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# **A TEXTUAL COMMENTARY ON THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT**

A Companion to the Sixth Edition of the  
United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament

by  
**H.A.G. Houghton**

**DEUTSCHE BIBELGESELLSCHAFT**

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in their own language.



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A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament

H. A. G. Houghton

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## PREFACE

This is a commentary on all the textual variations presented in the sixth edition of the United Bible Societies' *Greek New Testament* (UBS6). It covers every unit listed in the apparatus at the foot of the page, as well as readings in the text indicated by square brackets. Its aim is to describe the differing readings at each point, consider the evidence in support of each and explain why the form in the editorial text has been chosen. In many cases an indication is given of the reason the variation unit was selected for inclusion in the apparatus, be that its significance for translation, its theological implications, or the light it sheds on the textual transmission of the New Testament. Like the edition itself, this commentary is intended for an audience of translators, students and non-specialists. It is hoped that the English rendering of variants will also make it accessible to those with limited facility in New Testament Greek who encounter textual variation in footnotes in contemporary translations.

This volume is a successor to both the *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* by Bruce M. Metzger (1971, 1994) and its adapted version for translators, the *Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament* by Roger L. Omanson (2006). Although it was written independently of these, in order to present a new guide based on current scholarship, the final text was compared with both in order to ensure full coverage in places where they overlap. Indications are also given of other publications which may be useful to those wishing to study a particular variant in more detail or to explore a differing interpretation of the data. However, it is beyond the scope of this commentary to offer a comprehensive guide to scholarship at each place of variation. An overview of the textual tradition of the New Testament and the principles of textual criticism is provided in the Introduction, along with information on the background to UBS6 and the creation of this commentary. Technical terms are also explained in a Glossary towards the end of the volume.

I thank the German Bible Society for the invitation to write this book, and my colleagues on the Editorial Board of the United Bible Societies'

*Greek New Testament* for entrusting me with this task and providing feedback on drafts. I am particularly grateful for Klaus Wachtel's detailed engagement with the sections on the Acts of the Apostles and the Catholic Epistles. In addition, Tommy Wasserman generously shared his publications and offered comments on the entries for Mark, John, Acts, the Catholic Epistles and most of the Pauline Epistles, leading to numerous improvements in these books. Amy Myshrall gave helpful feedback on Galatians and Ephesians, and Elijah Hixson kindly provided me with copies of two other commentaries. Florian Voss (German Bible Society) was instrumental in enabling the production of the edition and this commentary to proceed in tandem and inform each other: it has been a pleasure to work with him, and his care and attention have significantly improved this volume.

The hybrid nature of the text of UBS6, described further in the Introduction, means that this book is neither a record of the committee's discussions nor an endorsement of every reading adopted as the editorial text. The persistence of scholarly disagreement as to the form which is most likely to be the earliest at each place of variation should make for humility when providing an account of the development of the text. In offering a personal understanding of the current state of the evidence, I have tried to allow for the fact that the consideration of additional material and the application of new analytical techniques will lead to further changes and differences in successive editions of the Greek New Testament. In order to extend the utility of this volume, I therefore invite its users to bring to my attention any inaccuracies or updates which may be listed on a companion website ([www.hughhoughton.uk/tcgent](http://www.hughhoughton.uk/tcgent)). I am grateful to those who have already contributed to this corrected edition (February 2026). My hope is that, as with the edition itself, such collaboration may further improve the understanding of the nature of the New Testament text, its transmission through the centuries and its significance in each generation.

Birmingham  
St Hugh's Day, 2024

## INTRODUCTION

### The Diversity of the Textual Tradition of the New Testament

Readers should not be surprised or dismayed that the text of the Greek New Testament exists in a variety of forms. Such a situation is only to be expected with a collection of books which has been transmitted across many centuries in thousands of handwritten documents, each of them unique and reflecting the circumstances in which they were produced and used. As with every writing from antiquity, these works circulated through the production of copies made by scribes with varying degrees of competence. Copying errors, material damage obscuring the text, editorial interventions seeking to correct apparent inconsistencies or to offer improvements to language or sense—all these may have contributed to the diversification of the textual tradition on each occasion that a copy was produced.

