

The two approaches being used to determine the original wording of the Greek New Testament

Modern-day conventional approach: (Textual Criticism)

The modern-day conventional approach ignores God's promise to preserve His words, and it ignores the fact that most of the ancient Greek manuscripts have amazing and sometimes miraculous agreement between them. Instead of acknowledging the incredible agreement between most of the ancient Greek manuscripts, the proponents of the modern-day approach rely upon a few ancient Greek manuscripts that disagree with each other thousands of times. Obviously, they either believe that God failed to preserve His words as He promised, or they simply do not believe He exists. (Many of the main influencers of this approach are confessed deists or atheists.)

You might wonder why this deistic approach has become so widely accepted. It is founded on a human deduction that cannot be proven. Proponents of this approach start with the unproven theory that the oldest Greek manuscripts must be the most accurate representatives of the original writings. While this theory seems logical to some, acceptance of it requires a person to ignore God's promise to **preserve His words**.¹ The two manuscripts they rely upon most are *Aleph* and *B* which disagree with each other over 3000 times in the gospels alone!² (These both date back to the fourth century and include all of the books of the New Testament.)

The main influencer for this modern-day conventional approach was Fenton Hort who lived during the 1800's. According to his son, Hort was an evolutionist with deistic leanings. He did not believe that the New Testament was divinely inspired by God. To him, the New Testament was just another work of antiquity written by human beings who were prone to making errors.³

Having this mindset, he believed that all of the ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament had errors that resulted when people made copies by hand. Since in his mind, the New Testament was merely a product of human beings, he believed it was up to human beings to try and figure out what the authors originally wrote. Keep in mind that the two Greek manuscripts he assumed were the closest to the original writings disagreed with themselves thousands of times. If **in his view**, the best manuscripts contained so many obvious errors, he had no problem believing that the New Testament was merely the product of human beings, and that it was not miraculously preserved by God **down through the centuries**.⁴

¹ *Psalm 12:6-7* The words of the LORD are pure words, Like silver tried in a furnace of earth, Purified seven times. ⁷ You shall keep them, O LORD, You shall preserve them from this generation forever.

² Anyone who believes God's promise to preserve His words would logically categorize such manuscripts as flawed witnesses to the original writings.

³ The modern-day conventional approach assumes that the New Testament should be treated the same way as other ancient writings of men such as Socrates and Plato. Ancient copies of such works have many disagreements with each other mainly because human beings are prone to making errors when making copies by hand. Then later, when copies were made of the copies that were already flawed with prior copying errors, even more errors resulted. Since there is so much disagreement between manuscripts of ancient human writings, it is impossible to know the exact wording of the original writings of men like Socrates and Plato. To figure out what the various authors actually wrote many centuries ago, human beings in modern times use pragmatic deductions hoping to determine what might have been the original wording, knowing it is impossible to know for sure what the authors originally wrote. This is also true concerning the modern-day conventional approach being used today by humans hoping to figure out the what the New Testament authors might have written.

⁴ Since human beings are prone to making errors when copying, we would expect the various copies to have disagreement between them, **UNLESS** God miraculously preserved His word by superintending the process.

Knowing that the best Greek manuscripts (**in his opinion**) had thousands of disagreements between them, he developed guidelines that men could use to hopefully deduce the original wording of the Greek New Testament (in all the verses where disagreement exists between the manuscripts he considered best). This deductive process is known as “textual criticism.” Because this process relies upon human deductive reasoning, it is impossible to determine the original wording for certain. This is why so many of those who engage in this process have stated that it is impossible to know for sure the exact wording of the Greek New Testament. They conclude this because the entire premise of textual criticism is founded on unproven assumptions that ignore God’s promise to preserve His words. They also ignore the amazing, and in some cases miraculous agreement that exists in the majority of ancient Greek manuscripts of the Greek New Testament. It is profoundly unfortunate that instead of recognizing God’s miraculous preservation on display in the majority of Greek manuscripts, they chose rather to rely upon a few Greek manuscripts that are obviously inferior and greatly flawed witnesses to the original writings.

The modern-day conventional approach has been used and relied upon for many decades. This approach has been used to put together and publish Greek New Testaments published by organizations like the United Bible Society. These Greek New Testaments have been used to produce most modern translations such as the ESV, NASB and NIV New Testaments in English.

The approach based upon faith in God’s promise to preserve His Words.

The modern-day conventional approach using textual criticism was not embraced prior to the nineteenth century. Before then, Christians believed that the best Greek manuscripts were generally in agreement with each other. They logically assumed that those in agreement with each other were the strongest witnesses to the original autographs. Even though many so-called scholars embrace the modern-day conventional approach, there have always been some men of God who rejected the deistic modern-day conventional approach. They concentrated their attention on Greek manuscripts that generally agree with each other. To this day, some godly men compare manuscripts of this nature to one another looking for agreement that reflects divine preservation.

The main premise of this approach is based upon God’s promise to preserve His Words. Logically, manuscripts that agree with each other are considered the best witnesses to the original autographs. Conversely, manuscripts that deviate significantly from the majority (and each other) are considered poor witnesses to the original autographs. They obviously were not the product of divine preservation. It should be noted that such manuscripts not only disagree with the majority, they also disagree greatly with every other manuscript, including the “older” ones. In other words, they are standalone in nature with **no other collaborating witnesses**⁵.

