

# In Defense of the Objective Authority of the Sacred Text

Wilbur N Pickering, ThM PhD

## Introduction

If the Sovereign Creator exists, and if He has addressed a written revelation to our race, then nothing is more important for us than to know what He said (with a view to obeying it, if we are smart). This because such a revelation will have objective authority over us (although the Creator gives us the option of rejecting that authority [but due regard should be given to the consequences]). The enemy has always understood this better than most of us, and began his attacks early on—"Yea, hath God said, . . .?" (Genesis 3:1). Of course many books have been written, pro and con, and I will here content myself with declaring these as presuppositions that I bring to my task: the Sovereign Creator exists, and He has addressed a written revelation to our race.

The discipline of textual criticism (of whatever text) is predicated on the assumption/allegation/declaration that there is a legitimate doubt about the precise original wording of a text. No one does textual criticism on the 1611 King James Bible since copies of the original printing still exist. With reference to New Testament textual criticism, the crucial point at issue is the preservation of its Text. For any text to have objective authority, we have to know what it is.

It is often assumed by the ignorant and uninformed—even on a university campus—that textual criticism of the New Testament is supported by a superstitious faith in the Bible as a book dictated in miraculous fashion by God. That is not true. Textual criticism has never existed for those whose New Testament is one of miracle, mystery, and authority. A New Testament created under those auspices would have been handed down under them and would have no need of textual criticism.<sup>1</sup>

Thus wrote Colwell in 1952. In 1948 he was even more antagonistic.<sup>2</sup> In simple terms his argument went like this: If God had inspired the New Testament text, He would have preserved it; He did not preserve it, so therefore He did not inspire it. I tend to agree with his logical inference [if his facts were correct], only I propose to turn the tables: It is demonstrable that God preserved the New Testament Text, so therefore He must have inspired it! I consider that the preservation of the N.T. Text is a strong argument for its inspiration, and since it is inspiration that gives it its authority, the two doctrines go hand in hand. Of course my use of the term 'demonstrable' is the red flag here; anyone who has not read my recent work could argue that I am begging the question.

Objective authority depends on verifiable meaning; if a reader/hearer can give any meaning he chooses to a message, any authority it ends up having for him will be relative and subjective (the 'neo-orthodox' approach). As a linguist (PhD) I affirm that the fundamental principle of communication is this: both the speaker/writer and the hearer/reader must respect the norms of language, in particular those of the specific code being used. If the encoder violates the rules, he will be deceiving the decoder (deliberately, if he knows what he's doing). If the decoder violates the rules, he will misrepresent the encoder (deliberately, if he knows what he's doing). In either event communication is damaged; the extent of the damage will depend on the circumstances.

Several times the Lord Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as "the Spirit of the Truth", and Titus 1:2 affirms that God cannot lie—it is one thing He can't do, being contrary to His essence; "He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13). It should be obvious to one and all that the Sovereign will not take kindly to being called a liar. To interpret the Sacred Text in a way that is not faithful to the rules of Hebrew and Greek, respectively, is to ascribe to the Author the intention of deceiving us, is to call Him a liar—not smart. But to interpret the Text, we must have it, so I return to the subject of preservation. I invite attention to the following evidence, in relief of the term 'demonstrable'.

---

<sup>1</sup> E.C. Colwell, *What is the Best New Testament?* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Colwell, "Biblical Criticism: Lower and Higher," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXVII (1948), 10-11.

## Incredibly Careful Transmission

This section focuses on the Thessalonian epistles, generally thought to have been the first of the apostle Paul's canonical writings (at least in conservative circles). If so, his prestige and authority as an apostle would not yet have reached its full stature, and in consequence such early writings might not have been accorded as much respect as later ones. As I continue collating more and more  $f^{35}$  MSS I have been surprised by a different picture. I have collated twenty-one representatives of the family, so far (for these two books), and invite attention to the results.

### Performance of $f^{35}$ MSS in individual books

MS	1 Thess.	2 Thess.	Location	Date <sup>1</sup>	Exemplar
18	---	---	Constantinople <sup>2</sup>	1364	---
35	2c	---	Aegean <sup>3</sup>	XI	---
201	4/ <sup>4</sup>	2x	London	1357	4/,2x
204	1x	---	Bologna	XIII	1x
328	1/,1s	1x,1s	Leiden	XIII	1x,1/
386	1/,2s	1s	Vatican	XIV	1/
444	1s	2s	London	XV	---
824	---	1s	Grottaferrata	XIV	---
928	---	---	Dionysiu (Athos)	1304	---
1248	3x,1/,4s	4s	Sinai	XIV	3x,1/
1249	1x	---	Sinai	1324	1x
1503	2s	---	M. Lavras (Athos)	1317	---
1548	2x,1s	1s	Vatopediu (Athos)	1359	2x
1637	1/	---	M. Lavras (Athos)	1328	1/
1855	---	1s	Iviron (Athos)	XIII	---
1864	---	---	Stavronikita (Athos)	XIII	---
1892	10s	3s	Jerusalem	XIV	---
1897	1/,1c	4s	Jerusalem	XII	1/
2466	1x1/,2s	1s	Patmos	1329	1x,1/
2587	1s	1s	Vatican	XI	---
2723	---	---	Trikala	XI	---

<sup>1</sup> I give the location and date as in the *Kurzgefasste Liste* (1994), although I must admit to an occasional doubt as to the accuracy of the dating.

<sup>2</sup> Although presently in Paris, 18 was produced in Constantinople.

<sup>3</sup> Although presently in Paris, 35 was acquired in the Aegean area.

<sup>4</sup> These are in common with MS 149, with which it shares a common source.

Key: s = singular reading (until all MSS have been collated, this is just an assumption)  
c = corrected variant (variation of any kind corrected to the presumed archetype)  
x = uncorrected variant ('variant' here means that it is attested by MSS outside the family)  
/ = family is divided (a splinter group)  
--- = no departures from the presumed profile.

## Implications

I begin with the last column in the chart, 'Exemplar'. Except for 18, 928, 1864 and 2723 that are themselves perfect, most of the others have a different rating. All singular readings should be discounted; if not introduced by the copyist it was done by the 'father' or 'grandfather'—an ancestor was free of all 'singulars', so they contribute nothing to the history of the transmission, are not relevant to the tracing of that transmission. All variants that were corrected to the presumed family profile should also be discounted—whoever did the correcting, it was done on the basis of a correct exemplar (correct at that point). So I only attribute 'x' and '/' to the exemplar—of course some of these could be the work of the copyist as well, which would make the exemplar even better, but I have no way of knowing when that occurred.

Notice that of twenty-one MSS, eleven of their exemplars (over half) were 'perfect', and another five were off by only one variant (the worst was only off by six, for two books). If there were no splinters, we could be looking at twenty-one independent lines of transmission, within the family, which to me is simply fantastic.<sup>1</sup> But what about the splinters? I will discuss them in order of occurrence in the Text—there are three in the first epistle and none in the second.

- 1) 1 Thess. 2:8—35\*, 386 and 2466 have  $\sigma\mu\epsilon\lambda\rho\sigma\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\iota$  along with [30%]; 35 is corrected, so its exemplar was different. 386 is at the Vatican and 2466 at Patmos; the likelihood of a common exemplar is remote—this is the sort of variation that could easily occur independently, which would make this case irrelevant to the transmissional history of the family.
- 2) 1 Thess. 5:3—328 and 1637 omit  $\gamma\alpha\rho$  along with [2%]; this sort of variant could easily have occurred independently—1637 was produced on Mt. Athos and 328 somewhere else, presumably, so this particular agreement probably does not arise from a common dependency, and in that event is irrelevant to the transmissional history of the family.
- 3) 1 Thess. 5:3 (again)—1248 and 1897 have  $\epsilon\nu\ \tau\eta$  (~21) alone; being from Sinai and Jerusalem, respectively, this case could indeed reflect a common influence; however, the three uncorrected variants in 1248 suggest a step or two (or three) between it and that common influence.

I conclude that all twenty-one MSS were independent in their generation, and I see no evidence to indicate a different conclusion for their exemplars. Please note that I am not claiming that all twenty-one lines remain distinct all the way back to the archetype. I cheerfully grant that there would be a number of convergences before getting back to the source.

I now invite attention to location and date. The MSS come from all over the Mediterranean world. The six Mt. Athos MSS were certainly produced in their respective monasteries (five). Ecclesiastical politics tending to be what it tends to be, there is little likelihood that there would be collusion between the monasteries on the transmission of the NT writings—I regard the six as representing independent lines of transmission (five of the exemplars were not identical). MSS from Trikala, Patmos, Jerusalem and Sinai were presumably produced there; 18 was certainly produced in Constantinople; 35 was acquired in the Aegean area. The MSS at the Vatican and Grottaferrata may very well have been produced there.

Having collated minuscule 1897, I must say that it looks just as old as minuscules 35, 2587 and 2723 (that I have also collated)—so if they belong to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, 1897 must as well. As I have argued in my article, "Is  $\mathfrak{f}^{35}$  ancient?" (mailing #37, but now included in "In Defense of Family 35"), the exemplars of these 11<sup>th</sup> century MSS were probably at least a century older, and since they participate

---

<sup>1</sup> 18, 928, 1864 and 2723 were produced in Constantinople, Dionysiu, Stavronikita and Trikala, respectively—I consider it to be virtually impossible that they should have a common exemplar (of course they could join somewhere back down the line).

in splinter groups in other epistles, there must be at least one generation between them and the archetype. I repeat a paragraph from that article:

Did someone concoct the  $f^{35}$  archetype in the 8<sup>th</sup> century? Who? Why? And how could it spread around the Mediterranean world? There are  $f^{35}$  MSS all over the place—Jerusalem, Sinai, Athens, Constantinople, Trikala, Kalavryta, Ochrida, Patmos, Karditsa, Rome, Grottaferrata, Sparta, Meteora, Venedig, Lesbos, and most monasteries on Mt. Athos (that represented different ‘denominations’), etc. But the Byzantine bulk ( $K^A$ ) controlled at least 60% of the transmissional stream ( $f^{35}$  = a. 18%); how could something concocted in the 8<sup>th</sup> century spread so far, so fast, and in such purity? How did it inspire such loyalty?

However, in my position paper, “In Defense of Family 35”, I have presented a variety of evidence and argument to the effect that  $f^{35}$  is independent and ancient, dating back at least to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

I now invite special attention to minuscule 18, produced in Constantinople in **1364!** As it stands it is a perfect representative of the presumed family profile for the Thessalonian epistles (I say ‘presumed’ only out of deference to all the family representatives that I haven’t collated yet, but given the geographical distribution of the twenty-one above, I have no doubt that the profile as given in my Text [mailings #30 and #33] is correct). How many generations of copies would there have been between MS 18 and the family archetype? Might there have been fifteen, or more? I would imagine that there were at least ten. However many there actually were, please note that every last one of them was perfect! *The implications of finding a perfect representative of any archetypal text are rather powerful. All the ‘canons’ of textual criticism become irrelevant to any point subsequent to the creation of that text* (they could still come into play when studying the creation of the text). For MS 18 to be perfect, all the generations in between had to be perfect as well. Now I call this **incredibly careful transmission**. Nothing that I was taught in Seminary about New Testament textual criticism prepared me for this discovery! Nor anything that I had read, for that matter. But MS 18 is not an isolated case; all the twenty-one MSS in the chart above reflect an **incredibly careful transmission**—even the worst of the lot, minuscule 201 with its 6 variants [the ‘singulars’ in 1893 and 1248 are careless mistakes (unhappy monks)], is really quite good, considering all the intervening generations.<sup>1</sup>

Given my presuppositions, I consider that I have good reason for declaring the divine preservation of the precise original wording of the New Testament Text, to this day. I have already presented that wording for the General Epistles and for the Pauline Epistles; on the basis of the work I have already done I do not doubt that I will be able to do so for the rest as well. BUT PLEASE NOTE: whether or not the archetype of  $f^{35}$  is the Autograph (as I claim), the fact remains that the MSS collated for this study reflect an incredibly careful transmission of their source, and this throughout the middle ages. My presuppositions include: God exists; He inspired the Biblical Text; He promised to preserve it for a thousand generations (1 Chronicles 16:15); so He must have an active, ongoing interest in that preservation [there have been fewer than 300 generations since Adam, so He has a ways to go!]. **If He is preserving the original wording in some line of transmission other than  $f^{35}$ , would that transmission be any less careful than what I have demonstrated for  $f^{35}$ ?** I think not. So any line of transmission characterized by internal confusion is disqualified.<sup>2</sup>

## Incredibly Careful Transmission #2

This section focuses on 2 & 3 John and Jude. I have collated thirty-seven representatives of family 35, so far (for these three books), and invite attention to the results. I have so far identified 84 MSS as belonging to  $f^{35}$  in the General Epistles (plus another 10 or 12 on the fringes), so this sample is certainly representative, considering also the geographic distribution.

