

ANCIENT MANUSCRIPTS AND BIBLICAL EXPOSITION

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Ancient manuscripts have been the subject of many books, journal articles, and essays, but few have dealt with their relationship to biblical exposition. Yet the expositor has a vital role in preserving what those ancient manuscripts of the Bible contribute to an accurate knowledge of Old and New Testaments. Few works on systematic theology deal with the important doctrine of preservation, yet Scripture itself deals extensively with that doctrine. To do his part in implementing that doctrine, the expositor must examine his text in the original languages, identify the text's original statement, and expound that original text. He must practice the doctrine of preservation by participating in that preservation.

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Nineteen ninety-seven marked the fiftieth anniversary of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The impact of these scrolls on Bible translations, textual criticism, and biblical exposition is still being assessed. The scrolls are part of a larger body of ancient manuscripts that the footnotes and margins of a number of current Bible translations cite in support of their renderings of the OT. The ancient versions to which those footnotes refer include the Samaritan Pentateuch (4th century B.C.¹), the biblical manuscripts from Qumran (3rd century B.C.–1st century A.D.), the Greek Septuagint (3rd–2nd centuries B.C.), the Aramaic Targums (1st–4th centuries A.D.²), the Syriac Peshitta (1st–2nd centuries A.D.), and the Latin Vulgate (ca. A.D. 400).

Those manuscripts have been subjects of many books, journal articles, and essays. Many of the published items deal with the significance and history of the ancient manuscripts. Various scholarly journals contain a large number of technical

¹Dating the Samaritan Pentateuch is not an easy matter. It may date from as early as the fifth century B.C. or as late as the second century B.C. See Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress; Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1992) 82-83.

²The tradition of the Aramaic translations or paraphrases dates back to the time of Ezra (cf. Neh 8:8). See F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments: Some Chapters on the Transmission of the Bible*, 3d rev. ed. (Westwood, N. J.: Revell, 1963) 52-53, 133-45.

articles on the application of ancient manuscript evidence to the textual criticism of both the OT and NT. One area of application often goes unnoticed, however. That is the area of biblical exposition or preaching. How do the ancient manuscripts affect the exposition of the biblical text? What effect might those manuscripts have upon present-day expositors of God's Word? What is the expositor's responsibility in light of those manuscripts?

THE EXPOSITOR IS ACCOUNTABLE FOR HIS ROLE IN THE PRESERVATION OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

The accountability of biblical expositors goes beyond the integrity they must demonstrate in their interpretation of the Word. It involves the integrity of the Scriptures themselves. The expositor who does a magnificent job of interpreting and explaining the Scriptures may yet sow a seed of doubt about the actual text or may even indulge in unwarranted emendations of the text. The commentaries and modern translations he utilizes in sermon preparation may affect his treatment of the biblical text. Many of those sources have sought to recover the original text so that they might translate or interpret the Scriptures more accurately.³

The Bible expositor's goal should be the accurate presentation of God's written revelation. That accuracy relates directly to the degree to which the expounded text conforms to what God originally revealed. Thus the Bible expositor becomes an active participant in the determination, transmission, and preservation of the biblical text. In order to place the expositor's role in proper perspective, an adequate understanding of the doctrine of the preservation of Scripture is necessary.

Biblical Indications of the Doctrine of Preservation

Traditionally the church has declared its belief that the preservation of the Scriptures is the result of God's providential activity. The Second London Confession (1677) made the following declaration: "The Old Testament in *Hebrew* . . . and the New Testament in *Greek* . . . being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and Providence kept pure in all Ages, are therefore authentic; so as in all controversies of Religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them."⁴ The

³Harold Scanlin, *The Dead Sea Scrolls & Modern Translations of the Old Testament* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1993), is a recent evaluation of the effects the Qumran manuscripts have had on a number of English translations. Among the translations evaluated were the Revised Standard Version (RSV), the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), the New English Bible (NEB), the Revised English Bible (REB), the New American Bible (NAB), the Jerusalem Bible (JB), the New Jerusalem Bible (NJB), the New Jewish Version (NJV), the New International Version (NIV), the Good News Bible (GNB), and the New King James Bible (NKJV). Individual translation projects have also published explanations of their procedures in utilizing evidence from ancient manuscripts. Cf. Kenneth L. Barker, ed., *The Making of the NIV* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991); Bruce M. Metzger, Robert C. Dentan, and Walter Harrelson, *The Making of the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991).

