



Fred S. Cannon

Acts 17:26: God Made of One [Blood]—Not of One Man—Every Ethnic Group of Humans

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Acts 17:26 has been word-for-word translated as “God made of one (henos) blood (haimatos) every ethnic group (ethnos) of humans.” “Of one blood” appears in most ancient manuscripts and Patriarch quotations, including Irenaeus, whereas “of one” appears in several preeminent ancient manuscripts and in a Clement quote. Nonetheless, several recent English translations read “from one man,” even though “man” does not appear in any early handwritten manuscripts. Some English translators perceive that “man” could be added as an ellipsis word after “one.” Ellipses are words that Koine Greek authors omitted from their writings, anticipating that their readers would “supply-in-thought” these missing words in their minds, from the immediately preceding linguistic context. However, inserting “man” here would not match the patterns of any other Koine ellipses. “Of one blood” or “of one” concurs with scientific discoveries, whereas “from one man” conflicts. We are indeed all one blood of God’s creation; and thus there is no room for racial bias.

Keywords: Acts, human origins, of one blood, Adam, Koine Greek Grammar, ellipsis.

In Acts 17:26, the Apostle Paul proclaimed, “He [God] made of *one blood* every ethnic group/nation of humans to live on all the face of the earth.” The overwhelming number of early manuscripts and Patriarch quotations read “of *one blood*,” whereas several early Alexandrian manuscripts read “of *one*,” with no noun. No early handwritten Acts manuscripts read “from *one man*” in this verse.

If Acts 17:26 were actually written as “he [God] made *from one man* all humans,” then this verse would be the only place in the whole Bible where a biblical text would unequivocally say that all humans came from one human. However, the early and sustained handwritten manuscripts read “of *one blood*” or “of *one*.” Unfortunately, those who read the erroneous translations “from *one man*” that have become popularized since the 1960s, and have not gone through the exercise that is described in this article, could unknowingly come to believe that the

Bible teaches that all humans came from one human. But the rigorously accurate reading(s) of Acts 17:26 do not say this. Moreover, no other verses in the Bible definitively say this.

We note that in Genesis 1, *adam* can refer to collective humanity, whereas in Genesis 2, *Adam* can refer to someone who lived with Eve in Eden, and offended God.¹

It is only within the past sixty years that several prominent English translations have presented Acts 17:26 to read “from *one man*.” These translations include the NIV, ESV, NET, and HCSB.² The KJV, Interlinear, and WEB read “from *one blood*” as translated from the *Textus Receptus*.³ The NAB and RSV (1972) read

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“from one” as translated from the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*.⁴ The NRSV reads “from one ancestor”;⁵ the REB and NEB read “from one stock”⁶ whereas the NJB reads “from one single principle.”⁷ The NASB of the 1970s reads “from one,” along with its footnote, “some later manuscripts read ‘one blood.’”⁸ In 1995, the revised NASB (NASBR) reads “from one man,” with “man” typed in italics, so as to identify it as an inserted word.⁹ Throughout this article, I will occasionally refer to these fifteen representative English translations. I have tabulated the readings of this Acts 17:26 passage in about 260 Bibles, in forty languages, and have not observed “from one man” appearing in any broadly distributed Bible translations until the 1960s. (Two less-known self-proclaimed paraphrases in the 1700s—one by Mace, the other by Haweis—did insert “one parent” and “one man’s blood” here.¹⁰)

Rationale by Others for Including “from one man” in Acts 17:26

In recent translations, how did so many different nouns get inserted after the word “one” in Acts 17:26? More specifically, why did the noun “man” end up here so recently, after being absent for nearly two millennia? In order to understand this anomaly, I emailed the following question to translators of recent English translations: “Why was the word *man* included as ‘from one man’ in Acts 17:26, when ‘man’ was not included in any early manuscripts?” Several translators were so kind as to offer email responses.¹¹ They all acknowledged that “man” was not included in any early handwritten manuscripts, yet their rationale for including “man” anyway can be summarized in the following four ways:

1. Inserting “man” makes explicit what most scholars think is the implicit reference, namely, to the one man Adam of Genesis 1:26–29 and Genesis 2.
2. Including “man” is a proper interpretation of an ambiguous passage.
3. “Of one” presents a word that begs a noun: of one ... what? “One man” provides this noun.
4. Often, the Koine Greek authors omitted words that they expected the Greek reader to “supply-in-thought” as “ellipsis” words, and “man” here is one of these ellipsis words.

Perspectives Regarding the Rationale for Inclusion of “from one man” in Acts 17:26

With regard to the *first rationale*, the Hebrew word *adam* can mean either “human, man, humanity” or someone named “Adam.”¹² As such, the Hebrew word *adam* is like the English word “deer”: both of these words can refer to the singular or to the collective whole. Thus, Genesis 1 can be about God creating *adam*-humanity (collectively) in the image of God over broad evolutionary time. Also, in Genesis 2–4, *Adam* can refer to someone who lived with Eve in Eden and offended God (Rom. 5:12–21).¹³ Many debates and confusions regarding these two Genesis chapters resolve themselves when this interpretation is employed. Moreover, this perspective corroborates with modern scientific findings: by the time the Genesis 2 individuals named Adam and Eve must have lived in Eden, the Genesis 1 *adam*-humanity had already become fruitful and multiplied and had inhabited six continents of the earth.¹⁴

First Corinthians 15:45–47 speaks of a “first” man, *adam*, and a “second” or “last” man, Jesus. But clearly, Jesus was not the very “last” human before humanity’s extinction—all of us alive today are living proof of that. Likewise, the Genesis 2–4 *Adam* was not the very “first” human before any other humanity existed. This Corinthians passage pertains to God’s narrative of the moral relationships of humans rather than to any ancestral chronology.

For the *second rationale* regarding ambiguity, C. John Collins admonishes:

In cases where ambiguities appear in the initial Greek and Hebrew manuscripts such that the original language grammar offers several ways to understand the text, the “essentially literal” approach will be to pass the responsibility on to the reader to decide, just as the readers of the Greek had to decide ... (In contrast) the tenets of “dynamic equivalence” push the translator to decide between the options on behalf of the reader ... As an expositor, I will take one approach or another; but as a translator, it is not my task to decide on behalf of the reader ... When people refer to a translation as interpretive, this is just the sort of thing they have in mind: it shuts the English reader off from other options.¹⁵

Collins further quotes A. J. Krailsheimer as lamenting,

It does not help if the translator introduces variants of his own, instead of following as faithfully as possible the chosen original, (which is the) ultimate criterion of accuracy and authenticity.¹⁶

In this article, the discussion focuses on issues related to emending factual substance, as distinguished from acknowledging cultural style. From this perspective, translating Acts 17:26 as “from *one man*” is indeed an expository variant and conjectural emendation; it is inappropriate for an “essentially literal” translation. Note that most of the fifteen representative English translations referenced above present themselves as “essentially literal” translations. However, inserting “from *one man*” in Acts 17:26 exhibits a significant departure from the “essentially literal” mandate regarding factual substance that is promoted by numerous translators.

To address the *third rationale* regarding the question “from one ... what?,” let’s pose the follow-up question: why not use the noun that appears in 95% of all handwritten Greek manuscripts and as quoted by Irenaeus (in AD 185), namely, “of *one blood*”? The merits and textual scholarship of this approach will be discussed further toward the end of this article.

Let us now focus on the *fourth rationale* regarding Koine Greek ellipses.

New Testament Ellipses and Grammatically Omitted Words in Koine Greek

Koine Greek grammar has routinely omitted several categories of words that would commonly be included in contemporary English grammar; and these absent words have been called “ellipses.”¹⁷ Heinrich von Siebenthal writes,

The term “ellipsis” (Greek for “omit”) refers to the omission of one or more sentence elements that would normally be required in a well-formed (grammatical) construction. Frequently, they are omitted when they can easily be supplied-in-thought on the basis of context.¹⁸

New Testament ellipses are words that are not grammatically required in Koine Greek, whereas to communicate the same meaning in English, an explicit word could be required.

