

A 'MAJORITY' READING FOR JAMES 3.3
SUPPORTED BY BOTH EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL EVIDENCE

William Varner

The Master's College and Seminary, Santa Clarita, CA, USA

In this article I propose the adoption of a different textual reading in Jas 3.3a from what is found in the critical texts of NA^{27/28} and UBS⁴. These editions read as follows: εἰ δὲ τῶν ἵππων τοὺς χαλινοὺς εἰς τὰ στόματα βάλλομεν εἰς τὸ πείθεσθαι αὐτοὺς ἡμῖν, καὶ ὅλον τὸ σῶμα αὐτῶν μετάγομεν ('If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can also turn the whole animal'). I suggest that ἴδε instead of εἰ δὲ has both older external evidence and a better argument from internal evidence for its adoption.

This preference alters the beginning of the verse from being the protasis of a conditional sentence to becoming the first of two primary clauses. In this suggested reading, the first clause then would consist of an imperative command ἴδε, 'look', which has been translated traditionally as 'behold'. In this reading, therefore, the protasis and apodosis in the conditional sentence are changed to an orienter and two coordinate indicative clauses as follows: 'Look! We put bridles into the mouths of horses so that they obey us and we guide their whole bodies.' This is also the translation in the Authorized Version, although the reading of the Textus Receptus at this point (ἰδοῦ) is based on only one late manuscript (1874), one Father (sixth-century Pseudo-Oecumenius) and one version (Old Church Slavonic). This ἰδοῦ differs from the 'Majority Text' reading of ἴδε that is found in C, P and a large representation of Byzantine manuscripts. This singular reading in the Textus Receptus appears to represent an effort to assimilate with the two occurrences of ἰδοῦ in 3.4 and 5.¹ Other manuscript representatives

1. The Textus Receptus followed the reading by Erasmus in his *Novum Instrumentum* although the *Complutensian Polyglot*, printed earlier than Erasmus's but

of the Alexandrian, Western and Byzantine families contain εἰ δέ.² These readings are complicated, however, by the unique EΙΔΕ ΓΑΡ in Codex Sinaiticus. The presence of the consequential conjunction γάρ makes for a rather complicated clausal structure if the previous letters are read as the conditional particle εἰ and the conjunction δέ. The complication of these variant readings is better understood when the practice of itacism among scribes is recognized. It is well known among students of the discipline that the diphthong ει and the letter ι were pronounced similarly in ancient times, and such is the case today in Modern Greek (the English sound 'ee'). This situation gave rise to the occasional scribal practice of writing ει for ι or vice versa.³ Thus the seemingly odd EΙΔΕ ΓΑΡ in Sinaiticus may be intended to convey

published later, has ἰδέ. It is rather strange that Erasmus used ἰδοῦ because the only manuscript he utilized that included James was miniscule 1, which surprisingly has εἰ δέ. Erasmus did not simply translate the Latin over into Greek because his Latin text has the conditional particle *si*, as does the Vulgate. I have not been able to answer the question why Erasmus adopted ἰδοῦ without any evident textual support, unless it was his own decision to assimilate the word to the later appearances of ἰδοῦ in vv. 4 and 5. The second edition of Erasmus's work was printed in 1519 and the title was changed then to *Novum Testamentum*. It was the third edition of 1522 that became the basis of William Tyndale's *English New Testament* (1526), and was the first one to contain the infamous 'Comma Johanneum' (1 Jn 5.7b-8a). A helpful discussion of the circumstances and procedures surrounding the printing of the *Novum Instrumentum* and successive editions can be found in William W. Combs, 'Erasmus and the Textus Receptus', *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 1 (1996), pp. 35-53.

2. Some of the textual information in this paragraph is supplied by the NA²⁸: 'ἰδέ 81. 442. 642. 1175. 1448. 1739 Byzpt syh mss | εἰδε (= ἰδε?) γαρ N* syh ms.' This should now be supplemented by the *Editio Critica Maior*, which lists 81 additional manuscripts containing ἰδέ (2 majuscules, 79 minuscules), plus 10 lectionaries, and the Armenian version. The rest of the manuscript tradition has εἰ δέ (4 majuscules, 57 minuscules plus Latin and Coptic versions). See B. Aland *et al.*, (eds.), *Novum Testamentum Graece: Editio Critica Maior*, IV (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2013), pp. 48-49.

