another important fact that ought to be accounted for and may bolster the case for ὀργισθεῖς is a reference found in Ephrem's fourth century commentary on Tatian's *Diatessaron* -serts e getting Mark earliest documents, on another hand, orgisteis which was produced in the second century. Ephrem suggests that when Jesus met the leper he was mad at him. His commentary reads:

If you are willing, you can cleanse me. The formula is one of petition and the word is one of fear. That you are able to I know, but whether you are willing, I am not certain.' Therefore, our Lord showed him two things in response to this double [attitude]: reproof through his anger, and mercy through his healing [...] [The Lord] was angry with regard to this line of reasoning and so [he ordered] secondly, 'Go show yourself to the priests, and fulfill that Law which you are despising.' [...] It is also said that [the Lord] was not angry with him, but with his leprosy" (MCCARTHY, 1993, p. 202-203).

If the *Diatessaron* did have this reading, then as Ehrman (2003, p. 123) argues: "it is the earliest witness that we have — no papyri survive for this portion of Mark, and our earliest surviving MS for the verse is Vaticanus, from the mid-fourth century, nearly three hundred years after Mark actually wrote the account".

This further evidence just confirms how intricate this textual problem in the Gospel of Mark is. On the one hand, σπλαγχνισθεῖς is thoroughly attested by the best and most reliable manuscripts. On the other, the combination of codex D and Ephrem dates ὀργισθεῖς to the second century and places this reading in a variety of locations. As a result, it seems reasonable to conclude that the quality of external support favoring ὀργισθεῖς comes close to or even equals that of the list of Alexandrian witnesses reading σπλαγχνισθεῖς. Therefore, the external evidence itself cannot indisputably establish which variation unit should be taken as the original in Mark 1:41. It is also needed to take into account the intrinsic and transcriptional probabilities involving the text of Mark. That is where the internal evidence is of special help.

## Internal evidence

The internal evidence assesses the originality of a text based on internal grounds, i.e. within the writer's and the copyist's contexts. Textual scholars usually



divide internal evidence into two categories: Intrinsic probability and transcriptional probability. The former asks which of the competing readings makes more sense in terms of the author's writing style, the latter indicates which form of the text is the more likely to be changed by a scribe. What follows is an analysis of these two criteria.

### Intrinsic Probabilities

The writers of the Gospels ascribe a vast array of emotions to their portraits of Jesus. He is said to feel compassion (Lk 7:13), he is angry and indignant at times (Mk 3:5), he is troubled (Jn 13:21), he is deeply grieved (Mt 26:38), he is greatly disturbed in spirit (Jn 11:33), he weeps (Jn 11:35), he is surprised and amazed (Lk 7:9), he rejoices (Lk 10:21) etc. There is no doubt that Jesus expressed many emotions throughout his life. When it comes to Mark's textual problem, which of the two competing readings — anger or compassion — better fits within the Markan portrayal of Jesus? Even more crucial, which one makes better sense within the very context of the healing narrative?

Those are fundamental questions that make all the difference in making a textual analysis. The Gospel of Mark indicates two occasions where Jesus is explicitly said to have felt compassion. One appears in Mark 6:30-33. Jesus and his disciples retreat themselves to an isolated place where they could take a rest. They set off in a boat but some people spot them and run on foot to reach them. As Jesus disembarks, he sees a large crowd and he feels compassion (ἐσπλαγγίσθη) “because they were like sheep without a shepherd” (Mk 6:34, NIV). Before dismissing the multitude, Jesus feeds them by multiplying some bread and fish. The other occasion comes on shortly after in chapter eight. Once again, a large crowd has got together to hear the master. Now Jesus is compassionated for them (σπλαγγνίζομαι) as they have been with him three days and have nothing to eat (Mk 8:2 NIV).