Even in contemporary English, we practice ellipsis, but we hardly notice it because of how English speakers grammatically form English sentences. For example, in Matthew 6:24, Jesus says, “No one can serve two masters, for the one he will hate, and the other he will love, or one he will cleave to, and the other he will despise.” English speakers naturally find no need to include “master” four more times in this one sentence. We call the absent word {*master*} an “ellipsis.” In this article, I designate ellipsis words with {*brackets and italics*}. Apparently, the Koine Greek mind accepted and supplied-in-thought a yet broader range of ellipses; and these patterns of omissions were common in both biblical and classical Greek texts, including in the writings of Aristotle, Plato, Atticus, and others.¹⁹

The published KJV has tracked these New Testament ellipses with italicized words that are included in the KJV English text, whereas many other translations do not identify their ellipses. Also, examples of New Testament ellipses have been highlighted in two scholarly Greek grammar books: one by von Siebenthal (hereafter VS); the other by Blass, Debrunner, and Funk (hereafter BDF).²⁰ I have tabulated about 3,255 of these New Testament ellipses that have been identified by these three sources;²¹ these represent about 1.8% of all the words in the English-translated KJV New Testament. I also categorized each of them by the Koine Greek grammatical constructs and linguistic patterns that VS and BDF highlight. Notably, the proposed Acts 17:26 reading “from one {*man*}” does not match any of these ellipsis grammatical constructs and linguistic patterns; nor do VS, BDF, or the KJV identify this Acts 17:26 “*man*” as a prospective ellipsis. I surmise that “from one {*man*}” would be a unique outlier as an ellipsis in several regards—if, indeed, someone were to propose this as an ellipsis. Rather, “from one {*man*}” should be construed as a “conjectural emendation,” that is, an added word, a variant not present in the handwritten manuscripts, and a conjecture on the part of the translator.

Short-Term Working Memory in Language Processing

As we appraise these ellipses, we note that these Koine Greek patterns and constructs are based on sound psycholinguistic communication processing that pertains to our short-term working memory.

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We surmise that a generic manner of communication processing is common to all humans, including those of the Koine Greek and the English-speaking linguistic cultures. Yet, the Koine grammar that is employed to achieve understandable communication appears, in some ways, distinct from how English grammar achieves this end.

Psycholinguists Herbert Clark and Eve Clark address the thought processing of speech listeners and text readers in their book *Psychology and Language*, which has been cited 5,500 times.²² In this book, Clark and Clark summarize the underlying thought-processing steps that humans employ over a broad array of languages as follows:

- (1) The listeners (or readers) take in raw speech (or text) and retain a verbatim phonological representation of it in short-term “working memory.”
- (2) They immediately attempt to organize the phonological representation into constituents (phrases), identifying their content and function.
- (3) As they identify each constituent, they use it to encode and construct underlying propositions, building continually on a hierarchical representation of propositions.
- (4) Once they have identified the propositions for a constituent, they retain them in this short-term working memory; and at some point purge memory of the phonological representation. In doing this, they forget the exact wording, and retain the meaning ... Listeners (and readers) typically begin purging verbatim memory after a sentence boundary has passed.²³

In this description, the focus is on the concept of the “short-term working memory,” which maintains the “phonological representations” as verbatim words for perhaps one or several sentences of speech or text.

While analyzing these Koine Greek ellipsis words and tabulating which grammatical construct and linguistic pattern they conform to, I came to realize that these ellipsis patterns accommodate the very short-term working memory. Specifically, these ellipses are preceded within the same sentence—or in the prior one to three sentences—with the context that supplies-in-thought what the ellipsis word is. Thus, Koine Greek ellipses are not about the reader recalling facts from long-term memory or from recalling Old Testament narratives. Rather, they are about the writer grammatically presenting text in a manner

such that the reader can linguistically supply-in-thought the best-fitting words that are derived from the short-term working memory within the immediately preceding one to three sentences of the same pericope (a pericope is a paragraph or story). In this way, Koine Greek hosts grammatical constructs slightly distinct from English, but it effectively adapts to the same linguistic mental processing of the human mind that is posed by Clark and Clark.²⁴

Ellipsis Grammatical Constructs and Linguistic Patterns of Koine Greek That Employ Short-Term Working Memory

Based on the VS and BDF characterizations, I have enumerated the Koine linguistic patterns that these Greeks exhibited, as they appear to have adapted the common fundamentals of short-term working memory to their grammatical constructs.²⁵ Their quantitative frequency of occurrence in the KJV New Testament is summarized in table 1, which is compiled from two hundred pages of Excel spreadsheets.²⁶ This table also identifies where these patterns are addressed in VS and BDF.²⁷

Pattern 1. Passive voice “to be”: In the passive voice, the verbs “to be” are often grammatically omitted in the Koine Greek, and can be grammatically added as ellipses in English translations. These omitted words can include *is, was, be, were, am*.

Pattern 2. Chain-of-reference: Within a given pericope, an author can achieve participant tracking by means of a “chain-of-reference.” Norm Mundhenk describes a chain-of-reference as follows:

Once a particular participant has been introduced into a discourse, that participant can be referred to any number of times. Whenever particular participants are “on stage,” different languages have different ways of keeping track of them, via a “chain-of-reference” ... Greek grammar is quite different from English; and in the Greek, an individual may never be referred to by either a noun or pronoun, but only by the endings of the verbs.²⁸

Ellipsis chain-of-reference personal pronouns can include, for example, *him, her, he, she, them, you*, and also *this, these*. These can be implicitly deduced based on the verb inflections.

Pattern 3. Connectors and prepositions: Connectors and prepositions that English would include are

Table 1: Ellipsis Categories and Koine Greek Grammatical Omissions and Number of Ellipses in Each Category

The *italicized* words are words included in the King James Bible that were not present in the handwritten Koine Greek grammar. Ellipsis words are shown in *{brackets and italics}*. Words that provide context are **bolded**.

| Grammatical Pattern | Reference* | Example Verse Reference | Example Verse | Number of Ellipses | | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|--------------------|------------|-----------------|-------------|
| | | | | Acts | Luke | Pauline Letters | All NT |
| 1. Passive Voice: can omit copula verbs "to be": <i>be, is, was, were, am</i> . | V447 B70 | Acts 4:24 | You <i>{are}</i> God, who made heaven, earth, and sea | 28 | 67 | 396 | 807 |
| 2. Chain of Reference: can omit pronouns when they are known from prior context in same pericope: <i>him, her, she, it, them, this</i> . | V451 B72 | Acts 5:6 | The young men arose, wrapped him up, and carried <i>{him}</i> out, and buried <i>{him}</i> . | 140 | 156 | 214 | 948 |
| 3. Can omit connectors, prepositions: <i>and, of, which, that, even, etc.</i> | B254 | Acts 1:16 | Men <i>{and}</i> brothers, ... | 55 | 17 | 143 | 389 |
| 4. Can omit possessive references: <i>his, hers, your, their, etc.</i> | V208 | Acts 8:17 | Then they laid <i>{their}</i> hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit | 30 | 35 | 72 | 251 |
| 5. Can omit familial relationship: e.g., <i>son of, mother of</i> . | V237 B89 | Mark 15:40 | Mary the <i>{mother}</i> of James | 6 | 77 | 0 | 102 |
| 6. In introducing a quotation, can omit "I say, she was saying, he said, I wrote, we send." Also, "know that." | V554 V370 B254 | Acts 13:47 | The Lord commanded us, <i>{saying}</i> , "be light to the Gentiles" | 12 | 2 | 12 | 36 |
| 7. If elements are common to two sequential phrases, can omit repeated word(s) in the second phrase (often in parallel structure). | V554 B253 | Acts 24:16 | Have always a conscience void to offence toward God and <i>{toward}</i> men. | 23 | 17 | 72 | 201 |
| 8. Other reference as per prior context in same pericope. Also, verb = noun. | V444 | Acts 15:23 | they wrote <i>{letters}</i> (or <i>writings</i>) (omitted noun linked to verb) | 31 | 12 | 71 | 214 |
| 9. Insertion not needed in modern English (although appearing in KJV). | - | Acts 25:15 | Elders...desiring <i>{to have}</i> judgment against him. | 12 | 10 | 23 | 68 |
| 10. All <i>men</i> , any <i>men</i> , no <i>man</i> in ESV read as <i>all, everyone, anyone, none</i> | B143 ESV | Acts 1:24 | You, Lord, know the hearts of all <i>{men}</i> (i.e., <i>everyone</i> , or all) | 5 | 3 | 15 | 52 |
| 11. Greek <i>hoytos</i> = this one (translated as this <i>{man}</i> or this <i>{fellow}</i> in KJV, etc.) | Thayer | Luke 23:52 | Joseph...of Arimathaea...this one <i>{man}</i> | 1 | 7 | 0 | 21 |
| 12. <i>Man, men</i> : Can omit when context given previously in same pericope. | B143 | Acts 10:1,2 | Cornelius...a devout <i>{man}</i> that feared God and gave alms | 2 | 3 | 5 | 24 |
| 13. Can omit weak head noun linked to an adjectival phrase—primarily inanimate concepts: e.g., next <i>{day}</i> , hilly <i>{land}</i> . | V468 V554 B125 | Acts 21:8 | And the following <i>{day}</i> , we departed and came to Caesarea. | 15 | 11 | 5 | 50 |
| 14. Can omit first noun in a "noun of noun" clause: e.g., <i>{part}</i> of the price. | V444 B118 B254 | Acts 5:2 | Ananias...kept back <i>{part}</i> of the price | 11 | 3 | 5 | 26 |
| 15. Other ellipses: supplied-in-thought from same pericope; per V and B. Also, idioms. | V245 V444 B306 V555 B254 | Acts 7:59; 8:2 Luke 14:18 | And they stoned Stephen, and he fell asleep ...men carried Stephen <i>{to his burial}</i> All with one <i>{consent}</i> (or one <i>{accord}</i>) | 15 | 4 | 22 | 66 |
| 16. Apparent conjectural emendation (if one chooses this emended wording). | ESV NIV | Acts 17:26 | God made from one <i>{man}</i> ? all ethnicities of men | 1** | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| SUMS of all ellipses/omissions | | | | 387 | 424 | 1055 | 3255 |