Guided by the knowledge that God promised to preserve His Words, those who believe God’s promises can know for sure the exact wording of books like II Thessalonians because there are 15 ancient Greek

⁵ Since they were standalone copies, it is likely that they were regarded as inferior copies by those who possessed them. In the 19th century, Aleph was discovered in a basket of scraps that monks were using to light fires. They did not regard Aleph as reliable, so they did not use it. Their lack of use would explain why such manuscripts survived so long. They were probably not handled as much as more highly regarded manuscripts that were read to congregations weekly. Manuscripts regarded as trustworthy wore out from handling and had to be replaced periodically.

manuscripts that **agree perfectly with one another**⁶. Because they believe God divinely preserved His Words, they consider such manuscripts like Aleph and B **flawed** since together, they disagree twenty times with the II Thessalonians manuscripts that are in perfect agreement. (The United Bible Society Greek New Testament ignores the testimony of the manuscripts in perfect agreement and relies upon manuscripts like Aleph and B which happen to disagree with each other a dozen times in II Thessalonians.)

Those who know this and truly believe God preserved His Words confidently accept the strong testimony of the fifteen II Thessalonians manuscripts that agree with each other perfectly.

For most of the New Testament books, multiple manuscripts have been identified that agree perfectly with each other. As of early 2026, multiple identical manuscripts have not yet been identified for a few of the New Testament books. The process of collating all the known manuscripts is incomplete. Because I believe God has preserved every single word of the Greek New Testament, I am confident that multiple identical manuscripts for the remaining New Testament books will eventually be identified.

Multiple identical manuscripts testify loudly to God's divinely preserved words. But evidence of divine preservation exists for every New Testament book since there are many manuscripts that are in virtually perfect agreement with each other. This near-perfect agreement makes it possible to determine the exact wording of each verse even for the few New Testament books for which two or more identical books have not yet been identified.

Motivated by the knowledge that God has promised to preserve His words, we can compare all the manuscripts that have near-perfect agreement together looking for agreement. Because there are so many known manuscripts, this can be a very tedious process. But, when manuscripts are carefully compared with each other, some manuscripts seem related to each other because of their strong agreement. (It seems obvious that they are descendants of the same parent – the original document.)

After decades of such collating and comparison, there is one group of manuscripts for each book of the New Testament that are now identified as part of a related family, now labeled *Family 35*. No other group or family of manuscripts agree with each other so strongly as Family 35. Believing that God preserved His words just as He promised, we can confidently focus our attention on this family as it has been identified for each New Testament book.

The fifteen identical books of II Thessalonians are part of Family 35. But there are many other manuscripts for II Thessalonians that have just one deviation. And others that have only 2 or 3 deviations. These near-perfect manuscripts are obviously related to the fifteen perfect copies. (They too are part of Family 35.) Because of their strong agreement with each other, it is obvious that they all are descendants of the original autographs. (This assumes you believe God preserved His words as He promised.) No other manuscripts of II Thessalonians come close in comparison.

Now let's consider the few New Testament books for which no identical manuscripts have been identified yet. For the sake of discussion, imagine a hundred manuscripts for a certain New Testament book are collated and compared with each other. As a result, someone with much experience doing this would be able to identify several manuscripts (say 20 in this example) that seem to be related by amazing agreement. If he then focuses more attention on these 20, he will notice that some agree almost perfectly, with three or less

⁶ Most of these manuscripts that agree perfectly with one another were located in many different cities in countries that are not too far from the Mediterranean Sea.

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deviations. Upon closer analysis, he will eventually realize that these 20 manuscripts agree together on almost every verse. So, the collator can now shift his focus to those few disagreements between the combined 20 manuscripts. If most of these 20 manuscripts agree on one of the verses, the collator can confidently conclude that the agreeing manuscripts have the **correct wording**.⁷ Outlier or standalone readings will become obvious. In fact, closer observation of outliers often reveals obvious spelling or transposing errors that explain the deviation. This is the general process that is used. Generally, evidence of God's preservation is the agreement between manuscripts that agree almost perfectly **with each other**.⁸

Using this approach that assumes divine preservation, manuscripts have been identified that are obviously part of this family of manuscripts now called Family 35. Through the comparing process described above, at least one perfect manuscript has been identified for every New Testament book except Acts. But one has been identified for Acts that is perfect except for one single letter. These perfect manuscripts now form the basis for a Greek New Testament that is based on Family 35. It can be purchased on [Amazon by clicking this link](#). (It may also be read at [no cost online by clicking this link](#).)

To view Tom Bear's companion YouTube videos related to this article, click the following links:

[Evidence that God preserved every single word of the Greek New Testament \(YouTube video\)](#) (7 minutes)

[God has preserved every single word of the Greek New Testament \(YouTube video\)](#) (22 minutes)

⁷ Using this process, at least one manuscript for each of these New Testament books has now been identified as being a complete, God-preserved manuscript.

⁸ In comparison, the textual critic compares a few manuscripts riddled with variations and uses his own pragmatic deductions to best determine which one of the few manuscripts might be the best rendering, even if his conclusion is contradicted by many manuscripts (sometimes over 1000) that agree with each other.