3. For the issue of itacism and the common interchange of ει and ι, see F.T. Gignac, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods. I. Phonology* (Milan: Cisalpino, 1976), pp. 189-93. The role of itacism in the textual tradition of the New Testament is discussed in C.C. Caragounis, *The Development of Greek and the New Testament: Morphology, Syntax, Phonology, and Textual Transmission* (WUNT, 167; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), pp. 496-546.

an original ἴδε.⁴ (See the end of the article for an image of Jas 3.3a in Codex Sinaiticus.)

Due to the diversity of readings among the manuscripts and because of the distinct possibility of scribal itacism, the UBS committee gave a {C} rating to εἰ δέ in their text. Some of the committee members believed that εἰ δέ was the more difficult reading, an issue that we will address later. The diplomatic advice of Metzger is as follows: ‘The editor must choose the reading that, in his judgment, is most appropriate in the context.’⁵

Although normally reticent to dissent from the readings of the two critical texts of NA^{27/28} and UBS⁴, I have chosen to follow Metzger’s advice about context and suggest the adoption of the ἴδε variant for the five following reasons, each of which is based on what textual scholars call internal evidence.⁶ (1) In every other case in which the conditional εἰ δέ appears in James, the δέ clearly expresses an idea that is adversative to what he has just stated (1.5; 2.9, 11; 3.14; 4.11). Such an adversative idea is *not* the case if there is a conditional sentence beginning 3.3. (2) If 3.3 is a conditional sentence, the καί that initiates the proposed apodosis (καὶ ὄλον τὸ σῶμα αὐτῶν μετάγομεν) seems to be

4. Other examples of this specific type of itacism may be illustrated by the variant readings in a few minuscules reading ἴδετε rather than εἴδετε in Phil. 1.30 and εἴαται rather than ἴαται in Mk 5.29. It also appears as the singular πραξίς in the title ‘Acts of the Apostles’ in Codex Bezae (D) and in P⁷⁴ (at the end of the manuscript).

5. B.M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2nd edn, 1994), p. 611. Whenever Metzger mentions a majority vote of the committee and then includes the minority opinion, it implies that Metzger himself was part of the minority vote.

6. This is not the place to enter into a discussion of the text-critical approaches that have been called ‘reasoned eclecticism’ and ‘thorough eclecticism’. Suffice it to say that the decisions that have led to the readings adopted in the editions of Nestle-Aland through the 27th edition reflect the reasoned eclecticism approach. Thorough eclecticism, with its strong emphasis on internal evidence, has been associated with the British scholars G.D. Kilpatrick and J.K. Elliott. Although I am more sympathetic to reasoned eclecticism, the use of internal evidence combined with early external attestation as evidenced in this article indicates that there is room for a ‘balanced eclecticism’ that sees the value of all the evidence being brought to bear on each individual case. Nor is this the place to analyze the ‘coherence based genealogical method’ that is reflected in some of the textual decisions in the Catholic Epistles of NA²⁸, because the texts of NA^{27/28} are identical in Jas 3.3.

out of place. Although English translators have recognized this by rendering it as 'also', it is not the normal role of an apodosis in a conditional sentence to add new information to the protasis, but rather to show the result of fulfilling the hypothetical condition in the protasis. (3) Because James uses the aorist middle imperative of *ὀράω* (*ἰδοῦ*) to call attention to the ship/rudder in 3.4 and to the fire/forest in 3.5a, the parallelism is more evident if he uses the aorist active imperative of *ὀράω* (*ἴδε*) in 3.3. This parallelism can be seen as follows by underlining the paralleled imperatives:

ἴδε τῶν ἵππων τοὺς χαλινούς εἰς τὰ στόματα βάλλομεν εἰς τὸ πείθεσθαι αὐτοὺς ἡμῖν...