Evidence for thoroughgoing alteration of the New Testament text is very limited, however, and seems largely to be restricted to the first couple of centuries when the nature and form of the corpus were still under development (e.g. the assembly of letter collections, the production of an early harmony of the gospels, editorial activity such as that associated with Marcion). The translation of biblical books into other languages in this period also contributed to their textual diversity, in that this process inaugurated new traditions which could represent several potential wordings in the source language and which then went on to develop in their own ways. The scarcity of documents surviving from these centuries makes it difficult to establish the extent of textual variation commonly present in the earliest copies and the degree to which these writings may have circulated in 'free' forms alongside a more controlled tradition. Nevertheless, if the manuscripts which have been preserved are representative of the situation in antiquity, there are no grounds for serious doubt as to the consistency of the New Testament tradition.

In addition, the first generations of biblical scholars were aware of the challenges posed by manuscript transmission and took this into account

in their interpretation of the text. Many early Christian writings provide information about differences between copies known to their authors. While the grounds on which they may have preferred one reading to another are not always the same as those adopted by modern editors, ancient interpreters often maintained the value of multiple readings for understanding the sacred text. In any case, copies of the Bible produced for use within Christian communities were treated as scripture regardless of the exact form of text they contained, just as contemporary readers accept differences between modern translations into a single language. Diversity was a characteristic of the New Testament from its beginning, given that it contains four separate accounts of the life of Jesus and letters written to specific communities and individuals which, even though they address particular situations, were still deemed by the early Church to be of broader value for subsequent readers. The oldest surviving documents offer little indication of strict control of textual production or uniformity in scribal practice: along with the various early translations of the New Testament, this shows that the spreading of the message was considered to be of greater importance than its specific wording.

### The Need for an Edition

Just as the New Testament writings pass down the earliest traditions of Christianity, so their own textual history constitutes the record of their transmission across the centuries. A scholarly edition therefore fulfils two functions. It offers a specific form of text, usually that which is considered to be the earliest attainable wording, along with an indication of the development of the tradition as shown by differences within the surviving evidence. The earliest text can be described as 'original' insofar as it is considered to provide the origin for the variant readings, even though its relationship to the documents first produced by the authors or to the collections which stand at the head of the tradition may remain unclear.<sup>1</sup> A single text is desirable for the purposes of translation, interpretation and study, despite varying levels of editorial confidence in the reconstruction. The history of the tradition is illustrated by the criti-

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<sup>1</sup> There are discussions of the term 'original text' in Epp 1999 and by Holmes in Ehrman & Holmes 2013: 637–688. The textual form which underlies all surviving evidence is often referred to as the 'initial text'.

cal apparatus in which variant readings and their attestation are listed. These alternative forms not only indicate options which were not adopted by the editors but also serve as a reminder that the editorial text is a composite form, a reconstruction based on and reflecting the diverse textual tradition of the New Testament. In a hand edition, such as the sixth edition of the United Bible Societies' *Greek New Testament* (UBS6), this apparatus is relatively slim and serves to highlight places of particular importance to users. The current Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* (NA29) is also a hand edition but with a fuller critical apparatus for more technical study.<sup>2</sup> Some of the more comprehensive editions represent the pinnacle of previous generations of scholarship, such as those edited by Tregelles, Tischendorf and Westcott & Hort in the latter half of the nineteenth century and by von Soden in the early twentieth century. In the present day, the understanding of the textual tradition of the Greek New Testament is being transformed by the ongoing *Editio Critica Maior* (ECM). This substantial edition, which will run to several volumes, aims to present the textual history of the first millennium. Following the examination of all available surviving documents, it cites between one hundred and two hundred manuscripts in each book, as well as ancient translations and quotations in early Christian writers. Such a project is only possible through the use of modern digital technology.<sup>3</sup>

As new material is taken into consideration and fresh techniques are applied, the understanding of the text and transmission of the New Testament continues to develop. A scholarly edition provides both a set of the historical data for the text and an interpretation of that evidence based on current knowledge and specific editorial principles (discussed in their own section below). It offers users a working text, enabling them to approach the original writings while reminding them that the tradition is one of diversity and requires further study and interpretation to be more fully appreciated. In addition, it demonstrates the continuity of the transmission and, accordingly, the confidence users may have both in the editorial text and the tradition of the work itself. In

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to the introduction to the edition itself, Trobisch 2013 offers a guide for users.