After some resistance by his disciples, Jesus has the crowd sit down and feeds them by multiplying seven loaves of bread and a few small fish (Mk 8:5-8). Interestingly enough, the Markan Jesus is compassionate in two similar situations. Both of them involving food provision for a hungry crowd. The term σπλαγγνισθεῖς “feeling compassion” is used once again in Mark 9 in an episode where Jesus is asked to cast out a demon. The story takes place right after the Transfiguration account. There is an argument between the teachers of the law and the disciples. A numerous crowd is around them. Jesus asks what the disciples were arguing about. A man in the crowd answers by asking Jesus to heal his possessed son. Jesus is incredulous as his disciples are incapable of performing the miracle. After asking how long the boy had been like that, the father pledges Jesus: “But if you can do anything, take pity (σπλαγγνισθεῖ) on us and help us” (Mk 9:22, NIV). Though σπλαγγνισθεῖ does appear in this episode, it is striking that it is the man who asks for compassion, not Jesus



who demonstrates it. Surprisingly, the reaction of Jesus does not show mercy, rather, it comes in way of a rebuke: “If you can? Everything is possible for one who believes” (Mk 9:23, NIV). Does Mark also present an angry Jesus in his Gospel? Yes, he does. There are several occasions in Mark where Jesus is irate.

In the opening of chapter three, Jesus enters the synagogue and there he comes across with a man who has a withered hand. The story comes in a sequel of five controversial clashes between Jesus and the Pharisees. They once again watch to see whether Jesus would heal him on the Sabbath day and accuse him on the spot. Jesus, then, asks the man to come forward and makes the question: “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” (3:4 NIV). As they respond with silence, Jesus looks at them with anger (ὀργῆς) and deeply distressed at their stubborn heart (3:5). He then says to the ill man: “‘Stretch out your hand’ and his hand was completely restored”. The Pharisees went on to plot Jesus’ death along with the Herodians (3:6).

Another explicit reference to an angry Jesus comes in Mark chapter ten. Again, Jesus is in a debate with the Pharisees, this time on the divorce (Mk 10:2-12). Some people were bringing their little ones to Jesus so that he could lay his hands on them. The disciples try to prevent them from bringing the children to Jesus. When Jesus sees this, he becomes indignant (ἠγανάκτησεν) and says: “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it” (Mk 10:14-15).

So, the Markan Jesus does get angry in a couple of occasions, as opposed to the other Gospels where the word ὀργῆς is never assigned to describe an emotion of Jesus. Firstly, he shows anger toward a group of Pharisees who were disputing his authority. Then, he is angry at his own disciples for hindering some children from approaching him. At this point, it is possible to infer that Mark does not have any reservation in describing Jesus as either compassionate or angry. The question, however, is: What emotion better fits into the passage of Mark 1:39-45 where he is before the leper?

As touching as the story itself, however, is the difficulty to account for the compassionate variant in light of the subsequent actions of Jesus as the story unfolds. After healing the leper, Jesus warns him strongly — translation of the Greek ἐμβριμησάμενος. This verb is rarely used in the NT and literally means “to snort”; “to express anger or displeasure” (BAUER et al., 1996 p. 254). Although it is difficult to completely determine the meaning of this word, there is another occurrence of ἐμβριμησάμενος in Mark. It comes on chapter 14, verse 5, when the disciples reproach (ἐμβριμησάμενος) the woman who anointed Jesus. That should probably be similar to its use in Mark 1:41.

Another important term in the story comes alongside the rebuking. After doing so, Jesus immediately “sent him out” — rendering of the Greek ἐξέβαλεν. This form comes from the verb ἐκβάλλω which literally means “to throw out more or less forcibly”; “to drive out” (BAUER et al., 1996, p. 237). This is a word typical of Mark when he describes Jesus casting out demons (eleven of sixteen occurrences)<sup>4</sup>. It is also used when Jesus drives the money changers out of the temple (Mk 11:15) and in the parable of the vineyard when the wicked tenants cast out “the son” (12:8). In those instances, there seems to be some kind of aggressive action related.

This additional description seems easier to be accommodated in light of an angry Jesus. One would not expect him to strongly rebuke and cast out the leper if what came before was an expression of pure compassion. That rapid shift of emotions would be highly unnatural and strange. The opposite is true, though. It seems that the angry reading is in par with what happens as the story goes on. At this point, the intrinsic probability suggests that the emotional condition represented in the “Western” text of Mark 1:41 is easier to reconcile both with the immediate context of the leper’s cleansing and with the tone of the Gospel as a whole than the shared reading of the Alexandrian and Byzantine traditions.

