

## THE PRESERVATION OF SCRIPTURE

by  
William W. Combs\*

One of the many issues in the current debate about Greek manuscript text-types and English versions is the question of the preservation of Scripture. In fact, as one analyzes the arguments for the King James-only, Textus Receptus (TR), and Majority Text (MT) positions, it soon becomes obvious that the doctrine of the preservation of Scripture is at the heart of many of these viewpoints.

It may be helpful, at the outset, to note the major differences among these three perspectives. The MT position differs from the TR position in that it argues that the text of the autographs is more perfectly preserved in the thousands of manuscripts that are part of the Byzantine text-type. Since, therefore, these manuscripts represent a majority of all extant Greek manuscripts, a Greek text derived from a consensus of these manuscripts can be called the Majority Text.<sup>1</sup> The TR viewpoint, on the other hand, suggests that the various printed editions of the Greek New Testament, beginning with Erasmus in 1516, more perfectly preserve the autographs. The name Textus Receptus was not formally attached to these printed editions until 1633.<sup>2</sup> Though the TR is Byzantine in character, yet, because it is based on only about seven out of the thousands of Byzantine-type manuscripts, it differs from the more broadly based MT. Daniel Wallace has counted 1,838 differences between the TR and the *Majority Text* of Hodges and Farstad.<sup>3</sup> There has been no English translation based on the MT. The KJV was, of course, translated from the TR, and the TR and King James-only positions are almost always

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\*Dr. Combs is Academic Dean and Professor of New Testament at Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary in Allen Park, MI.

<sup>1</sup>E.g., Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, eds. *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982).

<sup>2</sup>See William W. Combs, "Erasmus and the Textus Receptus," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 1 (Spring 1996): 35; also available from <http://www.dbts.edu/journal.html>.

<sup>3</sup>"Some Second Thoughts on the Majority Text," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146 (July–September 1989): 276.

inextricably tied to one another such that one can speak of the KJV/TR position. The King James-only view argues that the KJV is the only English Bible that may be called the Word of God.

Preservation is an underlying presupposition that often controls the text-critical arguments of the KJV/TR and MT positions.<sup>4</sup> For example, Edward F. Hills argues that “the New Testament textual criticism of the man who believes the doctrines of the divine inspiration and providential preservation of the Scriptures to be true ought to differ from that of the man who does not so believe.”<sup>5</sup> He goes on to add that the proper method of textual criticism, which he calls the “*consistently Christian*” method, “interprets the materials of New Testament textual criticism in accordance with the doctrines of the divine inspiration and providential preservation of the Scriptures.”<sup>6</sup> The perspective of Hills is one that is universally shared by all those in the KJV/TR camp.<sup>7</sup>

The emphasis given to the preservation argument varies among members of the MT camp. The modern MT and KJV/TR movements owe their impetus to the writings of John Burgon (1813–1888). Though he is often identified with the KJV/TR camp, he himself held a position similar to the MT. This is commonly understood by most anyone who has studied Burgon’s writings.<sup>8</sup> Burgon himself said: “Once for all, we request it may be clearly understood that we do not, by any means, claim *perfection* for the Received text. We entertain no extravagant notions on this subject. Again and again we shall have occasion to point out (*e.g.* at page 107) that the *Textus Receptus* needs correction.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>This assessment is also shared by other observers. See, e.g., Gordon D. Fee, “Modern Textual Criticism and the Revival of the *Textus Receptus*,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 21 (March 1978): 21–24; Daniel B. Wallace, “The Majority-Text Theory: History, Methods and Critique,” *Journal of the Evangelical Society* 37 (June 1994): 186–97; David D. Shields, “Recent Attempts to Defend the Byzantine Text of the Greek New Testament” (Ph.D. dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1985).

<sup>5</sup>*The King James Version Defended*, 4th ed. (Des Moines, IA: Christian Research Press, 1984), p. 3.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.* Similarly, David W. Cloud has an article entitled “Preservation Is Missing in Standard Works on Textual Criticism” (Oak Harbor, WA: Way of Life Literature, 1999); available from <http://wayoflife.org/~dcloud/fbns/preservationis.htm>.

<sup>7</sup>The one exception may be the Trinitarian Bible Society, according to Shields (“Recent Attempts to Defend the Byzantine Text of the Greek New Testament,” pp. 104–6). But see an article on their official web site by G. W. Anderson, which is similar to the normal KJV/TR position on preservation: “What Today’s Christian Needs to Know About the Greek New Testament”; available from <http://biz.ukonline.co.uk/trinitarian.bible.society/articles/grktxt.htm>.

<sup>8</sup>See, e.g., Wallace, “The Majority-Text Theory,” pp. 187–89.

<sup>9</sup>*The Revision Revised* (reprint ed.; Paradise, PA: Conservative Classics, n.d.), p. 21,

Burgon's departure from the TR toward the MT is candidly admitted by TR supporters like Edward F. Hills and Theodore P. Letis.<sup>10</sup> However, Burgon is still claimed by most TR supporters as their champion, while at the same time they continue to denounce the modern MT movement. For example, Donald Waite inexplicably asserts: "I also maintain that [Burgon] would have defended the Textus Receptus over the so-called 'Majority' Greek text of Hodges and Farstad."<sup>11</sup>

For Burgon preservation was certainly an important factor in his text-critical views. He argued:

There exists no reason for supposing that the Divine Agent, who in the first instance thus gave to mankind the Scriptures of Truth, straightway abdicated His office; took no further care of His work; abandoned those precious writings to their fate. That a perpetual miracle was wrought for their preservation—that copyists were protected against the risk of error, or evil men prevented from adulterating shamefully copies of the Deposit—no one, it is presumed, is so weak as to suppose. But it is quite a different thing to claim that all down the ages the sacred writings must needs have been God's peculiar care; that the Church under Him has watched over them with intelligence and skill; has recognized which copies exhibit a fabricated, which an honestly transcribed text; has generally sanctioned the one, and generally disallowed the other.<sup>12</sup>

Burgon's view of preservation was particularly tied to his High Church Anglicanism and apostolic succession, in that the correct text is to be found in what the Church through its bishops has preserved.<sup>13</sup> He observed: "The Church, remember, hath been from the beginning the 'Witness and Keeper of Holy Writ'.... The Church, in her collective capacity, hath nevertheless—as a matter of fact—been perpetually purging herself of those shamefully depraved copies which once everywhere abounded within her pale...."<sup>14</sup> The "Witness and Keeper of Holy Writ" is a reference to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of

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note 2.

<sup>10</sup>Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, p. 192; Theodore P. Letis, "Introduction," in *The Majority Text: Essays and Reviews in the Continuing Debate*, ed. Theodore P. Letis (Grand Rapids: Institute for Biblical Textual Studies, 1987), pp. 2–5.

<sup>11</sup>*Fundamentalist Distortions on Bible Versions* (Collingswood, NJ: Bible for Today Press, 1999), p. 7.

<sup>12</sup>John W. Burgon, *The Traditional Text of the Gospels*, ed. Edward Miller (London: George Bell and Sons, 1896), pp. 11–12.

<sup>13</sup>See Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, pp. 140, 142 and idem, "A History of My Defense of the King James Version," *Burning Bush* 4 (July 1998): 102.

<sup>14</sup>*The Revision Revised*, pp. 334–35.

England, to which Burgon subscribed.<sup>15</sup> Thus, it may be, as Hills and Letis suggest, that Burgon's rejection of the TR was related to its origin with Erasmus, who was not a bishop.<sup>16</sup>

Since preservation was an important ingredient in Burgon's text-critical views, it is not surprising that we should see the argument from preservation used by his followers in the MT camp. It is quite prominent in Wilbur Pickering's articulation,<sup>17</sup> though it receives less emphasis in Zane Hodges' writings.<sup>18</sup> However, Robinson and Pierpont deny that their text-critical methodology in defense of the MT is in any way tied to the doctrine of preservation.<sup>19</sup>

### VIEWS ON PRESERVATION

The views of evangelical Christians who are currently engaged in the present debate about preservation can be classified a number of ways. At the most fundamental level, one can make a twofold division: (1) those who deny the Scriptures teach any doctrine of preservation and (2) those who affirm there is a doctrine of preservation taught by the Scriptures, either directly or indirectly. However, a threefold division is more helpful since those in group 2, who affirm a doctrine of preservation, are themselves sharply divided as to what that doctrine teaches. On one side are those who believe that the Scriptures have been preserved in the totality of the biblical manuscripts (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek), and, on the other side, are those who believe that the Scriptures have only been accurately preserved in the KJV/TR/MT tradition—that any other textual tradition is corrupt.

Right at the onset, we must distinguish between belief in a *doctrine*

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<sup>15</sup>See Edgar C. S. Gibson, *The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England*, 5th ed. (Methuen & Co., 1906), p. 526.

<sup>16</sup>Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, p. 192; and Letis, "Introduction," p. 5.

<sup>17</sup>"Contribution of John William Burgon to New Testament Criticism," in *True or False? The Westcott-Hort Textual Theory Examined*, ed. David O. Fuller (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids International Publications, 1973), pp. 277–80; idem, *The Identity of the New Testament Text* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1977), pp. 143–44. See especially the discussion by Daniel B. Wallace, "The Majority Text and the Original Text: Are They Identical?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148 (April–June 1991): 152–54.

<sup>18</sup>"Rationalism and Contemporary New Testament Textual Criticism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128 (January–March 1971): 29–30. In his later writings, however, Hodges holds the preservation argument in abeyance and argues the MT position on strict text-critical grounds. See, for example, "Modern Textual Criticism and the Majority Text: A Response," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 21 (June 1978): 145–46.

<sup>19</sup>Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont, *The New Testament in the Original Greek According to the Byzantine/Majority Textform* (Atlanta: Original Word Publishers, 1991), pp. xli–xlili.

of preservation and, simply, belief in preservation. This is crucial in understanding exactly what those in group 1 are denying. To my knowledge, no one in that group denies *the preservation of Scripture*, that is, that the books of the Old and New Testaments have been substantially preserved to our day. But they do deny that Scripture anywhere promises, either directly or indirectly, its own preservation—a doctrine of preservation. That is, they can speak of the preservation of Scripture because it is a historical reality, but it is not a theological necessity. This then provides another way to distinguish between groups 1 and 2. Those in group 1, who deny a doctrine of preservation, believe Scripture has been preserved, but it is only a historical reality—a fact that is clear from the historical evidence. Those in group 2, who affirm a doctrine of preservation, also believe that the historical evidence demonstrates the preservation of Scripture, but add that this preservation is a theological necessity—Scripture must be preserved because Scripture itself promises its own preservation. We will now turn to a more complete description of these views.

### Denial of a Doctrine of Preservation

In an article entitled “Inspiration, Preservation, and New Testament Textual Criticism,”<sup>20</sup> by Daniel B. Wallace, we find what is apparently the first definitive, systematic denial of a doctrine of preservation of Scripture.<sup>21</sup> He has been joined in his view by W. Edward Glenny.<sup>22</sup> Though it is impossible to prove that most evangelical Christians have always affirmed a doctrine of preservation, the position of Wallace and Glenny appears to be a rather novel one. It is clearly the rise of the KJV/TR movement that has sparked the recent discussions by Wallace and Glenny, and it is principally the particular doctrine of preservation found in the KJV/TR position that they are seeking to refute—a preservation that hints at, and often openly declares, the perfect preservation of the text of Scripture. But in refuting that extreme view, they have eliminated any vestige of the preservation of Scripture as a doctrine.

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<sup>20</sup>*Grace Theological Journal* 12 (Spring 1991): 21–50. This article originally appeared in *New Testament Essays in Honor of Homer A. Kent, Jr.*, ed. Gary T. Meadors (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1991), pp. 69–102.

