

God or Jesus? Textual Ambiguity and Textual Variants in Acts of the Apostles

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Abstract

The correlation of God and Jesus in Acts, in particular the use of κύριος/ὁ κύριος for both, produced a number of statements in which there can be a certain degree of ambiguity as to the referent. At these points we often find variants in the manuscripts, which reflect efforts of ancient readers to disambiguate the statements and clarify the text. They often seem to have drawn upon the immediate context to help them judge matters. So the variants are artefacts of this exegetical activity of these ancient readers of Acts.

One of the most interesting features of the Acts of the Apostles is what looks like an intentional correlation of references to God and Jesus in a number of expressions.¹ To be sure, Acts also distinguishes God and Jesus. So, e.g., some 160 times the God of biblical tradition is designated ὁ θεός, and is consistently the referent of this construction in Acts, whereas Jesus is unambiguously referred to almost 70 times by name, (ὁ) Ἰησοῦς.² But, to reiterate, at various points the author also seems to have intended to correlate God and Jesus, conspicuously linking them in discourse and references to religious practices. For example, in Acts we have several textually secure references to the grace of God (11:23; 13:43; 14:26; 20:24), but 15:11 refers to “the grace

¹ Studies of Christology in Acts are too numerous to list them here. In another recent publication I have attempted my own characterization of some major features: L. W. Hurtado, “Christology in Acts,” in *Issues in Luke-Acts* (ed. S. A. Adams and M. W. Pahl; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2012), 217-37. C. K. Rowe argues that there is a similar intentional ambiguity, esp. in the use of the term κύριος in Luke: *Early Narrative Christology: The Lord in the Gospel of Luke* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006).

² I use approximate numbers because at a number of places there are textual variants, and approximate numbers will serve to make my points. Anarthrous forms of θεός with the biblical deity as referent appear in 5:29, 39; 7:55. In 12:22, I take the anarthrous form in the crowd’s acclamation as “the voice of a god.”

of the Lord Jesus” (cf. also 14:3; 15:40), which seems to have created some differences among ancient readers about whose grace is referred to in 20:32, as reflected in the variants there (to which I return later in this essay).

It is interesting that this sense of ambiguity in the text at certain points is not ours alone, but, as we shall see, is reflected in the manuscript tradition. That is, it seems that at a number of places in Acts we have textual artefacts of the efforts of ancient readers to clarify for themselves the referents in some statements, and so to disambiguate them.³

Certainly, one of the factors contributing to this referential ambiguity in a number of places in Acts is the pattern of the author’s use of ὁ κύριος and κύριος.⁴ In the majority of their 70 (or so) uses in Acts, the arthrous-singular forms of κύριος are applied unambiguously to Jesus, either along with his name (e.g., 1:21; 4:33; 8:16; 11:17, 20; 15:11, 26; 16:31; 19:5, 13, 17; 20:21, 24, 35; 21:13), or an arthrous form on its own but the referent clear contextually (e.g., 9:1, 11, 15, 17, 27, 28; 11:16; 13:12; 14:3; 18:8; 22:10; 23:11).⁵ In a few other instances, however, God is rather obviously the referent of the arthrous-singular of κύριος (e.g., 3:20; 4:26; 7:33; 13:47).⁶ On the other hand, the typical

³ I have been persuaded that we should view most *intentional* changes to the text as more likely made by readers, not copyists (“scribes”). See esp. M. W. Holmes, “Codex Bezae as a Recension of the Gospels,” in *Codex Bezae: Studies From the Lunel Colloquium, June 1994* (ed. D. C. Parker and C.-B. Amphoux; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 123–60; and U. Schmid, “Scribes and Variants: Sociology and Typology,” in *Textual Variation: Theological and Social Tendencies?* (ed. H. A. G. Houghton and D. C. Parker; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2008), 1–23.

⁴ See, esp. J. D. G. Dunn, “ΚΥΡΙΟΣ in Acts,” in *Jesus Christus als die Mitte der Schrift* (ed. C. Landmesser et al.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997), 363–78; G. Schneider, „Gott und Christus als ΚΥΡΙΟΣ nach der Apostelgeschichte,“ in *Lukas, Theologe der Heilsgeschichte: Aufsätze zum lukanischen Doppelwerk* (ed. G. Schneider; Bonn: Peter Hanstein Verlag, 1985), 213–26; and, e.g., G. D. Kilpatrick, “ΚΥΡΙΟΣ Again,” in *The Principles and Practice of New Testament Criticism: Collected Essays of G. D. Kilpatrick* (ed. J. K. Elliott; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990), 216–22, for observations about anarthrous and arthrous forms of κύριος in the LXX and the Gospels. I think we see the influence of the LXX pattern of usage in Acts. Unfortunately, neither Dunn nor Schneider gives much attention to textual variants.

⁵ I have listed only those places where the text is secure and where the referent is unambiguously clear. There are a number of other instances where Jesus is in my view likely the referent as well (e.g., 9:31, 35, 42; 11:21; but cf. Dunn, “ΚΥΡΙΟΣ in Acts,” 369–72), but to argue the cases would distract unnecessarily us from the focus of this essay.

⁶ In 7:33 Bezae has καὶ ἐγένετο φωνή, and in v. 31 instead of this phrase has ὁ κύριος εἶπεν. I find unpersuasive Read-Heimerdinger’s claim that the speeches of characters such as Stephen and the apostles do not reflect the theology of the author of Acts, and so I must dissent from her further claim that the author did not use arthrous forms of κύριος with reference to God. Cf. J. Read-Heimerdinger, *The Bezan Text of Acts: A Contribution of Discourse Analysis to Textual Criticism* (JSNTSup 236; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), e.g., 280–81. Cf. also her view of the referent of “ὁ κύριος” in 13:47 (*ibid.*, 284–85).

referent of the anarthrous-singular forms of κύριος is God (e.g., 2:25; 2:39; 3:22; 7:31; 7:49; 15:17; 17:24, similarly to the frequent use of anarthrous singular forms of κύριος in the LXX as the translation-equivalent for יהוה), although in a few other instances in Acts the referent is equally clearly Jesus (e.g., 2:36; 10:36!).⁷

This leaves a goodly number of places in Acts where it is not entirely clear whether κυριος/ὁ κύριος refers to God or to Jesus (e.g., 5:9; 5:19; 8:22, 24, 26, 39; 11:21; 12:7, 11, 17; 13:2, 10-11). For example, in his study of the uses of κύριος in Acts, Dunn lists thirty-three (of 110) as “ambiguous.”⁸ As an initial example, in the episode about Simon Magus (8:14-24), Peter reprimands him for thinking he could purchase “the gift of God” (τὴν δωρεάν τοῦ θεοῦ, v. 20), and warns him that his heart is not right before God (τοῦ θεοῦ, v. 21). So, does Peter’s exhortation to petition “the Lord” (τοῦ κυρίου, v. 22) refer to God or to Jesus?