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Finally, there is another piece of evidence that strongly favors the view that in this episode Jesus was angry. It comes from the parallel accounts in Matthew and Luke that also share the story. It is striking how similar the accounts are in describing some of the details of the story. They are virtually identical up to and past the point at which the participle describing Jesus’ emotion is given in Mark. But even more astonishing is the notorious omission of the participle by both Matthew and Luke. They simply ascribe none emotion to Jesus. It is difficult to say how Matthew and Luke exactly composed their stories. While most likely they are getting it from Mark, one cannot exclude the possibility that they are also relying on information coming from the church’s oral tradition as Darrell Bock (1994, p. 467) indicates when he says:

The wording of the three accounts is very close, especially in the dialogue. Where differences do occur, it is hard to tell who influenced whom. Sometimes Matthew and Luke agree against Mark; sometimes Matthew and Mark agree against Luke; and sometimes Luke and Mark agree against Matthew. Perhaps this event was a well-known tradition that circulated orally as well as in written form.

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<sup>4</sup> Mark 1:34, 39, 43; 3:15, 22, 23; 6:13; 7:26; 9:18, 28, and 38 use ἐκβάλλω with reference to exorcism; additional uses for the verb occur in 1:12; 5:40; 9:47; 11:15; 12:8.





Mark, the earliest account, presents its story in 97 words. It is distinct in some details. Mark does not include κύριε (Lord) in the request of the leper as do Matthew (8:2) and Luke (5:12). Mark is also alone when it says καὶ ἐμβριμησάμενος αὐτῷ εὐθὺς ἐξέβαλεν αὐτὸν (and warning him sternly, he immediately sent him out). The other two gospels simply say: “And he ordered him” (Lk 5:14) or “Then Jesus said to him” (Mt 8:4). Mark’s verse 45 is not included in Matthew’s story which ends with Jesus ordering the leper to offer a gift as a testimony (Mt 8:4).

Luke goes further than Matthew but puts it in different words than Mark. Mark says that the leper went about and began spreading the word. Luke does not indicate that it was the leper whom spread the news. Luke’s description uses 98 words, being the longest between the three (in fact it is only one word longer than Mark). Among other details, Luke differs from Mark and Matthew as it uses the word ἀπελθὼν for “go away” whereas Mark and Matthew both use the verb ὑπάγε. Matthew is the shortest and less detailed account. It uses only 62 words. Matthew places the healing right after Jesus went down from the mountain where he delivered his famous sermon. Mark and Luke do not give this reference. Matthew also disagrees with them by saying “show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift (Mt 8:4 NRSV) whereas Mark and Luke add καθαρισμοῦ (cleansing): “show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing (Mk 1:44, Luke 5:14).

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So, the accounts are very similar, but they do have some idiosyncrasies which make it hard to precisely know whom Matthew and Luke are getting their information from. But, in any event, at least two possibilities may be drawn from this synoptic problem: Either Matthew and Luke are getting their stories from Mark, the so-called “Markan Priority”, or they are taking it from different sources. Either way, both scenarios indicate that the angry variant would have made them feel uncomfortable. If they took it from Mark, it is evident that they deliberately omitted Jesus’ emotion. If they took it from somewhere else, it also suggests their discontentment, given that they most likely did have Mark at their disposal but chose not to follow his description of the story. Why is that? Would an angry Jesus not help in Matthew and Luke’s description of Jesus’ life?