*V = von Siebenthal; B = Blass, Debrunner, Funk; ESV = English Standard Version; Thayer = Thayer's Greek Lexicon; NIV = New International Version.

**In Acts 17:26, if a translator chooses "He (God) made from *one man* all men," then this would be the only conjectural emendation that we find throughout this ellipsis survey. But no Greek or ancient manuscripts read that way; instead, the overwhelming number read "of one blood," while several read "of one."

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often omitted in New Testament Greek; for example, *and, but, of, even, which, so*.

Pattern 4. Possessive pronouns: Possessive pronouns are often omitted; for example, *his, her, their, your, our*. In their place, the Greek article for “the” or “a” may be included instead.

Pattern 5. Familial relationships: When identifying an individual and his/her kin, the familial relationship may be omitted. For example, “Mary the {mother} of James” (Mark 15:40). Likewise in the Luke 3:23–35 genealogies, {son} is omitted; rather, these relationships read, for example, “Joseph, which was {the son} of Heli ... Adam {ellipsis word} of God.”

Pattern 6. The verb “say”: When introducing a quotation, “say” can be omitted, such as in “I {say}.”

Pattern 7. Sequential clauses, often parallel structure: When two clauses appear in sequence, some common elements, such as repeated words, can be omitted from the second clause. However, in my research, I have never found common elements omitted from the first clause. These sequential phrases often appear in parallel structure; and this provides the framework for the reader to supply-in-thought the ellipsis words. For example, in Luke 10:41–42, Jesus admonishes, “Martha, you are anxious about many things, but one {thing} is necessary.”

Pattern 8. Other references within the same pericope: Other reference-related ellipses can include (a) an excluded noun when its meaning is derived from a previously included verb that has the same corresponding root meaning, or vice versa; and (b) an element that has already appeared in the prior one to three sentences—that is, while the reader’s mind still has the working-memory “file-cabinet” open regarding these thoughts.

Pattern 9. Unneeded KJV insertions: The KJV sometimes adds italicized words that are not really needed to understand the English text, particularly by a contemporary English reader. These KJV-italicized insertions do not appear in several of the contemporary English translations.

Pattern 10. *Pantas*: When the Greek word *pantas* (translated “all”) is used, the KJV context can follow with {men}, whereas ESV and other translations present this as “everyone” or “everybody,” or simply

“all.” Since these pertain to the Greek definition of *pantas*,²⁹ they are not true ellipses. Likewise, “no {man}” can be translated as “none” or “nobody,” and “any {man}” can read as “anyone.” Also, *pantas* can refer to “all {things}” or “everything.” In table 1, these “everything” meanings are grouped with pattern 9.

Pattern 11. *Hoytos* or *taute*: Thayer lists *hoytos* and *taute* (along with their other inflections) as demonstrative pronouns meaning “this,” “this one visibly present here,” or “the one just named in the immediately preceding subject.”³⁰ Thus, by their Greek definition, these words serve as both a pronoun and noun spliced together into a single Greek word. These do not constitute true ellipses, although the KJV sometimes presents them as “this {man}” or “this {fellow}.” Similarly, *tis* or *tis heis* can mean either “a certain one” or “a certain.”³¹ The KJV may read “a certain {man}.” This is not a true ellipsis, since “one” is included as a part of this dual “certain-one” Greek structure.³² Notably, the Greek grammar for *hoytos* and *taute* (which mean “this”) is unrelated to the grammar for *heis*, *henos*, and *mia* (which mean “one”), as discussed below.

All the ellipses categorized under patterns 1–11 sum to 3,088 (table 1).³³ Thus, these “routine” ellipses regarding Greek grammar and word meanings constitute more than 94% of all KJV New Testament ellipses.

Pattern 12. Man, men, or women as ellipsis: There are only twenty-four other times when *man*, *men*, *women*, *person*, or a similar word appears as an ellipsis word in the KJV New Testament (that is, other than in patterns 10 and 11 above). In all twenty-four cases, such ellipsis individuals are specifically identified via chain-of-reference by their proper name, by verb tense, or by the pronouns “he,” “she,” or “they” within the immediately prior one to three sentences. In none of these twenty-four instances does the reader need to refer to the Old Testament in order to “supply-in-thought” the ellipsis word “man.” The “man” ellipsis is addressed further below.

Pattern 13. Weak head nouns in adjectival phrase: A weak head noun can be omitted in an adjectival phrase. Often this occurs when an adjective is effectively used to serve as a Greek noun. The omitted head noun is often a concept or inanimate object, such as *day*, *time*, *land*, *rain*, *clothes*. This pattern

appears in Matthew 6:2,3, where “the right {*hand*} knows not what the left {*hand*} is doing.” Here, “right” and “right *hand*” are idioms in both Greek and English. Similarly, Clark and Clark noticed that English readers exhibit understanding when they view a noun that is used as a verb.³⁴

Pattern 14. {Noun}-of-noun: The Koine Greek can omit the first noun in a “{*noun*}-of-noun clause,” which hosts a preposition (often “of”) nestled between two nouns. The first noun can be an ellipsis noun. An example is “{*part*} of price” (Acts 5:2).

Pattern 15. Other ellipses supplied-in-thought from the same pericope; and idioms: There are other ellipses that can be supplied-in-thought from within the same pericope per the immediate context. For example, Acts 27:43 narrates that a centurion commanded that all passengers aboard a **grounded, sinking ship** “that could **swim** should **cast** {*themselves*} first {*into the sea*}, and **get to land**.” In this sentence, “{*into the sea*}” is understood as the ellipsis phrase, because this matches the immediate context derived from the bolded words. In table 1, quite a few of these pattern 15 ellipses are ones that have been specifically discussed by VS and/or BDF.³⁵

I include several Greek and English idioms in this category. In the Luke 14:18 parable, the KJV reads, “all with one {*consent*} ... made excuses to not attend a feast.” Per BDF, this Greek expression “*apo mias*” (word-for-word “with one”) is a “superlative expression” that could read “with one accord,” “once for all,” “all at once,” or “all together.”³⁶ This operates like an idiom.