<sup>21</sup>Wallace’s former teacher, Harry Sturz, did in fact precede him in the denial of any corollary between inspiration and preservation, but Sturz argued, contrary to Wallace, that preservation *is* promised in Scripture. See Harry A. Sturz, *The Byzantine Text-Type and New Testament Textual Criticism* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), p. 38.

<sup>22</sup>“The Preservation of Scripture,” in chapter 5 of *The Bible Version Debate: The Perspective of Central Baptist Theological Seminary*, ed. Michael A. Grisanti (Minneapolis: Central Baptist Theological Seminary, 1997). But, as I will demonstrate later, Glenny retreats from his denial in a footnote to his essay.

It is important to remember that simple statements to the effect that “God has wonderfully preserved the Scriptures” or that “God has providentially preserved the Scriptures” do not, in and of themselves, tell us anything about one’s belief, or lack thereof, in a doctrine of preservation. Whatever has been preserved, whether it is the Bible or, for instance, Julius Caesar’s *Commentaries on the Gallic War*, has been preserved because God is in control of the universe. Any ancient document that is extant today owes its present existence to God’s preservation. So we can say that all the works of ancient authors in existence today have been “providentially preserved.” But again, this does not necessarily imply a doctrine of preservation—that God must preserve. God did not have to preserve Caesar’s *Commentaries on the Gallic War*, and, as is well-known, many ancient documents that were once known to exist have long since perished (e.g., Origen’s Hexapla<sup>23</sup>). A *doctrine* of preservation of the Scriptures says that they must be preserved—that they cannot have perished.

Both Wallace and Glenny put forth two major arguments against preservation. First, preservation is not a necessary corollary of inspiration; that is, while inspiration is a true doctrine, there is nothing in the doctrine itself that demands that what God inspired he was bound to preserve. Second, the biblical texts that are used to support a doctrine of preservation have been misinterpreted, and, in fact, do not teach such a doctrine. They take what might be called a minimalist approach to these texts. Both of these arguments will be examined in due course.

#### Preservation in the KJV/TR/MT Tradition

Though there are some differences among the King James-only and Textus Receptus positions, they both affirm a doctrine of preservation of Scripture, and it is this doctrine that is generally a controlling principle in their text-critical arguments. Although this doctrine receives greater emphasis and is more fundamental in the KJV/TR position, as we noted earlier, the preservation argument also shows up in most formulations of the MT position. The distinguishing factor in this expression of the doctrine of preservation is the notion that God has only accurately preserved the Scriptures in a particular translation (KJV) and printed Greek text (TR) or in a particular manuscript tradition (Byzantine). Other translations of the Bible and other Greek texts are corrupt to such a degree that they generally cannot be called the Word of God. Questions regarding

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<sup>23</sup>Hexapla is Greek for “sixfold,” and was so named because it was an edition of the Old Testament in six parallel columns. Unfortunately, only fragments of the Hexapla have survived since it was too massive to be copied in full, and the original was destroyed in A.D. 638 when Caesarea was overrun by the Arabs.

the Old Testament text are usually not addressed in this debate.<sup>24</sup>

This view of preservation is often described by its supporters as nothing more than *providential* preservation. When, for example, opponents charge that those who hold this view must actually believe in a continuing miracle of *inspiration*, advocates commonly protest that that is not their position, but that of Peter Ruckman, with which they do not wish to be identified.<sup>25</sup> They, we are told, believe in *providential* preservation. However, one gets the impression from their discussions that for the advocates of this viewpoint the word *providential* has taken on an unusual meaning, that *providential* preservation places the preservation of the Scriptures on a different level than other works.<sup>26</sup> However, this is a misunderstanding of *providential*. In reality, “providence is God’s power in bringing the movement of the universe to its predetermined goal and design.”<sup>27</sup> God brings about his will in the universe either directly (e.g., miracles) or indirectly, that is, through secondary causation. Concerning this latter means, Sproul explains: “We are creatures with a will of our own. We make things happen. Yet the causal power we exert is secondary. God’s sovereign providence stands over and above our actions. He works out His will through the actions of human wills, without violating the freedom of those human wills.”<sup>28</sup>

When most writers speak of the preservation of the Scripture as being providential, they mean Scripture has been preserved by secondary causation, through ordinary human means, rather than by God’s direct, miraculous intervention. God has not chosen to preserve the Scriptures miraculously. Thus the preservation of Scripture is not different *in*

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<sup>24</sup>See Roy E. Beacham, “The Old Testament Text and English Versions,” in chapter 3 of *The Bible Version Debate: The Perspective of Central Baptist Theological Seminary*, ed. Michael A. Grisanti (Minneapolis: Central Baptist Theological Seminary, 1997).

<sup>25</sup>See, e.g., David W. Cloud, “What About Ruckman?” *O Timothy* 11 (November 1994); available from <http://wayoflife.org/~dcloud/articles/ruckman.htm>.

<sup>26</sup>For instance, Edward F. Hills says, “Dr. Warfield ignored the providential preservation of the Scriptures and treated the text of the New Testament as he would the text of any book or writing” (“A History of My Defense of the King James Version,” p. 100). Of course, it is nonsense to suggest that Warfield “ignored the providential preservation of the Scriptures” (see his “The Westminster Confession and the Original Autographs,” in *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, vol. 2, ed. John E. Meeter (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1973), pp. 588–94 [originally published in *The Presbyterian Messenger*, September 13, 1894]). Hills’s negative view of Warfield stems from Warfield’s failure to subscribe to Hills’s particular view of preservation.

<sup>27</sup>Rolland D. McCune, “Systematic Theology I” (class notes, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 1997), p. 185.

<sup>28</sup>R. C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1992), p. 62.

*method* from any other ancient book God has determined to preserve, as, for example, Caesar's *Commentaries on the Gallic War*—both Scripture and Caesar's work have been preserved providentially, by secondary causation, by essentially ordinary human means. But we could also say that Origen's Hexapla has providentially *not* been preserved. A *doctrine* of preservation of the Scriptures would mean, however, that the preservation of Scripture was always assured even though God carried out his will to preserve the Scriptures primarily through the actions of human wills.

Advocates of the KJV/TR position, who themselves use the phrase *providential preservation*, often, in their further descriptions of what they mean by preservation, betray the fact that they do indeed believe in a preservation of the Scriptures that is beyond secondary causation. Ray, for example, on the one hand, says that "God has providentially preserved for us the Greek New Testament from which the Authorized King James Bible was translated in 1611"<sup>29</sup>; on the other hand, he says that "the writing of the Word of God by inspiration is no greater miracle than the miracle of its preservation in the Textus Receptus."<sup>30</sup> David Cloud speaks of "the Scripture which has been providentially 'kept pure in all ages,'"<sup>31</sup> but then says: "The bottom line is that the same Bible that claims to be infallibly inspired also claims to be infallibly preserved."<sup>32</sup> And, amazingly, Richard Flanders, after arguing that the Bible "claims its God-given words will be providentially preserved,"<sup>33</sup> goes so far as to say that "the actual existence of the original text will continue eternally...."<sup>34</sup>

The first major plank of the KJV/TR viewpoint is that preservation is a corollary of inspiration. Hills argues:

If the doctrine of the *divine inspiration* of the Old and New Testament Scriptures is a true doctrine, the doctrine of the *providential preservation* of the Scriptures must also be a true doctrine.... If He gave the Scriptures to His Church by inspiration..., then it is obvious that He would not allow this revelation to disappear or undergo any alteration of its fundamental

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<sup>29</sup>Jasper J. Ray, *God Wrote Only One Bible* (Junction City, OR: Eye Opener Publishers, 1955), p. 193.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>31</sup>"Comments on James Price's *Textual Emendations in the Authorized Version*" (Oak Harbor, WA: Way of Life Literature, 1986); available from <http://wayoflife.org/~dcloud/fbns/commentsonprice.htm>.

<sup>32</sup>"Preservation Is Missing in Standard Works on Textual Criticism."

<sup>33</sup>"Does the Bible Promise Its Own Preservation?" p. 1. This is an unpublished paper by the pastor of the Juniata Baptist Church in Vassar, MI.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 6.

character.<sup>35</sup>

Second, we are told that the Bible actually teaches the doctrine of “infallible” preservation of the Scriptures. Many texts are commonly cited, including Psalm 12:6–7; 119:89; 119:152; 119:160; Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 5:17–18; John 10:35; Matthew 24:35, and 1 Peter 1:23–25. Finally, preservation means that the biblical text has always been publicly available throughout the history of the church. Hills says, “It must be that down through the centuries God has exercised a special, providential control over the copying of the Scriptures and the preservation and use of the copies, so that trustworthy representatives of the original text have been available to God’s people in every age.”<sup>36</sup> These last two points are quite important because they are used to rule out immediately any printed Greek text or version that is not based on the TR. Only the TR, we are told, displays the kind of “perfect” preservation that Scripture promises for itself, and the only Greek text available throughout all of church history, according to this view, has been the TR. Any printed text or version not based on the TR must therefore be of necessity corrupt—not worthy of the title, “the Word of God.”

### Preservation in the Totality of Manuscripts

That God has preserved the Scriptures in the totality of the manuscript tradition has traditionally been the position of most evangelicals and fundamentalists on the subject of preservation. On the one hand, they have generally affirmed that a doctrine of preservation is taught in Scripture; on the other hand, they have rejected the view that preservation is restricted to just a single text-type (e.g., Byzantine text), printed text (e.g., TR), or version (e.g., KJV). For example, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary has said:

While the Bible clearly teaches the ultimate indestructibility of the verbal revelation of God (Matt 24:35; 1 Pet 1:25), it does not tell how and where the written manuscript lineage of that Word is preserved. We believe that God has providentially preserved His word in the many manuscripts, fragments, versions, translations, and copies of the Scriptures that are available, and that by diligent study, comparison, and correlation, the original text (words) can be ascertained.<sup>37</sup>

There is nothing new about this viewpoint. B. B. Warfield understood

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<sup>35</sup>*King James Version Defended*, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup>*Inspiration & Preservation of Scripture* (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 1996); available from <http://www.dbts.edu/inspiration.html>.

this to be the clear teaching of the Westminster Confession:

We thus have brought before us by the Confession, in turn, the original autograph of Scripture, produced by the immediate inspiration of God; the preservation of this autographic text in a multitude of copies whose production is presided over by God's singular care and providence; and the ordinary Bibles in the hands of the people, each of which conveys divine truth to the reader with competent adequacy for all the needs of the Christian life.<sup>38</sup>

Like the previous position, this view normally uses the argument based on a corollary between inspiration and preservation (though sometimes it is not formally stated as such). Wisdom, for example, says, "Verbal inspiration is useless without verbal preservation," and Houghton argues, "A view of inspiration without a corresponding view of preservation is of no value."<sup>39</sup> Though these statements could easily be made by someone in the KJV/TR camp, this view of preservation does not hold that the corollary between inspiration and preservation requires that preservation be restricted to the KJV, TR, or MT. The implications of this corollary will be explored later in this essay. In addition, this view of preservation appeals to some of the same biblical texts as the previous view, though they are interpreted quite differently. It obviously does *not* hold that the doctrine of preservation requires that the most accurate biblical text or, for that matter, any biblical text, be publicly available to God's people at all times.

#### EXAMINATION OF THE BIBLICAL DATA

Appeal has traditionally been made to a number of biblical texts in order to prove a doctrine of preservation. Those who deny that there is any doctrine of preservation discount all these texts, and even those who affirm a doctrine of preservation do not necessarily agree that every one of these texts is applicable. A number of the most commonly cited texts will now be examined. But before these texts are considered, it will be helpful to first look at a phrase whose meaning is central in a number of them—"the Word of God."

#### The Word of God

In order to prove a doctrine of preservation, a number of Scripture

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<sup>38</sup>"The Westminster Confession and the Original Autographs," p. 594.