As it was seen above, there are two occasions where Jesus is explicitly described as showing compassion in Mark. Firstly, in Mark 6:34 when he fed five thousand and afterwards in Mark 8:2 when feeding four thousand. Matthew reproduces both stories and maintains the participle showing that Jesus was compassionate (14:14, 15:32). Luke takes over only the first story and does not ascribe any emotion to Jesus (9:10-17). Elsewhere, though, Luke does present a compassionate Jesus. It is at the resurrection of the son of the widow in a town called Nain. Jesus is said to have had compassion when he saw the widow (9:13). Oddly enough, when Mark explicitly presents an angry Jesus, both Mark and Luke narrate the same episode, but none of them includes Jesus’



wrath. In Mark 3:15, Jesus looks around with anger at the Pharisees because they were watching to see whether he was going to heal on the Sabbath. It is debatable whether they are taking the story from Mark or from somewhere else<sup>5</sup>. Either way, both Matthew and Luke opt for a version without Jesus' anger. Matthew rewrites the story and says nothing about Jesus getting angry (Mt 12:12-13). Luke recasts the verse almost verbatim but the reference to Jesus' anger is suppressed (Lk 6:10).

These facts evince that both Matthew and Luke have no problem in describing a compassionate Jesus. They do so in several occasions in their accounts. But when Jesus is explicitly depicted as angry in Mark, they do not include this reference as they borrow and adapt the stories. They simply omit that. Based on this, it is fair to say that if Jesus were originally compassionate in Mark 1:41, the other Gospels writers most likely would not remove this description. The opposite also holds true. If Jesus were angry at the episode, they probably would not add this to their descriptions. As they did not do this, the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, which probably took their stories from Mark, can work as evidence that Jesus was originally angry when he healed the leper in Mark 1:41.

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### Transcriptional Probabilities

It is well-known that scribes occasionally changed the New Testament text in its copying process. Sometimes those alterations would be down to the scribes' limitations when transmitting the text. Broadly speaking, they are not difficult to spot and account for the majority of changes in the surviving copies (see PAROSCHI, 2012, p. 109). At other times, though, alterations were made purposefully. Scribes were consciously modifying the text either to clarify it or to reconcile apparent discrepancies and contradictions.

In Mark's case, there should be little doubt that scribes would have been much more concerned with an angry Jesus than with a compassionate one and hence someone would have got a "legitimate" reason for changing the text. That has been the hardest evidence put forth by commentators to argue that it is virtually impossible that a scribe would have shifted the text from compassion to angry.

That is the position of James Edwards, for example, in *The Gospel according to Mark*. Edwards firstly concedes that coming from Jesus, anger initially sounds wrong, but he agrees that it may argue for its originality "since copyists tended to change difficult readings into more acceptable ones" (EDWARDS, 2002, p. 70).

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<sup>5</sup> Hagner argues that Matthew is working on Markan material (HAGNER, 2002, p. 332). Bock recognizes that Luke's and Mark's accounts are close (BOCK, 1994, p. 507).



James Brooks (2001 p. 55) has a similar take in *The New American Commentary: Mark*. He puts his opinion this way:

Why scribes would have changed the latter [angry] to the former [compassionate] is easy to see, but that they would have changed the former to the latter is inconceivable. Despite the massive external attestation for “filled with compassion,” internal considerations are so strong that “having become angry” probably is the original.

In taking this stance, commentators rely heavily on the transcriptional probability to make their textual judgment on this passage. But not everybody has given that importance to this rationale. Some authors have suggested other scenarios and possibilities to explain how an accidental mistake could have changed this text.

An alternative explanation has appeared in a recent article written by Peter Williams (2012). His principal objective is to point out that the paper written by Bart Ehrman (*A Leper in the Hands of an Angry Jesus*) - which argues for angry as original - lacks an engagement with the full range of possible accidental errors that could occur in a text. Williams mainly argues that there are other scenarios, overlooked in Ehrman’s discussion, that could explain the alteration. One of them, according to Williams, would be the graphic resemblance between *ORΓICΘEIC* and *CIΛAΓXNIΘEIC* in the form of script used in the earliest manuscripts (majuscule). Williams (2012, p. 6) makes the following remark:

Not only do they end with the same six letters, but they also begin with the letters O and C respectively, which both begin with the same shape. They also share the letter Γ between their beginning and end. Within *CIΛAΓXNIΘEIC* a parablepsis from Π to Γ omitting ΠΛΛ or a haplography of the adjacent letters Λ or A or a parablepsis from Γ to N omitting XN are all very easy to imagine [...] Such a scenario would involve both accidental and deliberate elements, though the initial force that brought about the change would have been accidental.