<sup>1</sup> This point deserves some elaboration. A typical ‘Alexandrian’ MS will have over a dozen variants per page. A typical ‘Byzantine’ MS will have 3-5 variants per page. MS 201 has less than one per page, and one of the better  $f^{35}$  MSS will go for pages without a variant. There is an obvious difference in the mentality that the monks brought to their task. A monk copying an ‘Alexandrian’ MS evidently did not consider that he was handling Scripture, in stark contrast to one copying a  $f^{35}$  MS.

<sup>2</sup> Things like  $M^6$  and  $M^5$  in John 7:53-8:11 come to mind. This section first appeared in December, 2006 as my mailing #41; followed by the next section as my mailing #42.

**Performance of f<sup>35</sup> MSS in individual books**

MS	2 John	3 John	Jude	Location	Date	Exemplar
18	---	1s	---	Constantinople	1364	---
35	---	---	2c	Aegean	XI	---
141	---	---	---	Vatican	XIII	---
149	---	1/	1/,1c	Vatican	XV	2/
201	---	1/	1/	London	1357	2/
204	---	---	---	Bologna	XIII	---
328	---	---	1x,1s	Leiden	XIII	1x
386	---	---	---	Vatican	XIV	---
432	2s	1/	3s	Vatican	XV	1/
444 <sup>1</sup>	---	---	1s	London	XV	---
604	1x	1/	---	Paris	XIV	1x,1/
664	1x,1s	3s	3s	Zittau	XV	1x
757	2s	---	---	Athens	XIII	---
824	---	---	---	Grottaferrata	XIV	---
928	---	---	---	Dionysiu (Athos)	1304	---
1100	---	---	---	Dionysiu (Athos)	1376	---
1247	1x,1/,1s	1/,1s	1x,1/,6s	Sinai	XV	2x,3/
1248	2/	1/,3s	4s	Sinai	XIV	3/
1249	1/,1c	---	1/	Sinai	1324	2/
1503	1s	---	---	M. Lavras (Athos)	1317	---
1548	---	---	1s	Vatopediu (Athos)	1359	---
1628	---	---	1s	M. Lavras (Athos)	1400	---
1637	---	---	---	M. Lavras (Athos)	1328	---
1725	---	---	1s	Vatopediu (Athos)	1367	---
1732	1/	---	1x,1s	M. Lavras (Athos)	1384	1x,1/
1754	1s	1/,1s	2s	Panteleimonos (Athos)	XII	1/
1855	---	---	---	Iviron (Athos)	XIII	---

<sup>1</sup> 444 is a mixed MS. In James, 1&2 Peter it is not at all f<sup>35</sup>, while in 1 John it is a very marginal member of the family.

1864	---	---	---	Stavronikita (Athos)	XIII	---
1865	---	1/	---	Philotheu (Athos)	XIII	1/
1876	2/,1s	1/	1/,2s	Sinai	XV	4/
1892	1x	---	---	Jerusalem	XIV	1x
1897	---	---	1s	Jerusalem	XII	---
2221	---	---	---	Sparta	1432	---
2466	---	1/	2s	Patmos	1329	1/
2587	---	---	1c	Vatican	XI	---
2626	1/	1/,1s	2/	Ochrida	XIV	4/
2723	---	---	---	Trikala	XI	---

### Implications

In 2 John, 2/3 (twenty-four) of the MSS are perfect representatives of the family as they stand; in 3 John the percentage is also 2/3 (twenty-four, but a different selection); in Jude just under 1/2 (seventeen); and for all three under 1/3 (eleven). Over half (twenty-one) of the exemplars were presumably perfect. Since I have the figures for all seven books (of the General Epistles), I can assure the reader that all thirty-seven MSS are independent in their generation, as were their exemplars. Cursives 149 and 201 are clearly related, as are 432 and 604, and all four probably come from a common source short of the archetype. I see no evidence of collusion, of 'stuffing the ballot box'—there was no organized effort to standardize the Text. We are looking at a normal transmission, except that it was **incredibly careful**. The eleven MSS that are perfect in all three books had perfect ancestors all the way back to the archetype, and so for the twenty-one perfect exemplars.

I refer the reader to the prior section for the explanation of how I arrive at the classification of the exemplars. So also for comments about the location and date of the MSS, except that I have added Athens, Leiden, Ochrida, Sparta, Zittau and two more Mt. Athos monasteries (the seven are: Dionysiu, Iviron, M. Lavras, Panteleimonos, Philotheu, Stavronikita, Vatopediu).

As I keep on collating MSS I have observed a predictable pattern. For the first 2 or 3, even 4, pages the MSS tend to have few mistakes, or none. If the scribe is going to make mistakes, it tends to be after he has been at it long enough to start getting tired, or bored. Quite often most of the mistakes are on a single page, or in a single chapter; then the scribe took a break (I suppose) and returning to his task refreshed did better work. I would say that the high percentage of 'perfect' copies is largely due to the small size of our three books—the copyists didn't have a chance to get tired. For all that, this observation does not change the fact that there was **incredibly careful transmission** down through the centuries. Considering the size of my sample and the geographic distribution of the MSS, I am cheerfully certain that we have the precise original wording, to the letter, of the **f<sup>35</sup>** archetype for 2 and 3 John and Jude. It is reproduced in my Greek Text (mailing #31). I repeat the closing paragraph of the former section.

Given my presuppositions, I consider that I have good reason for declaring the divine preservation of the precise original wording of the New Testament Text, to this day. I have already presented that wording for the General Epistles and for the Pauline Epistles; on the basis of the work I have already done I do not doubt that I will be able to do so for the rest as well. BUT PLEASE NOTE: whether or not the archetype of **f<sup>35</sup>** is the Autograph (as I claim), the fact remains that the MSS collated for this study reflect an **incredibly careful transmission** of their source, and this throughout the middle ages. My presuppositions include: God exists; He inspired the Biblical Text; He promised to preserve it for a thousand generations (1 Chronicles 16:15); so He must have an active, ongoing interest in that

preservation. If He is preserving the original wording in some line of transmission other than **f**<sup>35</sup>, would that transmission be any less careful than what I have demonstrated for **f**<sup>35</sup>? I think not. So any line of transmission characterized by internal confusion is disqualified—this includes **all** the other lines of transmission that I have seen so far!

## The Divine Preservation of the Original Wording of the General Epistles

As a point of departure for this discussion I will use a definition of 'preservation' written by Bart D. Ehrman:

Any claim that God preserved the text of the New Testament intact, giving His church actual, not theoretical, possession of it, must [emphasis added] mean one of three things—either 1) God preserved it in all the extant manuscripts so that none of them contain any textual corruptions, or 2) He preserved it in a group of manuscripts, none of which contain any corruptions, or 3) He preserved it in a solitary manuscript which alone contains no corruptions.<sup>1</sup>

He limits the concept of preservation in a way that verges on the creation of a straw man,<sup>2</sup> but his definition serves my present purpose very nicely. It is obvious that option 1) cannot stand, but what of 2) and 3)? As the title indicates, this paper is limited to the General Epistles; this group of seven books is one of the sections into which scribes divided the New Testament for the purpose of making copies.<sup>3</sup> Since of Ehrman's three options the third would appear to be the easiest to meet, if we can, I will begin with it.

We must first define the scope—are we looking for a manuscript that is perfect for a whole book,<sup>4</sup> a whole section, or the whole New Testament? I think it is reasonably clear that the correct answer is a whole book; after all, that is how the New Testament was written; it follows that the very first copies were made book by book (and all subsequent copies are dependent upon them). So far as I know, no one claims divine inspiration for the division into sections—over the centuries of copying this became an accepted response to the constraints of materials and time. However, since most of the extant copies reflect that division, it will be interesting to see if we can find a manuscript that is perfect for a whole section. The formal recognition of the complete canon of the New Testament did not take place until the end of the fourth century (and many hundreds of copies were in existence by that time—in fact, the main lines of transmission had been established long since), but the question there was the precise roster of books to be included, not the precise wording of the several books. Although many of us believe that God certainly superintended that choice of books, the wording was not at issue. So, we are looking for manuscripts that are perfect for a whole book.

We must next define the text—precisely what profile are we looking for; how can we know if a MS is 'perfect'? This question lands us squarely in the snake pit of NT textual criticism [and most of the snakes are poisonous]. What I think on that subject began to appear in print in 1977<sup>5</sup> and I will not repeat here what is available elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> As a tactical withdrawal I will retreat to an easier question (but I will return to the main one): How can we know if a MS is a perfect representative of its text-type? To gain time I will illustrate the theory with a concrete example. I invite attention to the chart that follows:

---

<sup>1</sup> "New Testament Textual Criticism: Search for Method," M.Div thesis, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1981, p. 40—from a copy he sent me personally.

<sup>2</sup> For a full discussion of the implications see Appendix A in the third edition of my book, *The Identity of the New Testament Text II* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> There are comparatively few MSS (about 60) of the complete New Testament (and about 150 more that have all but Revelation); because of the bulk (and the physical and financial difficulty of gathering enough leather) the four Gospels were copied as a unit, and so for the letters of Paul (including Hebrews) and the General Epistles. Acts was usually joined to the Generals, but not always, and there are many MSS (over 300) that join Acts, Paul and the Generals. Revelation was added here and there.

<sup>4</sup> Since the Autographs did not contain chapter or verse divisions, or even division between words, anything less than a whole book will not be convincing.

<sup>5</sup> *The Identity of the New Testament Text* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers, 1977)—but now please see the third edition.

<sup>6</sup> See also, "In Defense of Family 35".

## Performance of f<sup>35</sup> MSS in Individual Books for the General Epistles—raw data<sup>1</sup>

**Key:** s = singular reading (until all MSS have been collated, this is just an assumption);  
 c = corrected variant (variation of any kind corrected to the presumed archetype);  
 x = uncorrected variant ('variant' here means that it is attested by MSS outside the family);  
 / = family is divided (a splinter group);  
 h = an obvious case of homoioteleuton (or –arcton), involving a line or more;  
 i = sheer inattention (usually repeating a syllable from one line to the next);  
 --- = no departures from the presumed profile.

MS	James	1 Peter	2 Peter	1 John	DATE	LOCATION	CONTENT	Corpus exemplar
18	---	1x,2/	1s	1x,2/	1364	Constantinople	eapr	2x,4/
35	2c	2c	---	2c	XI	Aegean	eapr	---
141	1/,2s	1x,4/,2s	1c,1s	1/,3s,2h	XIII	Vatican	eapr	1x,6/
149	1x,5/,1c,7s	1x,8/,3s	5/,2s	4/,1c,3s	XV	Vatican	eapr	2x,24/
201	5/,1s	7/	3/	2/	1357	London	eapr	19/
204	1x	1/	2/,2s	---	XIII	Bologna	eap	1x,3/
328	1x,5/,2s	5/,4s	1x,2/,1s	2x,4/,1c,1s	XIII	Leiden	ap	5x,16/
386	2/	1/,1s	1/,2s	3/,3s,1h	XIV	Vatican	eapr	7/
432	5/,3s,1h	10/,6s	1x,2/,1c,1s	1x,5/,1c,1s,1h	XV	Vatican	apr	2x,23/
604	6/,1s	1x,11/,1s	4/,1c,1s	7/,1s	XIV	Paris	ap	2x,29/
664 <sup>2</sup>	4x,5/,21s	5x,9/,1c,25s	4/,1c,14s	6x,6/,14s,1h	XV	Zittau	eapr	16x,24/
757	1x	3/,1c,1s	1x,1s	1/	XIII	Athens	eapr	2x,4/
824	1x,2s	1s	1s	---	XIV	Grottaferrata	eapr	1x
928	2/	3/	3/	1/,1c	1304	Dionysiu	eap	9/
1248	1x,2/,2c,2s,2h	1x,5/,2c,3s,1h	2x,1/,7s	4s,2h	XIV	Sinai	eapr	4x,11/
1249	3/	1x,5/,2s	4/	1x,3/	1324	Sinai	ap	2x,17/
1503	1s	3/,1c	1s	1s	1317	M Lavras	eapr	3/
1548	2/,2s	1x,6/,1c,2s	1/,2s	1/,1s	1359	Vatopediu	eap	1x,10/
1637	1/,1s	4/,1c,1s	1/	1c	1328	M Lavras	eapr	6/
1754 <sup>3</sup>	2/,16s	3/,8s	2/,9s	2x,1/,13s,3h	XII	Panteleimonos	ap	2x,9/

<sup>1</sup> I collated all the manuscripts myself.

