

## Mt 23:38 Does P77 omit ἔρημος ?

NA<sup>27</sup> Matthew 23:38 ἰδοὺ ἀφίεται ὑμῖν ὁ οἶκος ὑμῶν ἔρημος. 39 λέγω ...

omit: P77?, B, L, ff<sup>2\*</sup>, Sy-S, sa, bo<sup>pt</sup>, mae-2, NA<sup>25</sup>, WH, Weiss

P77 (200 CE, POxy 2683 + 4405) is doubtful. According to the ed.pr. it reads:  
αφειεται υμιν ο [ c. 8 ]. λε

The editors write: "The trace before λε is much more like **C** than **N**."

This cannot be confirmed from the image: Only a small dot before the λ can be seen. The λε is quite certain. The dot could be the top right edge of a **C**, but it could also be the remains of a **N**. Below the dot the papyrus breaks off.

K.S. Min (ANTF 34, p. 196 + 209 reconstructs: [οικος υμων]. λε[γω

Min's complete reconstruction of the papyrus page (p. 209) seems to suggest an omission of ἔρημος. It looks convincing. (In principle it is also possible that P77 omits singularly ὑμῶν.)

P.M. Head writes regarding P77, Tyndale Bulletin 51 (2000), pp. 1-16:

"In fact P<sup>77</sup> does not read ἔρημος at all, except for what the original editors thought was a part of a sigma at the edge of the old fragment. The announcement of a new piece of the same page held out the prospect of further clarity on this subject, but unfortunately it remains lost between the two fragments. Close examination of the papyrus casts doubt on whether the extant ink is really part of a sigma at all (as to read it as a sigma creates another problem that requires a unique variant to be postulated in the intervening space). It seems more likely that P<sup>77</sup> should be read as a witness for the shorter reading here, which while not itself decisive, is an important contribution to an interesting, although comparatively minor problem."

He adds on the textualcriticism list (Dec. 2005): "I did work both with the texts themselves - this included the use of some old but helpful microscopes in the Papyrology Room in the Ashmolean in Oxford - and with good photos."

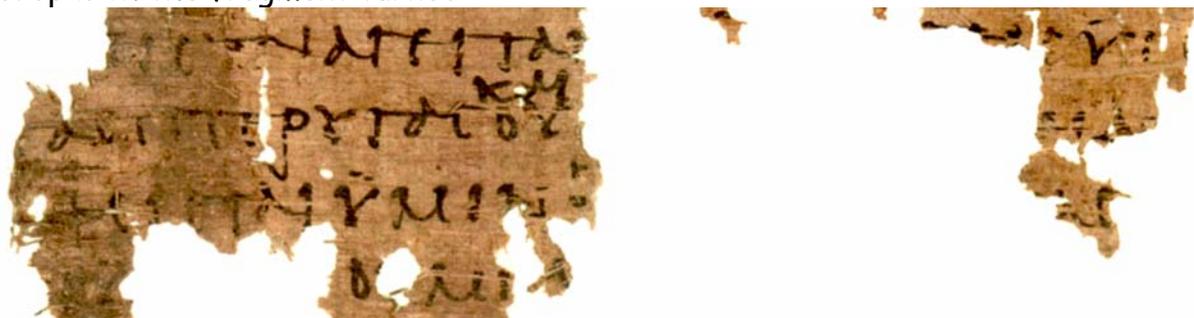
Let's have a look at the evidence:

Here's the image:

Note that the little fragment at the bottom is rotated by about 45 degrees.



Crop with the fragment turned:



And with reconstruction:



ΤΑΣΠΤΕΡΥΓΑΣΟΥΚΗΘΕΛΗΣΑΤΕΙΔΟΥ

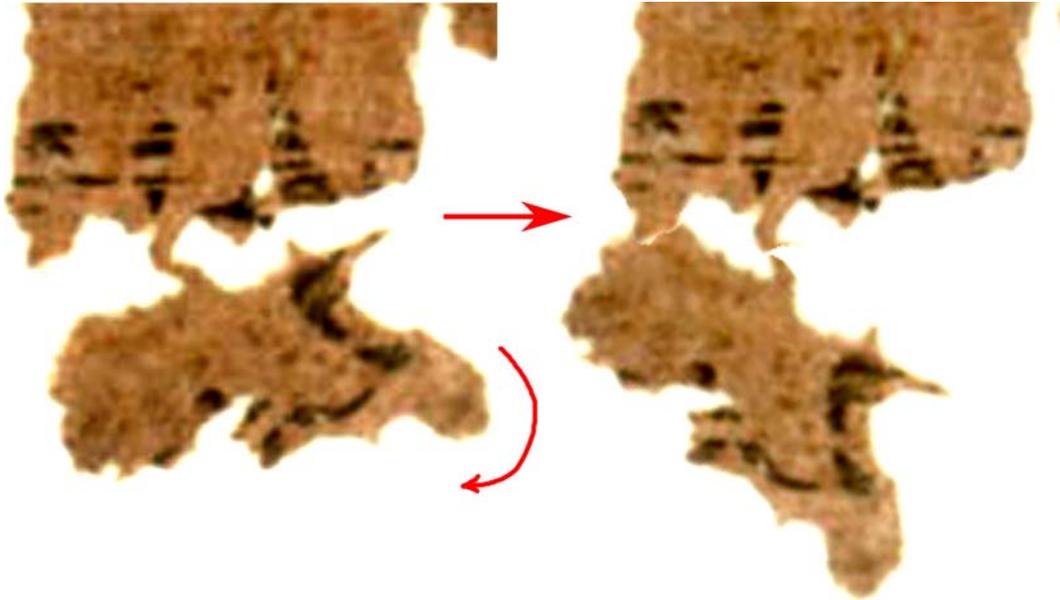
ΑΦΕΙΕΤΑΙΥΜΙΝΟΟΙΚΟΣΥΜΩΝΛΕΓΩ

(green = visible letters)

If the letters on the right are really λϵ from λεγω of the beginning of verse 39, then the reconstruction without ἔρημος is certain.

Are the letters λϵ ?

First we have to turn the fragment by about 45 degrees.



Basically the λ could also be the remains of an Ν, from ΥΜΩΝ.

So, either without ἔρημος, this would be:

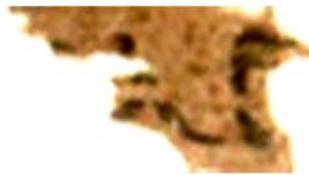
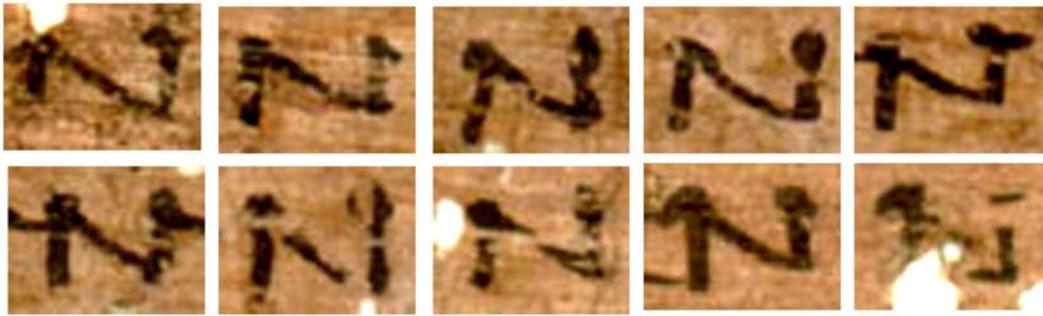
Α ΦΕΙΕΤΑΙ ΥΜΙΝ ΟΙΚΟΣ ΥΜΩΝ ΛΕΓΩ

Or with ἔρημος, this would be:

Α ΦΕΙΕΤΑΙ ΥΜΙΝ ΟΙΚΟΣ ΥΜΩΝ ΕΡΗΜΟΣ

The question therefore is, if the Lambda is really a Lambda.

Here are some letters for comparison:  
In the middle is the letter in question.



I think it is pretty clear from this that the letter is indeed a Lambda. And if this is so, then the space is not sufficient for including ἔρημος. The only possibility left then is (as proposed by the editors) that the papyrus omitted singularly ὑμῶν. But I think this is very improbable.

Conclusion:

I agree with Peter Head against the original editors: P77 does not read ἔρημος.