<sup>39</sup>Thurman Wisdom, "Textus Receptus: Is It Fundamental to Our Faith?" *Faith for the Family*, October 1979, p. 3; Myron J. Houghton, "The Preservation of Scripture," *Faith Pulpit*, August 1999 (a publication of Faith Baptist Theological Seminary, Ankeny, IA).

passages in which the phrase “the word(s) of God” (or Lord) is used are commonly appealed to. It is customarily assumed, usually with no supporting argumentation, that this expression universally refers to Scripture, God’s written revelation. However, a study of this phrase suggests that, more often than not, God’s written revelation is not in view.<sup>40</sup>

A glance at a concordance or lexicon will easily demonstrate that in the Old Testament the expression “the word of God” (or Lord) is used almost universally of oral communication.<sup>41</sup> Most of the time the phrase occurs in instances of God’s communication to man, beginning in Genesis 15:1, “the word of the LORD came to Abraham in a vision, saying, ‘Do not fear...,’”<sup>42</sup> and continuing throughout the OT. Also numerous are the occasions where the word of the prophet to his audience is designated as the “word of the LORD,” beginning at Numbers 36:5, “Then Moses commanded the sons of Israel according to the word of the LORD, saying, ‘The tribe of the sons...,’” and also continuing throughout the OT. Because what came orally to God’s spokesmen was sometimes eventually written down, the phrase came to designate Scripture as well. For instance, when the copy of the Law was found in the temple during the reign of Josiah, the king says: “Go, inquire of the LORD for me and for those who are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book which has been found; for great is the wrath of the LORD which is poured out on us because our fathers have not observed the word of the LORD, to do according to all that is written in this book” (2 Chr 34:21). But this usage is not common in the OT, with other terms being more frequently used to refer to the written word (e.g., law, testimonies, statutes, etc.). While the attributes of God’s oral communication can often be easily transferred to God’s written word, a

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<sup>40</sup>David W. Hay denies the expression “Word of God” is *ever* used in the Bible with reference to writings (“The Expression ‘Word of God’ in Scripture,” *Canadian Journal of Theology* 2 [July 1956]: 139).

<sup>41</sup>Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press), s.v. “דָּבָר,” pp. 182–83 and “דְּבָרִים,” p. 57 [hereafter cited as BDB]. See the discussions in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, s.v. “דָּבָר,” by W. H. Schmidt, 3:111–125; *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, s.v. “Word, Word of God, Word of the Lord,” by H. D. McDonald, pp. 1185–88; *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, s.v. “Word,” by H. Douglas Buckwalter, pp. 828–31; *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, s.v. “Word, Word of the Lord,” by G. W. Bromiley, pp. 956–62. See also Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), pp. 47–50; idem, “Scripture’s Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture,” in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), pp. 19–49.

<sup>42</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*, 1995 edition.

one-to-one correspondence is not always possible; so texts that seem to promise preservation of “the word of God” need to be examined carefully to determine if such an application is valid.

At the beginning of the New Testament there is a continuation of the Old Testament usage when “the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness” (Luke 3:2). But once Jesus comes as “the Word” (John 1:1, 14), there is no further reference of the word of God coming to anyone. While “the word of God” does occasionally designate Scripture in the NT, most often “it is used to refer comprehensively to the body of revealed truths which made up the apostolic gospel.”<sup>43</sup> This is how it is used exclusively in Acts: for example, “they...*began* to speak the word of God with boldness” (4:31); “the word of God kept on spreading” (6:7); “the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied” (12:24); and “the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region” (13:49). The phrases “the word of God” or “the word of the Lord” are used twenty-one times in Acts and in every case the referent is to the apostolic message of Christ, which was delivered orally. This is the normal usage in Paul’s epistles as well. For instance, when Paul describes his enemies as those who “corrupt the word of God” (2 Cor 2:17, KJV), he is not making reference to the Scriptures, but the gospel message.<sup>44</sup> Those in the KJV/TR camp, because they incorrectly assume Paul’s “word of God” is Scripture, commonly argue erroneously that here Paul is acknowledging the corrupting of “manuscripts and translations by false teachers.”<sup>45</sup>

#### Psalm 12:6–7

<sup>6</sup>The words of the LORD *are* pure words: *as* silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. <sup>7</sup>Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt

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<sup>43</sup>J. I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), p. 85. See also Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed., rev. and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), s.v. “λόγος,” p. 478 and “ῥῆμα,” p. 735 [hereafter cited as BAGD]; *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. “λέγω, λόγος, et al.,” by A. Debrunner, et al., 4:114; *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, s.v. “Word, Tongue, Utterance,” by B. Klappert, 3:1113.

<sup>44</sup>Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 157; Ralph P. Martin, *2nd Corinthians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986), p. 50.

<sup>45</sup>David W. Cloud, “The Problems with Bible Preservation/Can You Answer All of the Questions?” (Oak Harbor, WA: Way of Life Literature, 1999 [available from <http://wayoflife.org/~dcloud/fbns/problemswith.htm>]); also Clinton Branine, *The History of Bible Families and the English Bible* (Greenwood, IN: Heritage Baptist University, n.d.), p. 1; Ray, *God Wrote Only One Bible*, p. 4.

preserve them from this generation for ever. (KJV)

Several ideas are usually extracted from this verse in the KJV by those in the KJV/TR camp. The “words of the LORD” are understood to be the Bible, and these “pure words” are promised an eternal preservation. It is also understood that these “pure words” will be preserved in a pure form. There are several problems with this interpretation. Everyone would agree that the originally inspired words are “pure words” in the sense that they are “true and dependable, containing no hidden dross or deceit.”<sup>46</sup> Truly, these “pure words” are inerrant words, but the passage does *not* say how *purely* they will be preserved, only that they will be preserved. Therefore, at most this verse might be a general promise of the preservation of God’s Word. Even then it is somewhat problematic that God would promise only to preserve his Word from David forward (“from this generation”). What about the period between Moses and David?<sup>47</sup>

However, it is more probable that verse 7 (“Thou shall keep them...thou shalt preserve them”) is not even referring to “the words of the LORD” in verse 6. That is, the antecedent of “them” in verse 7 is probably not the “words” of verse 6. The Hebrew term for “them” (twice in v. 7) is masculine, while the term for “words” is feminine. Therefore, most interpreters and versions understand the promise of preservation in verse 7 to apply to the “poor” and “needy” of verse 5. Note the NIV:

<sup>5</sup>“Because of the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy, I will now arise,” says the LORD. “I will protect them from those who malign them.” <sup>6</sup>And the words of the LORD are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times. <sup>7</sup>O LORD, you will keep us safe and protect us from such people forever.

David’s subject in this Psalm is stated right in verse 1: “Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases to be, For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men.” David is concerned about the righteous who are being oppressed by the wicked of “this generation.” In the midst of this he declares his assurance that God will preserve the righteous forever. Taken in this sense, this passage has no bearing on the doctrine of preservation.

### Psalm 119:89

Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven.

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<sup>46</sup>*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, s.v. “צַרְיָה,” by Robin Wakely, 3:849.

<sup>47</sup>Glenny, “The Preservation of Scripture,” p. 91.

About this verse, D. A. Waite argues:

God's Word is not in doubt. It is permanent. It is unconfused and plain. God has settled this. If it has been settled, that means it has been preserved, kept pure, Nothing has been lost.... Some people say, "Well, it is settled in Heaven but not on earth." But God doesn't need it in Heaven; He knows His Word. We are the ones who need it. He is using this verse, Psalm 119:89, to show us that God has given us Words that are settled.<sup>48</sup>

Thus we are to understand that there is a perfect copy of the Bible in heaven, and this perfect Bible has been "given" to us here on earth.

There are a number of problems with this interpretation. For one, as has been previously explained, it cannot be automatically assumed that any reference to the word of God ("Your word") is to be identified with God's written revelation. So the question in Psalm 119:89 becomes, Is "Your word" a reference to Scripture or some other usage of the term *word*? On the positive side, it is universally recognized that in Psalm 119 the term *word* (דְּבָרָה), used here, along with the expressions *law* (תּוֹרָה), *testimonies* (עֲדוּת), *precepts* (פְּקוּדִים), *statutes* (חֻקִּים), *commandments* (מִצְוֹת), *ordinances* or *judgments* (מִשְׁפָּטִים), and *promise* or *word* (אִמְרָה) are commonly used as "synonyms for Scripture,"<sup>49</sup> particularly the Torah.<sup>50</sup> And in this section of the Psalm (vv. 89–98), other verses do seem to make reference to the Torah: "If Your law had not been my delight, Then I would have perished in my affliction" (v. 92); "I will never forget Your precepts, For by them You have revived me" (v. 93); "I am Yours, save me; For I have sought Your precepts" (v. 94); "The wicked wait for me to destroy me; I shall diligently consider Your testimonies" (v. 95); "I have seen a limit to all perfection; Your commandment is exceedingly broad" (v. 96). So the Psalmist could be referring to Scripture, and it must be admitted that even some who do not share the KJV/TR viewpoint on preservation, nevertheless, believe that verse 89 refers to "a copy of words that God in heaven has permanently decided on and has subsequently caused to be committed to writing by men."<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup>*Defending the King James Bible* (Collingswood, NJ: Bible for Today Press, 1992), pp. 7–8.

<sup>49</sup>Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), p. 417.

<sup>50</sup>Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), p. 139.

<sup>51</sup>Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture," p. 33. See also John R. Rice, *Our God-Breathed Book—The Bible* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1969), p. 181. William D. Barrick understands Ps 119:89 to mean that the Word of God is preserved in heaven in the *mind* of God ("Ancient Manuscripts and Exposition," *Master's Seminary Journal* 9 [Spring

Granting for the moment that this verse is referring to God's written revelation in heaven, it still says nothing about the preservation of that revelation here on earth, notwithstanding Waite's protestations to the contrary. In fact, it says nothing about its initial inspiration here on earth. In short, no direct promise of preservation here on earth can be gleaned from this verse.

Apart from this verse, there is nothing in the rest of Scripture to suggest the idea of an archetypal Bible in heaven, which, if true, might logically lead to a dictation view of inspiration.<sup>52</sup> While it might be accurate to describe some portions of the Bible as being dictated (e.g., The Ten Commandments), conservative explanations of the doctrine of inspiration have generally rejected a dictation methodology.<sup>53</sup> It seems more likely that "Your word" in verse 89 has no *direct* reference to God's written revelation. As Anderson notes, "thy word...is probably the expression of God's all-embracing purpose and will (cf. Isa 40:8)."<sup>54</sup> God's purpose, his will, is "firmly fixed" in heaven "beyond the reach of all disturbing causes."<sup>55</sup> This seems confirmed by the next two verses:

<sup>90</sup>Your faithfulness *continues* throughout all generations; You established the earth, and it stands. <sup>91</sup>They stand this day according to Your ordinances, For all things are Your servants.

What God says, his word, is determined and fixed; it can be counted on; thus, God is faithful. His word holds the universe in place.<sup>56</sup> Thus, it would appear that this verse has no direct application to the doctrine of preservation.

#### Psalm 119:152

Of old I have known from Your testimonies That You have founded them forever.

This verse would seem to offer stronger support for a doctrine of preservation. The context (vv. 145–52) makes clear reference to God's

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1998]: 28).

<sup>52</sup>E.g., Rice, *Our God-Breathed Book—The Bible*, pp. 282–91.

<sup>53</sup>E.g., Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983–1985), 1:207.

<sup>54</sup>A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, 2 vols., New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 831.

<sup>55</sup>J. A. Alexander, *The Psalms* (reprint of 1873 ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), p. 495.

