

## **PRESERVATION OF THE BIBLE: PROVIDENTIAL OR MIRACULOUS? THE BIBLICAL VIEW**

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*Many evangelicals and KJV-only advocates assert that the Bible provides explicit evidence for a doctrine of miraculous preservation. In their assertions, they apply the doctrine to a particular version of the Bible, most often the King James Version (KJV) of 1611. Yet an examination of exegetical evidence from commonly cited biblical texts supports only a general promise of preserving the truth of God's message to mankind, not a particular version of the Bible. Many verses—including some related to immutability, infallibility, and preservation—have been incorrectly interpreted and applied to preservation. The preservation of God's revelation is the lesson in many of the passages, but no explicit indication applies them directly to written Scripture or to how and when a promise of general preservation would be fulfilled. Since historical evidence demonstrates that scribal errors exist in every extant manuscript, the conclusion to be drawn is that the Bible has been providentially preserved by means of secondary causation through the plethora of available manuscripts and not through miraculous preservation of particular manuscripts and versions. God Himself is faithful and true and His Word reflects His character; His decrees are absolutely immutable and infallible. Although the Scriptures themselves strongly assert that truths contained in it are firmly established and will endure forever, the case for providential preservation must rest upon theological grounds through the historical (i.e., canonicity) and manuscript evidence (i.e., textual criticism) rather than upon exegetical grounds.*

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### Introduction

History provides evidence that God's Word has been preserved in numerous copies and translations throughout the world. *Webster's Dictionary* defines "preserve" as "to keep or save from decomposition."<sup>1</sup> Thus, to preserve something is to save it from corruption, damage, or erosion so that the original state or condition is maintained to the greatest degree possible for an indefinite period of time.

How has this preservation been accomplished? Has God miraculously preserved His Word to the degree that no errors or variations occurred in the transmission process? Or have humans been responsible to preserve His Word apart from the Lord promising to do so? The first possibility can be dismissed because of obvious errors in transmission.<sup>2</sup> However, the second possibility is not so easily answered. To say that man has indeed been given the responsibility to preserve the Word of God for future generations would account for errors that have occurred. Yet is this all that preservation involves, or does a providential<sup>3</sup> safekeeping guard the essential quality of the Bible for future generations?

But the question may arise as to whether or not the Bible is better preserved than any other piece of literature. If it is, is it due to a doctrine of preservation explicitly taught in the Scriptures? Many theologians answer "yes," and use numerous passages to defend their position. However, do those passages refer to preservation of the Bible itself? The foundational question to answer is whether or not the Lord has promised to preserve His Word. If He promises to preserve the Scripture, a proper doctrine of preservation can be formulated. If commonly quoted passages used to defend preservation of the Word of God do not refer to the Bible itself, preservation cannot be defined as a doctrine. Rather, it must be defended on historical and theological grounds.<sup>4</sup> Concerning the position of the seminary at which

<sup>1</sup>Philip Babcock Gove, ed., *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language* (Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1971) 1794.

<sup>2</sup>For further evidence, see Jon A. Rehurek, "Derived Autographic Authority: Recognizing Distinctions in the Transmission of the Scriptures" (Th.M. thesis, The Master's Seminary, April 2004) 1-24.

<sup>3</sup>Erickson defines the providence of God as "the continuing action of God in preserving his creation and guiding it toward his intended purposes" (Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2d ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998] 412).

<sup>4</sup>Combs writes: "Right at the outset, we must distinguish between belief in a *doctrine* of preservation and, simply, belief in preservation. This is crucial in understanding exactly what those in group 1 [i.e., those who deny the Scriptures teach any doctrine of preservation] 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

he taught, Glenny writes,

We gladly affirm God's providential control over the events of history so that His Word has been preserved by natural processes in the many extant manuscripts, versions, and other copies of Scripture. Furthermore, we want to clarify our position by stating what we do not believe. We do not believe that God has perfectly preserved His Word by miraculous, supernatural means in any one manuscript, version, or text-type.<sup>5</sup>

Can Glenny's position be biblically defended? Is preservation theologically derived? Sawyer writes, "The problem of an appeal to *providence* for support of an argument is that there is no objective criterion by which one is to judge what is and is not providential."<sup>6</sup> The Bible clearly teaches that all events of human history are providential (Isa 46:5, 8-11). Nothing is out of God's control or veers from His ultimate design and intention. Combs brings clarity to the earlier question of whether or not the Bible is better preserved than other ancient literature: "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.'"<sup>7</sup> Even so, what is the nature of that preservation? If it is providential, what does that mean? How is the Word of God preserved?