William’s scenario is not impossible, but its complexity greatly weakens its possibility. After all, what would characterize this alteration? A combination of both accidental and deliberate mistakes involving only one scribe or more than one? And if the initial force that caused the change was accidental, what would we expect the next

scribe to do, to implement the error or to fix it? So, it is difficult to satisfactorily account for this variant by appealing to a complex setting like this suggested by Williams.

Bruce Metzger is another author who appeals to a possible accidental mistake to explain away the alteration. In his *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (METZGER, 1994, p. 65), he suggests that the replacement of ὀργισθεῖς for σπλαγχνισθεῖς may have “arose from confusion between similar words in Aramaic (compare Syriac *ethraḥam*, “he had pity,” with *ethra’em*, “he was enraged”).”

As compelling as this reasoning might be, one should also see, as Proctor (1999, p. 9) cautions, that this explanation also fails to persuade, since “no Aramaic text for Mark 1:41 exists, and the only Syriac witness that mentions Jesus’s anger toward the leper (Ephrem’s *Commentary on the Diatessaron XII 22-23, Hymns on Paradise XII. 13*) uses a word other than *ethra’em*” (p. 9).

Putting the evidence together, it is quite reasonable to assume that ὀργισθεῖς should be the variant reading adopted in Mark’s story. As Proctor (1999, p. 113) notes: “arguments from internal evidence are most persuasive when intrinsic and transcriptional probabilities agree on the same reading.” That is precisely the case in Mark 1:41. The reading ὀργισθεῖς presents a better fit at both immediate and wide context of Mark’s narrative. This reading would also be the least likely to be preserved by scribes within the manuscript tradition. Therefore, the internal criteria strongly suggest that ὀργισθεῖς is the variant to be preferred in Mark 1:41. Having established that anger is most likely the emotion expressed in this episode, one wonders why Jesus got angry on that day. What was the object of Jesus’ wrath?

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## Explaining Jesus’ emotion

Commentators who accept ὀργισθεῖς as the original reading propose a wide range of interpretations in an attempt to explain what would have been the object of Jesus’ wrathful reaction in Mark 1:41. There is indeed all sort of explanations (see EHRMAN, 2003, p. 135-138). Obviously, most of them try to ease the tension created by the participle ὀργισθεῖς. At the end of the day, it is very difficult to nail down this issue. After all, the text does not provide enough information to draw an incontestable conclusion. It simply says that Jesus was angry as he stretched out his hands to touch the leper. Why did Jesus get angry when he healed him? Why did he not demonstrate compassion and mercy toward that poor leper who by that time would be completely marginalized and outcast from society?

It gets even less understandable if one compares this unpleasant reaction to that of Jesus at another healing episode a few chapters on, in Mark 5:25-



34. Here too there is someone severely ill, a woman who had been suffering a discharge of blood for twelve years. Such a condition, would also render the person religiously and socially unclean, so that one would not be allowed to have any human contact, according to Leviticus 15:25-30. In an attempt to be healed, she touches Jesus' clothing seeking for her cure. Surprisingly, Jesus shows a very different reaction from that of the leper. To her, Jesus utters the most compassionate words as he says: "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering" (Mk 5:34). A comparison between these two healing narratives may shed some light on why Jesus had different reactions in episodes which, otherwise, he should have had the same attitude.

Both stories involve people approaching Jesus who in their ill state were not allowed to have any human contact according to the standards of that time. However, there is a fundamental difference in the way they approached him. The leper came up to Jesus, completely disregarding the prescription to stay away from other people and apparently did not believe Jesus was able to perform his cleansing as he kind of skeptically says: "If you want you can cleanse me" (Mk 1:40). The way the leper approaches Jesus does show some incredulity as Brooks (2001, p. 55) coherently observes: "Jesus was perhaps angered that the leper doubted that the God active in Jesus's ministry desired his cleansing".