<sup>56</sup>Glenny, "The Preservation of Scripture," p. 88.

written revelation in the Torah. The Psalmist says he will observe the Lord's "statutes" (v. 145) and keep his "testimonies" (v. 146). He waits for His "words" (v. 147) and meditates in His "word" (v. 148) and asks to be revived according to the LORD's "ordinances" (v. 149). The Psalmist observes that the wicked do not obey His "law" (v. 150). Finally, he concludes in verses 151–52, "You are near, O LORD, And all Your commandments are truth. Of old I have known from Your testimonies that You have founded them forever." These "testimonies," have been "founded forever," meaning, as the NIV puts it, "you established them to last forever."

Glenny seeks to deny any reference to preservation by suggesting the point of the verse is that "in contrast to the wicked, the Psalmist is trusting in God's Word (vv. 145–149). His confidence is that God's law is not fickle; it is trustworthy and based on God's unchanging moral character. That must be the meaning of verse 152 in its context."<sup>57</sup> All of this is true but it is doubtful if it goes far enough. If God has "established" the "testimonies" to "last forever," it is certainly true that "God's law is not fickle" and that "it is trustworthy and based on God's unchanging moral character." But since the Psalmist would have come to know these "testimonies" from the written Torah, probably through his own reading, it is difficult to imagine that he could divorce their being "founded," established, or caused to "last forever" apart from a *preserved* written form, the written form from which he was reading. The Torah could not likely be "established...to last forever" apart from a written form. Verse 152 appears to be a fairly direct promise of preservation.

#### Psalm 119:160

The sum of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting.

This verse is similar to Psalm 119:152 in that it is part of a section (vv. 153–60) in which the Psalmist makes numerous references to the Torah: "law" (v. 153), "word" (v. 154), "statutes" (v. 155), "ordinances" (v. 156), "testimonies" (v. 157), "word" (158), and "precepts" (159). Again, Glenny seeks to discount the preservation emphasis in verse 160 by interpreting it as he does verse 152. Concerning the last part of the verse, "And every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting," Glenny says: "[the Psalmist] must be expressing his confidence in the infallibility and absolute trustworthiness of God's Word. Every statement in God's Word is dependable."<sup>58</sup> Certainly that is true, but it

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

seems to fall short of the meaning of the last part of the verse. God's special revelation is "truth"—it is "dependable," as Glenny notes; but it is also "everlasting." As in verse 152, the Psalmist is reflecting on God's Word in the written Torah, which he sees as both dependable and imperishable. This verse, then, like 152, would also seem to strongly imply a doctrine of preservation.

### Isaiah 40:8

The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.

In this verse we are again faced with the problem of identifying "the word of our God," as well as the meaning of "stands forever." The Hebrew word for "stands" (עָמַד) when it is used figuratively can have the ideas of "fixed," "confirmed," "established," "endure," and according to BDB in this verse the particular sense is "be fulfilled."<sup>59</sup> BDB also suggests parallels with Isaiah 14:24, "The LORD of hosts has sworn saying, 'Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand,'" and Isaiah 46:10, "Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure.'" Thus, the idea would be that "the word of our God stands forever" in the sense that it will "be fulfilled." However, commentators universally understand the emphasis to be more that of "permanence"—the permanence of God's word in contrast to "the grass" and "the flowers."<sup>60</sup> Motyer says that in verses 6–8 "the message is the contrast between human transience and divine permanence, designed to affirm that what the Lord promises he will most surely keep and perform."<sup>61</sup> Thus Isaiah says that the plans and purposes of the nations will fail, "but the word of our God stands forever"—his plans are fixed, established, permanent; they cannot be "annulled by the passage of

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<sup>59</sup>p. 878.

<sup>60</sup>So Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965, 1969, 1972), 3:35; John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 2 vols., New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986, 1998), 2:54; Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 42; Barry G. Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), p. 163; George A. F. Knight, *Isaiah 40–55*, 2nd ed., International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), pp. 14–15; R. N. Whybray, *Isaiah 40–66*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 51.

<sup>61</sup>J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), p. 245.

time.”<sup>62</sup> Alexander suggests that “there is a tacit antithesis between the word of God and man; what man says is uncertain and precarious, what God says cannot fail.”<sup>63</sup> What God says, his word, cannot be changed; it is immutable.

Glenny seeks to dismiss any implications this verse might have for the preservation of Scripture by arguing that “this OT context speaks of the infallibility of God’s promises to deliver His people from their captivity in Babylon.”<sup>64</sup> Earlier he says that “this promise from God ‘stands forever’; it is infallible.”<sup>65</sup> But this analysis seems to miss the clear emphasis of “permanence” in verse 8, an emphasis that would support the preservation of the word of God. However, it must still be determined if “the word of our God” refers to written revelation. Glenny argues that Isaiah is referring more generally to God’s word, that is, “God’s promise to deliver His people from the Babylonian Captivity and bring them back to Judah (vv. 9ff.).”<sup>66</sup> But most would not wish to restrict the phrase so narrowly. Grudem is probably more on target when he observes that “Isaiah 40:6–8...refers to the words of God spoken and/or written through the Old Testament prophets” and that verse 8 “is a statement about the character of God’s words generally, without reference to any particular form in which they occur.”<sup>67</sup>

Overall, then, it does not appear that verse 8 should be pressed to affirm a specific and direct promise of the preservation of God’s written revelation. Instead, it may have a more indirect application to the doctrine.

#### Matthew 5:17–18

<sup>17</sup>Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. <sup>18</sup>For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

This is one of the most commonly referenced passages used to

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<sup>62</sup>*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, s.v. “עֹלָם,” by Anthony Tomasino, 3:349.

<sup>63</sup>J. A. Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2 vols. (reprint of 1875 ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 2:98.

<sup>64</sup>“The Preservation of Scripture,” p. 89.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup>Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 90.

support the preservation of Scripture. More familiar are the words of the KJV, which renders the last part of verse 18 thusly, “one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.” It is universally agreed that the “jot” (ἰῶτα) refers to Hebrew (or Aramaic) letter י (yōd), the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet.<sup>68</sup> The “tittle” (κεραία) literally means “horn,” that is, a “projection” or “hook.”<sup>69</sup> This has often been understood to refer to small parts of letters, especially the small strokes distinguishing similar Hebrew letters (e.g., י and ך).<sup>70</sup> The NASB’s “smallest letter or stroke” very adequately conveys the sense.

Taken at face value, the phrase “not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law” could be understood to teach an absolutely perfect preservation of the “Law.” And in fact Flanders says:

Some say that this promise refers only to the *fulfillment* of scripture and not to its preservation. But notice that it says the text of the Bible (to the very letter) will not “pass” in the sense that “heaven and earth” shall one day “pass.” The Greek word used here for “pass” is *pareithe*, and it refers to the physical extinction of the thing that shall pass. It can also be translated “perish.” Just as God’s creation *will* pass some day, God’s Words will *never* pass! The actual existence of the original text of scripture will continue eternally, just as the physical existence of heaven and earth will not continue.<sup>71</sup>

Flanders’s interpretation is just how Matthew 5:18 is commonly understood from the KJV/TR viewpoint. Cloud explains: “In summary, the Bible promises that God will preserve His Word in pure form, including the most minute details (the jots and titles [*sic*], the words), and that this would include the whole Scriptures, Old and New Testaments. The biblical doctrine of preservation is verbal, plenary preservation....”<sup>72</sup> Waite describes this as the “inerrant preservation of the Words of the

<sup>68</sup>E.g., BAGD, s.v. “ἰῶτα,” p. 386; D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in vol. 8 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), p. 145; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 80; R. T. France, *Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), p. 115.

<sup>69</sup>BAGD, s.v. “κεραία,” p. 428.

<sup>70</sup>E.g., Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), pp. 109–110; Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), p. 104; John A. Broadus, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1886), p. 100; Other suggestions include the Hebrew letter י (wāw), the hook at the top of the ancient י, or scribal ornamentation of certain letters (see Carson, “Matthew,” p. 145; Gundry, *Matthew*, p. 80).

<sup>71</sup>“Does the Bible Promise Its Own Preservation?” p. 6.

<sup>72</sup>“Preservation Is Missing in Standard Works on Textual Criticism.”

Bible.”<sup>73</sup> But, in fact, these advocates of KJV/TR position do not actually take Matthew 5:18 literally, even though they claim to do so. If not one “jot” or “tittle” is to be changed, then they should insist on using only the 1611 edition of the KJV since “jot” and “tittle” certainly involve spelling, and there have been thousands of spelling changes since 1611. In addition, if not one “jot” or “tittle” is to be changed, they should also insist upon the authority of the Apocrypha since it was also a part of the 1611 edition.

There are two things to be said about the KJV/TR interpretation of Matthew 5:18. First, it is an *incontrovertible* fact, obvious to anyone who has examined the manuscript evidence, that we do not now possess the words of the autographs in an absolutely inerrant state. This assertion is most significant since it flatly contradicts the whole thesis of the KJV/TR position. I will demonstrate the truth of this assertion later in this essay. Second, Jesus is not teaching in this verse the “inerrant preservation of the Words of the Bible.” We will now turn to the actual meaning of Jesus’ words.

Matthew 5:18 is first of all an example of hyperbole,<sup>74</sup> “a conscious exaggeration or a type of overstatement in order to increase the effect of what is being said.”<sup>75</sup> In a graphic way, then, this text makes a point similar to Isaiah 40:8—if “not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished,” the “Law” is immutable;<sup>76</sup> it “stands forever.” “No part of the law, not the most insignificant letter, was to be set aside”<sup>77</sup>; “the law is unalterable.”<sup>78</sup> But unlike Isaiah 40:8, this text is more directly tied to Scripture since “Law” in verse 18 is at least a reference to the Torah, more probably the entire OT.<sup>79</sup> But again, this is not to be taken literally, as though Jesus were promising that no Hebrew manuscript could be changed or that no copyist could make an error. This is simply a hyperbolic way of saying that God’s written revelation cannot be changed.

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<sup>73</sup>*Fundamentalist Distortions on Bible Versions*, p. 23.

<sup>74</sup>So Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary of the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 178; Robert H. Stein, *Difficult Sayings in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), p. 36.

<sup>75</sup>Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. and Moisés Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p. 95.

<sup>76</sup>Keener, *Matthew*, p. 177; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols., International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988, 1991, 1997), 1:492.

<sup>77</sup>Broadus, *Matthew*, p. 100.

<sup>78</sup>France, *Matthew*, p. 115.

<sup>79</sup>Carson, “Matthew,” p. 145.

If the Scripture cannot be changed, then it obviously remains valid, with full authority. Thus, the emphasis in Matthew 5:18 is more on the *authority* and *validity* of the OT, not primarily its preservation.<sup>80</sup> As Moo observes: “Probably, then, we should understand v. 18 to be an endorsement of the continuing ‘usefulness’ or authority of the law.”<sup>81</sup> Thus, this verse makes no *direct* affirmation concerning preservation; however, the emphasis on the continuing authority of the Scriptures can *by implication* be used to argue for the preservation of those same Scriptures. This approach will be discussed later in this essay.

### John 10:35

If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken),

This verse is also commonly used to prove a doctrine of preservation. Waite says: “The Lord Jesus Christ Himself is saying that the Words of God cannot be ‘loosened, broken up, destroyed, dissolved, melted, or put off.’ It is permanent and preserved by God.”<sup>82</sup> Brake adds: “[John 10:35] maintains that the Scriptures cannot cease to exist, that they *will stand*. It is as direct and forceful as possible in maintaining the preservation of the Scriptures.”<sup>83</sup> Contrary to Brake, Jesus’ statement that “the Scripture cannot be broken” is probably not a “direct” assertion of the preservation of the Scriptures. The word “broken” (λύω) has the idea of “repeal, annul, abolish.”<sup>84</sup> Büchsel suggests that here the best rendering is “to set aside,” “to invalidate.”<sup>85</sup> The Scripture cannot be emptied of its authority or, as Morris explains, “Scripture cannot be emptied of its force by being shown to be erroneous.”<sup>86</sup> Thus, Jesus’

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<sup>80</sup>Douglas J. Moo, “The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View,” in *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian*, ed. Wayne G. Strickland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), pp. 347, 353; Morris, *Matthew*, p. 110; Gundry, *Matthew*, p. 80; Blomberg, *Matthew*, p. 104; Carson, “Matthew,” p. 145.