In light of these questions, specific passages of Scripture must shed light on

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. . . . 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" (William W. Combs, "The Preservation of Scripture," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 5 (Fall 2000):6-7, 10). Two representatives of Group I are W. Edward Glenny, "The Preservation of Scripture," in *The Bible Version Debate: The Perspective of Central Baptist Theological Seminary*, ed. Michael A. Grisanti (Minneapolis: Central Baptist Theological Seminary, 1997) 71-106; and Daniel B. Wallace, "Inspiration, Preservation, and New Testament Textual Criticism," *GTJ* 12/1 (Spring 1991):21-50.

<sup>5</sup>Glenny, "The Preservation of Scripture" 71.

<sup>6</sup>M. James Sawyer, "Evangelicals and the Canon of the New Testament," *GTJ* 11/1 (Spring 1990):45. Yet, Combs makes a valid point when discussing what providence actually means and how it is often misunderstood or taken to an extreme. He writes, "God brings about his will in the universe either directly (e.g., miracles) or indirectly, that is, through secondary causation. . . . 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 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" (Combs, "The Preservation of Scripture" 9-10).

<sup>7</sup>Combs, "The Preservation of Scripture" 8.

this issue, because “the only objective criterion we have by which we can determine God’s providence and will is His interpretation of the events of this world in His Word.”<sup>8</sup> The question is not, Has the Bible has been preserved? History confirms that it has. The question is whether it was miraculously preserved or providentially preserved through secondary causation. The goal must be to find out what—if anything—the Bible teaches about preservation. Therefore, the meanings of a number of the commonly used proof texts need to be examined to determine whether or not providential preservation of the Scripture is explicitly taught.

### **Assessing the Biblical Case for Preservation**

The only proper place to start an investigation into the preservation of the Scripture is in the biblical record itself. A number of passages have been offered as evidence for the preservation of the Bible, some of them making specific reference to “the Word of God.” Yet, how many of them—properly interpreted—actually support a doctrine of preservation? Combs writes, “It is customarily assumed, usually with no supporting argumentation, that this expression always 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>9</sup> What does each of the following passages have to contribute to a proper understanding of preservation?

#### **Immutability Texts**

Two passages from the Gospel of Matthew are commonly quoted as proof that God has promised to preserve His Word, i.e., the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. The first passage is Matt 5:17-18<sup>10</sup> and the second Matt 24:35. What

<sup>8</sup>Glenny, “The Preservation of Scripture” 79-80.

<sup>9</sup>Combs, “The Preservation of Scripture” 13. A number of lexicons demonstrate that the OT expression “the word of God” (or Lord) is almost always used of oral communication. See Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., “דְּבָרִים” and “אִמְרָתוֹ,” in *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-Aramaic Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1979) 182-84, 57. See also H. Douglas Buckwalter, “Word,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2d ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001) 828-31. See also Wayne P. Grudem, “Scripture’s Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture,” in *Scripture and Truth*, eds. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992) 19-59. To this Combs adds: “Because what came orally to God’s spokesmen was sometimes eventually written down, the phrase came to designate Scripture as well. . . . While the attributes of God’s oral communication can often easily be transferred to God’s written word, a 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 application is valid” (Combs, “The Preservation of Scripture” 13-14).

<sup>10</sup>Combs writes, “This is one of the most commonly referenced passages used to support the preservation of Scripture” (“The Preservation of Scripture” 20-21).

do these statements of Jesus teach?