Pattern 16. Conjectural emendations: These are words that English translations emend (add) into the text that involve conjecture on the part of the translator.³⁷ In such cases, the translator might perceive that the Greek text, as handwritten, is not only “incomplete” or “ambiguous,” but also that two or more possible meanings could be attributed to the text. Then the translator conjectures which of these meanings should be selected. This involves subjective opinion on the part of the translator.³⁸ Among all the ellipsis words that the KJV filled in with italics, I found no substantive conjectural emendations. Nor did I find any conjectural emendations among the ellipses identified by VS and BDF.³⁹ Thus, the sole conjectural emendation found among all these

evaluated passages would be “from one {*man*},” if someone were to consider this as a prospective reading in Acts 17:26.

{*Man*} as an Ellipsis: Further Discussion of Ellipsis Pattern 12

So, how would “from one {*man*}” in Acts 17:26 stack up against these other “*man*” ellipses, where “*man*” could be “supplied-in-thought”? Table 2 presents twenty-four passages in which the KJV identifies in italics the ellipses *man*, *men*, *women*, *fellow*, or *soldier* (that is, in cases not already discussed per pattern 10 or 11 above).⁴⁰ My analysis reveals that, in Acts 17:26, the proposed “from one {*man*}” emendation in Acts 17:26 does not conform to the Koine grammatical constructs or linguistic patterns employed for any of these other valid twenty-four “*man*” ellipses.

In narratives and parables, the identity of a valid “*man*” or “*woman*” ellipsis hosts chain-of-reference links on multiple occasions in the same pericope—often by specific name and also by such words as *he*, *his*, *him*, *she*, *they*; as well as by verb tenses (refer to pattern 2 above). Among these twenty-four cases, the number of chain-of-reference links that validate “*man*” as the grammatically appropriate ellipsis word was in the range of 1 to 30 (table 2).

Frequently, when “*man*” occurs as an ellipsis, it appears in an adjectival phrase that comprises an adjective plus the ellipsis head noun “*man*” that the adjective modifies. In this adjectival phrase construction, the adjective actually serves as a noun in the Koine Greek; the italicized English word “*man*” would not be needed if the adjective were transformed into the equivalent English noun. Thus, this “ellipsis” pertains to how the Greek grammar allows an adjective to be used as a noun (refer to pattern 13 above). In Acts 10:2, Cornelius is described by an adjectival phrase as being a “*eusebes* {*man*}.” *Eusebes* is formally an adjective that means “devout,” yet in this verse it acts as a noun that could be translated as the English noun “devotee.”

The ellipsis word “{*woman*}” could be inserted in Luke 17:35, where Jesus says, “Two {*women*} shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left” (KJV). Here, {*women*} is discerned by the Greek verb tense. Matthew and Luke quote Jesus as repeating this sentence structure several more times,

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such as with “two in a field” (Luke 17:36, as in pattern 13). As a practical function, these proverbs carry more eloquence and urgency when presented in their abbreviated double-parallel structure, without the ellipsis words. This eloquence-through-absence is achieved in both Koine Greek and English.

The KJV refers to a “band {of men}” in John 18:3, which gathered against Jesus at the Mount of Olives. The Greek word is “*steiran*” – a noun that designates a Roman “cohort” of five hundred to one thousand soldiers. “Cohort” appears in many English translations without the added ellipsis “men” (pattern 9).⁴¹

In the KJV, Paul’s letters include only “man” or “men” as an ellipsis word in five passages; four of these are in rigorous parallel structure per pattern 7 (such as old man/new {man} in Colossians 3:9,10).

In the Romans 5:12–21 pericope, Paul contrasts the offense and death of Adam with the resurrection and grace of Christ. In verse 17 in the Interlinear Bible, the word-for-word English reads: “For if by the offense of the one, death reigned by the one ...” Many of the representative English translations contain variations such as “one {man’s} offense,” although several do not include “{man}” (pattern 9).⁴² According to the Koine Greek grammatical patterns, “one” could be interpreted as referring to “one offender,” “one man,” or “Adam,” as all of these are referenced in this pericope immediately before Romans 5:17 (patterns 2 and 8). This Romans passage is starkly distinguished from Acts 17:26, where no such context or chain-of-reference within Paul’s speech in Athens supplies-in-thought a “from one {man}” translation. Parenthetically, please note that there is nothing in this Romans 5:12–21 pericope that states outright that this one offender Adam was the first human to have ever lived.

Another Pauline “man” ellipsis appears in 1 Corinthians 14:21, which reads in the KJV: “In the law it is written, ‘With {men of} other tongues and other lips will I speak ...’” Notably, these words “{men of}” appear neither in the Interlinear Bible (either English or Greek), nor in other recent English translations (REB, NJB). Moreover, the Isaiah 28:11 source for this does not include “men” – neither in the Hebrew⁴³ nor in the Greek Septuagint.⁴⁴ So, “men” is an unnecessary ellipsis word in 1 Corinthians 14:21 (pattern 9).

Then, in Hebrews 11:8–12, the KJV does not include an italicized ellipsis “man,” but many other recent English translations do. This passage speaks of the faith of Sarah and the “seed” of Abraham, who by faith “conceived from one {seed}.” Many recent English translations include the ellipsis word “man” here rather than “seed.” Such a {man} or {seed} could appropriately refer to either Abraham or his seed, as both have already been introduced within this pericope in immediately preceding sentences.

Peter wrote about “Noah, the eighth {person},” per the KJV in 2 Peter 2:5. However, most representative contemporary English Bibles translate this as “Noah with seven others” who were saved in the flood. These eight are Noah, his three sons, and their four wives. Importantly, in this 2 Peter 2:5 passage, it is Noah who is specifically named as that eighth {person} (pattern 2).

In summary, among these twenty-four table 2 passages where the ellipsis word “man” appears, all of these passages internally spell out who this “man” is within the prior one to three sentences of the same pericope. This stands in stark contrast to Acts 17:26, where there is no mention of any such “man” in the same pericope. Moreover, in most of these twenty-four passages, the ellipsis word “man” is a weak place-holder noun that need not be there in the Koine Greek, since the preceding adjective is being used as a noun. In stark contrast, if “man” were to be included in Acts 17:26, it would instead be a very emphatic word. Indeed, it would cause Acts 17:26 to be the only passage in the whole Bible that would definitively say that all humans came “from one {man}” (see discussion below).

Occurrence of the Combination “one man” in the New Testament

The combination “one man” is spelled out seven times in the Koine Greek New Testament—always to emphasize both *one* and *man*. For example, in John 11:50 and 18:14, Caiaphas schemes that it is “profitable for one man to die for the people.” Then Romans 5:15 speaks of the “grace of the one (*henos*) man (*anthropou*), Jesus Christ.” So likewise, in Acts 7:26, Luke and Paul had wanted to emphasize both “one” and “man,” surely the word “man” would have appeared in the handwritten manuscripts. This complete absence of “man” connotes that Luke and Paul intentionally did not say “man.”

Table 2: Passages in which “man,” “men,” “women,” or similar person-identifiers are perceived as an ellipsis, and are italicized in the King James Bible (pattern 12).