<sup>81</sup>“The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses,” p. 353.

<sup>82</sup>*Defending the King James Bible*, p. 13.

<sup>83</sup>Donald L. Brake, “The Doctrine of the Preservation of the Scriptures” (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1970), p. 14.

<sup>84</sup>BAGD, s.v. “λύω,” p. 484. Cf. the NRSV, “and the scripture cannot be annulled.”

<sup>85</sup>*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. “λύω et al.,” by F. Büchsel, 4:336.

<sup>86</sup>Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 2nd ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 468. See also D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 399; F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), p. 235; J. Carl Laney, *John*,

statement that “the Scripture cannot be broken” is basically making the same point as Matthew 5:18. Murray argues that “in both passages it is the inviolability of Scripture that is asserted.”<sup>87</sup> Thus, if Scripture cannot be emptied of its authority, it must have a continuing authority, and, therefore, John 10:35, like Matthew 5:18, has an important implication for the preservation of Scripture. Again, this will be addressed later in this essay.

### Matthew 24:35

Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.

Jesus statement, “My words will not pass away,” might at first seem to be a direct promise of preservation. Waite takes the promise quite broadly:

The Lord is talking of *His Words*, the New Testament. Not the Masoretic Hebrew Old Testament only, but His *Words* will not pass away. That means the promise extends to the New Testament. I believe, personally that the Lord Jesus was the Source and Author of every word of the Hebrew Old Testament text. He was the Revelator. He is the Word of God. In a very real sense, therefore, His *Words* include the entire Old Testament. He is also the Source and Author of all the New Testament books.<sup>88</sup>

However, this verse would seem to promise too much. It is simply not true that *all* of Jesus’ words have been preserved. The apostle John reminds us that “there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25). Certainly, Jesus must have said some things that were not recorded in the NT, and some of those words *have* passed away. Though it is true that God (or Jesus) is the ultimate author of Scripture, this verse is not directly referring to any written revelation.

Matthew 24:35 uses the same hyperbolic language as Matthew 5:18. “Not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass [παρέλθῃ] from the Law” is saying much the same thing as “My words will not pass away [παρέλθωσιν].” Both the words of the Law and the words of Jesus are immutable; they cannot be set aside; they are unalterable. As the words of God, they “stand forever” (Isa 40:8). And just as “not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law” speaks of the *authority* and *validity* of

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Moody Gospel Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), p. 197.

<sup>87</sup>John Murray, “The Infallibility of Scripture,” in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 4 vols. (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976–82), 1:15.

<sup>88</sup>*Defending the King James Bible*, p. 11.

the Law, so the fact that Jesus' "words will not pass away" gives them equal authority to the OT. Carson notes: "The authority and eternal validity of Jesus' words are nothing less than the authority and eternal validity of God's words (Ps 119:89–90; Isa 40:6–8)."<sup>89</sup> But unlike Matthew 5:18, which clearly refers to Scripture, 24:35 has reference to the authority of Jesus' oral words. And though it is true that some of Jesus' words were recorded in Scripture, written revelation is not the primary emphasis here. Any application to preservation would be indirect, much like Isaiah 40:8.

### 1 Peter 1:23–25

<sup>23</sup>for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God. <sup>24</sup>FOR, "ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF, <sup>25</sup>BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER." And this is the word which was preached to you.

Again, Waite says, commenting on this passage:

That is a reference to *Bible preservation*, isn't it? The Word of God is *incorruptible*.... God's Words cannot be corrupted, corroded, or decayed like our bodies.... The words of God are incorruptible. They live and abide forever. That is a promise of God's preservation.... The Words of God do not go away. They do not perish. They endure *for ever*.<sup>90</sup>

Waite's reference to the Word of God being "incorruptible" comes from the KJV translation: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible...." The Greek term (*ἀφθαρτος*) does not mean "incorruptible" in the modern sense of "without error," but "imperishable," as the NASB rightly translates.<sup>91</sup> Peter is not suggesting there can be no errors in the manuscript tradition.

But does this verse directly teach that God's written revelation is "imperishable"; in other words, does it directly affirm a doctrine of preservation? There are several problems with that interpretation. First, it is not certain that the phrase "living and enduring" in verse 23 modifies "word." A case can be made that it modifies God—"through the word of the living and enduring God."<sup>92</sup> The same two participles are applied to

<sup>89</sup>Carson, "Matthew," p. 507.

<sup>90</sup>*Defending the King James Bible*, p. 14.

<sup>91</sup>Also NIV. Cf. BAGD, s.v. "ἀφθαρτος," p. 125.

<sup>92</sup>E.g., J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1988), pp. 76–77. This is also the marginal reading of the NRSV and the NEB.

God in Daniel 6:27 (LXX). However, it must be admitted that this reading is rejected by most commentators. Second, Peter is quoting Isaiah 40:8 in verses 24 and 25, and we have already noted that this text is probably not a direct promise of the preservation of Scripture. Third, it is not clear that Peter's reference to the "word of God" in verse 23 and the "word which was preached" in verse 25 is a reference to Scripture. As was previously explained, in the New Testament the "word of God," more often than not, has reference to the gospel message, rather than God's special written revelation. Finally, the passage in Peter ends with the words: "And this is the word which was preached to you." This would seem to indicate that Peter's emphasis throughout has been on the gospel message as proclaimed to his readers, not on God's written revelation.<sup>93</sup> That gospel message may have included references to God's Word written, but it does not appear that this is Peter's primary emphasis. Therefore, any reference to the preservation of Scripture in this passage is probably indirect at best.

### Summary of Biblical Data

It has been demonstrated that many of the verses commonly claimed by those in the KJV/TR camp to directly prove a doctrine of preservation have been misinterpreted and misapplied. On the other hand, at least two verses, Psalm 119:152 and 160 would seem to suggest a more direct promise of preservation, with Isaiah 40:8 and Matthew 24:35 supplying more indirect support. In addition Matthew 5:18 and John 10:35 also strongly imply a doctrine of preservation with their emphasis on the continuing authority of Scripture—an argument that will be explored shortly. The attempt by Wallace and Glenny to discount the force of these passages for preservation is unconvincing.

Thus we conclude that some of the verses discussed above do teach a doctrine of preservation, some more directly and others more indirectly. However, they do not support the view of preservation that is put forth by the KJV/TR camp—that God has perfectly preserved the Bible to our day. Instead, they only suggest a general promise of preservation without specifying how (what method) or to what extent (how pure) God has chosen to preserve his Word.

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<sup>93</sup>Michaels, *1 Peter*, p. 79; J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude* (reprint of 1969 ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), pp. 80–81; Edward G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter* (reprint of 1947 ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), p. 151; D. Edmond Hiebert, *First Peter* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), p. 105. Though not a conclusive argument, Peter does use the term ῥῆμα, which is commonly used for oral communication (BAGD, s.v. "ῥῆμα," p. 735).

### IS PRESERVATION THE COROLLARY OF INSPIRATION?

Webster defines *corollary* as “(1) a proposition inferred immediately from a proved proposition with little or no additional proof, (2a) something that naturally follows: result, and (2b) something that incidentally or naturally accompanies or parallels.”<sup>94</sup> Thus to say that preservation is the corollary of inspiration means that preservation is a doctrine that can be “inferred immediately” from the “proved proposition” of inspiration; preservation “naturally follows” or “parallels” inspiration. To say that there is a correlation or parallel between inspiration and preservation does not reveal anything about the exact nature of that preservation. It is perfectly reasonable to assert a corollary between inspiration and preservation without asserting that preservation be in every way equal to inspiration—for example, that inerrant inspiration demands inerrant preservation. This is the fallacy of the KJV/TR position, which takes the corollary to demand a kind of preservation that is perfect, or almost perfect, and uses that argument to restrict preservation to a specific translation (KJV) or printed text (TR). It is this unreasonable, unbiblical, and unhistorical expression of the corollary that Sturz, Wallace, and Glenny have sought to refute.<sup>95</sup> Although the KJV/TR movement has misconstrued the corollary, the corollary is still valid.

A right understanding of the corollary suggests that there is no real purpose or value in inspiring a document that is not preserved. Skilton observes:

But we must maintain that God who gave the Scriptures, who works all things after the counsel of his will, has exercised a remarkable care over his Word, has preserved it in all ages in a state of essential purity, and has enabled it to accomplish the purpose for which he gave it. It is inconceivable that the sovereign God who was pleased to give his Word as a vital and necessary instrument in the salvation of his people would permit his Word to become completely marred in its transmission and unable to accomplish its ordained end. Rather, as surely as that he is God, we would expect to find him exercising a singular care in the preservation of his written revelation.<sup>96</sup>

To illustrate, we might ask, What would be the purpose of producing an authoritative record (inspiration) and letting it perish? Why, for

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<sup>94</sup>*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed., s.v. “corollary,” p. 259.

<sup>95</sup>Harry A. Sturz, *The Byzantine Text-Type*, pp. 37–39; Wallace, “Inspiration, Preservation, and New Testament Textual Criticism,” pp. 31–33; Glenny, “The Preservation of Scripture,” pp. 77–78.

<sup>96</sup>John H. Skilton, “The Transmission of the Scriptures,” in *The Infallible Word* (reprint of 1946 ed.; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), p. 143.

instance, let Paul write an inspired letter to the Romans and then have it perish on the way to Rome? Of course, that did not happen, but could it have happened? If one denies a corollary between inspiration and preservation, Paul's letter could have perished before it got to Rome.

The purpose of inspiration was to produce γραφή (2 Tim 3:16), a written record, a deposit of divine truth for the readers, not the writer. Without preservation the purpose of inspiration would be invalidated. Since it was clearly God's intention that Paul's inspired letter to the Romans be read by the Romans—it could not have perished—there must have been a divine work of preservation at work for at least a few weeks or months until the letter was received by the Romans. This suggests that there is some degree of correlation between inspiration and preservation. And the letter to the Romans was not meant just for the Romans. No Scripture was intended for just the original recipients—"For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom 15:4). Similarly, Paul warns the Corinthians using the example of Israel's failure: "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor 10:11). If the Old Testament Scriptures ("these things") were "written," that is, inspired for the purpose of instructing future believers ("our instruction"), that purpose for the inspired writings demands their preservation.

The corollary between inspiration and preservation is so compelling that even Glenny, who denies this principle in the text of his chapter on preservation, is forced to recant his denial in a long footnote to that same chapter:

An obvious truth is that a document that is to be included in the canon must be preserved. Therefore, since inspiration implies canonicity, in an indirect way inspiration is related to the preservation of the *documents* that are included in the canon. However, the preservation I have addressed and evaluated in this chapter is not the preservation of the *documents* that are in the canon, but rather the perfect preservation *of the words of the texts of all of those documents*.<sup>97</sup>

While it is true that Glenny's main concern in his chapter on preservation is to disprove "the perfect preservation *of the words of the texts of all those documents*," in the process he absolutely denies any corollary between inspiration and preservation. But since this denial creates an untenable problem for his doctrine of the canon, Glenny permits the corollary to enter through the back door. Why is it that "a document that is to be included in the canon *must* be preserved"? (emphasis

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<sup>97</sup>"The Preservation of Scripture," pp. 104–05, note 36.

added)<sup>98</sup> Obviously, it is because God wanted the documents he *inspired* to be in the canon, and if he wanted his *inspired* documents to be in the canon, he “must” have preserved them. This line of reasoning ultimately is based on a corollary between inspiration and preservation. Glenny’s *doctrine* of the “preservation of the documents”<sup>99</sup> is essentially the position I am arguing in this essay—preservation of the Scriptures in the totality of the manuscripts.