As noted already, Jesus is more typically the referent of the arthrous-singular forms of κύριος, but the immediate context suggests that God could be intended as the recipient of the petition for forgiveness. It should not be surprising, therefore, that the manuscript evidence reflects different efforts to judge the matter. So, in v. 24, whereas most witnesses have the Magus ask Peter to petition τὸν κύριον, a number of other

⁷ I omit from this discussion uses of the vocative form, κύριε, given that this address can have a range of connotations. Note that in 10:36 the christological claim is that Jesus is “Lord of all” (πάντων κύριος), which may not, thus, be a real instance of the simple anarthrous form of κύριος applied to Jesus. Also, in 2:36 and 10:36 the anarthrous forms are predicates in copula constructions, which distinguish them from the constructions in which God is the referent. Cf. the discussion of anarthrous κύριος in Bezae by Read-Heimerdinger, *Bezan Text of Acts*, 294–97. By my count, of the twenty or so uses of anarthrous forms of κύριος in Acts in at least ten instances the referent is clearly God. Of the remaining instances, in several (11:21; 12:7; 12:23; 13:11) it is not entirely clear what the “hand/angel of the Lord” represents, but in each case it is at least plausible that God is intended. In any event, there is a clear general pattern of distinction between referents for the arthrous and anarthrous forms, and so I find Read-Heimerdinger’s summary of the matter insufficiently precise (*Bezan Text of Acts*, 293–94).

⁸ Dunn, “ΚΥΡΙΟΣ in Acts,” 369–72. Among these 13:2, “λειτουργούντων δὲ αὐτῶν τῷ κυριῷ” is particularly intriguing. In light of the general pattern of usage of the arthrous singular forms of κύριος in Acts, Read-Heimerdinger’s confidence that Jesus is the likely referent has some basis (*Bezan Text of Acts*, 281). The contextual variants “word of the Lord/word of God” in 12:24 and 13:5 show efforts to clarify the referent in these statements, but there seems to be no variation in the phrasing in question in 13:2. Curiously, some commentators devote space to the possible connotation of the verb but do not consider who “the Lord” is: e.g., C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 1:604–5. In the LXX, the verb λειτουργέω frequently designates priestly service to God (e.g., Deut 10:8; 17:2; 1 Sam 2:11, 18; 3:1).

witnesses prefer τὸν θεόν (D 614. 1505 and others).⁹ It seems to me that it is most likely that the latter variant reflects an effort by some ancient readers of Acts to clarify the intended recipient of the petition here, in this case replacing τὸν κύριον with τὸν θεόν. Similarly, in v. 25, whereas many witnesses have τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου, a number of others (P74 A Ψ et al.) have τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, the latter variant also removing any ambiguity in the alternative phrasing, and so most likely a secondary variant. Granted, in ancient manuscripts the difference between the *nomina sacra* forms of κύριος and θεός typically involved only the initial letter of each word. But I propose that these variants most likely reflect intentional changes, not accidental ones. I think that it is considerably less likely that they arose simply through copyists confusing a *theta* and a *kappa*.

So now let us examine other instances where it appears that ancient readers sought to resolve this sort of ambiguity. I give particular attention to Codex Bezae's readings at these points. Because its text of Acts is so distinctive, it will be especially interesting to see how the textual transmission recorded in this manuscript handled this matter.¹⁰ One of the questions will be whether we perceive any pattern or "drift" to the preferred readings in Bezae at these points, that is, any tendency to prefer God or Jesus.

⁹ There are some other interesting variants in Codex D in v. 24 that do not concern us here. See, e.g., B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2d ed.; Stuttgart, New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 314.

¹⁰ There is, of course, a copious body of scholarly publications on Codex Bezae, as reflected in the valuable reference work by J. K. Elliott, *A Bibliography of Greek New Testament Manuscripts* (2d ed.; SNTSMS 109; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 49–53. In particular, note the essays in D. C. Parker and C.-B. Amphoux, eds., *Codex Bezae: Studies from the Lunel Colloquium June 1994* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), including a valuable contribution by our honouree: J. K. Elliott, "Codex Bezae and the Earliest Greek Papyri," 161–82. Relevant to the present discussion, cf. also especially Read-Heimerdinger, *Bezan Text of Acts*, esp. 275–310. E. J. Epp, *The Theological Tendency of Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis in Acts* (SNTSMS 3; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), is also important (e.g., 61–64). There are discussions of a few variants in studies such as G. D. Kilpatrick, "An Eclectic Study of the Text of Acts," in *Biblical and Patristic Studies in Memory of Robert Pierce Casey* (ed. J. N. Birdsall and R. W. Thomson; Freiburg, New York: Herder, 1963), 64–77; and J. Dupont, "Notes sur les Acts des Apôtres," *RB* 62 (1955): 47–49. Note also now the large project by J. Rius-Camps and J. Read-Heimerdinger, *The Message of Acts in Codex Bezae. A Comparison with the Alexandrian Tradition* (4 vols; London: T&T Clark International, 2004–2009). I do not engage here the long-standing questions about the "Western" text, on which see, e.g., W. A. Strange, *The Problem of the Text of Acts* (SNTSMS 71; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); B. Aland, "Entstehung, Charakter und Herkunft des sog. westlichen Textes untersucht an der Apostelgeschichte," *ETL* 62 (1986): 5–65; and, more recently, C. Tuckett, "How Early Is 'the' 'Western' Text of Acts?," in *The Book of Acts as Church History / Apostelgeschichte als Kirchengeschichte* (ed. T. Nicklas and M. Tilly; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 69–86.