Note the English noun equivalent for the Koine adjectival phrase.

| Book | Verse | Phrase with elliptical word such as “ <i>man</i> ,” “ <i>men</i> ,” “ <i>women</i> ,” which are in <i>italics</i> . | Person | Text Type | Number of References | Pattern Number | English noun/phrase for Koine adjectival phrase |
|---------------|--------------|---|---------------------------|-----------|----------------------|----------------|---|
| Matt. | 1:19 | Joseph, a just <i>man</i> | Joseph | N | 8 | 8, 12 | Purist, innocent, saint |
| | 5:11 | Blessed when <i>men</i> revile you | G | T | 1 | 2 | They (per verb tense)* |
| | 13:17 | Prophets and righteous <i>men</i> | G | P | 11 | 8, 12 | Purists, innocents, saints* |
| | 23:27 | Dead <i>men’s</i> bones | G | P | na | 8, 12 | bones of the dead* |
| | 24:41 | Two <i>women</i> grinding...one...other | G | P | 1 | 2, 7, 9 | grinders |
| | 26:71 | Another <i>maid</i> saw him (Peter) | Unnamed | N | 1 | 9, 12 | Maid* |
| | 27:27 | Band of <i>soldiers</i> (in garden) | Cohort | N | 6 | 8 | Cohort (500–1,000 soldiers)* |
| | 28:4 | Keepers...as dead <i>men</i> | G | N | 1 | 13 | as though dead* |
| Mark | 6:21 | Chief <i>estates (men)</i> of Galilee | leaders | N | 1 | 8, 13 | leaders* |
| Luke | 17:34 | Two <i>men (persons)</i> ...one...other | G | P | 1 | 7 | sleepers |
| | 17:35 | Two <i>women</i> grinding...one...other | G | P | (verb) | 2, 7, 9 | grinders |
| | 17:36 | Two <i>men</i> in field...one...other | G | P | 1 | 7, 9 | field hands |
| John | 18:3 | Band of <i>men</i> (in garden) | Cohort | N | 10 | 9 | Cohort (500–1,000 soldiers)* |
| Acts | 10:2 | Cornelius ... a devout <i>man</i> | Cornelius | N | 13 | 8, 12 | Devotee, saint |
| | 24:5 | This man a pestilent <i> fellow</i> | Paul | N | 30 | 2, 8, 13 | real pest, plague* |
| Rom. | 5:17 | By one <i>man’s</i> offence | man/ Adam/ offender | N/T | 4 | 2, 7, 8, 9 | One offender |
| 1 Cor. | 10:29 | Another <i>man’s</i> conscience | G | T | na | 7, 9 | Another’s (parallel structure) |
| | 14:21 | With <i>men of</i> other tongues | G | T | 1 | 9 | With other tongues* |
| 2 Cor. | 4:16 | Outward man...inward <i>man</i> | G | T | na | 7 | self*; (parallel structure) |
| Col. | 3:9,10 | Old man...new <i>man</i> | G | T | na | 7 | self*; (parallel structure) |
| 1 Tim. | 5:24 | Some men’s...some <i>men</i> | G | T | na | 7 | (parallel structure) |
| Heb. | 11:11,12 | (Multitude) sprang from one <i>man</i> | Sarah | N | 1 | 2, 9 | (from one received seed) |
| 1 Pet. | 4:16 | You suffer... <i>any man suffers</i> | G | T | na | 7, 9 | Anyone (parallel structure) |
| 2 Pet. | 2:5 | Noah, the eighth <i>person</i> | Noah | N | 1 | 2, 8, 12 | Noah and seven others* |
| Acts | 17:26 | From one <i>man</i> (?) | no ID | N | 0 | none | none |

Person: G = generic person in parable, proverb, or teaching

Text type: N = narrative; P = parable or proverb; T = teaching.

Number of references: Number of times within the same pericope that the individual(s) are identified by name, or by “he,” “she,” “they,” or by gender, etc.

Pattern number: Koine Greek grammatical rule and characteristic pattern, according to table 1.

Equal noun: English noun or phrase that would be equivalent to the Greek adjectival phrase that has head noun “man,” etc.

*Equal noun or phrase that is used in at least one of the fifteen representative English translations (NIV, ESV, NET, HCSB, KJV, The Interlinear Bible, WEB, NAB, RSV, NRSV, REB, NEB, NJB, NASB, and NASBR).

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“From one {*man*}” as an Ellipsis?

In Acts 17:26, how would “from one {*man*}” stack up against these other ellipses, if one were to consider “from one {*man*}” as an appropriate ellipsis rather than as an improper conjectural emendation? Surely “from one {*man*}” would not be categorized with the Greek grammatical structures listed above as patterns 1–6, 8–11, or 14.

Note that “from one {*man*} all ethnicities of **men**” would not fit within the category of pattern 7 regarding parallel structure, because the ellipsis word should be supplied-in-thought in the second parallel phrase, but it is not. Here, the phrase structure is reversed: “{*man*}” would be an omitted ellipsis word in the first phrase, with “**men**” not appearing until the second phrase. Indeed, if such a pattern 7 parallel structure construct were to be construed regarding Acts 17:26, this would be the only place in the whole New Testament – out of the 3,255 ellipses analyzed – where one would find such a “backward” parallel structure.

Nonetheless, let us consider what such a “backward” parallel structure would look like, as a peer reviewer has requested. Upon careful consideration of the handwritten Greek text and the ellipsis parallel structure pattern, this text would be construed as “of one {ethnic group}/all **ethnic groups**” – that is, quantifier-head noun/quantifier-head noun. The Greek word for “ethnic group(s)” is “*ethnos*.” So, even here, we would not derive “from one *man*.” Please note, moreover, that this backward “one {*ethnos*}/all *ethnos*” construction would be in concurrence with very recent paleogenetic findings (as discussed below), and its meaning could be quite similar to “of one *blood*.”

With regard to patterns 12, 13, and 15, there is no context immediately before Acts 17:26, nor even any prior Acts text, that would lead the audience to infer “from one {*man*}.” Neither was Paul’s Athens audience familiar with the Hebrew traditions related to Genesis. Indeed, the primary reason that Paul was making this speech in the Areopagus of Athens was to address Epicureans, Stoics, and other Hellenists whom he knew held no prior background in Hebrew literature or customs.⁴⁵

Among these table 2 passages, there is no other case in which recent English translations have inserted

one variant word {*man*}, whereas an overwhelmingly large number of handwritten manuscripts support a different word, “*blood*.”

Cardinal Numbers Followed by an Ellipsis Noun

Cardinal numbers of two or greater are rarely followed by ellipsis nouns in the New Testament manuscripts written in Koine Greek. The rare cases where this does occur have already been mentioned: in the Matthew and Luke passages where there are two {*women*} grinding: one taken; one not. Also, there is one other such case that appears in Revelations 22:2, where the tree of life yields “twelve {*manner of*} fruit” (KJV). Recent English translations and BDF interpret this to mean either twelve “types” of fruit or “crops” of fruit.⁴⁶ Perhaps Collins would let the reader be the one to discern which.⁴⁷ Indeed, we all look forward to finding out which – sometime in glory.

Koine Greek Use of *heis*, *henos* and *mia*, Which Translate as “One”

Next, let’s consider whether there is anything grammatically distinct about the Koine Greek words *heis* (masculine or neuter), *henos* (genitive masculine or neuter), *mia* (feminine), and their inflections that have been translated as “one.” In my research, I particularly sought patterns that would justify the notion of following *heis*, *henos*, *mia*, and their inflections with an ellipsis noun such as we might include in English, even though it is absent in the Koine Greek.

The Koine Greek *heis*, *henos*, *mia*, and their inflections have been characterized as “the ordinal number one” and “an adjective.” These Greek words appear with the meaning of “one” on about 350 occasions in the New Testament.⁴⁸ In about 280 cases, these Greek “one” words are immediately followed by a Greek noun that this word modifies. Then, in most of the remaining cases, *heis*, *henos*, *mia*, and their inflections serve as chain-of-reference words in the very same manner as the English “one” does: that is, where the understood noun that modifies “one” – *heis*, *henos*, or *mia* – appears among the preceding three to ten words. Importantly, with these “one” *heis*, *henos*, and *mia* words, a following explicit noun is no more absent in the Koine Greek than in the translated English.

In addition, the Greek words for “one” appear in about sixty-five “unity passages”; usually these are followed by a noun. These unity passages emphasize that we have one faith, one Spirit, one God, and one body in Christ (as in John 17). In about eight of these “unity verses,” no noun follows “one” – either in the Greek or English – and this noun absence is clearly intentional. For example, in John 17:22, Jesus says, “that they may be one, as we are one.” Here, if someone felt obliged to follow “one” with a noun, perhaps they could choose “one oneness” or “one unity.”

