

Is it True That No Two NT MSS Are Exactly the Same?

The idea that no two New Testament manuscripts (MSS) are exactly the same has been widely circulated. The testimony of Wilbur N. Pickering, Ph. D., in his essay, “In Defense of the Objective Authority of the Sacred Text,”¹ explodes this myth based on his own personal collations. Dr. Pickering writes:

[Out of 21 MSS of the Thessalonian epistles I have personally collated], eleven of their exemplars (over half) were ‘perfect,’ and another five were off by only one variant. . . . The MSS come from all over the Mediterranean world. . . . [Considering] minuscule 18 . . . at least ten [generations passed between this MS and] the family archetype[,] [very possibly] fifteen or more[.] . . . 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* [Emphasis in original, both here and below in the bold print.]. . . . 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! . . . MS 18 is not an isolated case . . . [By contrast, a] typical “Alexandrian” MS will have over a dozen variants per page. . . . [but] one of the better f³⁵ MSS [the f³⁵ group is a segment of the Byzantine MSS] will go for pages without a variant. . . . A monk copying an “Alexandrian” MS evidently did not consider that he was handling Scripture, in stark contrast to one copying a f³⁵ MS. . . . In 2 John . . . [I have collated] twenty-four . . . MSS [that] are perfect representatives of the family as they stand . . . in 3 John . . . also twenty-four . . . in Jude . . . seventeen . . . for all three . . . eleven . . . all thirty-seven MSS [from which the statistics of this sentence come] are independent in their generation, as were their exemplars. . . . 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**. . . . [There were] twenty-one perfect exemplars [for all three books, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude]. . . . [In the book of James] . . . the exemplars of [MSS] 18, 35, 1864, 1865, 2221 and 2723 are perfect representatives . . . [In] 1 Peter . . . we have four exemplars that [are perfect copies] . . . [in] 2 Peter . . . we have eight exemplars . . . [in] 1 John . . . we have eight exemplars . . . [in] 2 John . . . most of the [collated] cursives are perfect representatives . . . [in] 3 John . . . we have twenty-one perfect exemplars . . . [in] Jude . . . half of the cursives are perfect representatives . . . The exemplar of [MS] 2723 . . . is perfect throughout a section of seven books. (pgs. 1-12)

Thus, there are actually substantial numbers of manuscripts of the NT that are exactly alike. The findings above are the work of only one man, working with a relatively small number of the over 5,000 MSS of the New Testament. Someone who says that no two MSS of the New Testament are exactly alike does not know what he is talking about.

¹ See <http://walkinhiscommandments.com>.