⁴William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson, 1969) 251.

belief that God's written Word has been preserved without undue alteration is the basis for confidence in the teachings of the Bible.

Like the Second London Confession, W. Graham Scroggie attributed the preservation of Scripture to the providence of God.⁵ God must have a role in the preservation of His Word if it is to be kept inviolate. The active preservation of the Scriptures is necessary because the sinful nature of mankind is antagonistic to God and His Word. Such antagonism breeds both contempt for Scripture and the neglect of Scripture. It is fully within the capacity of sinful mankind to allow the Word to perish and to alter its wording intentionally or unintentionally.

The Great Omission. Is the doctrine of the preservation of Scripture still a part of the evangelical creed? If so, what is its importance? In his book *Christian Theology*, Millard J. Erickson entitled the chapter on biblical inspiration, "The Preservation of the Revelation: Inspiration."⁶ However, the chapter does not deal with biblical preservation. In fact, Erickson's volume does not treat the doctrine of the preservation of the Scriptures anywhere. The chapter title indicates that Erickson believes that preservation relates in some way to inspiration. Apparently, he would attribute preservation to divine action. Erickson defined inspiration as the "supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit upon the Scripture writers which rendered their writings an accurate record of the revelation."⁷ If preservation is accomplished by inspiration, then it too must stem from divine intervention.

Elsewhere, Erickson refers to Scripture's permanence, citing Matt 5:18 as his proof-text.⁸ The only mention he gives to biblical passages dealing with addition to and subtraction from Scripture (e.g., Deut 4:2; Prov 30:5-6; Rev 22:18-19) is in the context of a discussion concerning the biblical canon's composition.⁹

Lewis Sperry Chafer's *Systematic Theology* is among the few theologies to dedicate any space at all to the topic of the preservation of Scripture.¹⁰ There it merits a separate, though brief, chapter. Chafer defines the matter in the following fashion:

The Bible is eternal in its own right. It abides because of the fact that no word Jehovah has spoken can be removed or shaken. In fact, it is by means of His written Oracles that God announces His binding declarations concerning the "all things" which cannot be shaken. The Scriptures are the legal instrument by which God obligates Himself to execute every detail of His eternal covenants and to fulfill every prediction His prophets

⁵W. Graham Scroggie, *Is the Bible the Word of God?* (Chicago: Moody, 1922) 14-16.

⁶Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985) 199.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., 203.

⁹Ibid., 211.

¹⁰Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1947) 1:124-25.

have made. The legal instrument which secures this vast consummation must continue, and shall continue, until the last promise, for which it stands as surety, has been realized.¹¹

Chafer quotes Ps 119:89,¹² but does not discuss its specific contribution to the doctrine of the preservation of Scripture. Unfortunately, he does not discuss human responsibility or textual criticism as they relate to preservation.

The vast majority of the theological resources utilized by pastors fall short in discussing this important doctrine.¹³ That omission in theological literature is a disturbing reflection on what must be taking place in Bible college and seminary classrooms. When a large body of Christian literature ignores an aspect of biblical theology, one can rest assured that it is also getting short shrift academically. If this omission is not corrected, future expositors may be unable to define the doctrine and unaware of their role in the preservation of God's written Word.

The Biblical Definition. A definition of preservation as it relates to the Scriptures is best derived from the Scriptures themselves. The presentation of the biblical witness concerning preservation in Chart 1 reveals: (1) that God preserves His Word forever, (2) that God preserves His Word unchanged, and (3) that God preserves His Word primarily in heaven. Psalm 119:89 is the key biblical reference. God's revelatory Word is fixed firmly in heaven. Regardless of what might happen to His Word on earth, it is securely preserved in His mind. The primary residence of God is heaven, so it is only logical that the psalmist would define the presence of the eternal Word as the divine abode.