**Matthew 5:17-18.** In this passage, Jesus says, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter [ἰῶτα, *iōta*] or stroke [κεραία, *keraiā*] shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.”<sup>11</sup> Glenn writes, “Matthew 5:18 is clearly speaking of fulfillment in Christ of OT ethical (3:15) and prophetic (1:13; 2:15; 4:14; etc.) texts.”<sup>12</sup> He states that these verses, “in context, speak of the eschatological fulfillment of promises, prophecies, and types from the Old Testament.”<sup>13</sup> But Jesus’ reference to the OT should not be limited to the texts specified by Glenn; the verses broadly refer to Jesus’ fulfillment of *all* OT prophecies concerning the Messiah. This interpretation indicates that they do not refer to the preservation of one or even several manuscripts of the OT; they refer to fulfillment of the prophetic truth contained in them. Yet the words of Jesus also address the immutability and authority of the OT. Grudem concurs:

Consistent with the view that the Old Testament writings are God’s own speech is a willingness on the part of New Testament authors to rely on individual words or even letters of the Old Testament. Jesus’ affirmation of the abiding validity of every “iota” and “dot” of the Old Testament law (Matt. 5:18) indicates such confidence.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, the context shows that Jesus limits His reference to the OT and does not include future writings and later events that make up the content of the NT. In v. 17, He clearly refers to “the Law” and “the Prophets” of the OT. He refers to the authoritative nature of the OT Scriptures and their fulfillment in Himself as the promised Messiah, not to the preservation of the manuscripts.<sup>15</sup> He did not come to “abolish” (καταλῦσαι, *katalusai*) the Law and the Prophets, but to “fulfill”

<sup>11</sup>English translations of Scripture are from the New American Standard Bible.

<sup>12</sup>Glenn, “The Preservation of Scripture” 87.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Grudem, “Scripture’s Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture” 40.

<sup>15</sup>Although it is beyond the scope of this discussion, there are numerous views as to what Jesus meant by “fulfill.” Carson writes, “The best interpretation of these difficult verses says that Jesus fulfills the Law and the Prophets in that they point to him, and he is their fulfillment. The antithesis is not between ‘abolish’ and ‘keep’ but between ‘abolish’ and ‘fulfill.’ . . . Therefore we give *plēroō* (‘fulfill’) exactly the same meaning as in the formula quotations, which in the prologue (Matt 1–2) have already laid great stress on the prophetic nature of the OT and the way it points to Jesus” (D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” vol. 8, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984] 143-44).

(πληρώσαι, *plērōsai*) them. Glenny writes, “The point of this verse is that Jesus did not come to destroy (or to perpetuate for that matter) the OT Law. He is the one to whom all the OT points (Luke 24:25-27, 44-46) and He came to fulfill all that was prophesied about Him in it.”<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the restriction of this passage to the messianic prophecies of the OT should be maintained.<sup>17</sup>

Immediately following this reference to OT prophecies, Jesus once again mentions “the Law” and the smallest marks found in the Hebrew OT. Carson describes them:

The “jot” (KJV) has become “the smallest letter” (NIV): this is almost certainly correct, for it refers to the letter י (*yōḏ*), the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The tittle (*keraiā*) has been variously interpreted: it is the Hebrew letter ו (*wāw*) . . . or the small stroke that distinguishes several pairs for Hebrew letters (צ/ץ; ג/ג; ח/ח) . . . or a purely ornamental stroke, a “crown”; . . . or it forms a hendiadys with “jot,” referring to the smallest part of the smallest letter. . . . In any event Jesus here upholds the authority of the OT Scriptures right down to the “least stroke of a pen.” His is the highest possible view of the OT.<sup>18</sup>

His description provides further proof of reference to the Hebrew OT prophetic Scriptures alone and not to the future yet-to-be written Greek NT Scriptures. Yet Cloud, a KJV-only advocate, disagrees: “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.”<sup>19</sup> Likewise, Waite writes, “Not ‘one jot’ nor ‘one tittle’—that is Bible preservation, isn’t it? Now He’s talking about the Old Testament, and I’m sure by extension we can carry that on to the New Testament as well.”<sup>20</sup> Yet, is this the literal rendering of what Jesus said? The above evidence refutes the KJV-only position on this passage. Combs rebuts, “If not one ‘jot’ or ‘tittle’ is to be changed,

<sup>16</sup>Glenny, “The Preservation of Scripture” 87.