### THE ARGUMENT FROM AUTHORITY

Closely tied to the argument for preservation based on a correlation between inspiration and preservation is another corollary between the *authority* of Scripture and preservation. Harold Stigers, in an article entitled “Preservation: The Corollary of Inspiration,” never actually makes a *direct* case for a corollary between inspiration and preservation, in the sense argued above. Instead, he says: “The preservation of the Scriptures is bound up with their authority so that the two are really indissoluble. The former is a most necessary outgrowth of their inspiration.”<sup>100</sup> The argument here is that since the Scriptures are authoritative, an authority that comes from their inspiration (2 Tim 3:16), the Scriptures can have no continuing authority unless they are preserved. Bahnsen correctly notes: “It is certainly legitimate for us to maintain that God in His sovereignty has preserved His Word in dependable form for all generations. To be a Christian *requires* the possession of God’s words as a basis for faith and direction in life,...and men in all generations are *responsible* to be Christians.”<sup>101</sup>

Concerning *authority*, Grudem says: “The authority of Scripture means that all the words in Scripture are God’s words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.”<sup>102</sup> It is “the right to command belief and/or action.”<sup>103</sup> This very principle is seen in the most fundamental text on inspiration itself, 2 Timothy 3:16–17: “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for

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<sup>98</sup>In a letter to me, Glenny says: “It is inconsistent, and I think impossible, for a canonical document to be lost” (November 5, 1997).

<sup>99</sup>“I base my belief in the preservation of documents on theological reasoning from the doctrines of inspiration and canonicity. And, based on this theological reasoning, I believe we could call this belief in the *preservation of documents* a doctrine...” (Ibid.).

<sup>100</sup>*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 22 (September 1979): 217.

<sup>101</sup>Greg L. Bahnsen, “Autographs, Amanuenses and Restricted Inspiration,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 45 (April–June 1973): 110.

<sup>102</sup>*Systematic Theology*, p. 73.

<sup>103</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1:243.

teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” These purposes for Scripture, to teach, reprove, correct, and train, cannot be fulfilled unless Scripture is preserved. This is where Matthew 5:17–18 and John 10:35 also tie into the doctrine of preservation. Since both passages teach a continuing authority for Scripture, as we have demonstrated, they indirectly support a doctrine of preservation. But the same can be said for numerous texts that command the believer’s obedience. If these texts are essential to the believer’s sanctification, and they are, they must have been preserved.

## THE METHOD AND EXTENT OF PRESERVATION

Though it has been demonstrated that a doctrine of preservation can be rightly affirmed both directly and indirectly from the overall biblical teaching, it is important to make clear that none of these Scripture texts and arguments tell us *how* God would preserve his Word, only that he *would* preserve it. We are told neither the *method* nor the *extent* of this preservation.

### The Method of Preservation

As far as the method of preservation is concerned, there are only two options. Scripture must be preserved either directly, by miraculous intervention in the transmission process, and/or indirectly, through secondary causation—“through the actions of human wills,” as Sproul reminded us earlier. It is generally agreed that God’s normal method of preservation has been indirect, through secondary causation. This method has usually been termed *providential*, though, as we previously noted, providence simply has to do with God carrying out his design for the universe, regardless of whether that is done directly or indirectly. But in discussions of preservation the term *providential* is used to signify that though God miraculously inspired his Word, he has normally chosen to preserve it via secondary causation, that is, through ordinary human means. And because preservation has been by ordinary human means, the transmission process has inevitably resulted in the introduction of errors.

As we have observed earlier, because advocates of the KJV/TR position commonly claim to believe in providential preservation through ordinary human means, they generally wish to distance themselves from the idea of a miraculous re-inspiration of manuscripts or versions. However, providential preservation via secondary causation cannot produce the kind of product this position claims to possess—an error-free TR and/or KJV. Speaking of the TR, Waite says:

It is my own personal conviction and belief, after studying this subject since 1971, that the words of the Received Greek and Masoretic Hebrew texts that underlie the King James Bible are the very words which God has preserved down through the centuries, being the exact words of the originals themselves. As such, I believe they are inspired words.<sup>104</sup>

Of the KJV he adds that he has “not found any translation errors in the King James Bible.”<sup>105</sup> In another place, Waite says that “the King James Bible is ‘God’s Word Kept Intact.’”<sup>106</sup> What does “intact” mean? Waite explains: “It means ‘not harmed.’ Nothing harms or defiles it.... The King James Bible—in my studied opinion—is the only translation that completely and accurately reflects, in English, the original Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek.”<sup>107</sup> Similarly, Cloud says: “I believe the King James Bible is an accurate and lovely translation of the preserved Greek and Hebrew text of Scripture. I do not believe the King James Bible contains any errors.”<sup>108</sup> In like manner, Thomas Strouse writes: “The KJV is the Word of God in the English language. It has no errors in it because it carefully reflects the original language texts closest to the autographa.”<sup>109</sup> Ian Paisley agrees: “I believe the Authorised Version preserves the Word of God for me in the English tongue and that it contains no errors.”<sup>110</sup>

Although many of those in the KJV/TR camp refrain from using language associated with the original inspiration of the Scriptures, some are not so guarded. Paisley argues: “There is no such thing as verbal Revelation without verbal Inspiration and there is no such thing as verbal Inspiration without verbal Preservation. In all cases it is not partial but plenary i.e. full, complete, perfect.”<sup>111</sup> Wallace Miller insists that the “Authorized 1611 Version is the preserved, inerrant, inspired, and perfect word of God in the English language.”<sup>112</sup> And amazingly, Charles

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<sup>104</sup>*Defending the King James Bible*, pp. 48–49.

<sup>105</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup>David W. Cloud, *For Love of the Bible: The Battle for the King James Version and the Received Text from 1800 to Present* (Oak Harbor, WA: Way of Life Literature, 1995), p. 10.

<sup>109</sup>*The Lord God Hath Spoken: A Guide to Bibliology* (Virginia Beach, VA: Tabernacle Baptist Theological Press, 1992), p. 23.

<sup>110</sup>*My Plea for the Old Sword* (Belfast: Ambassador Productions, 1997), p. 9.

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>112</sup>*The Revelation of God to Man* (Cincinnati, Published by the author, 1992), p. 79.

Perkins believes that “there are no mistakes in it [KJV] and not one word, comma, period, chapter heading, or verse number needs to be changed.”<sup>113</sup>

No matter whether one uses the miraculous language of inspiration to describe preservation, or simply calls it providential, the Bible the KJV/TR position claims to possess—an infallible and inerrant Bible—requires a continuous chain of miracles throughout the transmission process. But in actuality the facts demonstrate nothing of the kind, as we will now prove.

### The Extent of Preservation

How pure have the original words of the biblical writings been preserved? It is an indisputable fact, proven by the manuscript and versional evidence, that God has not perfectly (that is, without error) preserved the Scriptures throughout their long history of transmission. There is no single manuscript, printed text, or version that can be shown to be error free. This is patently obvious to anyone who is at all familiar with the transmission history of the Scriptures. First, we should note that no two Greek manuscripts of the New Testament agree exactly; these thousands of manuscripts all differ from one another to some degree.<sup>114</sup> No one has ever suggested, even within the KJV/TR camp, that a particular one of these manuscripts is a perfect copy of the autographs—that it is error free. This conclusively demonstrates that God has permitted errors to enter the transmission process, which is the inevitable result of providential preservation. So clearly, at least for 1500 years, once the autographs had perished and before the age of printing, no one had access to an error-free Bible.

Even then, the coming of the printing press did not suddenly produce a perfect Bible. How could it? There were no inerrant Greek manuscripts available from which to produce an inerrant Greek New Testament. When Erasmus published the first Greek New Testament in 1516, he had access to only about seven of the several thousands of Greek manuscripts that are now extant, and even these seven were only partial copies of the New Testament.<sup>115</sup> For instance, for the book of

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<sup>113</sup>*Flaming Torch*, April–June 1998, p. 7.

<sup>114</sup>Gordon D. Fee, “The Textual Criticism of the New Testament,” in vol. 1 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), p. 420. Burgon himself said: “That by a perpetual miracle, Sacred Manuscripts would be protected all down the ages against depraving influences of whatever sort,—was not to have been expected; certainly, was never promised” (*The Revision Revised*, p. 335).

<sup>115</sup>Combs, “Erasmus and the Textus Receptus,” p. 45.

Revelation Erasmus had only one manuscript available to him. Unless this copy of Revelation was an exact copy of the autograph, Erasmus' Greek New Testament was corrupted (i.e., contained errors) when it came off the press. And it is an indisputable fact that it did contain errors.<sup>116</sup> To be specific, the single manuscript of Revelation used by Erasmus was not really a separate manuscript of the text of Revelation but was actually imbedded in a commentary on Revelation by Andreas of Caesarea. As such it was difficult for the printer to read the text itself, so Erasmus had a fresh copy of the text made. The copyist himself misread the original at places, and thus a number of errors were introduced into Erasmus' printed text. One example is in Revelation 17:8, where the copyist mistakenly wrote *καίπερ ἔστιν* ("and yet is") instead of *καὶ παρέσται* ("and shall come"). This erroneous reading in Erasmus' Greek New Testament is not found in any manuscript of Revelation, yet it occurs in all editions of the TR that have followed Erasmus' first edition, including the widely used version published by the Trinitarian Bible Society.<sup>117</sup> Interestingly, Hills admitted that this *is* an error in the TR (and KJV).<sup>118</sup>

The subsequent history of the printed TR did not produce an error-free Bible. This can be seen from the fact that many indisputable errors introduced into Erasmus' first edition, such as the one just discussed, were never corrected, and also from the fact that there have been at least thirty editions of the TR, with hundreds of differences among them.<sup>119</sup> Even the Trinitarian Bible Society, which publishes the most commonly used edition of the TR, admits that no two of these thirty editions is

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<sup>116</sup>Cf. the oft-quoted appraisal of F. H. A. Scrivener: "Erasmus' first edition is in that respect the most faulty book I know" (*A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. [London: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1874], p. 383).

<sup>117</sup>H KAINH ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ. This version is subtitled *The New Testament: The Greek Text Underlying the English Authorised Version of 1611*. My copy is not dated, though it was apparently published in 1976. See Andrew J. Brown, *The Word of God Among All Nations: A Brief History of the Trinitarian Bible Society, 1831–1981* (London: Trinitarian Bible Society, 1981), p. 130.

<sup>118</sup>Edward F. Hills, *Believing Bible Study*, 3rd ed. (Des Moines, IA: Christian Research Press, 1991), p. 83.

<sup>119</sup>These include the Complutensian Polyglot of 1514 (though not published until 1520 or 1522), Erasmus' five editions between 1516 and 1535, the 1534 edition of Simon Colinaeus, the four editions of Robert Estienne (Latin, Stephanus) from 1546 to 1551, the nine editions of Theodore Beza from 1565 to 1604, the Antwerp Polyglot of 1571, the seven editions of Bonaventura and Abraham Elzevir from 1624 to 1678, the Paris Polyglot of 1630–1633, and the London Polyglot of 1657. For a listing of some of the differences, see Herman C. Hoskier, *A Full Account and Collation of the Greek Curative Codex Evangelium 604* (London: David Nutt, 1890), appendix B.

exactly the same.<sup>120</sup> While it is common to speak of the TR as a single, fixed text, there is in fact no such thing.