It is proposed in this article that Acts 17:26 is yet another “unity” passage that is presented by Paul. Specifically, in Athens, Paul emphasized that all ethnic groups have *one blood* or *one oneness*. This *one blood* provides our image-of-God foundation upon which all other human “unities” are built.

Henos or mias in the Genitive Construction

Let us now focus on passages that use *henos* or *mias* as “one” in genitive construction, and especially in the partitive genitive or genitive of origin. These can be an adjective-noun or noun-of-noun phrase in which the head noun (second word in our case) identifies the whole, of which the genitive adjective (or genitive noun) is a part.⁴⁹ For example, relative to our Acts 17:26 discussion, the head noun would be “blood” or “man” and the genitive adjective is “*henos*.” Koine Greek employs a genitive construction, whereas contemporary English does not.⁵⁰

For the genitive – and especially the partitive genitive or genitive of origin – to be understood in all its emphases, both the head noun and the genitive adjective (or genitive noun) should be presented in the text. Or, if the head noun is an omitted ellipsis (as is rare),⁵¹ it should be readily “supplied-in-thought” by the immediately preceding context. The Koine genitive forms of “one” are *henos* (masculine or neuter) and *mias* (feminine); these two genitive forms appear in thirty-six New Testament passages. In all but seven of these, the head noun, designating the “whole,” appears in the Greek text. The seven exceptions are Matthew 6:24, Luke 10:41–42, Romans 3:12, 1 Corinthians 12:12, Galatians 3:16, Galatians 3:20, and Hebrews 11:12. In all of these seven, the implicit head noun appears in the immediately preceding passage, and generally in parallel structure. For example, Luke 10:41–42 reads, “Martha, you

are anxious about many **things**, but *henos* {*thing*} is necessary.” In most of these seven passages, English translations also leave out this head noun. Matthew 6:24 reads, “No one can serve two masters, for the one he will hate, and the other he will love, or *henos* he will cleave to, and the other he will despise.” To be understood in English, as in Koine Greek, the text need not include “{*master*}” four more times.

We connote that the genitive use of *henos* or *mias* involves strong head nouns that definitively characterize the whole that is being partitioned. This genitive construction invokes the question “one what”; and the “what” is most often explicitly written in or (infrequently) strongly implicated by the immediately preceding parallel phrase. With this genitive construction, the author never leaves a shadow of doubt as to what this “whole” is. Per this analysis, if Paul and Luke had meant “one *man*,” this word “*man*” would have surely been written down in the early handwritten manuscripts.

By the way, this analysis offers further credence to the perspective that the initial Acts 17:26 text was more likely to have read “of *one blood*,” with this head noun “*blood*” emphasized, rather than merely “of *one*,” without a head noun.

New Testament Passages with Ellipses That Involve the Old Testament

In my research, I found only four ellipsis-use passages where a New Testament author makes significant reference to a specific Old Testament passage; and in all four cases, the ellipsis word is provided in the immediately preceding New Testament context. Three of these passages were discussed above: (1) Hebrews 11:8–12, the (optional) ellipsis {*man*} or {*seed*} pertains to the just-previously referenced Abraham; (2) 2 Peter 2:5, the (optional) ellipsis {*person*} is the just-previously referenced Noah; and (3) Romans 5:12–21, the ellipsis {*man*} is the just-previously referenced offender Adam. The fourth passage is 2 Corinthians 8:15, in which Paul discusses how Greek churches had taken a love offering for their fellow-believers in Jerusalem. Then, in the KJV, Paul quotes Exodus 16:18 as “he {*taking*} much, he had nothing left over; and he {*taking*} little did not have less.” Consistent with other ellipsis grammatical patterns, notice that in 2 Corinthians 8:15, the immediately prior context, in parallel structure, alludes to an ellipsis word such as “taking” or “gathering.”

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Thus, in all four of these cases, the ellipsis words are grammatically supplied-in-thought from the short-term working memory of the New Testament pericope itself. The reader is not required to engage his or her long-term memory to recall specific Old Testament words that should be filled in.

“From one {man}”: An Outlier Ellipsis? Or a Conjectural Emendation?

In overview, if the proposed “from one {man}” reading of Acts 17:26 were to be perceived as a Koine Greek New Testament ellipsis, it would be an unusual and unique outlier in many respects.

1. It would be the only New Testament passage where the vast majority of handwritten manuscripts in multiple languages host one reading (of *one blood*), whereas the proposed ellipsis reading (from one {man}) cannot be found in any of those early ancient languages.

2. It would be the only New Testament passage where there are no references within the immediately preceding context of the same pericope as to who this “{man}” is.

3. It would be the only passage in the New Testament where specific reference to the Old Testament would be required to supply the ellipsis word-in-thought—and it would be filling in such a word inappropriately, at that.

4. Indeed, neither Paul nor Luke could have expected that the word “man” would have been “supplied-in-thought” by any of Paul’s Athens audience, who were Stoics, Epicureans, and Hellenists—Greeks who had no Old Testament background.⁵² Thus, the whole psycholinguistic rationale for considering an ellipsis word would be absent.

5. The combination “one man” is spelled out in seven New Testament passages, always to emphasize both “one” and “man.” Acts 17:26 would be the only passage where the emphatic word “man” somehow was left out of the initial text, even though such a word would surely be needed to emphasize its point.

6. The genitive words for “one” (*henos* and *mias*) appear thirty-six times in the New Testament, and always with either an included head noun (29 times) or a strongly implied head noun that appears in an

immediately preceding parallel phrase (7 times). Acts 17:26 “from one {man}” would be the only departure from this pattern.

7. It would be one of only two cases in which Paul would use “man” as an ellipsis without Koine parallel structure. In the other case of 1 Corinthians 14:21, Paul quotes Isaiah; and the ellipsis “man” that several English translations insert in 1 Corinthians actually does not appear in the Isaiah text.

8. Both VS and BDF discuss the Greek grammar and ellipses in many New Testament passages. Specifically, they both include discussion of the grammar in Acts 17:26.⁵³ But none of these Greek grammar scholars attribute “from one {man}” as a prospective ellipsis here.

9. Usually, the ellipsis word “man” is a weak, insignificant placeholder noun that follows a strong and revealing adjective—an adjective that in the Koine Greek is effectively serving as a noun. But if Acts 17:26 were to truly read “from one {man},” the “man” would be significant and emphatic; indeed it would be the only place in the whole Bible that definitively indicates that all humanity came from one “man.”

10. In this regard, both Bruce Metzger and Klaus Wachtel perceived that the scribes who were transcribing Acts would have expected to read “man” (*anthropou*) after “one” (*henos*).⁵⁴ Yet these eminent scholars and others have recognized that those ancient scribes never handwrote “man” here.⁵⁵ Why insert {man} in now, two millennia after Luke wrote Acts?

11. This {man} would be the only variant of consequence that has become popularized within a mere sixty years—and two millennia after the text’s initial writing—and in a whole different language from any of the languages that were used in handwritten Bible manuscripts.

12. Such a “from one {man}” statement would be the only biblical passage where a proposed “ellipsis” could be proven false by modern scientific discoveries (see discussion below).

In overview, the “from one {man}” reading, if perceived as an ellipsis, would be a unique outlier on many counts. Therefore, this proposed reading

should not be construed as a valid ellipsis at all. Rather, this “from one {*man*}” reading should be recognized for what it truly is: a conjectural emendation that would not match any of the Koine Greek grammatical constructs or linguistic-based patterns.

Some translators have invoked the concept of “dynamic equivalence” as a rationale for including “from *one man*” in Acts 17:26. However, Koine Greek has a word for “man”; it is *anthropou*. By means of our quantitative analysis, we can deduce that if the initial text meant *anthropou*, its authors would surely have included such an emphatic head noun here. But to the contrary, neither this word *anthropou* nor its equivalent appears in early handwritten manuscripts of any language. Therefore, “from *one man*” in this passage is not equivalent to “of *one*” or “of *one blood*,” whether dynamic or otherwise.