<sup>17</sup>Glenny asserts, “Matthew 5:18 does not even refer to the NT text, let alone speak of its perfect supernatural preservation” (*ibid.*).

<sup>18</sup>Carson, “Matthew” 145.

<sup>19</sup>David W. Cloud, “Preservation Is Missing in Standard Works on Textual Criticism,” March 30, 1999, updated December 16, 2002, <http://www.wayoflife.org/~dcloud/fbns/preservationis.htm>, accessed 16 May 2003). He also writes in the same article: “I praise God that we are not left to drift upon the unsteady seas of modern critical scholarship. Because of faith in God’s promises to preserve His Word, I can reject the new texts and Bibles and cleave confidently to the faithful Received Text-based King James Version in English and to Received Text versions in other languages.”

<sup>20</sup>D. A. Waite, *Defending the King James Bible—A Four-fold Superiority: Texts, Translators, Technique, Theology. God’s Word Kept Intact in English* (Collingswood, N.J.: The Bible for Today Press, 1992) 10.

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.”<sup>21</sup> Such statements demonstrate that the focus for many in this passage is on miraculous preservation—most notably those advocating a particular text or version, i.e., the Textus Receptus/Majority Text and/or King James Version—rather than on the primary issue which is the immutable<sup>22</sup> authority of the OT in the fulfillment of its messianic prophecies in Jesus Christ.

The point is that if these verses claim miraculous preservation of the Scriptures themselves, the manuscript evidence contradicts Jesus’ words. No available manuscripts contain the inerrant autographic text (i.e., unchanged ‘jot’ or ‘tittle’) in totality. Combs writes, “Jesus is not teaching in this verse ‘inerrant preservation of the Words of the Bible.’”<sup>23</sup> Instead, Jesus is defending<sup>24</sup> the “nature, extent, and duration of its [OT authority] validity and continuity.”<sup>25</sup> Combs concludes,

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. . . . 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.<sup>26</sup>

**Matthew 24:35.** In Matt 24:34-35 Jesus says, “Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away.” In this passage He refers specifically

<sup>21</sup>Combs, “The Preservation of Scripture” 22.

<sup>22</sup>W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988, 1991, 1997) 1:492; cf. Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 177-78.

<sup>23</sup>Combs, “The Preservation of Scripture” 22.

<sup>24</sup>Keener (*A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* 178) calls “jot and tittle” a hyperbole, but Feinberg responds to those who take the words as hyperbolic, “I see no such proof” (Paul D. Feinberg, “The Meaning of Inerrancy,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980] 284.). Extreme caution should be used when labeling any portion of Scripture as hyperbolic. “Hyperbole” should be reserved for instances where the literal meaning brings an unjustifiable meaning to the text.

<sup>25</sup>Carson, “Matthew” 145.

<sup>26</sup>Combs, “The Preservation of Scripture,” 23. Cf. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 110; Carson, “Matthew” 145.

to the immutable character of *His own words*.<sup>27</sup> Here some see a reference to the whole NT or at least to the words of Jesus found in the Gospels and Acts. Waite writes,

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 Authority 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. Though we had human writers, the Lord Jesus Christ is the Divine Author and SOURCE of it all.<sup>28</sup>

Waite's understanding goes beyond what the text means. Glenny comments, "Verse 35 itself cannot mean that all of Jesus' words will be perfectly preserved in the text of Scripture since all of His words were not recorded in the text of Scripture, or anywhere else for that matter (cf. John 20:30; 21:25)."<sup>29</sup> Combs adds, "Though it is true that God (or Jesus) is the ultimate author of Scripture, this verse is not directly referring to any written revelation."<sup>30</sup>

Combs writes, "Both the words of the Law and the words of Jesus are immutable; they cannot be set aside; they are unalterable."<sup>31</sup> Speaking of both Matthew 5:18 and 24:35, Glenny concludes, "Therefore, when read in their context, these passages do not guarantee that every word of the autographs of Scripture will be preserved intact in some text or text-type. Instead, they teach that the Word of God is true, and that the OT prophesies will all come to pass."<sup>32</sup> Combs adds, "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."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>"But here that something [of greater endurance] is Jesus' speech, which therefore sets him above the Torah and makes his words like God's words (cf. Ps 119:89; Isa 40:8): they possess eternal authority" (Davies and Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* 3:368). Cf. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* 590. Morris notes, "What he [Jesus] says will in the end have its fulfillment" (Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* 613).