Finally, when we come to the KJV, we still have not arrived at a perfect Bible. When some advocates of the KJV/TR position are pressed on this point, they may allow for some imperfections. Hills concedes: “Admittedly the King James Version is not *ideally* perfect. No translation ever can be. But it is the product of such God-guided scholarship that it is *practically* perfect. Its errors are few and very minor.”<sup>121</sup> In a previous essay I have demonstrated that the current-day KJV clearly contains definite, unmistakable errors, so I will not retrace all that ground here.<sup>122</sup> However, two points should be noted. First, the translators themselves argue in the preface to the 1611 edition that no translation can be expected to be free from error since translators are not superintended by the Holy Spirit in their work as were the apostles when they wrote inspired Scripture: “For has there been anything perfect under the sun in which Apostles or their colleagues, people endued with an extraordinary measure of God’s Spirit and privileged with the privilege of infallibility, were not involved?”<sup>123</sup> Second, just as there is no single, fixed form of the TR, so also the KJV. There has never been one KJV, even in 1611. When the KJV was published, there were actually two printed editions in 1611, with 216 variations in the biblical text.<sup>124</sup> These are commonly called the “He” and “She” Bibles, from their respective readings in Ruth 3:15 (“he went into the city” and “she went into the city”). So if the 1611 KJV is without error, which one is it? And since 1611 the KJV has gone through many changes so that no modern-day Christian uses the 1611 KJV.<sup>125</sup> Even modern printings of the KJV differ among themselves.

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<sup>120</sup>G. W. Anderson and D. E. Anderson, “The Received Text: A Brief Look at the Textus Receptus”; available from <http://biz.ukonline.co.uk/trinitarian.bible.society/articles/tr-art.htm>.

<sup>121</sup>*Believing Bible Study*, p. 83. In *The King James Version Defended*, he admitted: “As the marginal notes indicate, the King James translators did not regard their work as perfect or inspired, but they did consider it to be a trustworthy reproduction of God’s holy Word...” (p. 216).

<sup>122</sup>See William W. Combs, “Errors in the King James Version?” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 4 (Fall 1999): 151–64.

<sup>123</sup>Erroll F. Rhodes and Liana Lupas, eds., *The Translators to the Reader: The Original Preface of the King James Version of 1611 Revisited* (New York: American Bible Society, 1997), p. 78.

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>125</sup>I have documented some of these changes in my “Errors in the King James Version?” pp. 160–61. For a much more comprehensive list, see F. H. A. Scrivener, *The Authorized Edition of the English Bible (1611), Its Subsequent Reprints and Modern Representatives* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1884), pp. 148–202.

For instance, at Jeremiah 34:16, the Cambridge edition reads “whom ye had set at liberty,” while the Oxford edition reads “whom he had set at liberty.”

In addition, those who would attempt to persuade us that the Bible has been perfectly preserved through the TR and KJV wish to give the impression that there are no differences between the Greek text and English version. Waite, for example, when confronted with the problem of how to defend his doctrine of perfect preservation in light of numerous editions of the TR, responds: “The one I am talking about is the exact Textus Receptus that underlies our King James Bible. It was printed by the Trinitarian Bible Society, London, England in the 1970’s. It’s Beza’s 5th edition, 1598, with very few changes. It’s the exact text that underlies our King James New Testament.”<sup>126</sup> But this is simply false. There are places where the KJV differs from the Trinitarian Bible Society TR or any other edition of the TR. A few examples will suffice.<sup>127</sup> In Hebrews 10:23 the KJV has “confession of faith,” but the Trinitarian Bible Society TR has “confession of hope.” Everyone concedes that the actual Greek word is *hope* (ἐλπίζ), not *faith* (πίστεις). *Hope* is found in all manuscripts and all editions of the TR. *Hope* and *faith* are two entirely different words, so one cannot sincerely argue that the translators simply decided on “faith” as the correct translation at this point. Besides, the Greek word for *hope* (ἐλπίζ) is used 52 others times in the New Testament and in *every* case the translators of the KJV rendered it “hope,” not “faith.”

In Acts 19:20 the KJV reads “God” (“So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed”), whereas the Trinitarian Bible Society TR has “Lord.” In Gal 4:15 the KJV has “Where” (ποῦ) (“Where is then the blessedness...”), while the Trinitarian Bible Society TR has “What” (τίς). “What” is not “Where,” and, more particularly, “Lord” is not “God.” One or the other must be in error. When pinned down on this point, Cloud, for example, concludes: “We are convinced that the KJV is accurate in all textual matters, and if there is a difference between a KJV reading and any certain edition of the Received Text, we follow the KJV.”<sup>128</sup>

So we see that the evidence of manuscripts, texts, and versions means nothing to those in the KJV/TR camp. The KJV is the final

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<sup>126</sup>*Fundamentalist Distortions on Bible Versions*, p. 16.

<sup>127</sup>For others, see F. H. A. Scrivener, *The New Testament in Greek According to the Text Followed in the Authorised Version Together with the Variations Adopted in the Revised Version* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1908), pp. 648–56.

<sup>128</sup>David W. Cloud, “Which Edition of the Received Text is the Preserved Word of God?” (Oak Harbor, WA: Way of Life Literature, 1996); available from <http://wayoflife.org/~dcloud/fbns/whichtr.htm>.

authority upon which all manuscripts, texts, and versions are to be judged. How do we know this? It is, we are told, a matter of faith. Cloud informs us: “The doctrines of Biblical infallibility and preservation raise many questions that cannot be fully answered. On the final analysis, they must be accepted by faith.”<sup>129</sup> Similarly, Moorman argues:

Preservation must be approached in an attitude of faith. Like all other Bible truths, the Scripture’s teaching on its own preservation is to be in the first instance accepted by faith. Edward F. Hills in his outstanding book, *The King James Version Defended*, calls it “the logic of faith.” The facts and evidence of such preservation will then follow.<sup>130</sup>

In one sense Moorman is absolutely correct. What the Bible teaches about its own preservation is to be accepted by faith. But that can be said of everything the Bible teaches—everything the Bible teaches is to be accepted by faith. This argument from faith or “the logic of faith,” as Hills likes to call it,<sup>131</sup> actually boils down to faith in the KJV as the perfectly preserved Word of God, in spite of all the evidence to the contrary. This is not faith, at least not in the biblical sense, but pure presumption.

The fundamental fallacy in KJV/TR position can be traced to the faulty premise that the Scriptures themselves teach a perfect and inerrant preservation of the actual words of the autographs. We saw this earlier in Flanders’s statement that “the actual existence of the original text will continue eternally....”<sup>132</sup> It is not enough to hold a Bible in one’s hand, even a King James Bible, and say this is the Word of God; the KJV/TR position insists that one must be able to say that these are the *Words* of God. Anything else, according to Waite, is “an apostate, heretical, modernistic, and liberal position.”<sup>133</sup> Thus one cannot honestly, according to Waite, say that the NASB is the Word of God. He complains that if one holds “his King James in his hand and the New American Standard in his hand with 5,604 differences in their Greek texts in the New Testament alone, how can they both be the ‘Word’ of God? ‘Word of God’ could not mean the ‘Words of God’ because of these differences in the Words.”<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>129</sup>“The Problems with Bible Preservation/Can You Answer All of the Questions?”

<sup>130</sup>“Principles of Bible Preservation”; available from <http://www.staggs.pair.com/kjbp/kjb-docs/biblepre.txt>.

<sup>131</sup>*Believing Bible Study*, pp. 36–37, 55–58.

<sup>132</sup>“Does the Bible Promise Its Own Preservation?” p. 6.

<sup>133</sup>*Fundamentalist Distortions on Bible Versions*, p. 45. See also pp. 1, 23, 42, 44, and 50.

<sup>134</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 42.

The true situation is this: God has preserved his Word to this day, but because of the means he has chosen to use to accomplish this preservation—providentially, through secondary causation—the words of the autographs have not been inerrantly preserved. Instead, God has chosen to allow for variations to occur—variants within the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek copies of the autographs. God has providentially provided all these copies in order to preserve the Scriptures. So it is proper to say that preservation has taken place in the totality of manuscripts. Because God chose this method of preservation, it was not possible to provide a perfectly pure text with no variations (errors). It was sufficient for God’s purpose to preserve his Word in copies of the autographs whose exact wording contains some variation. This level of purity is sufficient for God’s purposes.

### THE QUESTION OF CERTAINTY

Advocates of the KJV/TR position are unwilling to accept this view of preservation, preservation within the totality of manuscripts. Several reasons are given for rejecting this position, but they all seem to funnel down to the problem of certainty. They believe that this position does not allow the average Christian to be certain that he has access to the Word of God. With so much variation, we are told, one cannot be sure what the Word of God is, and thus inspiration is practically invalidated. Hills argues:

Has the special providence of God over the New Testament text done no more than to preserve the true readings somewhere, that is to say, in some one or other of the great variety of New Testament manuscripts now existing in the world? If Christ has done no more than this, how can it be said that He has fulfilled His promise always to preserve in His Church the True New Testament Text? How can His people ever be certain that they have the True New Testament Text?<sup>135</sup>

To accept the view that preservation is found in the totality of manuscripts leaves the Christian with what Hills calls “maximum uncertainty” about the text of Scripture, whereas the KJV/TR position results in “maximum certainty.”<sup>136</sup> Echoing this same concern, Cloud says that “the average Christian (including the average preacher)” is thus put “at the mercy of textual scholars to tell them what parts of the King James Bible (or any other Bible) can be trusted and what parts are corruptions and mistakes.”<sup>137</sup> But all this is simply a camouflage that seeks to give

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<sup>135</sup>*King James Version Defended*, p. 109.

<sup>136</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 224.

<sup>137</sup>David W. Cloud, “Correspondence with a Fundamentalist Bible Teacher Who

the impression that the words of the KJV or the TR are the words of the autographs and thus have no corruptions or mistakes in them. Cloud ignores the fact that all Christians are “at the mercy of textual scholars.” Every English translation, including the KJV, has been based on a printed Greek text. That printed Greek text was the product of textual criticism. So, whether they acknowledge it or not, readers of the KJV are “at the mercy” of Erasmus, who did textual criticism on the manuscripts available to him in order to produce his printed Greek text; and they are at the mercy of the translators of the KJV, who, as we have shown, did not always follow the TR.

When we examine the textual data, it may appear that the KJV/TR position does give greater certainty about the text of Scripture. If one takes into account all of the New Testament manuscripts, for example, there are more total variants among these manuscripts than the total number of variants found just within the Byzantine family, upon which the TR is based. Or if one looks only at various editions of the TR, the number of variants among them is small in comparison to the number of variants in all the New Testament manuscripts. Or if one examines the various editions of the KJV, the number of variants is also small. But this supposed certainty is simply an illusion. The admitted fewer variations in the Byzantine text-type do not necessarily mean that it is a purer text, one that is closer to the autographs. One could argue, and I *would* argue, that by excluding the other manuscript evidence, the KJV/TR position has left itself with a text that is not as pure as one obtained by giving consideration to the total manuscript evidence.<sup>138</sup> There is simply nothing in the biblical doctrine of preservation itself that says that the Byzantine text-type or TR is purer than any other text-type or printed Greek text. The Bible does not teach its own perfect preservation, and it is a serious error to claim otherwise.

As we have already noted, advocates of the KJV/TR position argue that only their view of preservation honestly permits the believer to hold in his hands a Bible (KJV) that can be called the Word of God. Cloud, for instance, says: “There is something wrong with a position on Bible preservation that leaves a man with no preserved Bible...”<sup>139</sup> Their premise is that they have a Bible (KJV) that has no errors; therefore, it,

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Denounces the King James Only & Received Text Only position” (Oak Harbor, WA: Way of Life Literature, 1999); available from <http://wayoflife.org/~dcloud/fbns/correspondencewitha.htm>.

<sup>138</sup>For proof of this point, see Combs, “Erasmus and the Textus Receptus,” pp. 35–53.