ἰδοῦ καὶ τὰ πλοῖα τηλικάῦτα ὄντα καὶ ὑπὸ ἀνέμων σκληρῶν ἐλαυνόμενα...

ἰδοῦ ἡλίκον πῦρ ἡλίκην ὕλην ἀνάπτει.

(4) The *καί* in its postpositive position in 3.4 appears to refer back to the preceding illustration in a way that is consistent with the idea that James desires to call attention to the previous command to 'look' at something 'also' in the natural processes of life. (5) Although Metzger informs us that a majority of the UBS committee members preferred *εἰ δέ* as the more difficult reading,⁷ could not the very same point be made about *ἴδε*, because it breaks the parallelism with *ἰδοῦ* in 3.4 and 5? If someone objects that it would be inconsistent to utilize both *ἴδε* and *ἰδοῦ* in such a close context, it should be noted that the following passages have these two different imperative forms utilized together in quite close context: Sir. 2.1 (LXX); Mk 3.32, 34; Mt. 25.6, 20, 22, 25; Jn 16.29, 32; and Gal. 1.20; 5.2.

J.B. Mayor also effectively defends the *ἴδε* reading at this point. He informs us that James also interchanges the active voice of *αἰτεῖτε* and the middle voice of *αἰτεῖσθε* in the same verse (4.3). This is the very same type of shift that I am proposing in 3.3. He even suggests that the difference between the voices in 3.3, 4 is that the middle voice calls for the subject to become more involved in the action that is commanded: 'Look at the details of the ship and its rudder'.⁸ Whether or not

7. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, p. 611.

8. J.B. Mayor, *The Epistle of St James: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Comments* (London: Macmillan, 3rd edn, 1910), pp. 418-20. See also J. Cantinat, *Les épîtres de Saint Jacques et Saint Jude* (Paris: Gabalda, 1973), *in loc.*

Mayor's explanation of the middle voice validates the variation in the voice of the imperatives elsewhere, these combined arguments for the preference of the ἴδε reading seem compelling enough to me to adopt it with less than the normal caution expected in a variant reading.⁹

The singular insertion of the ΓΑΡ after ΕΙΔΕ in Sinaiticus also must have concerned a corrector since he placed four dots above the questionable word. The corrector may have assumed that ΕΙΔΕ should be read as εἰ δέ and saw the grammatical difficulty of a conditional particle followed by two conjunctions. If the ΕΙΔΕ is understood as itacism for ἴδε, however, the original scribe of Sinaiticus intended for it to be read as 'For look, we put bridles'. His intention then was probably to view the imperative in 3.3 as support for the point that he had just made in 3.2, namely that a mature man is able to bridle his whole body. James's fondness for asyndeton, however, does not demand such a connecting conjunction.

While some scholars obviously think that the weight of the external evidence of manuscript age and quality tilts toward the reading εἰ δέ, the internal evidence of context and discourse considerations ought also to be given serious consideration in this passage. Furthermore, with the probable support for ἴδε from Sinaiticus, the reading does have some significant early manuscript support.

My conclusion, therefore, is that the function of both discourse markers ἴδε and ἰδοὺ call attention to the three examples from natural life—the horse/bridle, the ship/rudder and the fire/forest—and also effectively combine to make a powerful rhetorical argument for the unexpected (for its size) power of the tongue, both for good and for evil. Therefore, James asks us, yea even commands us, to 'look' at them with serious attention!¹⁰

9. At least one edition of the Greek New Testament adopts the suggested reading ἴδε, probably on the strength of its use by the majority of the manuscript tradition (Zane Hodges and A.F. Farstad [eds.], *The Greek New Testament according to the Majority Text* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982], p. 681).

10. This article was adapted and expanded from my commentary on James. See William Varner, *James* (Evangelical Exegetical Commentary; Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), *in loc.* Jas 3:3.

The Singular Reading of James 3:3a in Codex Sinaiticus

(image from Bible Works)