Chart 2 presents the flip side of the preservation of Scripture. God is the chief operative in preserving His Word unchanged in heaven. On earth, however, God's people are responsible for preserving and transmitting the Scriptures. A series of repeated prohibitions in Scripture defines the accountability for preservation on

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., 1:124.

¹³The introductory articles in volume 1 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelein, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), do not deal with the doctrine of preservation. The nearest thing to it is the discussion of textual transmission in the article by F. F. Bruce ("The Transmission and Translation of the Bible" 1:39-60). The following is a brief listing of various theological resources that fail to mention or discuss the doctrine of the preservation of Scripture: *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Walter A. Elwell, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996); G. C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, Jack B. Rogers, trans. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975); Donald G. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration & Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1994); *The Foundation of Biblical Authority*, James Montgomery Boice, ed. (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1978); F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of the Scriptures* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1988); Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, rev. John F. Walvoord (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974); Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); Terry L. Miethe, *The Compact Dictionary of Doctrinal Words* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1988).

earth. It should be obvious to the reader that God does not prohibit something that is impossible for an individual to do. When He prohibits lying, it is because an individual is capable of lying. If no one could tell a lie, God would not need to prohibit lying. That God prohibits the addition to and subtraction from His Word is testimony to the fact that His people can and, at times, do add to His written Word or subtract from it. Whether these passages refer to text or to canon, the bearing on the doctrine of preservation remains the same. The responsibility for preservation in this world rests squarely upon human shoulders.¹⁴

Chart 1: Biblical Descriptions of Preservation

Reference	Extent	Content	Nature	Location
Ps 119:89	forever	Yahweh's word	settled	in heaven
:152	forever	Yahweh's testimonies	founded	-----
Isa 40:8	forever	Yahweh's testimonies	stands	-----
Matt 5:18	till heaven and earth pass away till all be fulfilled	(every) "jot or tittle" of the law	not ever pass	-----
24:35	-----	Jesus' words	not ever pass away	-----
Luke 16:17	-----	(every) "tittle of the law"	(not) fail	-----
1 Pet 1:23, 25	forever	the incorruptible word of God	abides	-----

Matt 24:35 = Mark 13:31 = Luke 21:33
 Isa 40:8 = 1 Pet 1:25
Note: Isa 40:8 (1 Pet 1:25) and all gospel references may refer to fulfillment rather than to preservation

¹⁴One need not deny the doctrine of preservation in order to respond to those in the Textus Receptus camp. *Contra* Daniel B. Wallace, "Inspiration, Preservation, and New Testament Criticism," *Grace Theological Journal* 12/1 (1992):21-50.

Chart 2: Biblical Imperatives Concerning Preservation

Reference	“Do not add!”	“Do not diminish!”
Deut 4:2	✓	✓
12:32	✓	✓
Prov 30:6	✓	
Jer 26:2		✓
Rev 22:18-19	✓	✓

Biblical Illustrations of the Doctrine of Preservation

Jeremiah 36:1-32 is an exceptionally clear case study in the preservation of Scripture. During the reign of Jehoiakim, God revealed His Word to the prophet Jeremiah and commanded him to write the words in a scroll (vv. 1-2). Then the scribe Baruch inscribed the prophecies as dictated to him by the prophet (v. 4).¹⁵ Next, in accord with Jeremiah’s instructions, Baruch read the scroll to worshipers in the Temple (vv. 5-10). One of those present reported the reading to the royal officials (vv. 11-12). The officials in turn ordered Baruch to appear before them and to read the scroll to them (vv. 13-15). Following the reading, the officials took steps to protect Jeremiah and Baruch as well as to inform the king of the scroll’s existence and its contents (vv. 16-20).

Upon receiving the report from his officials, Jehoiakim sent Jehudi to retrieve the scroll from the secretary’s chamber (v. 21). As Jehudi read the scroll to the king in the presence of his royal officials, Jehoiakim cut away three or four columns of text at a time and threw the pieces into the nearby fire where the flames consumed them (vv. 22-23). An original manuscript (one of the autographa) of God’s written revelation thus perished forever from the earth because of the act of one man. In accord with the biblical passages prohibiting any subtraction of God’s Word, Jehoiakim obviously placed himself in danger of divine judgment.