Why did this phrase “from *one man*” become popularized in English translations within the past sixty years, when it had no support from any early handwritten manuscripts? When would it be legitimate for English translators to depart from all extant manuscripts, and insert a word with such emphasis and significance as “*man*” here? Such an insertion would effectively be a conjectural emendation. Emanuel Tov states,

The term conjectural emendation of the biblical text refers to the suggestion of new readings that are not transmitted in the witnesses of the biblical text ... Generally speaking, over the course of the past few centuries, far too many emendations were suggested, and most may now be considered unnecessary.⁵⁶

Numerous translation scholars reject the use of conjectural emendations as merely inappropriate “educated guesses,”⁵⁷ “a process precarious in the extreme,”⁵⁸ a “counsel of desperation,”⁵⁹ “mere imaginative rewriting,”⁶⁰ “capitulations that are violations to the text,”⁶¹ and “amusing themselves.”⁶² As summarized by Ryan Wettlaufer, many scholars would say that inserting any word that departs from extant manuscripts would be legitimate “only when it is clear that the extant manuscripts cannot be right.”⁶³ Yet here, it is the emended word “*man*” that cannot be right, relative to recent scientific findings. Instead, what can be right and in keeping with recent scientific findings is the text as it appeared in all the early handwritten Bible manuscripts, which read “of *one*” or “of *one blood*.” None read “from *one man*.”

Early Handwritten Bible Manuscripts All Read “of *one*” or “of *one blood*”

The rendering, “He (God) made of *one blood* all nations or ethnic groups of humans,” is shared by many of the earliest extant manuscripts and patriarchs.⁶⁴ These include Irenaeus (AD 185), St. John Chrysostom (AD 400–401),⁶⁵ Augustine (AD 356–426),⁶⁶ the Bezae Codex (GA05, AD 400s),⁶⁷ the Laudianus Codex (GA08, AD 550s), the Armenian Bible (AD 411), several Old Latin manuscripts (AD 400s–800s),⁶⁸ the Aramaic translation (AD 400s),⁶⁹ the Syriac Peshitta (AD 400s–600s),⁷⁰ and the Arabic Codex 151 (AD 867).⁷¹ A total of 453 Greek manuscripts read “of one blood,”⁷² along with the Patriarchs Theodoret of Cyrillus (AD c466), Ephraem Graecus (d373),⁷³ Nilus Ancyranus (AD 400s),⁷⁴ and Venerable Bede (AD 709–710).⁷⁵ The earliest witness we have of this verse was as quoted by Irenaeus in his book, *Against Heresies* (AD 185), which reads “of *one blood*.”⁷⁶ Irenaeus knew and heard Polycarp, and Polycarp was a disciple of the Apostle John, who was a disciple of Jesus. Thus, Irenaeus’s quotations bring us relatively close to the time of the autograph Acts source.

The other handwritten rendering of Acts 17:26 reads, “... of *one* all nations/ethnic groups of humans.” This “of *one*” rendering appears in four preeminent Alexandrian manuscripts, namely, Codex Vaticanus (GA03, AD 325–400), Sinaiticus (GA01, AD 325–375), Alexandrinus (GA02, AD 400s); and Papyrus 74 (P74, AD 600s). “Of *one*” also appears in most (but not all) of the Coptic renderings (AD 200s to 600s).⁷⁷ It also appears in quotes by Clement of Alexandria (Egypt) (AD 215),⁷⁸ Cosmas (the Monk) Indicopleustes of Alexandria, Egypt (AD 550),⁷⁹ and in numerous Latin Vulgate manuscripts.⁸⁰ In all, twenty-one handwritten Greek manuscripts host this “of *one*” reading.⁸¹

When aiming to discern whether “of *one*” or “of *one blood*” was the earliest attested rendering of this Acts 17:26 passage, we engage in a discussion of the “Alexandrian” and “Byzantine” textual traditions (as a simplification of a far more complex appraisal). In the Acts of the Apostles, important witnesses of the Alexandrian tradition are Codex Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus,⁸² and Papyrus P74 (AD 600s). Another important early Alexandrian text is Papyrus P45 (AD 200s–250s). However, P45 lacks much of the Acts text due to the decay of its papyrus; and P45 does not include Acts 17:26. We

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identify these five manuscripts—GA01, GA02, GA03, P74, and P45—as the *preeminent Alexandrian* texts in Acts.⁸³ During the recent 160 years, scholars have held these five documents in highest preeminence when aiming to discern the initial text of Acts in the New Testament,⁸⁴ although very recent scholarship has tempered this preeminence perspective.⁸⁵

The Byzantine textual tradition had culminated in complete Byzantine New Testament manuscripts, such as Codex Angelicus (GA020), in the AD 700s–800s. On the basis of limited knowledge regarding these, New Testament scholars during the 1800s imposed “tenacious negative bias against the Byzantine majority text,” as observed in the *Editio Critica Maior* (ECM).⁸⁶ By means of this negative reasoning, if a Bible scholar could convince oneself that the Alexandrian text came before the Byzantine, then it would make sense for such a scholar to readily favor the Alexandrian. But recent scholarship has discerned that the Byzantine tradition was alive and active at times contemporary with the Alexandrian tradition—and, in some respects, active before.⁸⁷ Specifically, regarding Acts passages that pose a pure Alexandrian/Byzantine distinction, Irenaeus in AD 185 and Augustine in AD 350–420 adopted Byzantine readings twice as often as Alexandrian.⁸⁸ Moreover, when Chrysostom quoted nearly all of Acts in AD 400–401,⁸⁹ he used the Byzantine text of Acts for these distinctive passages far more often (78%) than the Alexandrian (16%).⁹⁰ The Armenian Bible in AD 411 adopted the Byzantine readings just as often as it adopted the Alexandrian.⁹¹ Recognizing these and other factors has given fresh credence to the notion that “our Byzantine manuscripts have early roots; and this puts them in a position in some cases to preserve the earliest reading in isolation of the rest of the tradition.”⁹² This perspective is also recognized by ECM:

Since the *Textus Receptus* was overcome by the scholarly textual criticism of the 19th century, there is tenacious negative bias against the Byzantine majority text ... it is undoubtedly true that the majority (Byzantine) textual tradition as a whole goes back to a very early period and that the coherent transmission of the majority of all textual witnesses provides a strong argument *for*, not *against*, the variant in question. If the bias against the text of the (Byzantine) majority of all witnesses has been overcome, then the variants transmitted by the majority will appear in a different light ... It can then

be considered with due impartiality whether or not a majority reading does in fact follow the tendency towards the fuller, easier, more smooth variant.⁹³

So, what does “Byzantine tradition” mean, and how do scholars detect it and define it? Until recently, this was a nebulous concept that was difficult to quantify, and it was hard to single out the “trees” in the midst of the vast “forest” of so many manuscripts. But in 2017, ECM presented a list of about 767 Byzantine-distinguishing passages in Acts.⁹⁴ For each of these 767 Acts passages, nearly all Byzantine manuscripts host one reading called the “Byzantine reading,” while many Alexandrian manuscripts host a different reading called the “Alexandrian reading.” These distinguishing passages include those listed in ECM Part 2, pages 9–15, plus most (forty-four) of those listed in ECM Part 1.1, page 34*. If a manuscript predominantly hosted the “Byzantine” variant reading in each of these Acts passages, it could be definitively identified as a Byzantine manuscript.