<sup>139</sup>David W. Cloud, “The Heresy of Believing the KJV-TR is the Preserved Word of God” (Oak Harbor, WA: Way of Life Literature, 1999); available from <http://wayoflife.org/~dcloud/fbns/heresyofbelieving.htm>.

and only it, can be called the Word of God. It is interesting to note at the outset that the translators of the KJV held the exact *opposite* opinion. In their preface to the 1611 edition, they say:

Now to answer our enemies: we do not deny, rather we affirm and insist that the very worst translation of the Bible in English issued by Protestants (for we have seen no Catholic version of the whole Bible as yet) contains the word of God, or rather, is the word of God. In the same way, when the King's speech delivered in Parliament is translated into French, German, Italian, and Latin, it is still the King's speech, even if it is not interpreted by every translator with the same skill, or perhaps with as appropriate phrasing or always with as great clarity. For as everyone knows, things are classified by their major characteristics. Anyone will admit that a person may be regarded as virtuous even though he has made many slips during his life, otherwise no one could be called virtuous, because "all of us make many mistakes" (James 3:2). A person may be called handsome and charming, even though he may have some warts on his hand, and not only some freckles on his face, but also scars. So there is no reason why the word when it is translated should be denied to be the word, or should be declared inauthentic, simply because there may be some imperfections and blemishes in the way it is published. For has there been anything perfect under the sun in which Apostles or their colleagues, people endued with an extraordinary measure of God's Spirit and privileged with the privilege of infallibility, were not involved?<sup>140</sup>

R. A. Torrey tackled this problem of identifying translations as the Word of God:

I have said that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments *as originally given* were absolutely inerrant, and the question of course arises to what extent is the Authorized Version, or the Revised Version, the inerrant Word of God. The answer is simple; they are the inerrant Word of God just to that extent that they are an accurate rendering of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as originally given, and to all practical intents and purposes they are a thoroughly accurate rendering of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as originally given.<sup>141</sup>

Therefore, it is proper, and not any sort of deception, to speak of different printed Greek and Hebrew texts, and different translations, as the Word of God even though they have differences among them. God has preserved the Scriptures in a state of what might be called "essential purity."<sup>142</sup> Schnaiter reminds us, following the thought of B. B. Warfield, that we must be

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<sup>140</sup>Rhodes and Lupas, eds., *The Translators to the Reader*, p. 78.

<sup>141</sup>*The Fundamental Doctrines of the Christian Faith* (New York: George H. Doran, 1918), pp. 36–37.

<sup>142</sup>Skilton, "The Transmission of the Scriptures," p. 143.

careful to distinguish between textual purity and the purity of the sense of any given message. There is a purity with regard to the wording of a text that is different from the purity of the message. This merely recognizes that the same thing can be said reliably in more than one way. For example, there is no effect on the meaning of a statement like “she denied her daughter permission to go,” if the wording is altered to read “she refused to permit her daughter to go.” For a textual researcher who is trying to determine which of those was the original wording of a particular author, it is a question of wording purity. He may thereby refer to one text as “corrupt” and the other as “pure” without reference to the substance of the passage.<sup>143</sup>

The essential message of Scripture has been preserved not only in the Byzantine text-type, but in the Alexandrian text-type as well; the KJV is the Word of God as well as the NASB. When we refer to either or both of these versions as the Word of God, we do so because we rightly assume they are tethered to the autographs and are thus sufficient representatives of them.

Supporters of the KJV/TR position like to point out differences between modern versions and the KJV, seeking to demonstrate that versions like the NASB and NIV are corrupt because they omit various passages and titles associated with the Lord Jesus Christ. However, they are committing the logical fallacy of begging the question, that is, assuming ahead of time what is to be proved. One cannot start with the KJV, point out differences between it and another version, and from that assume that the other version is incorrect. A difference may just as likely indicate that the KJV is incorrect.<sup>144</sup> In any case, these differences are overblown. In truth, doctrinal differences have no real basis in the different Greek texts or English versions. Silva reminds us:

Christian assurance has little to do with certainty about details. Christ’s promise that the Scriptures would be preserved is not affected in the least by modern text-critical methods. The Westminster Confession of Faith, for example, a very extensive summary of Christian doctrine, was produced on the basis of the Textus Receptus. Who would want to argue that the adoption of the UBS text requires a revision of that document?<sup>145</sup>

For a more concrete example, we might consider the doctrinal

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<sup>143</sup>S. E. Schnaiter, “Review Article: *New Age Bible Versions*,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 2 (Fall 1997): 113–14.

<sup>144</sup>For a full discussion of this issue, see James R. White, *The King James Only Controversy* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1995), chapters 6–9.

<sup>145</sup>Moisés Silva, review of *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, ed. Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, in *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (Spring 1983): 185–86.

statement of Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary. It is a detailed declaration of about ten pages in length, consisting of fifteen different articles.<sup>146</sup> There are 920 different verses of Scripture cited in the statement, which are used to support the doctrinal affirmations; and, as one might expect in such a document, these verses represent the most important doctrinal passages in the Bible. Yet one can support these affirmations whether the verses are examined in the KJV, NASB, or NIV. No one is denying that different translations may sometimes disagree in the meaning of an individual verse, but these differences do not result in different formulations of fundamental doctrine. Burgon himself vehemently criticized the *Revised Version* of 1881, yet he admitted that doctrinal differences are not at issue between versions: “Let it be also candidly admitted that, even where (in our judgment) the Revisionists have erred, they have never had the misfortune *seriously* to obscure a single feature of Divine Truth.”<sup>147</sup> It cannot be denied that various Christians have some differences in their doctrinal formulations, such as between Presbyterians and Baptists, or between dispensationalists and covenant theologians; but these differences are not the result of using different Greek New Testaments or English versions. Instead, they are directly related to hermeneutical issues; the same words of Scripture are simply interpreted differently by various Christians.

#### IS PUBLIC AVAILABILITY A NECESSARY COMPONENT OF PRESERVATION?

Those in the KJV/TR camp commonly argue that the doctrine of preservation also includes the idea of public availability of the true text of Scripture. Hills, for example, argues: “It must be that down through the centuries God has exercised a special, providential control over the copying of the Scriptures and the preservation and use of the copies, so that trustworthy representatives of the original text have been available to God’s people in every age.”<sup>148</sup> And more specifically, he adds concerning the Scriptures: “He must have preserved them not secretly in holes and caves but in a public way in the usage of His Church.”<sup>149</sup> The point of this argument is to rule out from consideration as the Word of God Greek texts other than the TR and translations not based on the TR. This argument can be traced back to Burgon and has been followed by most proponents of the MT.

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<sup>146</sup>See the current seminary catalog, 1999–2002, pp. 88–98; available from <http://www.dbts.edu/faithstatem.html>.

<sup>147</sup>*The Revision Revised*, p. 232.

<sup>148</sup>*The King James Version Defended*, p. 2.

<sup>149</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 86.

I am utterly unable to believe, in short, that God's promise has so entirely failed, that at the end of 1800 years much of the text of the Gospel had in point of fact to be picked by a German critic out of a waste-paper basket in the convent of St. Catherine; and that the entire text had to be remodelled after the pattern set by a couple of copies which had remained in neglect during fifteen centuries, and had probably owed their survival to that neglect; whilst hundreds of others had been thumbed to pieces, and had bequeathed their witness to copies made from them.<sup>150</sup>

Burgon was arguing that to set aside the MT (which he called the traditional text) and embrace the text of his adversaries Westcott and Hort would mean "that God kept hidden from the church the true text of the Word of God from some time around the ninth century until the discoveries of the Codex Sinaiticus and Vaticanus in the nineteenth century."<sup>151</sup>

There are two problems with this argument. First the use of "true text" is loaded language that distorts the view of those who do not believe that the either the TR or MT is necessarily the closest text to the autographs. It is not the case that with the publication of the Greek New Testament of Westcott and Hort, we now have the "true text" that was unavailable before. Both the TR and MT are the "true text" in the sense that both can be called the Word of God, both accurately convey the message of the autographs. But the text of Westcott and Hort as well as the more recent Nestle-Aland and United Bible Societies' Greek texts can also be called the "true text" in that they also accurately convey the message of the autographs. It has already been argued that doctrinal differences among Christians do not stem from differences in Greek texts or English versions. Many of us simply prefer the more recent editions of the Greek New Testament because we honestly believe that they present a text that is somewhat more accurately representative of the autographs.

Second, the belief that God must have made the Scriptures publicly available at all times has no basis in Scripture itself or in the transmission history of the text. While there are, as I have argued, some texts that promise the preservation of Scripture, both directly and indirectly, none of these demand continuous public availability of the text. In fact, Scripture itself records an instance where part of the Old Testament was not available for a period of probably more than fifty years. When the temple was being repaired in the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah (622 B.C.), we read of the finding of "the book of the law" by Hilkiyah the high priest (2 Kings 22:8–10; 2 Chr 34:14–18). Though it is not

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<sup>150</sup>Burgon, *The Traditional Text of the Gospels*, p. 12.

<sup>151</sup>Brake, "The Doctrine of the Preservation of the Scriptures," p. 4.

clear whether “the book of the law” is a reference to the entire Pentateuch<sup>152</sup> or just the book of Deuteronomy,<sup>153</sup> it is undeniable from the reaction of Josiah (vv. 11ff.) that there had been general ignorance of the Law for some time (Josiah says “our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book,” v. 13). According to Deuteronomy 31, Moses wrote down the Law and gave it to the Levites to “place it beside the ark of the covenant” (v. 26). It is probable that normal access to the Scriptures was through copies since the ark, and presumably the Law, was placed in the most holy confines of the temple. But during the reign of Manasseh (697–642 B.C.) true Israelite religion was practically wiped out, and it may well be that all copies of the Law were destroyed, thus explaining the general ignorance of the Law until it was discovered during the reign of Josiah.<sup>154</sup>

### CONCLUSION

In discussions of the doctrine of preservation by those in the KJV/TR camp, one is often presented with a long list of Scripture texts that purport to support that doctrine. However, as our analysis has shown, the Scriptures themselves have little to say about their own preservation. And, in fact, Wallace and Glenny have openly denied a doctrine of preservation. Yet two verses, Psalm 119:52 and 160, would seem to suggest a more direct promise of preservation, while Isaiah 40:8 and Matthew 24:35 may play a more indirect role. Beyond that, the seemingly undeniable existence of a corollary between inspiration and preservation demands a doctrine of preservation. Equally important are the implications from texts such as Matthew 5:18 and John 10:35, which teach a continuing authority for Scripture, an authority that demands their preservation.

While some have gone too far in their denial of the doctrine of preservation, those in the KJV/TR camp have moved to the other extreme by raising the providential preservation of Scripture to the level of inspiration. That is, the perfect Bible they claim to possess in the TR and KJV cannot have been produced by providential preservation, but only by the miraculous working of God. As Warfield reminded us long ago, inspiration was an immediate activity of God that “produced the plerarily inspired Bible, every word of which is the Word of God.”<sup>155</sup> Preservation,

<sup>152</sup>E.g., Barrick, “Ancient Manuscripts and Exposition,” p. 31.

<sup>153</sup>E.g., Raymond B. Dillard, *2 Chronicles*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), p. 280.

<sup>154</sup>John C. Whitcomb, Jr., *Solomon to the Exile* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971), p. 136; Leon Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), p. 367.

<sup>155</sup>“The Westminster Confession and the Original Autographs,” p. 593.

on the other hand, was a mediate activity of God that “produced the safe transmission of that Word, but not without signs of human fallibility here and there in several copies.”<sup>156</sup> The indisputable evidence from manuscripts, printed texts, and versions proves that the autographic text has not been preserved in any single one of them, but in their totality. Only by careful examination of the preserved documents can the most accurate form of the Scriptures be identified. While it is not possible to produce a text that is in all points identical to the autographs, nevertheless, carefully produced texts and versions are able to convey God’s truth to the reader “with competent adequacy for all the needs of the Christian life.”<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup>Ibid., pp. 593–94.

<sup>157</sup>Ibid., p. 594.