<sup>3</sup> The ECM is introduced in Houghton et al. 2020, as well as in numerous recent overviews. The edition is accompanied by a range of online resources, some of which are described below.

this way, such an edition points beyond the wording of the text to the message of these writings and the way in which it has been received, understood and transmitted across the centuries.

### **Evidence for the Text of the New Testament<sup>4</sup>**

There is a vast amount of material which transmits the books of the Greek New Testament. Sources may be divided into primary evidence (or 'direct tradition'), consisting of Greek manuscripts, and secondary evidence (or 'indirect tradition') from early translations and quotations in Christian writers.

#### *Direct Tradition*

The oldest surviving New Testament documents are written on papyrus, a writing material made from plant stems which was in regular use until around the eighth century. Most of these have only been rediscovered since the end of the nineteenth century, preserved in the dry climate of the Egyptian desert. Almost all are fragmentary, ranging from scraps of single pages to more substantial books lacking portions at the beginning or end. The dating of papyri is approximate and is usually assigned on the basis of palaeography (comparison of handwriting styles): techniques from the physical sciences have yet to provide more specific results.<sup>5</sup> Some New Testament papyrus manuscripts may have been copied as early as the second century but a range of at least fifty years (and probably much more) should be applied to palaeographical estimates. The date assigned to copies of literary texts is often subject to revision as more comparative material is published from excavations. Although many ancient papyrus documents were written as scrolls, most Christian books take the form of a codex, consisting of folded pages written on both sides and bound in the middle.

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<sup>4</sup> An effort has been made to explain technical terms which appear in this account, but users may also wish to refer to the Glossary towards the end of this book.

<sup>5</sup> The calibration curve involved in Carbon-14 dating means that this often cannot be any more specific than palaeographic approaches. Recent developments in Raman spectroscopy or micro X-ray fluorescence analysis of ink offer a promising, non-invasive way of dating material, but this has not so far been widely applied. See further Nongbri 2018: 72–82 and Goler et al. 2019.

## THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

### Overview

Matthew is attested in seventeen fragmentary papyri from the second to the fourth century: the most substantial are Papyri 64/67 (two parts of the same document, identified as  $\mathfrak{P}^{64}$ ) and Papyrus 45 ( $\mathfrak{P}^{45}$ ), which contain portions of three and four chapters respectively. The principal sources for its text are the major majuscule codices of the fourth and fifth centuries: Codex Sinaiticus (01), Codex Alexandrinus (02), Codex Vaticanus (03), Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (04) and Codex Bezae (05). Of these, Codex Alexandrinus is usually the oldest witness to the majority text, which is sometimes also reflected in the Greek-Latin bilingual Codex Bezae. The agreement of the other early witnesses is often paralleled in Codex Regius (019, from the eighth or ninth century), and the group of minuscule manuscripts known as Family 1 ( $f^1$ ) which reflect a scholarly edition created in the tenth century. Other important minuscule witnesses are GA 33, 597, 892 and 1241. The text typical of the later Byzantine tradition is seen in most other majuscules, including Codex Washingtonianus (032, also called the Freer Gospels, whose date is uncertain), three ninth-century codices, 037 (a Latin-Greek bilingual), the Koridethi Codex (038) and 044. Family 13 ( $f^{13}$ ) also usually agrees with the majority. Some of the early majuscules, especially 01 and 04, have multiple layers of corrections, which are indicated in sequence by superscript numerals.