The Data

I list here thirty-two instances in Acts where textual witnesses diverge in seeking to identify the referent in a sentence/phrase, in twenty-two instances the witnesses simply preferring either κύριος or θεός (2:17; 6:7; 8:24; 8:25; 10:33; 12:11; 12:24; 13:5; 13:44; 13:48; 15:17; 15:40; 16:10; 16:15; 16:32; 17:27; 18:26; 19:20; 20:28; 20:32; 21:14; 21:20). In the remaining ten variation-units we see other efforts to make explicit the referents in certain expressions, e.g., by added identifying words (14:25; 16:6; 20:25), or other measures (2:21; 2:34; 5:9; 13:10; 16:7; 18:9; 18:25). In each variation-unit listed below I first record the reading preferred in the Nestle-Aland 27th edition of the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (hereafter NA²⁷), followed by the main variants that seem to reflect an effort to judge whether the referent in the sentence is God or Jesus, with a few major witnesses for these variants from NA²⁷ indicated in round brackets.¹¹

- 2:17 λέγει ὁ θεός: λέγει κύριος (D E et al.)
2:21 #τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου: τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου (D)
2:34 ὁ κύριος τῶ κυρίῳ: κύριος τῶ κυρίῳ (κ* B* D)
5:9 τὸ πνεῦμα κυρίου: τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ κυρίου (D) | τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον (P74 et al.)
6:7 ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ: ὁ λόγος τοῦ κυρίου (D E Ψ 614 et al.)
8:24 πρὸς τὸν κύριον: πρὸς τὸν θεόν (D 614. 1505 et al.)
8:25 τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου: τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ (P74 A Ψ 316 et al.)
10:33 ὑπὸ τοῦ κυρίου: ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ (P74 D M et al.)
12:11 ἐξαπέστειλεν ὁ κύριος: ἐξαπ. κύριος (κ A D E 33 M) | ἐξαπ. ὁ θεός (36 323 453 1739 et al.) | ἐξαπ. κύριος ὁ θεός (1241)
12:24 ὁ δὲ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ: ὁ δὲ λόγος τοῦ κυρίου (B et al.)
13:5 τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ: τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου (D et al.)
13:10 τὰς ὁδοὺς τοῦ κυρίου: τὰς ὁδοὺς κυρίου (P74 κ² A C D E Ψ M)

¹¹ For this exercise, I have drawn upon the textual apparatus of NA²⁷ to identify points of variation in the text and for the key witnesses for variants, and have double-checked readings of Codex Bezae by consulting the highly-regarded transcription by F. H. Scrivener, *Bezae Codex Cantabrigiensis* (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1864) and photographs available online: <http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/exhibitions/KJV/codex.php?id=1>. This produced a couple of additional instances of variation not noted in NA²⁷, which I mark with a # in the list. In instances where NA²⁷ prints words in square brackets, I simply record here the NA²⁷ reading without the brackets. I do not attempt a complete list of supporting witnesses, but only major ones in most cases. I use standard sigla, including “M” for the “Majority text,” reflected in the mass of medieval manuscripts. Variants are separated by a vertical mark (|).

- 13:44 τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου: τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ (B* C E Ψ M et al.) | Παυλοῦ πολὺν τε λόγον ποιησαμένου περὶ τοῦ κυρίου (D)
- 13:48 ἐδόξαζον τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου: ἐδόξαζον τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ (B E et al.) | ἐδέξαντο τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ (D) | ἐδόξαζον τὸν θεὸν καὶ ἐπίστευσαν τῷ λόγῳ τοῦ κυρίου (614 et al.)
- 14:25 τὸν λόγον: + τοῦ κυρίου (κ A C Ψ et al.) | + τοῦ θεοῦ (P74 E et al.)
- 15:17 #τὸν κύριον: τὸν θεόν (D)
- 15:40 τῇ χάριτι τοῦ κυρίου: τ. χ. κυρίου (D) | τ. χ. τοῦ θεοῦ (P45 C E Ψ et al.)
- 16:6 τὸν λόγον: + τοῦ θεοῦ (D)
- 16:7 τὸ πνεῦμα Ἰησοῦ: τὸ πνεῦμα κυρίου (C* et al.) | τὸ πνεῦμα (M) | τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον (arm^{mss} Eriphanius)
- 16:10 ὁ θεός: ὁ κύριος (D M et al.)
- 16:15 πίστιν τῷ κυρίῳ: πίστιν τῷ θεῷ (D)
- 16:32 τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου: τὸν λόγον κυρίου (D) | τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ (κ* B et al.)
- 17:27 ζητεῖν τὸν θεόν: μάλιστα ζητεῖν τὸ θεῖον ἔστιν (D) | ζητεῖν τὸ θεῖον (Cl) | ζητεῖν τὸν κύριον (E M)
- 18:9 #εἶπεν δὲ ὁ κύριος: εἶπεν δὲ κύριος (D)
- 18:25 τὴν ὁδὸν τοῦ κυρίου: τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου (D) | τὴν ὁδ. κυρίου (P41 B et al.)
- 18:26 τὴν ὁδὸν τοῦ θεοῦ: τὴν ὁδὸν (D) | τὸν λόγον τ. κυρίου (323. 945. 1739. et al.) | τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ ὁδὸν (Ψ M)
- 19:20 κατὰ κράτος τοῦ κυρίου ὁ λόγος ἠῦξανεν καὶ ἴσχυεν: κατὰ κράτος ἐνίσχυσεν καὶ ἡ πίστις τοῦ θεοῦ ἠῦξανεν καὶ ἐπληθύνε (D) | κατὰ κράτος ὁ λόγος τοῦ κυρίου ἠῦξανεν καὶ ἴσχυσεν (P74 κ² M et al.)
- 20:25 τὴν βασιλείαν: τ. β. τοῦ Ἰησοῦ (D) | τ. β. τ. θεοῦ (E M et al.) | τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ (323. 1739. 1891 et al.)
- 20:28 τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ: τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ κυρίου (D P74 A C E Ψ et al.) | τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ κυρίου καὶ τοῦ θεοῦ (C³ M)
- 20:32 τῷ θεῷ: τῷ κυρίῳ (B 326 et al.)
- 21:14 #τοῦ κυρίου τὸ θέλημα: τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ (D) | τὸ θέλημα τοῦ κυρίου (Ψ M)
- 21:20 ἐδόξαζον τὸν θεόν: ἐδόξαζον τὸν κύριον (D Ψ M et al.)