God could have allowed that portion of His revealed Word to remain unknown to future generations. He chose, however, to remind Jeremiah of all that had been written so that he could dictate it a second time to Baruch for recording (vv. 27-32; cf. John 14:26). Those prophecies had been destroyed, but they still survived unchanged in the mind of God in heaven. The second manuscript added many other prophetic utterances to the former collection. That addition was not human, but divine. Charles Feinberg summed up the matter as follows:

Jehoiakim’s destruction of the scroll was one of many attempts through the centuries to destroy God’s Word. But the Word of the Lord is indestructible. The God who inspires

¹⁵It is significant that the dictation was from prophet to scribe, not from God to the prophet. Dictation was involved, but not mechanical inspiration.

the Word will see to its preservation. It is certain that our present text of the Book of Jeremiah is longer than the original portions that had brief abstracts of Jeremiah's earlier prophecies. The additions doubtless included the doom of the godless king. After the Israelites broke the Ten Commandments, the Lord rewrote them and gave them to Moses (cf. Exod 31:28; 32:15-16; 34:1; also 1 Peter 1:25). Theodore Watts-Dunton wisely said, "When murdered Truth returns she comes to kill" (so Lewis).¹⁶

The evidence of Scripture is that God might, on occasion, allow a portion of His written Word to be destroyed (Exod 31:18-34:28; Jeremiah 36). At times He might choose not to restore what was lost. According to 2 Kgs 22:8-10 (cf. 2 Chron 34:14-16), God allowed the priests to misplace the entire five books of Moses¹⁷ for at least fifty years. The Lord sovereignly orchestrated the recovery of those books at the right time. The recovered revelation sparked Josiah's revival.

In yet another passage it is evident that at least two words dropped from the text and have yet to be recovered over two thousand years later. The Hebrew grammar and context of 1 Sam 13:1 indicate that some numbers have been lost.¹⁸ Such examples are evidence that the preservation of Scripture on earth is not some sort of perpetual miracle. Even John William Burgon refrained from attributing the preservation of Scripture to such a miracle:

That a perpetual miracle was wrought for their [the Scriptures'] preservation—that copyists were protected against all 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.¹⁹

Rather than acting openly in some miraculous fashion to preserve His written Word, God has placed the responsibility into His people's hands. That responsibility falls primarily upon pastors and teachers whom He commands to preach and teach the Word (Acts 10:42; 16:10; 1 Tim 4:11; 6:2; 2 Tim 2:2; 4:2). The example of the careful transmission of Scripture by the prophets and apostles is a

¹⁶Charles L. Feinberg, "Jeremiah," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) 6:609. The reference to Exod 31:28 is an error not caught by the proofreaders of *EBC*. It should be Exod 31:18. The quote from Watts-Dunton is evidently taken from Howell E. Lewis, *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1924).

¹⁷For a discussion of the various views concerning the content of the Book of the Law that influenced Josiah's reforms, see Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings*, vol. 8, *The New American Commentary*, E. Ray Clendenen, ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995) 382-84.

¹⁸Cf. Ronald F. Youngblood, "1, 2 Samuel," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 3:653-54; Gleason Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1994) 314.

¹⁹John William Burgon, *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels Vindicated and Established*, Edward Miller, ed. (London: George Balland Sons, 1896) 11; cf. Edward F. Hills, "The Magnificent Burgon," *Which Bible?*, 3d rev. ed., David Otis Fuller, comp. (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids International, 1972) 91.

worthy model to be followed by modern expositors (cf. 2 Cor 4:2; Gal 3:16).²⁰ It may be concluded, therefore, that the Bible expositor must be among those accountable for the preservation of God's written revelation on earth.

THE EXPOSITOR MUST BE ACTIVE IN THE PRESERVATION OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

The accountability of the expositor in regard to the preservation of Scripture goes beyond merely believing that one is accountable. He must also actively involve himself in the actual preservation of the biblical text. Expositors must involve themselves in at least three activities: (1) examining the biblical text in the original languages, (2) identifying the original text, and (3) expounding the original text.

