

Defining ‘Preservation’ #2

We understand that the human authors of Scripture wrote under inspiration, by which we mean that the Holy Spirit superintended the process with the result that they wrote just what He wanted them to write (respecting the norms that rule the use of language). The authors were inspired, protected from error, but not the copyists down through the years. There is nothing like actually collating a number of MSS to give one an appreciation for the divine preservation of the Text, a process more complicated than inspiration. (Satan was not allowed to interfere in the inspiring, but was in the preserving.)

The purpose of this note is to ‘chew’ a bit on the question of just how to evaluate a copy’s representation of its archetypal form, and hence its preservation thereof. I consider that the following should not be regarded as ‘variants’, or deviations from the archetype:

- 1) Whether a number is written out or given with the letters;
- 2) Whether a letter (*alpha*) is written out or given with the letter;
- 3) Abbreviations or ‘shorthand’ forms (these are especially frequent at the end of a line), where the identity of the word and its meaning are not touched; the so-called ‘nomina sacra’ are probably the best known examples.

Both parchment and ink were prepared by hand, and were hard to come by, so any legitimate means of economizing those materials would be viewed as entirely appropriate. This attitude is reflected in the first three items.

- 4) Copyists would often give expression to an artistic bent with the top line of a page and the end of lines, using flourishes, curlicues, exaggerated forms, lines running off the page, and such—these should be ignored.
- 5) Alternate spellings of the same word, where the identity of the word and its meaning are not touched. This one is a bit more bothersome than the others, but I think it should be included in the list. However, such differences can be useful in identifying sub-groups. I include here alternate spellings of a transliterated foreign word, as in Mark 5:41 (the more so, in this case, since it is translated).
- 6) Where the order of words is changed, but that change does not affect the meaning in any way (apparently), they are two ways of saying the same thing. Such are not ‘proper’ variants, although they may be useful in identifying subgroups. Some changes in word order do affect the nuance, so each case needs to be evaluated individually. For example: in Luke 10:41, is it ο Ιησους ειπεν αυτη, or is it ~ 3412? Both mean simply “Jesus said to her”.

I am changing the way I describe the performance of MSS with reference to their archetype. A MS that reproduces the archetypal form without any variants is a copy that represents the archetype perfectly. A MS that has only different ways of saying the same thing is a copy that represents the archetype completely. In this second category I include MSS that have only alternate forms and/or corrections to the archetypal form—the true reading is preserved in every case. I also include here the

repeating of a letter or syllable going from one line to the next (not a ‘proper’ variant in any case).

I will now list what I have found so far in terms of perfect or complete representatives of the Family 35 archetype, book by book.

Matthew: The first hand of GA 2554 is perfect.

Mark: GA 35 is complete.¹

Luke: GA 2382 is virtually complete. In 2:40, instead of *επ αυτω*, it has *επ αυτο* (there is a split in the family at this point). The preposition *επι* works with both the dative and the accusative cases, and the translation will be the same: “The grace of God was upon him”. If these are two ways of saying the same thing, then 2382 is complete; if not, it is off by one letter for the whole book!

John: GA 2382 is complete.

Acts: GA 35 is all but complete. In 1:11, instead of *ουτος Ιησους*, it has *ουτος ο Ιησους*. A demonstrative pronoun defines, even more than a definite article, so the article is redundant here; so they are two ways of saying the same thing: “this very Jesus”. In 26:29 Paul is defending himself before king Agrippa. Instead of *ευξαμην*, ‘I would pray’, it has *ευξαμην*, ‘I do pray’. The indicative is more direct than the optative, but the difference in meaning is slight. If these are not two ways of saying the same thing, then 35 is off by one letter, for the whole book of Acts!

Romans: GA 1482, 2554 and 2723 are perfect; 35 is complete.

1 Corinthians: GA 2554 is perfect.

2 Corinthians: GA 2554 is perfect; 35 is complete.

Galatians: GA 204, 1100, 1637, 1865, 2554 and 2587 are perfect; 35 is complete.

Ephesians: GA 928, 1864, 2554 and 2723 are perfect.

Philippians: GA 35, 204, 1072, 1864, 1865, 2554 and 2723 are perfect.

Colossians: GA 18, 444, 1732, 1864, 2554 and 2723 are perfect; 35, 1075, 1503 and 1725 are complete.

1 Thessalonians: GA 18, 824, 928, 1855, 1864 and 2723 are perfect; 35, 1865 and 2554 are complete.

2 Thessalonians: GA 18, 35, 204, 394, 928, 1072, 1075, 1249, 1503, 1637, 1768, 1864, 1865, 2554 and 2723 are perfect.

¹ AG 586; in 10:35 the sons of Zebedee are making a request: “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we (*ημιν*) may ask”. Instead of that, 586 has: “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever ye (*υμιν*) may ask”—manifest nonsense. The two letters received the same pronunciation, so someone hearing the text read would understand the first person without question. Even someone reading the text would perceive the obvious error and correct the text in his mind. Since 586 has only this one variant for the whole book, one letter, it is virtually perfect.

1 Timothy: GA 1761 and 2554 are perfect; 35 is complete.

2 Timothy: GA 824, 1072, 1075 and 1864 are perfect; 1865 and 2723 are complete.

Titus: GA 35, 1072, 1503, 1855, 1864, 1892, 2080, 2587 and 2723 are perfect.

Philemon: 29 out of 36 MSS are perfect.

Hebrews: GA 2554 is perfect; 35, 1637, and 2723 are complete.

James: GA 18, 1864, 2554 and 2723 are perfect; 35 and 2221 are complete.

1 Peter: GA 1865, 2554 and 2723 are perfect; 35 is complete.

2 Peter: GA 35, 1725, 1864, 2554 and 2723 are perfect.

1 John: GA 204, 824, 1100 and 2554 are perfect; 35, 1637 and 1865 are complete.

2 & 3 John, Jude; for all three books: GA 141, 204, 386, 824, 928, 1072, 1075, 1100, 1637, 1855, 1864, 2221, 2554 and 2723 are perfect. 35 and 2587 are perfect in John and complete in Jude. Only five out of 46 MSS have a variant in all three books.

Revelation: GA 1864 is complete.²

So then, I hold a perfect copy of the Family 35 archetype for 22 books. I hold a complete copy for another three. I say that GA 2382 is complete for Luke; but if not, it is off by a solitary letter. I say that GA 35 misses being complete for Acts by a solitary letter; not bad for the longest book in the NT. **God has preserved His Text!**

Of course, when printing a text a choice must be made between competing forms [I am prepared to explain mine in every case], but since the meaning is not touched, such choices will mainly be of concern to someone wishing to apply a numeric code to the text. **The sort of changes listed above may not legitimately be used to argue against the doctrine of inerrancy.**

² It will be observed that the MSS listed above date to the XI – XV centuries, and their geographic distribution is widespread.