Analysis

We can begin analysis of these data by noting the number of times that Codex Bezae prefers κύριος or θεός in the twenty-two instances in Acts cited here where the textual witnesses diverge over these words. In eleven of these variation-points Bezae prefers

κύριος (sometimes arthrous and sometimes anarthrous): 2:17; 6:7; 8:25; 12:11; 13:5; 13:44; 15:40; 16:10; 16:32; 20:28; 21:20.¹² In nine other instances, however, Bezae prefers ὁ θεός: 8:24; 10:33; 12:24; 13:48; 15:17; 16:15; 19:20; 20:32; 21:14.¹³ This immediately suggests that there is no obvious, consistent preference, at least no programmatic effort to insert references to God or to Jesus.¹⁴ Instead, the impression one has is that, at least in many instances, the readers of Acts who left their mark in the text witnessed by Bezae essentially attempted to judge the referents on a case-by-case basis, likely attempting to decide the matter in light of the immediate context of the statements or phrases in question. The same seems to be true for other manuscripts too.

The variants in 12:11 illustrate this, with some witnesses (e.g., B Ψ 614) supporting ὁ κύριος, an expression that typically designates Jesus, whereas other witnesses (ⲛ D et al.) have the anarthrous κύριος, which more often designates God in Acts. Still other witnesses (e.g., 36. 323) have ὁ θεός, or κύριος ὁ θεός (1241) here, both of which variants transparently reflect the view that God is the referent who sent the angel to rescue Peter from jail.¹⁵

¹² In 2:17; 12:11 and 15:40, Bezae has the anarthrous form, for which I suspect God was the intended referent, as I shall suggest in the following discussion. Bezae's preference for κύριος in 16:10, 32 and 20:28 does not fit the claim that Bezae "reserves κύριος for situations involving people of Jewish origin or for reporting their words. . . creating a distinction between gentiles and Jews" (cf. Read-Heimerdinger, *Bezan Text of Acts*, 286).

¹³ In addition, note that in 16:6 Bezae (with some others) specifies that "τὸν λόγον" is "τ. λ. τοῦ θεοῦ." Also, in 19:20 Bezae supports a distinctive reading that refers to "ἡ πίστις τοῦ θεοῦ" growing powerfully (κατὰ κράτος), whereas other witnesses refer to the powerful growth of "τοῦ κυρίου ὁ λόγος" or "ὁ λόγος τοῦ κυρίου;" in 17:27 Bezae refers to humankind seeking "τὸ θεῖον," where other witnesses have either "God" or "the Lord;" and in 18:26 Bezae has simply "τὴν ὁδόν" whereas other witnesses have "the way of God" or "the word of the Lord."

¹⁴ I must register dissent, therefore, from Read-Heimerdinger's view that Vaticanus reflects a "higher" Christology and that Bezae reflects an earlier christological stance (*Bezan Text of Acts*, 292–93). She fails to take adequate account of other evidence (e.g., that already in Paul's letters Jesus is linked with God in belief and religious practice), and in my view misunderstands the textual evidence that she considers.

¹⁵ If ancient readers perused the context to help them judge the referent in 12:11, they still had to choose what to make of the data. E.g., in 12:5, the church prays to God (πρὸς τὸν θεὸν) for Peter's release, and so the "ἄγγελος κυρίου" in 12:7 might readily be taken as from God, which might have prompted a preference for this variant in 12:11. On the other hand, in 12:17 Acts securely credits "ὁ κύριος" with rescuing Peter, which might have led some to prefer "ὁ κύριος" in v. 11. Cf. Read-Heimerdinger (*Bezan Text of Acts*, 283), who rightly suggests that "ἄγγελος κυρίου" (cf. her incorrect "ὁ ἄγγελος κυρίου") is somewhat ambiguous, "the duality perhaps being intentional." But she seems not to consider adequately the different pattern of usage of the anarthrous and arthrous forms of κύριος in Acts (and in the LXX), and so over-confidently claims that the frequent reference to Jesus as "ὁ κύριος" is "a deciding factor" for thinking that "Luke intends the angel of the Lord to be understood as that of Jesus." Contrast the

Among the remaining variation-units other than those involving simply a choice between κύριος or θεός, note 14:25, where Bezae (with Vaticanus and others) supports the reading that in Perga Paul and Barnabas spoke “τὸν λόγον,” whereas some other witnesses have either “τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ” or “τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου.” By contrast, in 16:6, where again we have the reading “τὸν λόγον” supported by many witnesses, Bezae has “τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ.” All of these variants reflect what appear to be authentic phrases used in Acts. So in each of these instances, whichever variant is judged to be “original,” I suggest that the others all represent efforts to clarify the text slightly by using terminology native to Acts.¹⁶

In 16:7, although a number of important witnesses (including Bezae and Vaticanus) have τὸ πνεῦμα Ἰησοῦ preventing Paul from going into Bithynia (a unique occurrence of this expression in the NT), a few have τὸ πνεῦμα κυρίου or τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, and others (as reflected in the “Majority” text) have simply τὸ πνεῦμα. Each of these latter variants is a more familiar expression, and “the Spirit of the Lord” could have been intended either as a more reverential way of referring to Jesus as “Lord,” or as an identification of the Spirit as God’s (the probable import of the variant “the Holy Spirit”). Moreover, these variants might have been intended to avoid any thought that “the spirit of Jesus” was some ghostly apparition.