<sup>2</sup> For all its wildness, 664 has all the diagnostic f<sup>35</sup> readings, and thus is clearly a family member (albeit sloppy and promiscuous).

<sup>3</sup> MS 1754 is second only to 664 in sloppiness, but is clearly a family member.

MS	James	1 Peter	2 Peter	1 John	DATE	LOCATION	CONTENT	Corpus exemplar
1855	1/,1s	1x,2/	2/	1/,1c	XIII	Iviron	ap	1x,6/
1864	---	3/,2c	---	1c,2s	XIII	Stavronikita	apr	3/
1865	1s	---	2s	1c	XIII	Philotheu	apr	1/
1876	1x,4/,3s	2x,4/,3s,1h	4/,1s	1x,3/,1c,2s	XV	Sinai	apr	4x,19/
1892	1x,4/,2c,1s	3x,4/,4s	1x,2/,1c	1/,1c,2s	XIV	Jerusalem	ap	6x,11/
1897	2/,3s	1/,3s	2s	2s	XII	Jerusalem	ap	4/
2221	1s	2x	1x,3/,1s	1x,1/	1432	Sparta	eap	4x,4/
2466	1/,1s	1x,1/,1c,4s	1x,2s	3/,1s	1329	Patmos	eap	2x,6/
2587	2/	3/	3/	1/	XI	Vatican	ap	9/
2626	1/,1s	1x,5/	1/,1s	2/	XIV	Ochrida	apr	1x,13/
2723	---	---	---	1h	XI	Trikala	apr	---

**f<sup>35</sup> in the General Epistles/Acts—raw data**

MS	2 John	3 John	Jude	Acts	DATE	LOCATION	CONTENT	Acts exemplar
18	---	1s	---		1364	Constantinople	eapr	
35	---	---	2c		XI	Aegean	eapr	
141	---	---	---	6x,1/,7c,13s,1i	XIII	Vatican	eapr	6x,1/
149	---	1/	1/,1c		XV	Vatican	eapr	
201	---	1/	1/	23x,3c,17s	1357	London	eapr	23x
204	---	---	---	4x,7s	XIII	Bologna	eap	4x
328	---	---	1x,1s		XIII	Leiden	ap	
386	---	---	---		XIV	Vatican	eapr	
432	2s	1/	3s		XV	Vatican	apr	
604	1x	1/	---		XIV	Paris	ap	
664	1x,1s	3s	3s		XV	Zittau	eapr	
757	2s	---	---		XIII	Athens	eapr	
824	---	---	---		XIV	Grottaferrata	eapr	
928	---	---	---		1304	Dionysiu	eap	
1248	2/	1/,2s,1h	2s,2h		XIV	Sinai	eapr	
1249	1/,1c	---	1/		1324	Sinai	ap	

MS	2 John	3 John	Jude	Acts	DATE	LOCATION	CONTENT	Acts exemplar
1503	1s	---	---		1317	M Lavras	eapr	
1548	---	---	1s		1359	Vatopediu	eap	
1637	---	---	---		1328	M Lavras	eapr	
1754	1s	1/,1s	2s		XII	Panteleimonos	ap	
1855	---	---	---	6x,6/,3s	XIII	Iviron	ap	6x,6/
1864	---	---	---		XIII	Stavronikita	apr	
1865	---	1/	---		XIII	Philotheu	apr	
1876	2/,1s	1/	1/,2s		XV	Sinai	apr	
1892	1x	---	1c,1s		XIV	Jerusalem	ap	
1897	---	---	1/	2x,1c,15s,1h	XII	Jerusalem	ap	2x
2221	---	---	---		1432	Sparta	eap	
2466	---	1/	2s		1329	Patmos	eap	
2587	---	---	1c		XI	Vatican	ap	
2626	1/	1/,1s	2/		XIV	Ochrida	apr	
2723	---	---	---	1x,1/,6s	XI	Trikala	apr	1x,1 <sup>1</sup>

Now then, the text-type that I call Family 35 (f<sup>35</sup>) is represented by some 84 MSS in the General Epistles. This sample of thirty-one family members is certainly representative of the whole text-type, taking into consideration the geographic distribution as well. The question immediately before us is: How can we know if a MS is a perfect representative of its text-type? The answer must obtain for a whole book.

The first book in the section is James. Looking at the chart we observe that cursives 18, 1864 and 2723 are presumed to be perfect representatives—they have no deviations from the presumed archetypal profile.<sup>2</sup> Since 35 has been systematically corrected, its exemplar was also perfect. If we ascribe singular readings to the copyist, then the exemplars of 1503, 1865 and 2221 were perfect as well. If 18, 1864 and 2723 are copies, not original creations, then their exemplars were also perfect; and the exemplars of the exemplars were also perfect, and so on. The implications of finding a perfect representative of any archetypal text are rather powerful. All the ‘canons’ of textual criticism become irrelevant to any point subsequent to the creation of that text (they could still come into play when studying the creation of the text). Of the other MSS, 204 and 757 have only one deviation; 386, 928, 1637, 1855, 2466 and 2587 have only two; and so on. (MS 664 has thirty, most of them being careless mistakes; 664 attests the basic profile [the diagnostic variants that distinguish it from all other profiles] and is thus clearly a member of the family.)

I have referred to ‘the presumed archetypal profile’. So how did I identify it? I did so on the basis of a fundamental principle. If we have a family made up of 50 MSS, wherever they are all in agreement there can be no question as to the family reading. Where a single MS goes astray against all the rest,

<sup>1</sup> For a book the size of Acts this is remarkable, if not astonishing.

<sup>2</sup> Before I collated cursive 18 for myself, I was limited to the collation reflected in TuT (*Text und Textwert der Griechischen Handschriften des Neuen Testaments* [Ed. Kurt Aland, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1987], volumes 9 and 11), which evidently assigns two errors to the copyist; I am satisfied that there are none.

there still can be no question—which is what I argue for James above. Wherever so many as two agree (against the rest) then we have a splinter group—off hand I would say that anything up to 20% of the total would remain a splinter group, with virtually no chance of representing the archetypal reading (if the other 80% are unanimous). Where the attestation falls below 80%, the more so if there are several competing variants, other considerations must come into play.

Returning to James, I claim that we have reasonable certainty as to the precise family profile for that book.<sup>1</sup> That being so, we can now evaluate the individual MSS. That is why I affirm that the exemplars of 18, 35, 1503, 1864, 1865, 2221 and 2723 are perfect representatives of the family. To have seven perfect exemplars out of thirty-one is probably more than most of us would expect! So in James we have several MSS that meet Ehrman's option 3), with reference to the archetypal text.

But what about Ehrman's second option? When he speaks of a 'group' of MSS, as distinct from a 'solitary' MS (option 3), he presumably is thinking of a family, since they would all have the same profile, of necessity. But if he is thinking of a family, then I submit that option 2) needs to be restated. I suggest: "He preserved it in a family of manuscripts whose archetypal text contains no corruptions—provided that its precise profile can be affirmed beyond reasonable doubt." (Recall that we are speaking of actual possession of the profile.) The obvious mistakes in individual representatives can cheerfully be factored out, leaving the witness of the family unscathed. As restated, Ehrman's second option is met by **f**<sup>35</sup> in James, with reference to the archetypal text. Let's move on to 1 Peter.

Looking at the chart, only cursives 1865 and 2723 are perfect representatives of the presumed archetypal profile, but since 35 has been systematically corrected, its exemplar was also perfect.<sup>2</sup> If we ascribe singular readings to the copyist, then the exemplar of 824 was perfect as well. Of the other MSS, 204 has only one deviation; 386 and 2221 have only two; and so on. Arguing as I did for James, in 1 Peter we have four exemplars that meet Ehrman's option 3) and again **f**<sup>35</sup> meets his option 2), with reference to the archetypal text. Let's move on to 2 Peter.

Looking at the chart, cursives 35, 1864 and 2723 are perfect representatives of the presumed archetypal profile.<sup>3</sup> If we ascribe singular readings to the copyist, then the exemplars of 18, 824, 1503, 1865 and 1897 were perfect as well. Of the other MSS, 1637 has only one deviation; 141, 757, 1855 and 2626 have only two; and so on. Arguing as I did for James, in 2 Peter we have eight exemplars that meet Ehrman's option 3) and again **f**<sup>35</sup> meets his option 2), with reference to the archetypal text. Let's move on to 1 John.

Looking at the chart, cursives 204 and 824 are perfect representatives of the presumed archetypal profile, but since 35, 1637 and 1865 have been systematically corrected, their exemplars were also perfect.<sup>4</sup> The single variation in 2723 is the omission of a whole line in an obvious case of homoioteleuton, which to my mind does not constitute a proper variant reading. In any case its exemplar would be perfect. If we ascribe singular readings to the copyist, then the exemplars of 1503 and 1897 were perfect as well. Of the other MSS, 757 and 2587 have only one deviation; 201, 928, 1548, 1855, 2221 and 2626 have only two; and so on. Arguing as I did for James, in 1 John we have eight exemplars that meet Ehrman's option 3) and again **f**<sup>35</sup> meets his option 2), with reference to the archetypal text. Let's move on to 2 John.

Looking at the chart, most of the cursives are perfect representatives of the presumed archetypal profile. Arguing as I did for James, in 2 John we have twenty-four exemplars that meet Ehrman's option 3) and again **f**<sup>35</sup> meets his option 2), with reference to the archetypal text. Let's move on to 3 John.

---

<sup>1</sup> There are two significant family splits in James, that I discuss in my paper, "**f**<sup>35</sup> sub-groups in the General Epistles" (my mailing #62, distributed in September, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> There are eight significant family splits in 1 Peter, that I discuss in my paper, "**f**<sup>35</sup> sub-groups in the General Epistles".

<sup>3</sup> There are two significant family splits in 2 Peter, that I discuss in my paper, "**f**<sup>35</sup> sub-groups in the General Epistles".

<sup>4</sup> There are two significant family splits in 1 John, that I discuss in my paper, "**f**<sup>35</sup> sub-groups in the General Epistles".

Looking at the chart, most of the cursives are perfect representatives of the presumed archetypal profile. Arguing as I did for James, in 3 John we have twenty-one exemplars that meet Ehrman's option 3) and again **f<sup>35</sup>** meets his option 2), with reference to the archetypal text. Let's move on to Jude.

Looking at the chart, half of the cursives are perfect representatives of the presumed archetypal profile. Arguing as I did for James, in Jude we have twenty-four exemplars that meet Ehrman's option 3) and again **f<sup>35</sup>** meets his option 2), with reference to the archetypal text.

**But is the archetypal text of **f<sup>35</sup>** the Autograph?** As they used to say in another world, long departed, "That's the \$64 question." In my position paper, "In Defense of Family 35", I present objective evidence in support of the claim that the text of **f<sup>35</sup>** is ancient and independent of all other lines of transmission. If **f<sup>35</sup>** is independent of all other lines of transmission then it must hark back to the Autographs. What other reasonable explanation is there? If anyone has a different explanation that accounts for the evidence better than (or as well as) mine does, I would like to see it.<sup>1</sup>

So then, if the archetypal text of **f<sup>35</sup>** is the Autograph then we have met two of Ehrman's three options for each of the seven General Epistles. I maintain that in this year of our Lord 2009 we have actual (not theoretical) possession of the precise original wording of James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John and Jude!!