All four gospels are present in the three principal early biblical translations: Latin, consisting of the Old Latin ( $lat^{vi}$ ) and Jerome's fourth-century revision known as the Vulgate ( $lat^{vg}$ ); the two main Old Syriac manuscripts ( $sy^s$  and  $sy^c$ ), as well as the later Peshitta ( $sy^p$ ) and Harklean version ( $sy^h$ ); the Coptic versions, including the Sahidic ( $co^{sa}$ ) and subsequent standard Bohairic ( $co^{bo}$ ).<sup>1</sup> Among early Christian writers, the commentary on Matthew by the third-century writer Origen was par-

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<sup>1</sup> Two further Old Syriac manuscripts have been discovered in recent years:  $sy^f$ , a palimpsest in St. Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai, with fragments of all four gospels, and a fragment of Matt. 11–12 in a double palimpsest in the Vatican Library.

ticularly influential (see Matt. 8:28 below), but it has not been preserved in its entirety. Second-century witnesses include Irenaeus and the Latin author Tertullian, as well as Tatian's *Diatessaron* (a Greek harmony of the four gospels which is only known through secondary sources).

Although Matthew usually comes first in collections of the four gospels, it was not the first to be written. It is generally accepted that Matthew was dependent on Mark; some also believe that it was a source for Luke. This means that comparisons with those two gospels may shed light on the development of the text. Nevertheless, Matthew was the principal gospel in antiquity, making it the main source for quotations and also meaning that the other accounts were assimilated to it. Despite ancient claims that Matthew was originally written in Hebrew, it is clearly a Greek composition as shown by its verbal dependence on Mark and its use of the Septuagint for quotations from the Jewish Scriptures. The identification of 'Semitic' constructions in its language or textual variants (apart from those in biblical quotations) is debatable.

There are three additional verses in the Byzantine tradition of Matthew not attested in the earliest manuscripts (Matt. 17:21, 18:11 and 23:14; see below). There is also one verse traditionally identified as a 'Western non-interpolation' (Matt. 27:49; see further the Overview for Luke), in which material from John appears to have been added at an early point. Three other verses are absent from a few ancient witnesses (Matt. 12:47, 16:2b–3 and 21:44). Other well-known variants include the inclusion of 'without cause' at Matt. 5:22, the forms of the doxology in the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:13), variations involving the teaching on adultery (Matt. 19:9), the sequence of the two sons in Matt. 21:29–31 and the question as to whether the Son knows the day and hour (Matt. 24:36). Names are a particularly common place of variation in this gospel, including the Gadarenes (Matt. 8:28), the apostle Thaddeus (Matt. 10:3) and Jesus Barabbas (Matt. 21:16–17).

The *Editio Critica Maior* of Matthew is in preparation and expected to appear in the next few years. Work towards this may be seen online in the form of transcriptions in the New Testament Virtual Manuscript Room (NTVMR) as well as the *Text und Textwert* (TuT) collations.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See further <https://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/>. For more on *Text und Textwert* and the other material mentioned in this overview, see the Introduction above.

The text of Matthew in UBS6 remains identical to that of the two previous editions apart from the removal of some square brackets.

### 1:7–8 Ἀσάφ, Ἀσάφ (Asaph, and Asaph) {B}

The majority of Greek manuscripts read Ἀσά, Ἀσά ('Asa, and Asa'; 019 032 037 etc.), which is the name of the son of Abijah (or Abijam) at 1 Kings 15:8. Nevertheless, there is very strong early support for Ἀσάφ, Ἀσάφ ('Asaph, and Asaph';  $\mathfrak{B}^{\text{vid}}$  01 03 04 etc.). There are numerous instances of the name Asaph in the Septuagint (e.g. 2Kings 18:18, 1Chron. 16:5, Neh. 7:44, Psalms 73–83 [72–82 LXX]). Given the frequency of the latter name, it could be that it was erroneously substituted for Asa at an early point, or that it is simply a spelling variant for Asa. However, taking into account the attestation of Asaph (also seen in the Latin, Coptic and Ethiopic translations), it seems more likely that this was the earliest text which was then corrected by an editor who compared Matthew's account with that of the Septuagint. It is possible that the evangelist may have taken the genealogy from an independent list rather than drawing directly on biblical narrative, which could account for this error.<sup>3</sup> In any case, the principle of consistency in referring to a single person throughout the Bible means that many translations will use the name Asa here, regardless of which reading is considered original. See also the following variation unit.