We have a very different set of variants in 17:27, but I suggest that they too reflect efforts to understand and “clarify” the statement in which they appear. Was it God’s plan for all nations “to seek God” or “to seek the Divine/Deity” (Bezae’s reading) or “to seek the Lord”? As noted by Metzger, “τὸ θεῖον” may have been placed here under the influence of this term in v. 29, and “since θεός is the subject of the sentence (cf. ver. 24), there was an added incentive for scribes to alter θεόν to either θεῖον or κύριον,” to avoid repetition.¹⁷ Also, however, some early Christian readers may have wanted to avoid any idea that people can seek the true God apart from God’s revelation

instances in Acts where the arthrous κύριος is used for Jesus, even in formulaic expressions: 8:16; 9:28; 11:17; 15:26; 19:5; 19:17; 21:13 (but cf. Bezae’s curious anarthrous variants in 19:5, 17!). A similar pattern is reflected in other NT writings, e.g., 1 Cor 1:2; 5:4; 6:11.

¹⁶ Examples of what seem to be secure instances of τὸν λόγον are in 4:4; 6:4; 10:44; 11:19; 14:12; 17:11; 20:7; τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ in 4:31; 6:2; 8:14; 11:1; 13:7, 46; 17:13; 18:11; and τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου in 15:35, 36; 19:10. See, e.g., comments about which variants are likely original and which secondary in Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 375, 390.

¹⁷ Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 405. This statement seems in conflict, however, with the initial sentence in Metzger’s comment on this variation-unit, in which he refers to “the careless substitution by a scribe of KN for ΘN . . .” I think it more likely that the change was intentional. Also, as indicated earlier, I find it more plausible that any such intentional changes were made by readers taking the time to study the text and puzzle over its difficulties, rather than by copyists “on the fly.”

in the gospel, and so may have preferred a reference to seeking τὸ θεῖον, “the divine,” perhaps connoting a less well informed religiousness. In any case, once again, I suggest that we have variants as products of serious efforts to engage the text and to render it less difficult.

The import of the variants in 18:9 (not noted in NA²⁷) is a bit more difficult to judge. It is possible that the absence of the definite article before κύριος in Bezae here is an accidental omission. Moreover, in 18:8 after καὶ ἐβαπτίζοντο, Bezae has a distinctive additional clause, πιστεύοντες τῷ θεῷ διὰ τοῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, which may have served to identify who the κύριος is who appears to Paul in v. 9.¹⁸ On the other hand, this latter, distinctive reading clearly shows a “dyadic” combination and distinction of two figures, God and Jesus. So, it is also possible that Bezae’s anarthrous form in v. 9 represents an effort to specify the referent as God, reflecting the dominant pattern of usage of this form of κύριος in Acts.

This latter is plausible if we take time to consider briefly some other instances where Bezae uses the arthrous and anarthrous forms of κύριος with some apparent concern to distinguish God and Jesus. For example, whereas in 2:21 there is a certain ambiguity in the anarthrous form of κύριος in the NA²⁷ reading, as to whether it refers to calling upon God or Jesus, the Bezae variant with the article, τοῦ κυρίου, tilts the probability strongly toward the latter.¹⁹ Note also that in 2:34 Bezae (and κ* B*) has “εἶπεν κύριος τῷ κυριῷ μου,” the anarthrous form, κύριος, referring to God and the form with the article designating “the Lord” Jesus.²⁰ In 13:10, Bezae (with numerous other witnesses) has Elymas opposing τὰς ὁδοὺς κυρίου (cf. τὰς ὁδοὺς τοῦ κυρίου in κ* B et al.), and in v. 11 Bezae has him struck by ἡ χεὶρ κυρίου.²¹ In light of Bezae’s distinctively explicit statement in v. 12 that the proconsul believed “τῷ θεῷ” and was astonished by “τῇ διδαχῇ τοῦ κυρίου,” I think it plausible that the anarthrous forms of κύριος in vv. 10-11 were intended to refer to God, with Jesus designated later in v. 12 by

¹⁸ Cf. Epp’s discussion of 18:8 and other instances in Acts (in readings supported both by Vaticanus and Bezae), who judged that there seems to be “a definite pattern in the usage of πιστεύειν τῷ θεῷ/κυριῷ (or πιστεύειν ἐπὶ/εἰς τὸν θεόν/κύριον),” gentiles referred to as believing in God, and Jews as believing in the Lord (*Theological Tendency*, 88–90).

¹⁹ Noted also by Read-Heimerdinger, *Bezan Text of Acts*, 279, although I am less confident than she about her claim that the Bezae variant in 2:17 was intended to make Jesus the author of the words quoted from Joel. Acts has several references to “calling upon” Jesus’ name (7:59; 9:14, 21; 22:16), confirming that the author sees this action as corresponding to the exhortation in the Joel quotation.

²⁰ Cf. the reading εἶπεν ὁ κύριος τῷ κυριῷ μου favoured in other witnesses (e.g., P74 κ² A B²).

²¹ I do not consider significant the omission of the article, ἡ, in Vaticanus and some other witnesses.

the arthrous form.²² On the other hand, I find it more difficult to judge confidently whether in 11:21 χεῖρ κυρίου refers to Jesus, who is designated with the arthrous forms in the immediate context (τὸν κύριον in vv. 20-21, and τῷ κυριῷ in v. 24), or to God, mentioned explicitly in v. 23 (τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ) and in the preceding context too (vv. 17-18). Clearly, in Bezae as in other NT manuscripts, both God and Jesus factor in religious discourse and practice.²³

The variants in 5:9 suggest several efforts to identify the Spirit here, apparently with reference to God or Jesus, a couple of the variants perhaps further illustrations of the distinguishable connotations typical in the anarthrous and arthrous forms of κύριος. The reading supported by Vaticanus and most other witnesses, τὸ πνεῦμα κυρίου (anarthrous κυρίου), may indicate that God is the intended referent, whereas the Bezae reading, τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ κυρίου (arthrous form), may have served to identify the Spirit with reference to Jesus.²⁴ The variant, τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον (P74 et al.), certainly seems to identify the Spirit as God's by means of a common early Christian expression.