I have argued above that preservation is to be demonstrated book by book, but wouldn't it be interesting if we could do the same for a whole section? But of course we have—Ehrman's option 2), as restated, obtains for the whole section of seven books. Not just interesting but astonishing it would be to find a single MS that is perfect throughout a section of seven books!<sup>2</sup> And again we have!! The exemplar of 2723 fills the bill, as does 2723 itself, virtually. The exemplar of 35 has but one variation in seven books!<sup>3</sup> So recently as six years ago I would not have dreamed of such a thing.

To all those who have gritted their teeth and held on to the doctrine of divine preservation by faith, down through the years, in spite of the taunts, I say: "Be of good cheer; what we have long affirmed by faith is now well on its way to being demonstrable."<sup>4</sup> A Doxology is in order!<sup>5</sup>

The next three sections derive from my concern to demonstrate that there are no contradictions or errors of fact in the New Testament, since any such would undermine the objective authority of its Text. After I have finished preparing the **f<sup>35</sup>** Greek Text, if time and health permit, I propose to address any and all 'problems' that have been alleged to attach to the N.T. Text, providing an explanation for or a solution to such allegations. (Then I would turn my attention to the Old Testament.)

## How Often Did Jesus Say Peter Would Deny Him?

The question can be understood in two different senses, and I wish to explore them both. How often was Peter to deny the Lord, and how often did the Lord warn him? I will consider the second question first. Each Gospel records a warning—the relevant passages are Matthew 26:30-35, Mark 14:26-31, Luke 22:31-34, 39 and John 13:36-38, 18:1. For reasons that will presently become apparent I will start to discuss the passages in reverse order.

---

<sup>1</sup> Should anyone wish to claim that **f<sup>35</sup>** is a recension, I request (and insist) that he specify who did it, when and where, and furnish evidence in support of the claim. Without evidence any such claim is frivolous and irresponsible—Hort's claim that his 'Syrian' text was the result of a 'Lucianic' recension is a classic example (Burgon protested at the complete lack of evidence, at the time, and no one has come up with any since). I remind the reader that evidence must be rigorously distinguished from presupposition and interpretation.

<sup>2</sup> This would be true for the archetypal text of any group of 70-80 MSS, or even fewer. If the archetype is the Autograph, all the more so.

<sup>3</sup> If it was the copyist of 35 that introduced the variation then his exemplar would be perfect; if it was the copyist of the exemplar who introduced it, then his exemplar was perfect—finding an almost perfect representative of an archetypal text also has powerful implications.

<sup>4</sup> If God demonstrably preserved the precise wording of a text throughout two millennia, this implies rather strongly that He inspired it in the first place—otherwise, why bother with it?

<sup>5</sup> This section first appeared as my mailing #29.

## How Many Warnings?

First, John 13:36-38:

36 Simon Peter says to Him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus answered him, “Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but later you will follow me.” 37 Peter says to Him: “Lord, why can’t I follow you now? I will lay down my life for your sake!” 38 Jesus answered him: “You will lay down your life for my sake? Most assuredly I say to you, no rooster can crow until you have denied me three times!”<sup>1</sup>

Notice the distinctive context that leads into our Lord’s warning. Notice also the emphatic nature of His declaration—by employing a double negative (in the Greek text) He leaves no question but that three denials will take place before the first rooster crows from that moment on. Notice finally where and when this exchange took place. They were in the upper room where they had gathered to observe the Passover. Evidently this conversation between the Lord and Peter came comparatively early in the proceedings, because it was followed by the contents of chapters 14, 15, 16 and 17 before they left the room and went to the garden on the Mount of Olives (18:1).

Second, Luke 22:31-34:

31 Then the Lord said, “Simon, Simon, indeed Satan has asked for you (pl) that he may sift you as wheat, 32 but I have prayed for you (sg) that your faith should not fail, and when you have returned to me strengthen your brothers.” 33 But he said to Him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death!” 34 So He said, “I tell you, Peter, no rooster can crow this day before you will deny three times that you know me!”

Notice again the distinctive context that leads into our Lord’s warning. It is clearly different from that given in John 13. Notice also that there seems to be an increase in the intensity of their exchange. There is a note of reproach in Peter’s speech, and the use of Peter’s name gives a stern note to the Lord’s response. The addition of “today” (compared to John 13) and the shifting of “thrice” to an emphatic position (in the Greek text—again as compared to John) contribute to the feeling of heightened intensity. Also, now Peter will deny that he even knows Him. Note finally where and when this exchange took place. They were still in the upper room, but this conversation evidently came near the end of the proceedings, because only the contents of verses 35-38 intervened before they left the room and went to the Mount of Olives (22:39). Of course, more may have actually happened than is recorded in 22:35-38, but it seems clear that the warning recorded in Luke is not the same as the one recorded in John, and that the one in John happened first.

I find a comparison of the two warnings in Greek to be impressive and convincing:

John 13:38: “Τὴν ψυχὴν σου ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ θησεῖς; Ἀμην, ἀμην λέγω σοι, οὐ μὴ ἀλεκτῶρ φωνήσῃ ἕως οὗ ἀπαρνήσῃ με τρίς.”

Luke 22:34: “Λέγω σοι, Πέτρε, οὐ μὴ φωνήσῃ σημεῖον ἀλεκτῶρ πρὶν ἢ τρίς ἀπαρνήσῃ μὴ εἶδεναι με.”

Really, there’s no comparison; they are obviously different (even taking into account that they probably spoke Hebrew, so we are looking at a translation). As in John, here again we have a plain affirmation that three denials [at least] will take place before the first rooster crows.

---

<sup>1</sup> The emphasis here is on the obligatory absence of any cockcrow until Peter has denied [at least] three times. There is no definite article with ‘rooster’, so it is “a rooster”; the negative is double, therefore emphatic, “absolutely not”. If you have lived where there were a number of roosters, you know that one or another can sound off at any time, and some one of them will crow almost on the hour throughout the night, while at dawn they put on a chorus. It was probably somewhere around 9 p.m. when Jesus issued this warning, and Peter’s first denial probably happened at least five hours later. For not a single rooster to crow anywhere within earshot during that time required supernatural intervention—which is why I render “no rooster can crow” (if an angel can close lions’ mouths [Dan. 6:22], closing roosters’ beaks would be a cake walk).

Third, Matthew 26:30-35:

30 And after hymn-singing they went out to the Mount of Olives. 31 Then Jesus says to them, "All of you will be caused to stumble because of me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'" 32 But after I am raised I will go before you to Galilee." 33 Peter answered and said to Him, "Even if everyone *else* is caused to stumble because of you, I will never be caused to stumble!" 34 Jesus said to him, "Assuredly I say to you that this night, before *any* rooster crows, you will deny me three times." 35 Peter says to Him, "Even if I have to die with you, I will **not** deny you!" All the *other* disciples said the same.

Notice that this exchange took place after they had left the upper room and were on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane. Again the context is distinct from that in Luke or John—here the Lord begins by warning all the disciples. Peter counters by contradicting Him. The Lord's reiterated specific warning to Peter contains no new elements except that now it is "this very night". Peter contradicts again, using a double negative for emphasis—he 'has his back up' and is starting to get impertinent. It seems clear that Matthew records a third warning to Peter, subsequent to those in Luke and John.

Fourth, Mark 14:26-31:

26 And after hymn-singing they went out to the Mount of Olives. 27 And Jesus says to them, "All of you will be caused to stumble because of me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.'" 28 But after I am raised I will go before you to Galilee." 29 But Peter said to Him, "Even if all are caused to stumble, yet I will not be!" 30 And Jesus says to him, "Assuredly I say to you that you, today, even this night, before a rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." 31 But he spoke the more vehemently, "If I have to die with you, I will certainly not deny you!" And they all said the same.

The first four verses are virtually identical with the parallel passage in Matthew, so we evidently have the same time and place in both. But now we come to verse 30, the despair of those who defend scriptural inerrancy and the delight of their opponents. Our Lord's statement here differs in several ways from that in Matthew 26:34 but the main problem is the word "twice". What are we to say: Are Matthew 26:34 and Mark 14:30 contradictory accounts of the same warning?

Before settling for that explanation, the precise turn of phrase in Mark 14:30 invites our attention. I believe it will help to see a word for word rendering of what Jesus said. "Assuredly I say to you that you, today, this very night, before twice a rooster crows, thrice you will deny me." The Lord's declaration here seems quite sharp. There is extraordinary emphasis on the second "you". "Twice" is also heavily emphasized. How are we to account for such severity? Peter's effort in verse 29 scarcely seems to merit such a reaction—the reaction recorded in Matthew 26:34 seems much more appropriate. And what shall we say to Mark 14:31? Peter's words here are virtually identical to those in Matthew 26:35 but they are introduced by "but he spoke the more vehemently." Why the vehement reiteration?

I suggest that the solution is to read the following sequence. Matthew 26:30-35<sup>a</sup> then Mark 14:30-31:

Jesus: "All of you will be caused to stumble because of me this night . . ."

Peter: "Though all are caused to stumble because of you, I will never be caused to stumble."

Jesus: "Assuredly I say to you that this night, before any rooster crows, you will deny me three times."

Peter: "Even if I have to die with you I will certainly not deny you!"

Jesus: "Assuredly I say to you that you, today, this very night, before a rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times."

Peter, more vehemently: "If I have to die with you, I will certainly not deny you!"

In other words, Mark omitted the exchange recorded in Matthew 26:34-35<sup>a</sup> while Matthew omitted the exchange recorded in Mark 14:30-31<sup>a</sup>. (The editorial comment “and they all said the same” comes at the end of the whole episode.)

On three separate occasions Jesus warned Peter that he would deny Him [at least] three times before a rooster crowed during that night. Peter’s responses became increasingly belligerent until after the third warning he even contradicted the Lord with an emphatic double negative (Mat. 26:35). Finally the Lord lost His patience, as it were, and said in effect, “Listen, not only will you deny me three times before a rooster crows once, you will deny me another three times before a rooster crows twice!” For answer Peter repeats his prior statement even more vehemently.

The reader will perceive that in answering the second question I have anticipated the answer to the first one. The Lord warned Peter four times, each Gospel recording a separate instance, and there would be [at least] six denials, three before the first crowing of a rooster (John, Luke, Matthew) and another three before the second (Mark). It remains to enquire whether the several accounts of Peter’s denials will countenance this proposal. The relevant passages are Matthew 26:57-75, Mark 14:53-72, Luke 22:54-62 and John 18:15-27.

### How Many Denials?

A cursory reading of these passages suggests that Peter’s denials were provoked by eight different challenges—the maid at the outside entrance (John), a maid in the courtyard (Matthew, Mark, Luke), the same maid a second time (Mark), a different maid in the gateway (Matthew), two different men (Luke, John), and the bystanders on two occasions (John and Matthew, Mark). Although it may be possible to combine one pair or another, there is no reasonable way to get the number down to three. But what if there were at least six denials?

To really get the complete picture we need to plot the relevant information on a chart. We need to know who issued the challenge, where, when, just how was it done, what was Peter’s reaction, and if a rooster crowed. Because of constraints of space and paper size, I will do a Gospel at a time, beginning with John.<sup>1</sup>

John 18:15-27:

	1 <sup>st</sup> denial	2 <sup>nd</sup> denial	3 <sup>rd</sup> denial
Who?	the gatekeeper (f)	servants and operatives	a relative of Malchus
Where?	outside gate	by the fire	by the fire (?)
When?	at the beginning of the proceedings	a little while after the first one	a little while after the second one (?)
How was it done?	she asks: “You aren’t one of this man’s disciples too, are you?”	they ask: “You aren’t one of his disciples too, are you?”	he asks: “Didn’t I see you with him in the garden?”
What was the reaction?	he says: “I am not!”	he said: “I am not!”	(Peter denied again)
Rooster?	(no)	(no)	immediately a rooster crowed

Luke 22:54-62:

	1 <sup>st</sup> denial	2 <sup>nd</sup> denial	3 <sup>rd</sup> denial
Who?	a servant girl	a man	another man
Where?	by the fire	by the fire (?)	by the fire (?)

<sup>1</sup> A comparison of the contents of the four Gospels reveals that in the main John supplies information not recorded in the other three; he wrote last, with the purpose of supplementing their accounts. Here again, the three denials he describes are all new information, not to be found in the other three.