### 1:10 Ἀμώς, Ἀμώς (Amos, and Amos) {B}

As in the previous unit, while early witnesses read Ἀμώς, Ἀμώς ('Amos, and Amos'; 01 03 04 etc.), most Byzantine manuscripts have Ἀμών, Ἀμών ('Amon, and Amon'; 019 032 *f*<sup>13</sup> etc.). Again, the latter is the correct name for the son of Manasseh (or Manasses) at 2Kings 21:18, while the name Amos is likely to have been more familiar as the father of Isaiah (2Kings 19:2 etc.) and one of the Minor Prophets in his own right. While Ἀμώς could have been an early error for Ἀμών, the external evidence (which differs slightly from the pattern of attestation in Matt. 1:7–8) suggests that Ἀμών is a later correction. Even so, based in the principle of consistency mentioned in the previous unit, translations may prefer to use Amon to indicate this king.

<sup>3</sup> Metzger 1994: 1.

**1:16** τὸν ἄνδρα Μαρίας, ἐξ ἧς ἐγεννήθη Ἰησοῦς ὁ λεγόμενος Χριστός (lit. the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah) {A}

The editorial text is found in the oldest surviving manuscripts (Ⲕ<sup>1</sup> 01 03 04 etc.) as well as Byzantine tradition, and so is confidently adopted as the earliest form of text. Nevertheless, there are variant readings which are of theological interest in that they alter the description of Joseph and Mary in order to emphasise the virgin birth, even though the change in phrasing in the editorial text from the rest of the genealogy already indicates that Jesus' birth was different from those preceding. One group of witnesses reads ὃ μνηστευθεῖσα παρθένος Μαρὶὰμ ἐγέννησεν Ἰησοῦν τὸν λεγόμενον Χριστόν ('to whom having been betrothed a virgin, Mary, bore Jesus who is called Christ'; 038 *f*<sup>13</sup> lat<sup>vl-pt</sup>). This is clearly an editorial change to indicate that Joseph was not Mary's husband at the time when Jesus was born, as well as underline Mary's virginity. A similar text is supported by the Curetonian Syriac, ὃ μνηστευθεῖσα ἦν Μαρὶὰμ παρθένος, ἣ ἔτεκεν Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν ('to whom Mary, a virgin, was betrothed, who gave birth to Jesus Christ'), which is paralleled in the third-century Greek writer Hippolytus; the other Old Syriac manuscript, the Sinaitic, is close to this but, surprisingly, has Joseph as the subject of the verb ('Joseph ... begot Jesus'). This appears to be a unique reading produced by an unthinking adherence to the pattern of the rest of the genealogy in which each name is repeated twice, the second time at the beginning of the 'begot' clause. The full range of readings in continuous-text Greek manuscripts is given in *TuT Matthew* (TS2), while a variety of potential witnesses to the more unusual readings have been considered in greater detail elsewhere.<sup>4</sup>

**1:18** γένεσις (birth) {C}

The majority of Greek witnesses read γέννησις ('birth'; 019 *f*<sup>13</sup> etc.), while the oldest manuscripts have γένεσις (also 'birth'; Ⲕ<sup>1</sup> 01 03 04 etc.). The difference between the two terms is that the latter has the sense of 'creation' (as in the book of Genesis) and 'genealogy' (for which it is used at Matt. 1:1), whereas the former refers to the physical process of

<sup>4</sup> e.g. Metzger 1972; Nolland 1996; Min 2005: 301–304.

giving birth. As such, γέννησις is the more appropriate word here and was used by early Christian writers to refer to the Nativity: it is attested in both Irenaeus and Origen. It is possible that this was original, with the evangelist making a deliberate change in terminology between Matt. 1:1 and 1:18. However, the attestation favours γένεσις, which is the harder reading in terms of sense although it is a simple substitution given its use in Matt. 1:1.<sup>5</sup> The similarity of the two words suggests that they might have been confused on multiple occasions. In certain languages, translators may have to choose between words with different nuances, whereas in others (such as English) it may be possible to render both in the same way. Both SBLGNT and THGNT have γένεσις.