In 19:20, we have what appears to be a revised word-order in the variant reading supported by P74 and other witnesses, and a distinctive reading in Bezae that involves reference to “the faith of God” growing instead of “the word of the Lord,” giving us the only occurrence of “ἡ πίστις τοῦ θεοῦ” in Luke-Acts. As others have proposed, Bezae's reading seems to reflect some sort of conflation, perhaps through a reader noticing the similarity of this verse to 6:7 and 12:24, where “the word of God/the Lord” ἠῤῥξανεν καὶ ἐπληθύνετο.²⁵

The variants in 20:25 show efforts to clarify whether Paul refers here to preaching “the kingdom,” “the kingdom of God,” “the kingdom of Jesus,” or “the gospel of God.” I am particularly interested in the variants that exhibit a preference for identifying the kingdom either with reference to God or, as in Bezae, with reference to Jesus. This might allow us to add this variation-unit to those eleven other places where

²² Cf. Read-Heimerdinger (*Bezan Text of Acts*, 284).

²³ Cf. Read-Heimerdinger (*Bezan Text of Acts*, 280–81), who confidently takes χεῖρ κυρίου as referring to Jesus. But in all comparable expressions elsewhere in Acts, the “hand” is God's: 4:28, 30; 7:25 (in addition to 11:21 and 13:11, which are under discussion here).

²⁴ Cf. comments by Read-Heimerdinger (*Bezan Text of Acts*, 282), who says that Bezae's arthrous form “undoes” the “set phrase” from the LXX, and “reactivates it so that what once referred to Yahweh can now also apply to Jesus as Lord.” It seems to me, instead, that all the variants reflect honest struggles by various ancient readers to make sense of the statement in 5:9.

²⁵ E.g., J. H. Ropes, *The Beginnings of Christianity, Vol. III: The Text of Acts* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1926), 185; Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 418–19, although neither mentions the similarity of wording in 12:24.

Bezae prefers κύριος to θεός. But, even so, as indicated earlier, the data do not suggest to me a uni-directional preference, but instead an effort to puzzle out each passage in its own light.

I return now to the twenty-two variation-units listed in which the major variants involve identifying the referent either as κύριος or θεός. In the first of these, 2:17, however, it is not entirely clear that the variants reflect different referents. Certainly, the referent of ὁ θεός (supported in most witnesses) is clear enough, but what are we to make of Bezae's preference here for the anarthrous κύριος? Given that this form is often used in Acts as the Greek substitute for YHWH (e.g., 2:39; 3:22, as is also the dominant translation-choice in the LXX), in Bezae here it might have been simply a preferred way of introducing the Joel quotation as words by the OT deity, using an expression familiar in the LXX (e.g., Amos 1:6, 11, 13; 2:1).²⁶ On the other hand, in light of statements later in the context (2:34) where Jesus is identified as the one who has “poured out [ἐξέχεεν]” the Spirit-phenomena recounted in the narrative here, and has now been made both “κύριον . . . καὶ χριστόν” (2:36), it is also possible (though I think less likely) that Bezae's reading in 2:17 served to ascribe the prophetic words to Jesus, or perhaps it served to project the sort of ambiguity of referent that we have noted is a characteristic of numerous uses of κύριος in Luke-Acts.²⁷

In at least many of the remaining instances, however, it seems to me likely that the variants more clearly reflect different judgments about the referent. So, e.g., in several instances (6:7; 8:25; 12:24; 13:5; 13:44; 13:48; 16:32), the main variants (“word of

²⁶ See, e.g., Ropes (*The Text of Acts*, 16–17) for a discussion of the variant forms of the Joel quotation in Acts witnesses. He judged λέγει ὁ θεός as “the undoubtedly original words” here (17).

²⁷ Cf. Read-Heimerdinger (*Bezan Text of Acts*, 289), who claims that the Bezae reading here makes “the Lord known to Joel (Yahweh) to be one and the same as the Lord acting in the present times (Jesus).” I think that she fails to consider here the potential significance of the anarthrous form of κύριος, for which in Acts the referent is more often God. At a number of other points as well, Read-Heimerdinger's views seem to me somewhat curious: e.g., on the variants in Acts 16:10 (*Bezan Text of Acts*, 291), or her claim that Bezae presents Paul as resisting the Spirit's directions in 20:32; 19:1 and 20:3 (*ibid.*, 288). Rius-Camps and Read-Heimerdinger, *Message of Acts*, 1:169, judge that Bezae's κύριος in 2:17 is “potentially ambiguous,” but that 2:33 “will make it clear that Jesus is intended.” The alternate reading, ὁ θεός, clearly designates God, and they claim that “it is typical of B03 [Vaticanus] to avoid identification of Jesus with the Lord who spoke to Israel in the past.” I cannot here engage the rather sweeping characterizations of Bezae and Vaticanus offered by these scholars, so I will simply note that I think they are based on a selection of data from the fuller evidence. E.g., at numerous points, Bezae adds honorific titles for Jesus (e.g., 1:21; 2:38; 4:33; 15:11), which hardly suggests a more primitive christological stance than is reflected in Vaticanus. Also, as Epp noted (*Theological Tendency*, 63), Bezae has a several more references to “the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (6:8; 14:10; 18:4, 8).

God” or “word of the Lord”) may be taken as reflecting preferences about how to identify the message. Bezae shows a frequent, though not consistent, preference in these variation-units for “word of the Lord” (6:7; 8:25; 13:5; 16:32), which I take as identifying the message with reference to Jesus, whereas, interestingly, Vaticanus frequently shows a contrasting preference for “word of God” (6:7; 13:5; 13:44; 13:48; 16:32).²⁸ Both expressions seem to be authentic to Acts, each with a number of secure occurrences where there is no variation among witnesses: “word of God” in 4:31; 6:2; 8:14; 11:1; 13:7; 13:46; 17:13; 18:11; and “word of the Lord” in 15:35; 15:36; 19:10.²⁹ So, to repeat my thesis, it appears that ancient readers often chose the one or the other expression, and on a case by case basis, perhaps reflecting their phrasing preferences, but also perhaps their exegetical judgments about which expression best fitted the statements in each context.