<sup>28</sup>Waite, *Defending the King James Bible* 11.

<sup>29</sup>Glenn, "The Preservation of Scripture" 88. Cf. Combs, "The Preservation of Scripture" 24.

<sup>30</sup>Combs, "The Preservation of Scripture" 24.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Glenn, "The Preservation of the Scripture" 89.

<sup>33</sup>Combs, "The Preservation of Scripture" 25.

**Psalm 119:89.** Another passage that could be included in this section is Psalm 119:89. In it the psalmist writes, “Forever, O LORD, Thy word is settled [נִשְׁׁבָּה, *niššāb*] in heaven.” Psalm 119 is an acrostic Psalm<sup>34</sup> that extols the virtues and magnificence of the Law of the Lord (v. 1) and the blessedness of whole-heartedly obeying it (v. 2). Kidner entitles the ל (*lamēd*) section (vv. 89-96) “The Great Certainties” and writes, “A striking feature of these verses is the coupling of God’s creative, world-sustaining word with His law for man.”<sup>35</sup>

But in a desire to uphold a doctrine of miraculous preservation, Waite has written,

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. Something which is settled is determined and even more solid than steel or concrete. 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>36</sup>

Is this the proper way to understand the verse? As Combs asks, is there “a perfect copy of the Bible in heaven?”<sup>37</sup> This is the contention of many, but evidence contradicts their argumentation. For the sake of argument, even if the reference is to the Bible, it would be restricted to the five books of Moses according to Allen, who thus sets the parameters of this Psalm: “The number of lines seems to have been determined by the use of eight synonyms for the focus of the psalmist’s interest, the ‘Torah.’”<sup>38</sup> Allen limits the specific referent of the psalmist to the Pentateuch, which would limit the direct application of verse 89 to Moses’ five books. Yet the reference is not necessarily to a particular portion or form of Scripture; rather, it is to the truth and immutability of the message contained in the Scripture, whether or not it refers to the whole OT or just to the Pentateuch. Furthermore, the origin of the stability of His “word” lies “in heaven,” not here on earth.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup>Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, vol. 21, WBC, eds. David A. Hubbard and Glen W. Barker (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983) 139.

<sup>35</sup>Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, vol. 14b, TOTC, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1975) 426.

<sup>36</sup>Waite, *Defending the King James Bible* 7-8.

<sup>37</sup>Combs, “The Preservation of Scripture” 16.

<sup>38</sup>Allen, *Psalms 101-150* 139.

<sup>39</sup>Combs writes, “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, not withstanding 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” (“The

Another assumption of Waite and other KJV-only advocates is that all occurrences of “the Word of God” refer to divine *written* revelation. Yet, as previously demonstrated, the reference is primarily to the *truth* of God’s message,<sup>40</sup> which then applies to the written record of that truth as found in the Scripture. In this Psalm the meaning definitely applies to the truths of the OT Law (vv. 92, 93, 94, 95, 96), but cannot be extended beyond that since Psalm 119 refers to no other portions of the OT Scripture.

What, then, does God’s Word being “forever . . . settled in heaven” mean? נִשְׁשָׁב (niššāb, “settled”; NASB marginal note reads “stands firm”) is a niphil participle<sup>41</sup> and means that the truth of God’s Word is “that which stands firm.”<sup>42</sup> It is established and, therefore, cannot be changed by anyone or anything. Barrick writes, “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.”<sup>43</sup> Yet this does not mean a written copy of the OT Law sits in a heavenly library guarded by angelic beings. The verse does not allude to any such idea, but it does state that the truth of God’s Word stands, will never fail, cannot be changed, and remains forever so in heaven where God dwells. It is dependable and immutable. Combs concludes, “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. Thus, it would appear that this verse has no direct application to the doctrine of preservation.”<sup>44</sup>

### **Infallibility Texts**

The previous passages in Matthew focus on the immutability of both the Law and the Prophets (OT) and of Jesus’ words, while the one found in Psalm 119:89 focuses on the immutability of the truth of God’s Word. All are equally authoritative

Preservation of Scripture” 17).