The Expositor Must Be Active in Examining the Text ___in the Original Languages

Those who believe in verbal, plenary inspiration ought to be in the forefront of scholarship in the biblical languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek)—if not as students and teachers, then at least as encouraging patrons. Expositors of the Scriptures must approach the text as it has been preserved. They must fully support any alteration they might make in the text. Exegesis is the explication of what the text says, not what one wishes the text might say. Every interpretation must be rooted and grounded in the original languages. Ultimately, reading the text in translation is not a viable substitute.

One who made it his life's work to interpret French literature, but who could only read it in an English translation, would not be taken seriously; yet it is remarkable how many ministers of religion week by week expound a literature that they are unable to read save in translation!²¹

Exposition must start with the text. The expositor must read it, interpret it, and expound it within its syntactical, lexical, literary, historical, social/cultural, geographical, and theological contexts.

Just as a sentence is more revealing than a single word, so the examination of a writer's syntax and style is that much more important to a biblical commentator. It is not surprising that fewer books have been written on this subject than on vocabulary, because whereas students of vocabulary can quickly look up lists of words in concordances and indices, in the field of syntax the study is more circuitous. There is no help

²⁰ For a full discussion of expository preaching, see Richard L. Mayhue, ed., *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (Dallas: Word, 1992).

²¹ H. H. Rowley, "Recent Foreign Theology," *ExpTim* 74/12 (1963):383; cf. Nigel Turner, *Grammatical Insights into the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1965) 2-3.

except in a few selective grammars and monographs, so that the worker really must work his way through all the texts in Greek.²²

It is reported that an old prospector summed up his life in the following words: “I spent five years looking for gold and twenty years looking for my burro.” Striking expository gold has about the same ratio of labor to results. For every nugget the expositor finds, he can expect to spend hours, days, weeks, or months looking for it. The expository examination of the Scriptures is not for the lazy or the quitter. It is a labor of love requiring commitment and perseverance.

According to the biblical testimony itself, even the individual inflection of its words is significant and authoritative (cf. Gal 3:16). The expositor must, therefore, assume that the author (or Author) made deliberate choices for phrases, words, and inflections in order to best convey the divine intent. The concept of deliberate, intelligent selection of words and inflections is sufficient justification for the expositor to concern himself with the problem of what was originally written. It made a difference to the author (or Author); it should make a difference to us.

Cicero somewhere has written of the *scientia iuris: res enim sunt parvae, prope in singulis litteris atque interpunctionibus verborum occupatae* [“knowledge of law: the matters are indeed small, mainly occupied with individual letters and also the punctuation of words”]. Delete the *prope* and you have a fair description of the matter of textual criticism. Whether Euripides wrote δεῖ [“it is necessary”] or χρῆ [“it is fitting”] in a given passage is hardly of metaphysical import. But we must assume that he made a choice between them. This is sufficient justification for concerning ourselves with the problem. It made a difference to the poet; it should make a difference to us. This planet, I do not doubt, shall never want for people to despise such problems and those who try to resolve them. Such contempt is founded upon the remarkable premise that one who manifests a concern for minutiae must of necessity be both indifferent to and unequal to profound problems. The Greeks, on the contrary, in their simplicity had contrived a word to express this reverence before even the smallest truth; and that word is φιλαλήθεια [“love of truth”]. The sacred writer speaks not idly when he reminds us that ὁ ἐξουθενῶν τὰ ὀλίγα κατὰ μικρὸν πεσεῖται [“the one despising the little things shall fall because of the insignificant”].²³

Many examples could be cited to demonstrate how important it is for the expositor to examine the biblical text in its original languages. In the NT, Matt 1:16 illustrates the significance of the gender of a relative pronoun. The verse is part of the genealogy of Christ. The association of Christ with the lineages of Joseph and Mary is expressed by a relative pronoun (“by whom,” NASB). The English is ambiguous because of its lack of gender in such pronouns. Therefore, from the English translation alone the expositor cannot determine if the antecedent is Joseph

²²Ibid.