For my analysis, I have taken this one step further. Among these 767 Byzantine-distinguishing passages, I focused on those where the delineation was very clear-cut in that *all* the preeminent Alexandrian manuscripts hosted one reading, whereas the Byzantine manuscripts hosted a different reading. I identified these as passages that host a *purely* distinctive Byzantine reading, and to save space, I identify these as the “B_p passages.” My aim has been to particularly focus on these B_p passages because, for these, the Byzantine reading could not have been witnessed from a preeminent Alexandrian manuscript (since *all* of those preeminent Alexandrian manuscripts host the Alexandrian reading). I found 480 passages that host purely distinctive Byzantine readings (the 480 B_p). Acts 17:26 is one of these B_p passages: “of one blood” is the purely distinctive Byzantine reading, whereas “of one” is the Alexandrian reading. I have compiled another three hundred pages of Excel data sets regarding these 480 B_p passages, while extensively using Text und Textwert by Aland, ECM, the ECM computer apparatus, and other sources.⁹⁵

In Acts 17:26, Aland identifies 453 handwritten Greek manuscripts that host the Byzantine reading “of one blood.”⁹⁶ In contrast, twenty-one host the Alexandrian reading “of one”; and these include the preeminent Alexandrian manuscripts GA01, GA02, GA03; and P74. I aimed to make a comparison regarding how many others, among these 480 B_p passages with a

purely distinctive Byzantine reading, host a similarly overwhelmingly high preponderance of the Byzantine reading over the Alexandrian reading. I found sixty-four such passages. When appraising overwhelming preponderance for Aland-tracked passages, I used the thresholds of 428 or more handwritten Greek manuscripts hosting the Byzantine reading, while twenty-five or fewer handwritten Greek manuscripts hosted the Alexandrian reading. Also, I used comparable thresholds when appraising ECM-tracked passages.⁹⁷

Among these sixty-four passages of overwhelmingly high Byzantine preponderance, Irenaeus quoted the Byzantine reading in six passages and the Alexandrian in one passage,⁹⁸ while Augustine quoted the Byzantine reading in eight and the Alexandrian in two.⁹⁹ The Armenian text translated with the Byzantine reading in nine of these passages and the Alexandrian in one.¹⁰⁰ In all but three of these sixty-four passages, Chrysostom quoted the Byzantine reading.¹⁰¹ Among these sixty-four, there are nineteen passages where the Byzantine reading was adopted by most of the Old Latin handwritten manuscripts.¹⁰² There are ten passages where the Byzantine reading was adopted by more of the ancient languages than adopted the Alexandrian reading.¹⁰³

For most of these sixty-four passages, the Byzantine reading has been adopted by several of these patriarchs and translations, but not by others. However, significantly, there is only one passage among these sixty-four—and indeed among all the 480 B_p passages—where the Byzantine reading is adopted relative to all of these criteria, and that is in Acts 17:26. Specifically, the “of *one blood*” reading, identified as “Byzantine,” is adopted by Irenaeus, Augustine, Chrysostom, and several other patriarchs; moreover, this reading is adopted by the Old Latin and the Armenian text, and a majority of other ancient languages.

In quantitative overview, ECM tabulates 767 passages in Acts that host a Byzantine reading that is different from the Alexandrian reading. Among these, there are 480 purely distinct Byzantine B_p passages. Among these 480 B_p passages, there are only sixty-four cases where an overwhelmingly high preponderance of Greek manuscripts host the Byzantine reading, whereas a very low number of Greek manu-

scripts host the Alexandrian reading; and Acts 17:26 is one of these. In Acts 17:26, the “of *one blood*” reading is also supported by (1) numerous very early patriarchs, including Irenaeus, Chrysostom, and Augustine; (2) numerous ancient languages, including Armenian, Syriac Peshitta, Syriac Harklean, Slavonic, and Georgian; and (3) Old Latin. Notably, the ECM team and Metzger exhibited some uncertainty regarding whether they preferred “of *one*” or “of *one blood*.”¹⁰⁴ This early and sustained support for “of *one blood*” is more substantial than for any other purely distinct Byzantine B_p reading in Acts. Thus, from multiple considerations, it would seem appropriate that if any Byzantine reading warrants consideration as the “guiding line” for an initial text, then this Acts 17:26 Byzantine reading “of *one blood*” surely warrants the utmost such consideration. Moreover, this “of *one blood*” reading corroborates with recent science findings.

“Of *one*” or “of *one blood*,” Not “from *one man*”

This brings us full circle back to Acts 17:26. We have surmised that this “of *one blood*” reading of Acts 17:26 hosts earlier and more-sustained support for a purely distinct Byzantine reading than any other passage in Acts. Moreover, I can say that, following an exhaustive search, I found no extant handwritten Greek, Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, or Aramaic manuscript Bibles that read, “He (God) made from *one man* every ethnic group.” Two later exceptions that read “from *one man*” are the Arabic Leiden Codex of AD 1342,¹⁰⁵ and the obscure Latin Lectionary Π^F Monte Cassino, Archivio della Badia, 521 AA (AD 1000s).¹⁰⁶

If “from *one {man}*” is proposed as an added ellipsis word, it would be a unique outlier that stands far apart from the grammatical constructs and linguistic patterns of New Testament Koine Greek. It is quite apparent that the word “*man*” in Acts 17:26 is an emendation that is both unnecessary, inaccurate, and misleading. The author agrees with Tov, and numerous other scholars, relative to not emending biblical texts, and particularly, in not emending this Acts 17:26 passage. Matti Friedman explains:

The language of the Bible had to be clear, standardized, and not in dispute ... The text tells many truths—those on the surface, and those hidden beneath it ... It is not just that we must know exactly

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what the words mean, ... because we do not and cannot know exactly what they mean. Perhaps we did once, and perhaps we will again one day, but for now, the information must be preserved even if it is beyond our understanding ... If we even change a short vowel to a long one, we may lose knowledge that God wanted us to have, even if we don't know why.¹⁰⁷

In this article, it is posed that recent science discoveries have revealed to us why we should have always kept Acts 17:26 as it was initially written: “of *one blood*” or “of *one*.”

Acts 17:26 in Context of the Bible and Science

We can glean from Acts 17:26 that God made all humans of one bloodline; and this is consistent with science, paleogenetics, and anthropology. Darwin used “similar *blood*” to depict observable similarities among species, such as among horses, donkeys, and zebras,¹⁰⁸ although neither he nor any of his contemporaries had yet uncovered the genetic code that dictated this similarity. Notably, during the past 150–200 years, anthropological evidence has pointed to a complex human lineage. Also, during the most recent five to twenty years, genetic evidence has pointed to a very tight “one bloodline” of ethnicity among all humanity. This genetic bloodline may have been as narrow as thousands in effective population, who were living in various pockets of Africa as recently as 50,000–200,000 years ago.¹⁰⁹

We now have the textual, anthropological, and genetic evidence to recognize that this “from one *man*” insertion is a conjectural emendation. For 1,500 years, scribes painstakingly hand-copied the Acts manuscripts. During this time, they had no scientific evidence that would keep them from handwriting “from *one man*” in Acts 17:26. Yet they remained disciplined in not writing “*man*” because they did not witness that reading in any manuscript they had accessed. Rather, they faithfully copied “of *one*” or “of *one blood*.”

The Apostle Paul said, “... we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age ... we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages ...” (1 Cor. 2:6–7, ESV). These inspired authors, faithful scribes, and fervent patriarchs—throughout one and one-half millennia—may

not have fathomed the full depth of humanity’s common bloodline secret. But now, via scientific discovery, we are unveiling God’s secrets of how God created life and *adam*-humanity through God’s creative-evolution.

Consistent with Paul’s Athens oration, we now glean that all humans are genetically linked together as a single blood-related family.¹¹⁰ We are all made by God.¹¹¹ We humans from every ethnic group are all united as one blood in the image of God,¹¹² and there is no room for racial bias. ▲

Notes

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³*King James Bible (KJV), Authorized Version* (London, UK: Robert Barker Printer, 1611); Jay P. Green, ed., *The Interlinear Bible*, with Textus Receptus (Received Text) (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984); M. P. Johnson, ed., *World English Bible (WEB)* [revision of the American Standard Version of 1901] (Colorado: Rainbow Missions, 2000, copyright waived); and Desiderius Erasmus, *Novum Testamentum*, 2nd ed. (Basel, Switzerland: Johann Froben, 1519). Digitized by Princeton Theological Seminary Library, 2011.

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⁸*New American Standard Bible (NASB)* (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1971).

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- Professor of New Testament Interpretation and Associate Dean at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, and review scholar for ESV translation, email message to author, 2020; and Darrell L. Bock, Senior Research Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, TX, and review scholar for ESV translation, email message to author, 2020.
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Acts 17:26: God Made of One [Blood]—Not of One Man—Every Ethnic Group of Humans

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