<sup>40</sup>Combs writes, “It seems more likely that ‘Your word’ in verse 89 has no *direct* reference to God’s written revelation” (ibid.)

<sup>41</sup>Barrick and Busenitz state “that the Niphil stem (or conjugation) of the Hebrew verb was employed to express the simple passive (i.e., the subject is the recipient of the action)” (William D. Barrick and Irvin A. Busenitz, *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew: OT 503 and 504 Syllabus* [Sun Valley, Calif.: The Master’s Seminary, 1999-2000] 120, cf. 84).

<sup>42</sup>Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “נִשְׁשָׁב” in *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-Aramaic Lexicon* 662.

<sup>43</sup>William D. Barrick, “Ancient Manuscripts and Exposition,” *TMSJ* 9/1 (Spring 1998):28.

<sup>44</sup>Combs, “The Preservation of Scripture” 17. Glenny writes, “Psalm 119:89 declares that God’s Word is settled forever in heaven. The verses following this one indicate that the point of this verse is that God’s Word is infallible and it hold the universe in place (vv. 90-91). The stability of the universe is an evident token of God’s faithfulness to His Word (v. 90)” (“The Preservation of Scripture,” 88).

and eternally enduring. This applies to preservation but not in a direct sense to the written words of the Old and New Testaments. In addition to the texts examined in the Matthew passages and Ps 119:89, the following passages also need attention to see whether or not they are applicable to preservation, and if so, in what sense.

**Psalm 12:6-7.** In Ps 12:6-7 David has written, “The words of the LORD are pure words; As silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times. Thou, O LORD, wilt keep them; Thou wilt preserve *him* from this generation forever” (emphasis added). Yet, in the KJV it reads, “The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve *them* from this generation for ever” (emphasis added). The translators of the KJV differed from the NASB translators in determining the antecedent of the pronoun in v. 7. Is it the “godly man” of v. 1, the “afflicted” and “needy” of v. 5, or the “words of the LORD” in verse 6?

The focus of David in the Psalm is to clarify a distinction between the words of wicked and evil men who deceive and the words of the LORD who keeps His promises. Perowne writes, “Falseness is everywhere; truth nowhere. The heart of men is double; their lips are flattering lips (ver. 3).” In light of this fact, the number of men with integrity is minimal (v. 1) and they have difficulty dealing with the falsehood and flattery (v. 2, 5a) that surrounds them and desire to be delivered. Therefore, the Lord Himself will arise and come to their defense (v. 5b).<sup>45</sup> Perowne continues,

This deliverance is promised them in the form of a Divine interposition. The singer, filled with the Spirit of prophecy, consoles himself, and those afflicted like himself, not in his own words, but in the words of God (ver. 6). And then remembering how pure those words are, how unalterably true—not like the words of men which *seem* so fair, but *are* so false—he feels that there he can rest, calm in the conviction that, though the wicked walk on every side, Jehovah will save them that love Him from all their machinations (ver. 8).<sup>46</sup>

The Lord’s deliverance is certain because everything He says is absolutely true. When He says that He “will arise” and “set him in the safety for which he longs” (v. 5b), He can be trusted because His words are “pure words” (v. 6a),

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<sup>45</sup>J. J. Stewart Perowne, *Commentary on the Psalms: 2 Volumes in 1* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1878-1879; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1989) 175. Craigie concurs, “There are two basic sections: (1) the vain speech of wicked persons (12:2-5); (2) the sure speech of God (12:6-9)” (Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, vol. 19, WBC, eds. David A. Hubbard and Glen W. Barker [Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983] 137).

<sup>46</sup>Perowne, *Commentary on the Psalms* 175-76.