So the leper was bold enough to come close to Jesus, but lacked faith doubting that Jesus was capable of healing him. The woman with hemorrhage also approached Jesus and so disrespected the law concerning her state, but rather than doubt, she expressed faith knowing that her touching would cleanse her from her disease. The woman's faith is pointed out by Jesus himself as he says: "Daughter, your faith has healed you" (Mk 5:34, NIV). In other words, the leper was bold enough to approach Jesus but lacked faith in him. If he did not believe, why did he approach Jesus at all? The woman also dared to come near Jesus but instead of doubting she confidently touched him, believing Jesus was able to cleanse her. The woman did believe, that is why she touched him.

The different reactions of Jesus in these stories are apparently related to the way one sought one's healing. For Jesus, what matters ultimately is the measure of faith one has. Jesus' anger here may reveal his dissatisfaction with those who are seeking a miracle but do not have faith enough it will be performed. His anger at this episode reflects a sincere expression of something that he did not approve; in this case, it was possibly at the unbelief manifested by leper who did dare to approach him in his leprosy state.

## Final remarks

This paper sought to investigate one of the most intriguing cases involving the New Testament textual tradition. That is the textual problem in the story of Jesus healing the leper in Mark 1:41. It is a perplexing issue because the vast majority of documents that recorded this text agree that when Jesus was approached by that leper, he *σπλαγχνισθεῖς* (felt compassion). Only a few manuscripts insist that he was feeling *ὀργισθεῖς* (anger). Given the rich new testamentary textual tradition, it is very improbable that only a few testimonies preserved an original reading. But as it turns out, that is not always the case.

The external criteria revealed that the compassionate reading receives a superb support from the great majority of surviving documents containing the text. It suggests that if not original, this variant came about very early on in the textual tradition. This section also demonstrated that though the reading *ὀργισθεῖς* gets little backing from the MSS, this western variant probably dates back to the second century and hence its importance and earliness should not be undermined when one makes a textual analysis.

The internal criteria brought in some important considerations that had a bearing on the final choice. First, the intrinsic probability suggested that Mark is much more keen on describing an uncompassionate Jesus than the other Gospels are. It revealed that the immediate context where the narrative unfolds makes a lot of sense if the reading *ὀργισθεῖς* is placed instead of *σπλαγχνισθεῖς*. It is so because the subsequent actions of Jesus warning severely the leper and casting him out are better understood in light of an angry Jesus.

Second, the transcriptional probability suggested that the reading more easily avoided by scribes would be *ὀργισθεῖς*, and therefore, it is more likely to have been the original and changed one. This fact is perhaps corroborated by the testimony of other two Gospels, Matthew and Luke. Both take over the story, and in many details are very similar to the Markan description, but at the moment where Jesus is said to have an emotion in Mark, neither Matthew nor Luke ascribe any reaction to Jesus, what suggests that the angry reading would have been omitted by them. Besides that, the other scenarios suggested to account for an accidental change are a bit unlikely and unconvincing.

This research, therefore, proposes that *ὀργισθεῖς* is the variant that best accounts for the external and internal criteria applied to this textual problem and it should be taken as the original in Mark 1:41. Accordingly, it suggests that critical editions of the Greek New Testament such as NA<sup>28</sup> and USBGNT<sup>4</sup> could reconsider their choice in upcoming editions of their Greek text as did the SBL in their recent publication, the SBLGNT. Having sorted it out, some Bibles versions such as the NRSV and ARA, which so far have chosen *σπλαγχνισθεῖς*, could also do the follow up in their translations.



Finally, this research sought to find a reason by which Jesus would have got angry on that day. Despite many attempts to find an answer, it suggests that his anger is related to the boldness of the leper in approaching Jesus without believing he was able to perform his healing, as opposed to the woman with hemorrhage who touched him out of certainty she would come away healed. Jesus' anger is in line with Mark's portrayal of Jesus. It displays Jesus as a full human, replete of emotions and that sometimes does get angry demonstrating his indignation at things that he did not approve, in this case, the outrageousness of the leper in seeking for something he did not believe in.

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