²³Robert Renehan, *Greek Textual Criticism: A Reader* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1969) 134 [English translations added].

or Mary. The Greek, however, is very clear. The Greek pronoun is feminine in gender. Mary is the proper antecedent. Christ's lineage is linked directly to Mary rather than to Joseph. The text indicates that Mary was the only human parent of Jesus Christ.²⁴

In the OT account of Jacob meeting Esau after many years of separation from him, some English translations have utilized identical phrases in Gen 33:9 and 11 ("I have enough" in KJV and NKJV; "I have plenty" in NASB). In the Hebrew text, however, Esau said, "I have much," but Jacob said, "I have everything."²⁵ The narrator of the event recorded that Jacob intentionally chose a term different from the one his brother Esau used to describe the extent of his possessions. It is the expositor's responsibility to draw his audience's attention to that fact and to explain its significance.

Although the carefully worded Hebrew original of Gen 33:9 and 11 can be adequately translated, elements of the Hebrew text in other passages are more difficult to translate. Isa 24:17-18 is just such an example. The NASB reads,

Terror and pit and snare
Confront you, O inhabitant of the earth.
Then it will be that he who flees the report of disaster will fall into the pit,
And he who climbs out of the pit will be caught in the snare.

The Hebrew highlights the three terms at the beginning of verse 17 by alliteration and assonance. "Terror and pit and snare" (פַּחַד וְבִקְעָה וְסִנְאוֹ, *paḥad wāpāḥat wāpāḥ*) are first identified in verse 17 and then employed in special wordplay in verse 18.²⁶

The context is one of judgment in the eschatological Day of the LORD (see esp., vv. 18b-23). The rhetorical paronomasia involves the forms of the words rather than their meanings. Their sounds as they are pronounced build to a crescendo and culminate in the onomatopoeic force of the third and final term פַּחַד (*pāḥ*) that

²⁴William G. Bellshaw and William D. Barrick, *The Language of Our Faith: Exploring New Testament Words* (Denver: Baptist Publications, 1974) 56; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 336-37.

²⁵The NKJV indicates in a marginal note that "enough" in Gen 33:11 is literally "all." NIV renders verse 9's phrase as "I already have plenty" and verse 11's phrase as "I have all I need." Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard, eds. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), translates the distinction in the two phrases (340-41), but fails to discuss its significance (345-46).

²⁶"Terror" (v. 17) and "disaster" (v. 18) are the same Hebrew word. Cf. J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1993) 204. For discussions of assonance and paronomasia, see the following: John Ellington, "Wit and Humor in Bible Translation," *The Bible Translator* 42/3 (1991):301-13; Nick Lunn, "Paronomastic Constructions in Biblical Hebrew," *Notes on Translation* 10/4 (1997):31-52; P. P. Saydon, "Assonance in Hebrew As a Means of Expressing Emphasis," *Biblica* 36 (1955):36-50; Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, no. 26 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995 reprint of 2d ed. of 1986) 212, 224, 237-50.

sounds like a trap snapping shut on its victim. Neither of these elements is available to the reader of the translations. The three like-sounding terms produce a cumulative effect that heightens the reader's or listener's interest and personal involvement in what is being said.

Walter Kaiser very appropriately employed the words of a Jewish poet from Poland as a reminder of the importance of reading the OT in its original Hebrew. Hayim Nachman Bialik (1873-1934) said, "Reading the Bible in translation is like kissing your bride through a veil."²⁷ The expositor must be wedded to the biblical text and enjoy it without any unnecessary veil intervening to distort his clear view and enjoyment of its God-breathed beauty.