That a given major witness varies in preference from one instance to another seems to me to support this proposal. For example, given that Bezae reflects a general preference for “word of the Lord,” the choice for “word of God” at some other points is all the more interesting. Bezae’s preference for “the word of God” in 12:24 (cf. “word of the Lord” in Vaticanus) is heavily supported by other witnesses too, and so might simply be the prior reading, which transmitters of the text reflected in Bezae saw no reason to alter.³⁰ It is also interesting to note, however, that in the immediately preceding narrative we have a disapproving reference to Herod being acclaimed in the cry “θεοῦ φωνὴ καὶ οὐκ ἀνθρώπου” (v. 22), and then being struck a mortal blow by “ἄγγελος κυρίου” because Herod did not give glory “τῷ θεῷ” (v. 23). So, most readers may have found “the word of God” in v. 24 a more suitable expression to express a contrast with the blasphemous activities of Herod.

Bezae’s preference for “the word of God” in 13:48 (also supported by B E et al.) is also very interesting, as there are several references to the “word of God/the Lord” in the immediate context (13:44, 46, 48, 49), with variants in each instance, except for

²⁸ We might also take account of Bezae’s variant in 13:44, which refers to a λόγον . . . περὶ τοῦ κυρίου, and the variant in 16:6, τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ. Including these, Bezae prefers “word of the Lord” in five instances and “word of God” in three others (12:24; 13:48; 16:6). Interestingly, in the variation-units where the options are “word of the Lord” and “word of God,” the only instance where Vaticanus and Bezae agree is 13:48.

²⁹ The expression “the word of God” appears three times in Luke (5:1; 8:11, 21; 11:28), along with instances of “the word” in reference to the Christian message (1:2; and probably 8:12, 13, 15). “The word of the Lord,” however, does not appear in Luke.

³⁰ Note that this reading is adopted in NA²⁷, reversing the decision made in previous editions.

13:46, where we have an apparently secure reading, “the word of God.”³¹ Bezae’s reading in 13:44 is distinctive, but basically supports a reference to “the Lord.” Thereafter, Bezae has “the word of God” in vv. 46 and 48, and then “the word of the Lord” again in v. 49. Is this a case of a deliberate linkage of the two expressions in close succession by framing two uses of the one with two uses of the other?³²

I noted earlier that in 16:6, Bezae (with some other witnesses) has Paul and Silas hindered by the Holy Spirit from speaking “τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ” in Asia, whereas most other witnesses have “τὸν λόγον.” I do not see an obvious reason for Bezae’s reading, and it may simply reflect a preference here for the fuller expression.³³

As I noted earlier, in 8:24 Bezae (with some others) has the Magus ask Peter to pray for him “πρὸς τὸν θεόν,” and so this may represent a desire to clarify who “the Lord” mentioned in v. 22 is, and who is the recipient of the prayer here.

In the first sentence of 15:17, most witnesses have people seeking “τὸν κύριον,” but Bezae (and a few Latin witnesses) have “τὸν θεόν” (a variation-unit not noted in NA²⁷). Bezae’s reading here may reflect an effort to clarify the referent in light of the immediate context, in which we have a secure statement in v. 14 that God (ὁ θεός) chose to look favourably upon gentiles, and also the statement in v. 19 that the gentiles were turning “to God” (ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν).³⁴

The difference among witnesses over whether in 15:40 Paul and Silas were committed by believers to “the grace of God” (P45 et al.) or “the grace of the Lord” (D B et al.) is another instance where the variants may reflect a desire to clarify the referent. Granted, “the grace of God” is the more securely well-attested expression in Acts (11:23; 13:43; 14:26; 20:24; cf. also 20:32), whereas “the grace of the Lord Jesus (Christ)” appears explicitly only in 15:11 (but cf. also 14:3), so “the grace of God” in 15:40 may only reflect a preference for the more familiar expression.³⁵ But it also avoids any ambiguity over who “the Lord” is in the alternate expression supported by D and others.

In 16:10, the choice is whether “ὁ κύριος” (Bezae) or “ὁ θεός” called Paul’s missionary ensemble to evangelize Macedonia, both variants with ample support. One might take “ὁ θεός” here as less ambiguous than the alternative, and so a clarifying

³¹ In v. 49, P45 and a few other witnesses have simply ὁ λόγος, omitting τοῦ κυρίου.

³² Cf. Vaticanus’ preference for “word of God” in 13:44, 46, and 48, and “word of the Lord” in v. 49.

³³ Cf., e.g., the same preference in E and several other witnesses in 6:4.

³⁴ Likewise, “λέγει κύριος” in v. 17 was probably taken as referring to God, in keeping with the dominant sense of the anarthrous κύριος. Cf. Read-Heimerdinger’s claim that Bezae avoids using ὁ κύριος in referring to gentiles (*Bezan Text of Acts*, 286).

³⁵ ⋈ A B and most other witnesses read “τῆς χάριτος τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ,” whereas C D Ψ and a number of other witnesses read “τῆς χάριτος τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.”

move. But it is also possible that “ὁ κύριος” seemed more appropriate to some readers in light of the preceding context in which “the spirit of Jesus” prohibits entry into Bithynia (v. 7).³⁶

The story of Lydia (16:11-15) seems to have presented some ambiguities as well. In 16:14, she is referred to as reverencing “τὸν θεόν,” but also as having her heart opened to the gospel message by “ὁ κύριος.”³⁷ So, it is interesting that in v. 15, although most witnesses have her as faithful “τῷ κυρίῳ” Bezae prefers “τῷ θεῷ,” the latter likely a clarifying variant that also aligns more with the description of her in v. 14.