When?	fairly early on (?)	a little later	about an hour later
How was it done?	she looked intently and said: "This man was also with him."	he said: "You also are of them."	he confidently affirmed: "Surely this fellow also was with him, for he is a Galilean."
What was the reaction?	he said: "Woman, I do not know him."	he said: "Man, I am not!"	he said: "Man, I do not know what you are saying."
Rooster?	(no)	(no)	immediately, while he was yet speaking, a rooster crowed.

Matthew 26:57-75:

	1 <sup>st</sup> denial	2 <sup>nd</sup> denial	3 <sup>rd</sup> denial
Who?	a servant girl	another girl	bystanders
Where?	by the fire	in the gateway	by the fire (?)
When?	fairly early on (?)	a little later	a little later
How was it done?	approached him saying: "You too were with Jesus the Galilean."	says to the others: "This fellow also was with Jesus the Natsorean."	come up to Peter and say: "Really, you too are one of them, because your very accent gives you away!"
What was the reaction?	denied before them all: "I don't know what you are saying."	denied with an oath: "I do not know the man!"	began to curse and to swear: "I do not know the man!"
Rooster?	(no)	(no)	immediately a roster crowed

Mark 14:53-72:

	1 <sup>st</sup> denial	2 <sup>nd</sup> denial	3 <sup>rd</sup> denial
Who?	a servant girl	the same girl	bystanders
Where?	by the fire	in the fore-court (?)	by the fire (?)
When?	fairly early on (?)	a little later	a little later
How was it done?	looked at him and said: "You also were with Jesus the Nazarene."	says to the bystanders: "This is one of them."	say to Peter again: "Surely you are one of them; for you are a Galilean and your speech shows it!"
What was the reaction?	denied, saying: "I neither know nor understand what you are saying"	(he denied again)	he began to curse and to swear: "I do not know this man of whom you speak!"
Rooster?	he went out to the fore-court and a rooster crowed	(no)	a rooster crowed a second time.

If you compare all the parameters—who, where, when, how, what—there really is no way to come out with only three denials; even to come out with only six requires some gymnastics (but I did attempt to do it in the first draft). Let's try to arrange the events in chronological sequence and see what happens.

John 18:17 gives us what is clearly the first challenge—as the maid who kept the outside door let Peter in, at John's request, she asked, "You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?"<sup>1</sup> Even

<sup>1</sup> Everyone there, including the girl, knows that John belongs to Jesus, so her question is perfectly natural, without malice—since John is vouching for Peter, she assumes that Peter must also belong to Jesus. John had heard all the warnings, so when Peter denied at the gate, in his presence, John doubtless kept a close eye on him the whole rest of the night. So we

though John was evidently standing right there, Peter denied, “I am not.” He then went in to stand near the fire in the courtyard. The other Gospels have Peter sitting, while John has him standing. Evidently there were quite a few people about—they could not all sit close to the fire. Presumably they would take turns standing near the fire to warm up and then move away a bit to sit down. Thus they, including Peter, would be alternately sitting and standing.

All four Gospels have Peter in the courtyard near the fire (Mat. 26:58 and 69, Mark 14:54 and 66, Luke 22:55, and John 18:18 and 25) and three of them (Matthew, Mark, John) give some account of the council’s dealings with Jesus before going on with Peter’s denials.<sup>1</sup> We know from Luke 22:61 that Jesus was at a window that looked out on the courtyard, only with His back to it. John is the only one who records that the high priest asked Jesus about His disciples (v. 19)—he is facing Jesus and therefore the open window, and would be speaking loudly enough for everyone in the room to hear clearly, so the people in the courtyard also heard everything he said—then in verse 25 we read, “Therefore they said to him, ‘You aren’t one of his disciples too, are you?’” I suggest that verse 25 gives us the second challenge and denial. The guards around the fire, presumably prompted by the high priest’s questioning Jesus about His disciples, put their question to Peter. He answers them as he did the girl at the gate, “I am not.” So far the challengers have only questioned, rather than affirm, but now the tempo quickens.

I take it that the first denials recorded in Matthew (26:69-70), Mark (14:66-68) and Luke (22:56-57) form a single episode. Collating them we may understand the following. A certain serving girl of the high priest came by and saw Peter sitting near the fire. She looked closely at him and said to the others, “This man also was with him” (Luke). She then addressed Peter directly, “You also were with Jesus the Nazarene, of Galilee” (Matthew, Mark). But he denied before them all, saying, “Girl, I don’t know him; I neither know nor understand what you’re talking about!” He then went out to the fore-court, and a rooster crowed (Mark 14:68). Thus, there were [at least] three denials before the first cockcrow.

I say ‘at least’ because the third denial in John probably belongs here as well. In 18:26 the verb “to say” is in the present tense, which seems to suggest a brief interval rather than nearly an hour (Luke 22:59); also the challenge is still framed as a question, “Didn’t I see you with him in the garden?”, rather than a direct accusation, which would fit better toward the beginning than at the end. I see no problem with suggesting that all three of the denials in John were part of the first set and thus he records the first rooster crow. In that event I would understand that there were actually four denials before the first crowing, the three in John plus the first one in the others. Because the rooster crowed “immediately” I imagine that the order would be as follows: the first two in John, in that order, then the first one in the others, and then, as Peter was moving toward the fore-court, the relative of Peter’s victim comes alongside and puts his question, so that Peter is at the fore-court when the first rooster crows (Mark 14:68). Actually, I am inclined to suspect that indeed there were four denials before the first cockcrow, which is recorded by both Mark and John (recall that Jesus neither said nor implied that there would be ‘only’ three).<sup>2</sup>

Now for the next round. In Mark (14:69) the same girl sees Peter again and starts telling the bystanders, “This fellow is one of them.” In Matthew (26:71) a different girl sees him and tells the bystanders, “This fellow was with Jesus the Natsorean.” In Luke (22:58) a man saw him and said, “You also are one of them.” In order to come out with only three denials in the second set, two of these would have to be combined, but as already stated, I am not aware of anything in the Text that rules out the possibility that there could be more than three. It seems to me that there is a progression in Peter’s desperation which culminates in his cursing and swearing. On that basis I would consider the instances in Mark and Luke as forming a single episode (if I had to)—the girl speaks, Peter denies, a man backs the girl up and Peter answers, “Man, I am not.” Then the instance in Matthew would be the sixth denial—notice that now Peter adds an oath! Because of the oath I consider that this denial

---

have an eyewitness account. Of course Peter himself would also be an eyewitness, but since he was undergoing satanic interference in his mind, his powers of recollection might be impaired.

<sup>1</sup> It is after midnight and chilly in the courtyard, hence the fire; but there must have been over fifty people in the room where the questioning was going on, and all windows would be open.

<sup>2</sup> The satanic interference in Peter’s mind was so effective that not even the rooster’s crowing woke him up.

comes after the other two just mentioned; also, Peter has moved out to the gateway. Actually, I am inclined to suspect that there were also four denials before the second cockcrow, so I will start again on that basis.

The girl that provoked the third denial is not about to let Peter get away with that denial. Whether she followed him out to the fore-court, or he moved back toward the fire, I imagine that Mark 14:69 records the fifth denial. If so, Luke 22:58 records the sixth denial, perhaps near the fire. Peter is definitely uncomfortable; he is getting altogether too much unwelcome attention. He moves out to the gateway (perhaps thinking of abandoning the premises)<sup>1</sup> where he is challenged by a different girl (Matthew 26:71); Peter denies with an oath (number seven). Luke (22:59) puts 'about an hour' between denials six and eight, so perhaps Peter was left alone for a bit. However, the 'trial' is over but the bosses are waiting for dawn so they can take Jesus to Pilate. Since the bosses aren't going home, the guards and employees can't either—they are obliged to wait out in the cold, bored stiff—so Peter is now the only show in town.

For the eighth denial three Gospels offer a candidate (Mat. 26:73-74, Mark 14:70-72, Luke 22:59-60). The accounts in Matthew and Mark are very similar and evidently parallel. Since Matthew has the rooster crowing "immediately" and Mark "the second time" this has to be last denial—since by now Peter is cursing and swearing it is fitting that it should be. By that time most of the people on the premises would be aware of Peter and his denials. After listening for a while they closed in, citing his accent. The account in Luke has just one man speaking, but his words are in the same vein. This also has to be the last denial because we are told that the rooster crowed while Peter was still speaking. Evidently a number of people were speaking at once (but not in unison), or in rapid succession, and different writers preserve some of the variety of statement. It would appear that they were ganging up on Peter, because he is driven to curse and to swear. And so we have a second set of four denials, before the second cockcrow. Even then it took a direct look from the Lord (Luke 22:61) to break Satan's spell and bring Peter to a realization of what he had done.

But the question may well be asked, why did each Gospel writer report and speak of only three denials (albeit giving different selections) if there were really six or eight?<sup>2</sup> I suggest that we are looking at a prime example of the grace and sensitivity of God. It would be quite humiliating enough to have denied the Lord three/four times, but to go on to do so another three/four times, even after hearing a rooster crow, would be almost too much to bear. Rather than put the full extent of Peter's ignominy on display the Holy Spirit had each writer give only a partial account, enough for the purposes of the record but without flaying Peter unnecessarily. I find it interesting to note that it is Mark who furnishes the necessary clue that there was to be a second set of denials. The opinion is widely held that Peter influenced the composition of this Gospel—this is overtly stated in the introduction to the Gospel found in many manuscripts—and if so he may have insisted on including the hint as to the extent of his humiliation, whereas the others delicately avoided it.

---

<sup>1</sup> So why didn't Peter just bolt out the gate at that point? I would say that there was supernatural intervention—he simply was not allowed to leave.

<sup>2</sup> Some 50% of the Greek manuscripts that contain the Gospels have colophons; these colophons state that Matthew was 'published' 8 years after Christ's ascension, Mark 10 years after, Luke 15 years after and John 32 years after Christ's ascension. (So the four Gospels are arranged in chronological order, not only in our Bibles but in the vast majority of the Greek manuscripts.) "To the Jew first, . . ."—since Matthew wrote for a Jewish audience, God's priorities dictated that Matthew's should be the first inspired account of our Savior's life on earth to circulate. Then Mark, with Matthew's Gospel open in front of him, and Peter at his elbow, wrote for the Roman mind (since Romans would care nothing for Hebrew Scriptures, Mark removed virtually all reference to fulfilled prophecy). Then Luke, with both Mark and Matthew to hand, wrote the third, for the Greek mind. Then John, with the first three open, wrote to fill in the gaps, preserving important information not provided by the others, for all minds. Now let's consider Peter's denials within that framework. Matthew wrote first, with one cockcrow. Mark says there were really two cockcrows and changes the second denial (1 and 3 are the same in Mark and Matthew). Luke speaks of just one cockcrow, changes the second denial yet again and provides added information (specific) about the third. So just with these three accounts we are up to five denials. John speaks of just one cockcrow but records three new denials, not mentioned by the other three. If these are inspired accounts, then God did it on purpose, and it is up to us to try to figure out why (see my concluding paragraph).

## The Text-critical Problem

Although there are around a hundred textual differences reflected in the printed editions of the Greek Text (in the passages considered), I will confine my remarks here to the set that is especially bothersome in terms of the subject matter of this paper.

There are four places in Mark's account that relate to the two cockcrows: "twice" in 14:30, "and a rooster crowed" in 14:68, "the second time" and "twice" in 14:72. Instances 1, 3 and 4 go together and appear to contradict the account in Matthew, Luke and John. Instance 2 is apparently even worse because according to Mark's account Peter had only denied once when the rooster 'jumped the gun' and crowed before he was supposed to (Jesus had said there would certainly be three denials, as recorded in the other three Gospels). Accordingly, ever since the second century there have been those who tried to 'help' Mark out of his difficulties, tampering with the text.