The Expositor Must Be Active in Identifying the Text's Original Statement

Textual criticism is the technique of restoring the original readings of texts. It has often been criticized heavily because of the excesses of some of its practitioners. Such opposition, however, is not a recent development. The Helvetic Consensus Formula (1675) made the following declaration:

Therefore we can by no means approve the opinion of those who declare that the *text* which the Hebrew Original exhibits was determined by man's will alone, and do not scruple at all to remodel a Hebrew reading which they consider unsuitable, and amend it from the Greek Versions of the LXX and others, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Chaldee Targums, or even from other sources, yea, sometimes from their own reason alone; and furthermore, they do not acknowledge any other reading to be genuine except that which can be educed by the critical power of the human judgment from the collation of editions with each other and with the various readings of the Hebrew Original itself—which, they maintain, has been corrupted in various ways. . . . Thus they bring the foundation of our faith and its inviolable authority into perilous hazard.²⁸

The integrity and purity of the Hebrew OT and the Greek NT as they are presently preserved are not in any "perilous hazard." Due to the extraordinary care with which the Massoretes transmitted the OT Hebrew text, a minute portion of the text is subject to question.²⁹ In the NT the expositor only needs to give attention to

²⁷Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Future Role of the Bible in Seminary Education," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 60/4 (1996):253. "Haim Nacham Bialik" in Kaiser's article might be either a variation in the transliteration of the poet's name or a spelling error. The spelling utilized above was taken from T. Cami, ed., *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse* (Hammondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1981) 132. Another excellent article dealing with the necessity (and, possibility) of knowing Hebrew for expounding the OT is Stephen J. Andrews, "Some Knowledge of Hebrew Possible to All: Old Testament Exposition and the *Hebraica Veritas*," *Faith & Mission* 13/1 (1995):98-114.

²⁸John H. Leith, ed., *Creeeds of the Churches* (New York: Doubleday/Anchor Books, 1963) 310-11.

²⁹On the subject of the transmission and integrity of the biblical texts of both Testaments, cf. Ellis R. Brotzman, *Old Testament Textual Criticism: A Practical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994) 17-24, 37-62; Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments* 114-24, 176-90; Josh McDowell, *Evidence That*

textual critical matters in about one-half of one percent of the text.³⁰

A detailed examination of the theories and practices of the textual criticism of the OT and NT must be left to another time. Bible expositors must look into the biblical text with a determination to know the truth of God's Word. In the translations and commentaries that they consult they will find discussions of textual critical matters. It is necessary that they remember the true nature of the different pieces of evidence.

(1) The ancient versions are human translations, not primary manuscripts. These include the Greek Septuagint and its daughter versions (Aquila, Theodotion, and Symmachus), the Aramaic Targums, the Syriac Peshitta, and the Latin Vulgate.³¹

(2) The Samaritan Pentateuch covers only the first five books of the OT. In addition, it gives evidence of having been modernized, supplemented, and altered in ways that prevent it from being a solid witness to the original text of the Pentateuch.³²

(3) The manuscripts from Qumran may include popularized Hebrew versions "developed to meet the requirements of a particular audience."³³

(4) All ancient manuscripts and versions must themselves be subject to careful textual criticism. They were all humanly produced and may contain scribal errors of both the unintentional and intentional kind.

(5) In the terms of legal *a priori* evidence, the Massoretic Text of the OT must remain as the accepted text unless there is evidence of equal authenticity and antiquity to the contrary.³⁴

At regular intervals in the church's calendar the Lord's Table or commu-

Demands a Verdict: Historical Evidences for the Christian Faith (San Bernardino, Calif.: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1972) 43-68; John Owen, "Of the Integrity and Purity of the Hebrew and Greek Text of the Scripture," *The Works of John Owen*, William H. Goold, ed. (London: Johnstone and Hunter, 1853) 16:345-421; René Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, Helen I. Needham, trans. (Chicago: Moody, 1969) 186-98.

³⁰Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, rev ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1986) 473-74.

³¹A thoughtful consideration of the value of ancient translations in textual criticism is presented by Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* 121-33. Basically, differences created by the translators do not qualify as legitimate textual variants.

³²Cf. Bruce K. Waltke, "The Samaritan Pentateuch and the Text of the Old Testament," *New Perspectives on the Old Testament*, J. Barton Payne, ed. (Waco Tex.: Word, 1970) 212-39.

³³Joseph R. Rosenbloom, *The Dead Sea Isaiah Scroll: A Literary Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970) xiii. Rosenbloom's study of the St. Mark's Isaiah Scroll (1QIs^a) reaches the conclusion that its variations from the Massoretic Text are often due to liberties taken by the Qumran scribes that modern textual critics would be reluctant to take.