In the account involving the Philippian jailor (16:25-34), similarly, we have references to God and Jesus intertwined, which probably generated the textual variants in v. 32, where witnesses divide over whether Paul spoke “the word of the Lord” (probably referring to Jesus) or “the word of God.” Note that in v. 31 Paul urges the jailor to “believe on the Lord Jesus,” but in v. 34 witnesses agree that he believed in “God.”³⁸ This may have led ancient readers to ponder how best to characterize Paul’s message in v. 32. In Bezae’s reading here (“τὸν λόγον κυρίου”), the anarthrous κυρίου may reflect the LXX usage of this form for YHWH, and if so might be an alternate attempt to refer to Paul’s message as stemming from God. But this reading might also have seemed a bit ambiguous, and so could have generated the other two, as attempts to specify more clearly the referent in the phrase.

In 20:28 the key and connected questions for ancient readers were whether God or Jesus “obtained” (περιεποιήσατο) the church, and how to understand the reference to blood in the final words of the verse. Most scholars judge that the readings favoured in NA²⁷ are more likely original.³⁹ But, if so, they comprise a statement that posed for many ancient readers some ambiguity and potential misunderstanding in referring to “the church of God” which he obtained “διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου,” especially if this

³⁶ I do not find persuasive the claim that Bezae presents Jesus as the Macedonian man who appeared to Paul in a vision. Cf. Rius-Camps and Read-Heimerdinger, *The Message of Acts in Codex Bezae*, 3:255.

³⁷ Scrivener judged that the original hand of Bezae had Lydia as σεβομένη τὸν κν, the *kappa* of the final word changed to a *theta* (Bezae Codex Cantabrigiensis, 444, col. 3 n. 481. I was unable to determine the matter from the online photos. If correct, however, I would take the change as instancing the efforts of ancient readers to clarify referents in the text.

³⁸ For our purposes, the stylistic difference between the NA²⁷ reading and Bezae’s variant in v. 34 is inconsequential.

³⁹ E.g., Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 425–27.

expression is understood as “through his [God’s] own blood.”⁴⁰ The variant reading, “ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ κυρίου” supported by Bezae and some other witnesses removes this difficulty, “the Lord” here referring to Jesus as the one who obtained the church through his own blood.⁴¹

The difference over whether Paul commended his hearers to “God” or “the Lord” in 20:32 was likely prompted by the following reference to “the word of his grace.” On the one hand, there are other references to the grace of God in Acts (11:23; 13:43; 14:26; 20:24; cf. “the grace of the Lord Jesus” in 15:11). On the other hand, in 14:3, “the word of his grace” clearly refers to “the Lord (Jesus).” Also, in 20:35 there is a secure reference to “the words of the Lord Jesus,” which may have further prompted some readers to prefer “the Lord” in v. 32.

In 21:14 (a variation-unit not noted in NA²⁷), most witnesses refer to “the will of the Lord” (with a variation in word-order among witnesses), but Bezae has “τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ.” “The will of the Lord” is an unusual expression, whereas references to the will of God abound in the NT (e.g., Acts 22:14; Rom 1:10; 2:18; 12:2; 15:32), and this may have been one factor in a preference for the latter phrasing in Bezae.⁴² It might also have served to remove any ambiguity as to the referent.

Finally, in 21:20 we have variants as to whether, upon hearing Paul recount his ministry among the gentiles, the Jerusalem church glorified “God” or “the Lord.” The latter reading probably refers to Jesus, and is supported by Bezae and numerous other witnesses including the mass of medieval manuscripts. But it is an unusual expression in Luke-Acts, the closest we have to an analogy in the reference in 13:48, “ἐδόξαζον τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου” (with variants discussed earlier).⁴³ Glorifying “God,” however, is reflected numerous times in Luke-Acts (Luke 2:20; 5:25-26; 7:16; 13:13; 17:15; 18:43;

⁴⁰ As now widely thought, however, this expression should likely be understood as “through the blood of his own (son).” See, e.g., Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 426–27. Cf. also B. D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 87–88, 264, who reads the variants in the context of “Patripassianist” controversies.

⁴¹ Here again, the arthrous form is important to note, designating, as it usually does in Acts, Jesus. Rius-Camps and Read-Heimerdinger (*Message of Acts in Codex Bezae*, 4:119) err in stating that “τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ κυρίου is found in the LXX,” citing Deut 23:2–4, 9; 1 Chr 28:8; Mic 2:5. In these and other LXX instances, the anarthrous κύριος appears, and the arthrous form in the Bezae reading reflects the early Christian adaptation of the term as a christological title. Bezae also has “περιποιήσατο ἑαυτῶν,” the latter word further emphasizing that “the Lord” who acquired the church is Jesus. The variant supported by M is an obvious conflation of the other two.

⁴² In Eph 5:17 many witnesses have τὸ θέλημα τοῦ κυρίου (adopted in NA²⁷), others have τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, and P46 has τὸ θέλημα τοῦ χριστοῦ.

⁴³ In 13:48 Bezae says the people “received the word of God.”

23:47; Acts 4:21; 11:18). So τὸν κύριον could have been replaced by some readers with this more familiar expression, perhaps also echoing the somewhat similar scene in 11:18. Or (if the judgment of NA²⁷ is followed) was τὸν κύριον preferred here by many readers, perhaps to “Christianize” the statement?

Conclusion

In the hope that the foregoing discussion has adequately given a plausible basis for my main contentions, I shall conclude by simply re-stating them. At a number of points in the text of Acts, ancient readers were presented with ambiguities, especially whether the referent was God or Jesus, and the variants at these points reflect readers’ efforts to judge the matter. It appears that they may often have done this by reference to the immediate context, and so the textual variants are artefacts of their exegetical efforts. We do not see a programmatic effort to insert Jesus or God, but instead it seems that readers engaged each of these variation-units on a case-by-case basis, simply seeking to grasp what they thought the text meant. In some cases (e.g., 20:28), doctrinal issues in the early church may have been a factor disposing readers to one variant or another, but these appear to be few.