According to the present state of our knowledge it appears that seven Greek MSS omit "twice" in 14:30 (but they do so in two different ways), nine MSS omit "and a rooster crowed" in 14:68 (but in two ways), five omit "the second time" in 14:72<sup>a</sup>, and seven omit "twice" in 14:72<sup>b</sup> (two others omit the whole clause). The roster of MSS shifts in each case, as does the versional evidence that sides with the omissions. Only three witnesses are thoroughgoing and omit all four: Codex Aleph, cursive 579 and the Old Latin "c" (it<sup>c</sup>). This is a curious state of affairs. If the purpose of the omissions was to make Mark conform to the other Gospels, only Aleph, 579 and it<sup>c</sup> have succeeded. Of the seventeen MSS involved, twelve omit only one of the four; one MS omits two of them; and two MSS omit three (there is some doubt here). Unless someone is prepared to show why Aleph and 579 are to be preferred above every other MS (some 1700 for Mark), and it<sup>c</sup> above all the rest of the versional evidence, Latin and otherwise, there is really no reason to take the omissions seriously. However, the eclectic school does take them seriously, even without the requisite demonstration.

It appears that the "harder reading" canon has come to the aid of the vast majority of the MSS, at least as far as the editors of the "critical" or eclectic texts presently in vogue are concerned. Instances 1, 3, and 4 are retained in all Nestle and UBS editions (although UBS ascribes "a considerable degree of doubt" to 1 and 3, and "some degree of doubt" to 4—the change in grade here is strange). However, when it comes to instance 2 ("and a rooster crowed") we get some variety: Nestle editions 1 to 25 omit the words; Nestle<sup>26</sup> and all three UBS editions retain them, but in single brackets (the UBS editors ascribe "a very high degree of doubt" to these words, along with the brackets which themselves signify "dubious textual validity"). Presumably the crucial datum here is that Codex B joins the evidence for omission with instance 2 (but not the others). From W-H through N<sup>25</sup> that was enough to banish the words from the Text. One supposes that it was the "harder reading" canon that restored them to UBS and N<sup>26</sup>, if only in brackets. It seems to me that this case affords a clear example of the superficiality that characterizes the work of the eclectic school—to challenge the authenticity of a reading supported by over 99% of the MSS is unreasonable at any time, but to do so in the face of a perfectly obvious motivation for the omission is irresponsible.

The English versions that I have consulted all retain instances 1, 3 and 4, but deal variously with instance 2. AV, LB, NKJV, Phillips and TEV all retain "and a rooster crowed," but LB favors us with a footnote: "This statement is found in only some of the MSS." What might the purpose of such a footnote be? From the use of the word "only" it would appear that the purpose is to raise a doubt in the reader's mind about the reliability of the Text. Why would they want to do that? The use of the word "some" also invites comment: it is their way of referring to some 1700 MSS, against nine! Will the reader not be deceived?

Jerusalem, NASB, NEB, NIV and RSV all omit the clause, but only Jerusalem does so without comment. The footnote in NEB reads, "Some witnesses insert 'and a cock crew'." As in LB, by "some" they mean some 1700 MSS, not to mention massive versional support and almost unanimous lectionary support. Will the reader not be deceived? The footnote in RSV reads, "Other ancient

authorities add ‘and the cock crowed’.” The footnote in NIV reads, “Some early MSS add ‘and the rooster crowd’.” The footnote in NASB reads, “Later mss. add: ‘and a cock crowed’.” In order to evaluate such footnotes we would need to know the precise definitions for “ancient”, “early” and “later”. However, I submit that the uninitiated reader of such footnotes will certainly be misled as to the massive evidence against omission.

The case of the NIV invites special comment. It is the only version that offers a footnote at all four instances. At 14:30 we read, “Some early MSS omit ‘twice’.” At 14:68 we read, “Some early MSS add ‘and the rooster crowed’.” At 14:72<sup>a</sup> we read, “Some early MSS omit ‘the second time’.” At 14:72<sup>b</sup> we read, “Some early MSS omit ‘twice’.” (The meaning of “some” in the second instance is quite different from that in the other three.) What possible reason could the editors have had for including these footnotes? The immediate effect is to call in question the reliability of the Text at those points. Since the NIV editors hold to a high view of Scripture, why would they want to do that? I suppose that it was precisely their concern for the inerrancy of the Text that was at work here. It appears that they did not see any other solution to the seeming discrepancy between Mark and the other Gospels than to imply that Aleph and Old Latin “c” might be right after all. Alas!

The NIV editors are barking up the wrong tree. The worst thing to be done here would be to follow Aleph in deleting all four instances. As already pointed out, the four Gospels record eight different challenges resulting in denials, but no two Gospels have the same selection. So to follow Aleph would force us to try to accommodate eight denials before the first rooster crow, which seems to me to be hopeless. The best thing to be done here is to follow the true Text, which God has graciously caused to be preserved, in this case, in over 99% of the evidence. Peter denied three/four times before the first rooster crow and another set of three/four before the second. The Lord had warned him: “Simon, Simon, indeed Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat” (Luke 22:31). Peter should have paid attention.

## Implications

One question that arises is this: What about the internal integrity of each account? For instance, in John’s account, even if we were to claim that two of the denials occurred before the first rooster crow, while the third denial came after the first and before the second, would this claim do violence to the integrity of John’s Gospel? Why would it? Let’s review the record. In John 13:38 Jesus said to Peter, “Most assuredly I say to you, a rooster shall not crow till you have denied me three times!” The Lord did not say “only” three times—the emphasis is on the obligatory absence of any rooster crow until Peter has denied three times, at least three times (there is nothing in the Lord’s turn of phrase to preclude the possibility that there could be more than three). In the Greek text there is no definite article with “rooster” and there is an emphatic double negative with the verb “to crow”—“a rooster shall not crow!” (These observations also apply in Luke 22:34; in fact, in all four Gospels, in both the predictions and the fulfillments, it is always “a” rooster.)

Turning to John’s account of the denials themselves, the first one, at the outside door (18:17), poses no difficulty. The second denial (18:25) likewise poses no difficulty—these two occurred before any rooster crow. But what if the third denial (in John’s account, 18:26-27) came *after* the first crowing?<sup>1</sup> I see no problem, in principle. The Lord made a statement of fact, correctly recorded by John—there had to be three denials before the first rooster crow. This was precisely fulfilled, the ‘Synoptics’ supplying the third denial. Nothing in John’s account precludes the possibility that there should be subsequent crowings. (Anyone who has lived near roosters knows that they start crowing off and on anytime after midnight and at daybreak put on a concert—it seems obvious to me that the first two crowings were overtly controlled by God so as to match Christ’s predictions.) In 18:27, after the third denial recorded by John, we read, “and immediately a rooster crowed.” John does not say that it was the first crowing. Someone without access to the other Gospels would naturally assume that John records the first rooster crow, and that the three denials he gives are the whole story—but nothing in John’s statement demands that interpretation; it simply arises from incomplete information. The other

---

<sup>1</sup> As the reader knows, I believe the third denial in John comes before the first cock crow, but I am covering this possibility for the sake of those who may prefer to have it in the second set.

three present several added denials that are clearly distinct. The several Evangelists provide distinct sets of details, much like the pieces of a puzzle, that must be fitted together to get the whole picture. The several accounts are complementary, not contradictory.

But how about the internal integrity of Mark's account? He is the only one who mentions the second rooster crow, as such, and in fact his account is tied to it. Jesus said, "before a rooster crows twice you will deny me three times," and Mark records three denials before the second rooster crow. Again, Jesus did not say "only" three times, the emphasis is on "you" and "twice". The other Gospels are needed to get the full picture, but Mark's account is entirely self consistent.

And how about Luke? In the warning the emphasis is on the obligatory absence of a rooster crow until Peter has denied three times—at least three times (Jesus did not say "only" three times). After describing three of the denials Luke writes, "and immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed." "A" rooster—he does not say it was the first. Then Luke has Peter remembering that Jesus said, "Before a rooster crows you will deny me three times." Presumably Peter remembered every detail of all the warnings, but Luke (and each of the other Evangelists) gives only a partial description—in fact, Luke has him recalling the warning recorded by Matthew, not the one he himself gave. A reader having only Luke's account may assume that he told the whole story, but it is an unwarranted assumption. Luke's account is internally consistent yet the precise turn of phrase is such that it does not preclude my proposal.

So what about Matthew? Virtually everything said about Luke above can be repeated here. He has Peter remembering the warning he himself recorded. Again it is "a" rooster. Matthew's account is internally consistent yet the turn of phrase will accommodate my proposal without being violated. All of which brings us back to the question: Why does each Gospel speak of three denials, rather than six, eight or whatever? I don't know; we aren't told. My best guess is that God chose to draw a veil over the full extent of Peter's ignominy (and perhaps to test our disposition when faced with the unexplained). But it remains a plain fact that each Gospel offers a different assortment of challenges and denials, giving a total of at least eight denials.

Another question that I have heard concerns the validity of attempting an exercise such as this at all. I believe that God deliberately brings difficulties into our lives (Job in the ash heap, Abraham on Moriah, Moses herding sheep, Joseph in prison, Daniel with the lions, and on, and on), and puts puzzles in the world, to test our disposition and fiber, and to cause us to grow. "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter" (Proverbs 25:2). [Even if you aren't a king, you get the point.] The case of John the baptizer in prison comes closer to home. He is frustrated, maybe disillusioned; he did his job but his expectations aren't being realized. So he sends two disciples to ask Jesus for an explanation. In effect Jesus answers, "Check the evidence; do your homework," and closes with, "And blessed is he who is not offended because of me" (Matthew 11:6). When faced with the difficult or unexplained we must be careful not to rebel. It is much better to obey the command recorded in 1 Peter 3:15. "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, . . ." Since opponents of a Text with objective authority have used the accounts of Peter's denials as an argument against any idea of inerrancy, I consider that a defense of that inerrancy is in order.<sup>1</sup>

### Several 'Problems' from Luke 3

#### Luke 3:23

*Και αυτος ην ο Ιησους, ωσει ετων τριακοντα αρχομενος, ων ως ενομιζετο υιος Ιωσηφ, του Ηλει, του Ματθαν, του Λευι, του Μελχι, . . .*

---

<sup>1</sup> This section circulated as my mailing #26, being a significantly modified and enlarged version of a paper circulated to the Majority Text Society many years ago.

There are four words here that invite special attention: *και*, *αυτος*, *ἦν* and *ὡς*. Since verse 22 ends with a statement from the Father at Jesus' baptism, it is clear that verse 23 begins another section. But the conjunction that signals the transition is *και* and not *δε*, as one would expect—this means that 'Jesus' continues as the topic. But in that event, how does one explain the personal pronoun *αυτος*, the more so in such an emphatic position? If the author's purpose was simply to register Jesus as a son of Joseph, as many suppose, why didn't he just write *και ὁ Ιησους ἦν υἱος Ιωσηφ*, etc.?

But then, why write *ὡς ενομιζετο*? It seems to me that the normal meaning of "as was supposed" is to affirm that Jesus was in fact Joseph's son; but that is precisely what Jesus **was not**. Luke has already made clear that Jesus' real Father was the Holy Spirit—1:34-35, 43, 45; 2:49. So what Luke is really saying is that although the people supposed Jesus to be Joseph's son, He actually had a different lineage—we should translate "so it was supposed". (Recall that a faithful and loyal translation seeks to transmit correctly the meaning intended by the author.)

The verb *ἦν* is the only independent one in the whole paragraph, verses 23-38. Is it working with the participle *αρχομενος* in a periphrastic construction? That appears to be the tendency of the eclectic text that places the participle right after Jesus (following less than 2% of the Greek MSS), which makes Jesus out to be in fact Joseph's son. It seems to me to be far more natural to take the participial clauses as being circumstantial: "beginning at about thirty years of age" and "being (so it was supposed) a son of Joseph". Setting those two clauses aside, the independent clause that remains is *ἦν ὁ Ιησους του Ηλει*, "Jesus was of Heli".

The participle 'beginning' requires an object, that the Text leaves implicit; from the context it seems clear that we may supply 'His ministry', or some such thing, which is why most versions do so.

I suggest the following rendering: "Beginning *His ministry* at about thirty years of age, being (so it was supposed) a son of Joseph, Jesus was actually of Heli, of Mathan, of Levi, . . ." I take it that the emphatic pronoun *αυτος* heightens the contrast between what the people imagined and the reality. Jesus was a grandson of Heli, Mary's father—Luke gives the genealogy of Jesus through His mother, while Matthew gives it through His stepfather.