### 1:25 υἰόν (a son) {A}

Most manuscripts read τὸν υἰὸν αὐτῆς τὸν πρωτότοκον ('her firstborn son'; 04 05\* 032 etc.; see *TuT Matthew* TS4), but a group of important witnesses simply have υἰόν ('a son'; 01 03 035 *f*<sup>1</sup> etc.). The possibility that the additional phrase was omitted by eyeskip from the end of υἰόν to the end of πρωτότοκον is negligible, given the addition of τόν ('the') at the beginning and the fact that υἰόν is often written as a *nomen sacrum* (YN). Instead it seems that the shorter form, with its early attestation, has been expanded to the text found in the parallel passage at Luke 2:7.

### 2:18 κλαυθμός (wailing) {B}

The editorial text, κλαυθμός ('wailing'; 01 03 035 0250 etc.) differs from the form of the original quotation in the Septuagint (Jer. 31:15 [38:15 LXX]), which reads θρήνος καὶ κλαυθμός ('mourning and wailing'; 04 05 019 032 etc.). It is possible that one of these words was omitted by a copyist in error, although the normal pattern for eyeskip would be to omit the second rather than the first term. The likely direction of editorial change is to conform a quotation to its source, which suggests that the longer reading is a correction. However, the relatively slim attestation of κλαυθμός leaves room for doubt as to whether it is original. If θρήνος ('mourning') is read here, it would be the only occurrence of

<sup>5</sup> Ehrman 2011: 88–89 suggests that γέννησις was a deliberate substitution, but Waserman 2012: 340 points to similar unmotivated variation elsewhere.

this noun in the New Testament. The full range of readings in continuous-text Greek manuscripts is given in *TuT Matthew* (TS5).

### 3:2 [καί] (and)

At the beginning of this verse, the textual tradition is split between witnesses which include καί ('and'; 01 03 04 032 *f*<sup>1</sup> *f*<sup>13</sup> and numerous minuscules) and those which lack it (05 017 019 022<sup>vid</sup> 036 037 etc.). In the absence of καί, the participle λέγων simply functions as a marker of direct speech. In the longer reading, which has the better external support and is preferred in SBLGNT and THGNT, the two participles are co-ordinated (κηρύσσων ... καὶ λέγων, 'proclaiming ... and saying').

### 3:16 [αὐτῷ] (to him) {C}

After the verb ἠνεώχθησαν ('were opened'), most Greek manuscripts include the pronoun αὐτῷ ('to him' or 'for him'; 01<sup>1</sup> 04 05<sup>supp</sup> 019 etc.), indicating that only Jesus saw the opening of the heavens and the dove, or that they were for his benefit. The absence of the pronoun from two important manuscripts (01\* 03) and some early versions may cast doubt on whether it was originally present, in which case the opening of the heavens could be interpreted as a more general event. However, the restriction to Jesus matches the source at Mark 1:10, and the pronoun could easily have been omitted from these few witnesses in error or through assimilation to the parallel at Luke 3:22, where both the heavens and the dove appear to be visible to all. Given the variations in the same manuscripts in the next two units, accidental omission seems less likely; THGNT includes the pronoun, whereas SBLGNT lacks it. The full range of readings in continuous-text Greek manuscripts is given in *TuT Matthew* (TS7).

### 3:16 [τὸ] πνεῦμα [τοῦ] θεοῦ (God's Spirit)

The two manuscripts which lack αὐτῷ in the previous unit also read πνεῦμα θεοῦ ('[a] spirit of God'; 01 03) here, rather than τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ ('the Spirit of God'; 04 05<sup>supp</sup> 019 etc.). The only other time this phrase appears in the gospels is at Matt. 12:28, which supports the shorter reading; the earlier references to the Holy Spirit in Matthew also lack a definite article (Matt. 1:18, 1:20, 3:11), but it is present in later ones (Matt. 4:1, 10:20, 12:32, 28:19). It is therefore possible that the