³⁴Robert Dick Wilson, *A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1959), has the classic presentation of the application of the principles of *a priori* evidence in the study of the OT.

nion is observed by individual congregations of believers. At the time of partaking of the bread, the pastor traditionally recites the words of 1 Corinthians 11:24 in something akin to the KJV: “Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.”³⁵ Is the text correctly preserved and transmitted by the traditional observance of this ordinance? The expositor with a good foundational knowledge of the contents of Scripture should question the text utilized in the ordinance. John 19:31-36 records that the soldiers came to break Jesus’ legs, but when they saw that He was already dead they did not do so. According to the text, “these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, *‘Not one of His bones shall be broken’*” (v. 36, NKJV).

If John 19:36 is authentic and accurate, how can “broken” be correct in 1 Corinthians 11:24? Further investigation in the gospel accounts reveals that Christ Himself did not use “broken” either. Matthew reported that the words of Christ were “Take, eat, this is My body” (26:26, NKJV). Luke’s Gospel says, “This is My body which is given for you” (22:19, NKJV). Therefore, if the self-witness of Scripture means anything, it must be obvious that “broken” in some of the Greek manuscripts of 1 Cor 11:24 is an erroneous reading. It may be classified as an addition to the original text by human hands. Those who made such an addition are subject to God’s judgment because they did not rightly preserve His written Word (cf. Deut 4:2; 12:32; Prov 30:6; Rev 22:18-19). The pastor or expositor who continues to propagate the corrupted Word in the public observance of the Lord’s Table will be held accountable for actively perverting the Scriptures rather than preserving them.

The Expositor Must Be Active in Expounding the Original Text

It is not sufficient merely to examine the original biblical text and to identify what the reading of the text should be. It is the responsibility of the expositor to expound the text faithfully.

Consider the example of Isa 24:17-18 that was discussed above. The expositor who has the elements of the Hebrew text clearly in mind can bring out the imminent demise of those who live under the judgment of God. Those who are subject to God’s judgment might flee from the fearful consequences, but they will only fall into a pit. If they manage to pull themselves up out of that pit and resume their flight, they will step into a snare or trap—*WHAM!* (The sense of the last part of this statement could be further emphasized by clapping the hands together with force.) There is no excuse—there is no escape. Be sure your sins will find you out. When they do, it will be too late.

An exposition of 1 Cor 11:23-26 prior to observing the Lord’s Table gives an expositor the opportunity to define and illustrate the authority by which the church observes the ordinance. The church’s authority for the ordinance is derived

³⁵The NKJV follows the same text with a marginal note observing that the Nestle-Aland Greek NT (26th ed.) and the United Bible Societies’ Greek NT (3d ed.) omit “broken.” The NASB has “This is My body, which is for you” with a marginal note mentioning that “Some ancient mss. read *is broken*.” NIV’s translation is the same as NASB for this phrase.

from the written revelation of God, not from human opinion or directives. Today, as in the past history of the church, it is the responsibility of believers to observe the ordinance in the form in which it was received from Christ Himself (1 Cor 11:23). No individual or assembly has the authority to alter what the Lord Himself has delivered to the church. That holds true for the scribes copying the Greek manuscripts, the editors compiling Greek NT editions, the translators, and the expositors.

CONCLUSION

The biblical doctrine of the preservation of Scripture consists of two parts: (1) God preserves His Word unchanged forever in heaven and (2) He gave His people the privilege and responsibility of preserving it on earth. The second part of the doctrine of the preservation of Scripture applies to the Bible expositor. The doctrine is not just an article of faith; it is something to be practiced. The expositor must participate in the preservation of God's written Word. He will be held accountable by a holy and omniscient God for any adulteration of the biblical text. He must diligently examine the original language of the biblical text. To the best of his ability, he must identify its original wording. He should tolerate no emendation or alteration without undeniable evidence of equal authenticity and antiquity. Then he must expound the text with integrity, accuracy, and enthusiasm.