The eclectic text gives our verse a different wording: *και αυτος ἦν Ιησους αρχομενος ὡσει ετων τριακοντα, ων υἱος, ὡς ενομιζετο, Ιωσηφ του Ηλι του Μαθθατ του Λευι του Μελχι, . . .* The RSV translates it like this: "Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli, the son of Matthat, . . ." Is not the normal meaning of this rendering that Jesus was in fact the son of Joseph? However, every version that I recall seeing has "Joseph, the son of Heli", which directly contradicts Matthew, "Jacob begot Joseph". The word 'son' (without the article) occurs only with Joseph, although most versions supply it on down the genealogy. But Luke is precisely correct in not using it, because it would not hold for the first and last names in the list—Heli did not beget Jesus (nor Joseph) and God did not beget Adam.

So then, properly understood Luke does not contradict Matthew (with reference to Joseph's father), nor does he affirm an error of fact (with reference to Jesus' father).<sup>1</sup>

### **Cainan<sup>2</sup>—Luke 3:36 X Genesis 11:12**

There are several spelling variations that together are attested by almost 1% of the MSS; 99% have *Καιναν*. Apparently only two omit, P<sup>75v</sup> and D, but no printed text follows their lead. So there is no reasonable doubt that Luke in fact wrote that Shelah was fathered by Cainan, not Arphaxad. This Cainan has been widely used to justify treating the genealogies in Genesis like accordions—if one name was demonstrably left out in the Genesis account, then who knows how many others were also left out. This Cainan is also used to deny the validity of constructing a strict chronology based on the time spans given in the genealogies.

---

<sup>1</sup> This section was first circulated as my mailing #16.

But where did Luke get this information? The LXX contains Cainan in Genesis 11:12, but is so different from the Massoretic text here that it looks like fiction. Recall that the LXX we know is based on codices Vaticanus, Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus, produced centuries after Luke. It is more likely that our LXX is based on Luke than vice versa. Where then did Luke get it? I understand that Luke obtained the information about this Cainan from records existing in his day, and being correct information was led by the Holy Spirit to include it in his Gospel. Just like Jude, who quoted Enoch—Enoch’s prophecy must have been in existence in Jude’s day, but we have no copy in Hebrew today (though Jews are reported to have used one so recently as the 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D.); similarly we have no copy of Luke’s source.<sup>1</sup>

This brief note was inspired by the discussion of the subject given by Dr. Floyd N. Jones in *Chronology of the Old Testament*<sup>2</sup> (which book comes close to solving all the alleged numerical discrepancies in the OT, at least as I see it). However, the explanation that follows is original with me (if anyone else has proposed it, I am unaware). Let’s recall the exact wording of Genesis 11:12-13. “Arphaxad lived thirty-five years and begot Salah; after he begot Salah, Arphaxad lived four hundred and three years, and begot sons and daughters.”

The verb ‘begot’ requires that Salah be a blood descendent of Arphaxad, not adopted. He could be a grandson, the son of a son of Arphaxad, or even a great-grandson, etc., except that in this case the time frame only has room for one intervening generation. The plain meaning of the formula in the Text, ‘W lived X years and begot Y; after W begot Y he lived Z years,’ is that W was X years old when Y was born, is it not? (and Y was Z years old when W died).<sup>3</sup> I take the clear meaning of the Hebrew Text to be that Arphaxad was 35 years old when Salah was born, whatever we may decide to do about ‘Cainan’.

Let’s try to imagine the situation in the years immediately following the Flood. After the Flood the ‘name of the game’ was to replenish the earth. Indeed, the divine command was: “Be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 9:1). So, whom could Noah’s grandsons marry? Obviously their cousins, Noah’s granddaughters. There would be an urgency to reproduce—thus, the girls would be married off at puberty, and the boys wouldn’t be wasting around either. The women would be giving birth as often as they possibly could. Really, the absolute top priority would be to increase the number of people.

Arphaxad was born two years after the flood, but his wife could have been born a year or two earlier. (The Sacred Text is clear to the effect that only eight souls entered the ark, but some of the women could have conceived during the Flood.) Thus, Arphaxad could have fathered “Cainan” when he was 17/18. Similarly, Cainan could have fathered Salah when he was 17/18. In this way Arphaxad could be said to have “begotten” Salah when he was 35. Cainan could have died early or been passed over in Genesis because the time span did not constitute a ‘generation’, or both. Or, as things got back to normal, culturally speaking, the haste with which Arphaxad and Cainan procreated might have been viewed as unseemly. The expedient of omitting Cainan would make the account more ‘normal’ while preserving precision as to the elapsed time.

---

<sup>1</sup> Let’s recall Luke’s stated purpose in writing: “It seemed good to me also, most excellent Theophilus, having taken careful note of everything from Above, to write to you with precision and in sequence, so that you may **know** the certainty of the things in which you were instructed” (Luke 1:3-4). Given his stated purpose in writing, Luke’s account needs to be historically accurate (cf. 2:2 and 3:1). So then, I take it that the Holy Spirit guided Luke to include Cainan<sup>2</sup>; I will argue the same for Joram below. While I’m on this tack, my solution to the ‘Jeremiah’ problem in Matthew 27:9-10 is similar. Daniel (9:2) refers to “the books” (plural) in connection with Jeremiah the prophet. So I assume that Matthew had access to other writings of Jeremiah, of which no copy survives.

<sup>2</sup> *Chronology of the Old Testament: A Return to the Basics* (Floyd Nolen Jones, The Woodlands, TX: Kings Word Press, 1999, pp. 29-36). (This is the 14<sup>th</sup> edition, revised and enlarged—the 1<sup>st</sup> came out in 1993.) I imagine that many readers may feel uncomfortable with the author’s very dogmatic way of expressing himself, but I would urge them to filter out the rhetorical style and concentrate on the substantial arguments, that are of extraordinary value. For example, his solution to the conundrum of the reigns of the kings on the two sides of the divided monarchy is simply brilliant, and to my mind obviously correct, leaving no loose ends. (In this connection, he debunks the claims of Edwin R. Thiele and William F. Albright.)

<sup>3</sup> It follows that this formula destroys the ‘accordion’ gambit. There were precisely 130 years between Adam and Seth, 105 between Seth and Enosh, 90 between Enosh and Cainan<sup>1</sup>, etc., etc. To argue that the years were based on lunar months will not save the gambit.

But Luke would be correct in saying that Salah was “of” Cainan who was “of” Arphaxad. Salah was Arphaxad’s grandson. In any case, the Messianic line was passed on by Salah. Without Luke’s record I, for one, would never have stopped to consider what must have happened immediately following the Flood—the absolute priority must have been to increase the number of people.

### The fictitious Arni and Admin (alias ‘Idi Amin’)

Luke 3:33 *του Αμιναδαβ,* *του Αραμ* —f<sup>35</sup> A(D)(N)Byz [97%], **Lect**,lat,syr<sup>p, h</sup>  
of Aminadab of Aram

*του Αμιναδαβ, του Αδμιν, του Αρνι* —none!!  
of Aminadab of Admin of Arni

*του Αδμειν, του Αρνει* —B  
*του Αδαμ,* — — *του Αρνι?*—syr<sup>s</sup>  
*του Αδαμ, του Αδμιν, του Αρνει*—~~κ~~<sup>\*</sup>,1241  
*του Αδαμ, του Αδμειν, του Αρνει*—cop<sup>sa</sup>  
*του Αδμειν, του Αδμιν, του Αρνι* —cop<sup>bo</sup>  
*του Αμιναδαβ, του Αδμιν, του Αρνει* —~~κ~~<sup>c</sup>  
*του Αμιναδαβ, του Αδμιν, του Αρνη* —f<sup>13</sup>  
*του Αμιναδαβ, του Αδμη, του Αρνι* —X  
*του Αμιναδαβ, του Αδμειν, του Αρνι* —L  
*του Αμιναδαβ, του Αδμειν, του Αραμ* —0102(P<sup>4?</sup>)<sup>1</sup>

The ‘Alexandrian’ witnesses are scattered all over the back side of the desert—almost no two agree. One would have thought that this would give the UBS editors pause, but not at all. They were so intent on doing despite to Christ’s genealogy that they actually concocted a ‘patchwork quilt’ and intruded the fictitious Admin and Arni into that genealogy. UBS has presented the evidence in their apparatus in such a way as to obscure the fact that no Greek MS has the precise text they have printed (the same holds for N-A). In Metzger’s presentation of the UBS Committee’s reasoning in this case he writes, “the Committee adopted what seems to be the least unsatisfactory form of text”.<sup>2</sup> Is this not a good candidate for ‘chutzpah’ of the year? The UBS editors concoct their own reading and proclaim it “the least unsatisfactory”! And just what might be “unsatisfactory” about the reading of 97% of the MSS except that it doesn’t introduce any difficulties?

There is complete confusion in the Egyptian camp. That confusion must have commenced in the second century, resulting from several easy transcriptional errors, simple copying mistakes. *APAM* to *APNI* is very easy (in the early centuries only upper case letters were used); with a scratchy quill the cross strokes in the *A* and *M* could be light, and a subsequent copyist could mistake the left leg of the *M* as going with the *A* to make *N*, and the right leg of the *M* would become *I*. Very early “Aminadab” was misspelled as “Aminadam” (except that β is often written as μ in the minuscule MSS, only without the ‘tail’, so they can easily be confused), which survives in some 25% of the extant MSS. The “Adam” of Aleph, syr<sup>s</sup> and cop<sup>sa</sup> arose through an easy instance of homoiarcton (the eye of a copyist went from the first *A* in “Aminadam” to the second, dropping “Amin-” and leaving “Adam”). *A* and *Δ* are easily confused, especially when written by hand—“Admin” presumably came from “AMINadab/m”, though the process was more complicated. The “i” of “Admin” and “Arni” is corrupted to “ei” in Codex B (a frequent occurrence in that MS—perhaps due to Coptic influence). Codex Aleph conflated the ancestor that produced “Adam” with the one that produced “Admin”, etc. The total confusion in Egypt does not surprise us, but how shall we account for the text and apparatus of UBS<sup>3</sup>/N-A<sup>26</sup> in this instance?<sup>3</sup> And whatever possessed the editors of NASB, NRSV, TEV, LB, Berkeley, etc. to embrace such an egregious error?

<sup>1</sup> There are a number of further variations, including a variety of confluents and spellings.

<sup>2</sup> *A Textual commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Bruce M. Metzger, London: United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 136.

<sup>3</sup> UBS<sup>4</sup>/N-A<sup>27</sup> have the text of the prior edition, the differences being in the apparatus; with reference to this variant set the apparatus remains basically the same in both editions.

‘Admin’ and ‘Arni’ have no more place in Christ’s genealogy than does Idi Amin, although he at least is not a fiction.

### **Joram—Luke 3:33 X Mt. 1:3, Ruth 4:19, 1 Chron. 2:9**

Luke 3:33 offers yet another textual difficulty. Does ‘Joram’ belong between Aram and Hezron, or doesn’t he? This time the evidence is seriously divided; it looks like this:

του ιωραμ **ƒ**<sup>35</sup> [75%] **Lect**,it<sup>b</sup>,sy<sup>h</sup> || --- **κ**,A,B,D [25%] lat,sy<sup>p</sup>,cop

The Old Latin **b** gives ‘Joram’ overt 5<sup>th</sup> century attestation, and I have argued elsewhere that **ƒ**<sup>35</sup> goes back to the 3<sup>rd</sup>, at least<sup>1</sup> (and the Lectionary system is ancient as well). So both variants are ancient. The apparent disagreement with Matthew, Ruth and Chronicles would be an obvious inducement to omit ‘Joram’. But what possible motivation would there be to invent and insert an unknown name? And if someone did, how could it come to dominate the stream of transmission?

The percentages are based on a thorough comparison of TuT<sup>2</sup> and the IGNTP Luke.<sup>3</sup> I venture to affirm that the absolute minimum for the omission (should complete collations ever become available) will be 21%, and the maximum 26%. I think that the real probability is around 23%, but I rounded up to 25%, so as not to be accused of ‘stacking the deck’ in favor of my choice. So then, given my presuppositions, the external evidence is compelling (the probabilities of the case happen to join in). But wherever could Luke have come up with ‘Joram’? As I have argued above, I assume he had access to records of which no copy survives; given his stated purpose to be historically precise, he was led by the Holy Spirit to include Joram. So then, Aram (Ram) was actually a grandson of Hezron; Hezron fathered Joram, who fathered Aram.<sup>4</sup>

## **The Resurrection Accounts—A Harmonization<sup>5</sup>**

### **A rough sequence within the parallel accounts**

Matthew 27:62-28:1;  
Mark 16:1-3 // Luke 24:1;  
Matthew 28:2-4;  
John 20:1-10;  
Matthew 28:5-8 // Mark 16:4-8 // Luke 24:2-8;  
Mark 16:9 // John 20:11-18;  
Matthew 28:9-15;  
Luke 24:13-35;  
Luke 24:36-43 // John 20:19-31.

### **The presumed sequence of events**

0. [Saturday—guards seal the stone and set up a watch (Matthew 27:62-66).]

<sup>1</sup> “In Defense of Family 35”.

<sup>2</sup> *Text und Textwert der Griechischen Handschriften des Neuen Testaments* (Ed. Kurt Aland, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), volumes 30 and 31. They collated a total of 1,756 MSS (they list a further 31 MSS that did not contain any of the chosen variant sets—they give 1,787 as the number of all known continuous text Greek MSS for Luke) for a select number of variant sets—54 such sets in Luke.

<sup>3</sup> *The New Testament in Greek: The Gospel according to St. Luke* (Ed. The American and British Committees of the International Greek New Testament Project, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984). This edition includes 8 papyri, 62 uncials and 128 (127) cursives, for a total of 197 Greek MSS (including fragments). The committee selected the 128 minuscule MSS it collated for the project by means of the Claremont Profile Method, evidently covering most (if not all) of von Soden’s sub-groups. For any given verse the number of extant MSS will be around 150.

<sup>4</sup> These three ‘problems’ were first circulated as my mailing #19.

<sup>5</sup> Opponents of a Bible with objective authority have long affirmed that there are insuperable discrepancies between/among the four Gospel accounts. My purpose here is to demonstrate that there are no discrepancies. This section is a revision of the paper in my Mailing #21.

1. Jesus rises from the dead.<sup>1</sup>
2. Early Sunday morning the women set out for the tomb—Magdalene (John 20:1); Magdalene and Mary (Matthew 28:1); Magdalene, Mary and Salome (Mark 16:1-2); Magdalene, Mary, Joanna and others (Luke 23:55-24:1, 10).<sup>2</sup>
3. On the way they worry about the stone (Mark 16:3).
4. Before they arrive an angel rolls back the stone, complete with earthquake, etc. (Matthew 28:2-4).<sup>3</sup>
5. They arrive and see that the stone has been rolled back, but the angel was no longer visible outside (Mark 16:4, Luke 24:2, John 20:1).<sup>4</sup>
6. Magdalene takes off immediately to tell Peter—Peter and John run to the tomb to see (John 20:2-3).<sup>5</sup>
7. Before Peter and John get there the other women enter the tomb, and see and hear the angels (Luke 24:3-8, Mark 16:5-7, Matthew 28:5-7).<sup>6</sup>
8. They leave the tomb in fear, saying nothing to the guards or anyone they chance to meet (Mark 16:8, Matthew 28:8a).
9. Probably right after the women leave, and before Peter and John arrive, the guards take off (Matthew 28:11-15).
10. Peter and John come and go [to their own homes] (John 20:4-10; cf. Luke 24:12 that is an historical aside).<sup>7</sup>
11. Magdalene returns to the sepulcher but doesn't get there until everyone is gone (that's why she thought Jesus was the gardener); Jesus appears to her first (Mark 19:9, John 20:11-17).<sup>8</sup>
12. Then Jesus appears to the other women and they go on their way to tell the disciples (Matthew 28:9-10, Luke 24:9-11).<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> None of the Evangelists mentions the moment of the resurrection; probably because that information was never revealed. The fact is taken for granted (the "firstborn from the dead"—Colossians 1:18, Revelation 1:5; the "firstfruits"—1 Corinthians 15:20, 23).

<sup>2</sup> The several accounts say it was very early, as the day began to dawn, while it was still dark, but by the time they got to the tomb the sun had risen. There is no discrepancy: recall that the garden is on the west side of a mountain, so even after the sun had risen the tomb would be in shadow, besides the shade of the trees. It was still darkish when they started out, but away from the mountain it was already day by the time they arrived—the tomb area would still be gloomy.

<sup>3</sup> The removal of the stone was not to let Jesus out; it was to let witnesses in! If we only had Matthew's record, we could assume that the women saw the shining angel outside the sepulcher, but a comparison of the other accounts leads to a different understanding. So how do we know those details? Matthew 28:11 says that "some" of the guard reported to the priests and accepted big money to spread a false report, but what happened to the other guards? I have no doubt that some of those guards were soundly converted and gave an eyewitness account to the Christian community.

<sup>4</sup> If the angel had been visible, Magdalene would not have taken off, because she would not have thought that the body had been stolen. The hypothesis that she came once alone, before the others, is highly improbable (see next note).

<sup>5</sup> Her use of the plural "we", verse 2, indicates that she was not alone at the tomb.

<sup>6</sup> I take Matthew and Mark to be parallel, describing the same event: the angel who rolled away the stone is now inside the sepulcher, sitting on the right side; he has turned off his neon and appears to be a young man clothed in white; each account furnishes a few distinct details in the angel's speech—Mark includes "and Peter" [was Peter looking over his shoulder?]. The women were not sure they were happy with the situation, and the 'young man' may well have said more than Matthew and Mark record. I take it that Luke records a second inning: the women are having trouble assimilating the missing body (they were loaded with spices to put on that body—was their effort to be wasted?); so the angel calls in a colleague and they both turn on their neon—a little shock treatment; then they appeal to Jesus' own words, which the women remember, and with that they are convinced and go their way.

<sup>7</sup> Verse 8 says that John (the author) "saw and believed". What did John 'see' that made him 'believe'? He saw the linen strips 'lying', that is, in the form of the body, only there was no body inside them! If someone had stolen the body, as Magdalene supposed, they would have taken the wrapped package (much easier to carry) and there would have been no linen strips. If someone had unwrapped the body, for whatever reason, there would have been a sizable mound of linen strips and spices piled up (how much cloth would it take to wrap up a hundred pounds of spices?). No, Jesus simply passed through the cloth, as He would later pass through the wall of the upper room, leaving the package like a mummy case or empty cocoon. When John saw that he understood that the only possible explanation was resurrection.

<sup>8</sup> When the disciples took off running, of course Magdalene followed them back to the tomb. But she was winded, and could not keep up with them (actually, in that culture women probably seldom ran, so she would really be out of breath, but she was not about to be left out of the action, either). She may have arrived as they were leaving; if not they would pass her on the road. In verse 12 John says that she saw two 'angels'. How did John know they were angels? He had just been there and knew there were no human beings around (the guards were presumably gone before the two got there). The angels were in white, but probably not shining, or Magdalene would have been shaken out of her despair. She was so locked in to her sorrow that not even seeing the wrappings collapsed without the body sank in.

<sup>9</sup> The question may reasonably be asked: How could Magdalene have time to go and come and Jesus appear to her first and still have time to appear to the women before they got to the disciples, the more so since Matthew 28:8 says the women "hurried and ran"? I offer the following considerations in relief of the perceived difficulty: 1) The Jerusalem of that day was small and distances were short ("nearby", John 19:42)—it was probably less than a mile, or even half a mile, between the tomb and Peter's house, as well as where the other disciples were staying; 2) the women were probably slow in entering the

13. Magdalene goes and tells the disciples (Mark 16:10-11, John 20:18).
14. Later in the day Jesus appears to Peter (cf. Luke 24:34).<sup>1</sup>
15. The Emmaus road episode (Luke 24:13-35, Mark 16:12-13).<sup>2</sup>
16. Jesus appears to the eleven, Thomas being absent (Luke 24:36-48, Mark 16:14-18, John 20:19-23).
17. After Jesus leaves, Thomas comes in and they tell him (John 20:24-25).

### Post resurrection day events

1. The next Sunday Jesus appears to them again and deals with Thomas (John 20:26-29).
2. Jesus appears to the seven beside the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-22).
3. On a mountain in Galilee (Matthew 28:16-20).
4. Jesus appears to over 500, also to James (1 Corinthians 15:6-7).<sup>3</sup>
5. The ascension from Olivet (Mark 16:19-20, Luke 24:49-51, Acts 1:3-12).

### Conclusion

Putting it all together, I see no reason to doubt that it all happened just like the Text says. There are no discrepancies, even though the variety of details was supplied by several eye witnesses (including converted guards) and recorded by four different Evangelists. This is just what we should expect from an inspired Text—inspired and preserved, to our day.<sup>4</sup>

## Conclusion

So then, did I succeed in defending the objective authority of the Sacred Text—well, of the New Testament? One's presuppositions will presumably figure largely in his answer. Quite apart from presuppositions, I have demonstrated objectively that **f**<sup>35</sup> is independent of all other lines of transmission. That being the case, it MUST hark back to the Autographs, because if it was concocted out of existing materials somewhere down the line, it would be dependent upon those materials. Given the abundance of extant New Testament materials, it is scarcely credible that the materials used in concocting **f**<sup>35</sup> (on that hypothesis) should have disappeared without a trace. Since there are no such materials, **f**<sup>35</sup> was not concocted. If it was not concocted, it harks back to the Autographs.

This brings us to the preservation of the Text. I have demonstrated objectively that we have in hand the precise original wording of the **f**<sup>35</sup> archetype. If that archetype is the Autograph, then we have actual possession of the Original Text.

tomb—the guards making like dead men, dark, spooky (it's a cemetery), all very strange, Magdalene the impulsive one wasn't there; they would be leery—Magdalene may have been almost to Peter's house before they worked up the courage to enter the tomb; 3) Magdalene, Peter and John were excited and had extra adrenalin—it didn't take that long; 4) The women ran out of the tomb and the garden, but not necessarily all the way to the disciples—once they got away from the garden and on 'safe' ground they may well have slowed down, or even stopped, to get a grip on themselves and discuss what had happened (Mary, the mother of James, was no longer young, and none of the women was used to running, not to mention the type of clothing they wore). Putting it all together, I see no reason to doubt that it all happened just like the Text says.

<sup>1</sup> I see no way of determining the correct sequence of items 14 and 15, it could have been the other way around. Also, during resurrection Sunday (we don't know just when) many resurrected saints "went into the holy city and appeared to many" (Matthew 27:53), which would have been **dramatic** confirmatory evidence to those who were visited.

<sup>2</sup> Some have alleged a discrepancy between the two accounts—their mistake is to tie both accounts to the eleven, which was not the case. There were other people in the upper room, besides the eleven. The eleven were reclining at a table, the 'others' would be nearer the door. The two from Emmaus come bursting in, all excited and probably feeling just a little important; it is the 'others', probably to 'prick their balloon', who say, "Oh, we already know that; He has appeared to Simon." (Human nature hasn't changed, and they didn't have the Holy Spirit yet.) While the two from Emmaus are talking with the 'others', not the eleven, Jesus Himself appears and interacts with the eleven (and they think He's a ghost!). Mark, writing for a Roman audience, is emphasizing that the disciples were not gullible, did not 'believe' because they wanted to—in verse 11 they didn't believe Magdalene, in verse 13 nor the two, in verse 14 Jesus rebukes their unbelief. There is nothing here to impugn the genuineness of these verses—they were certainly written by Mark at the same time that he wrote the rest. According to Matthew 28:17 many days later some were still doubting. In any group of people there are always differing levels of belief and unbelief. People's heads work differently, and at different speeds.

<sup>3</sup> I see no way of determining the correct sequence of the events in items 3 and 4.

<sup>4</sup> This section was first circulated as my mailing #21.

This brings us to the inspiration of the Text. If the Author has expended the care necessary to ensure the safe passage of His Text through two millennia, this furnishes a strong argument that He inspired it in the first place (quite apart from the usual arguments to be found in theological treatises).

This brings us to the objective authority of the Text. If the Sovereign Creator has addressed a written revelation to our race and has taken the care to deliver it intact into our hands in this year of our Lord 2009, then we had better believe that in His mind, at least, it has objective authority. And since He is also the Just Judge to whom we must give account—a word to the wise is sufficient.

Dr. Wilbur Pickering  
03-27-2009, Brasília