“intended, and to be fulfilled, absolutely as they run without any admixture whatever of untruthfulness.”<sup>47</sup> That is because the purity of those words has been tested and refined in the fires of a furnace, proving that no mixture of impurity is present (v. 6b).<sup>48</sup> Thus, the contrast is between the reliability of “the spoken words of God”<sup>49</sup> and the unreliable words of men.

But who or what will be “kept” and “preserved” in v. 7? The context shows that the proper antecedent of “them” in v. 7a is the “afflicted” and “needy” man of v. 5a, who is the same “godly man” of v. 1. Keil and Delitzsch write,

The suffix *ēm* in v. 8a [v. 7a English] refers to the miserable and poor; the suffix *ennu* in v. 8b [v. 7b English] (him, not: us, which would be pointed תצַרְנוּ [tšrēnū, “preserve us”], and more especially since it is not preceded by תִּשְׁמְרֵנוּ [tšmērēn, “keep us”]) refers back to the man who yearns for deliverance mentioned in the divine utterance, v. 6 [v. 5 English]. The “preserving for ever” is so constant, that neither now nor at any future time will they succumb to this generation.<sup>50</sup>

Therefore, the preserving applies to the righteous,

who are being afflicted, by the wicked of “this generation.” The pronoun “them” in verse 7 (“thou shalt keep them”) does not refer to the “words” of verse 6. It refers back to the “poor” and the “needy” of verse 5, and the “godly” and “faithful” men of verse 1, whom the Lord will “preserve” (v. 7b). . . . The point of the psalm is that the godly man will never cease; the faithful will never “fail from among the children of men” (v. 1).<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup>C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Psalms*, vol. 5, Commentary on the Old Testament (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1866-91; reprint, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1996) 121. They go on to state: “The poetical אִמְרָה [*imrāh*, “words” or “sayings”] . . . serves pre-eminently as the designation of the divine power-words of promise. The figure, which is indicated in other instances, when God’s word is said to be צֻרְפָּה (*sērūpāh*, “refined” or “tried”) (18:31; 119:40, Prov. 30:5), is here worked out: silver melted and thus purified בְּצִלְיֵי לְאֵרֶץ [*bā ʿalil ʾā ʾāreš*, “in a furnace on the earth”]” (ibid.) .

<sup>48</sup>“God’s word is solid silver smelted and leaving all impurity behind, and as it were, having passed seven times through the smelting furnace, i.e., the purest silver, entirely purged from dross” (Keil and Delitzsch, *Psalms* 121-22).

<sup>49</sup>Craigie, *Psalms 1-50* 138.

<sup>50</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, *Psalms* 122.

<sup>51</sup>Glenny, “The Preservation of the Scripture” 90-91. He also writes, “Hebrew grammar requires that it be the righteous whom God is keeping and preserving in verse 7. The word ‘them’ (v. 7a) is a masculine pronominal suffix and ‘the words’ of verse 6a is feminine in gender. . . . The textual evidence also supports the contextual and grammatical evidence that Psalm 12:7 does not refer to the doctrine of the preservation of God’s Word. There are a variety of readings for the Hebrew pronominal suffixes on the verbs ‘shalt keep’ and ‘shalt preserve.’ In the Masoretic Text, these verbs have third person plural and third person singular suffixes respectively, (‘wilt keep them’ and ‘wilt preserve him’ as the NASB translates the verse). There is also good support for the first person plural suffixes on both verbs in

In light of this interpretation, only v. 6 refers to the words of the Lord while v. 7 refers to the afflicted and needy man of v. 5, etc. And v. 6 has more to do with the *perfection* (i.e., ‘purity’) and lack of error found in the words of the Lord—i.e., their truthfulness and reliability—than with the *preservation* of those words. Combs writes, “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.”<sup>52</sup> Though the first part of Comb’s statement is true, the second part confuses the matter since it does not agree with the previous exegetical evidence that the preservation refers to the godly man of vv. 1 and 5 (Combs himself clarifies this later in his next paragraph).

Therefore, this passage does not speak of the preservation of God’s written Word; it only addresses the purity and trustworthiness of His words and the preservation that is being spoken of concerns the righteous man. In light of this, v. 6 is more applicable to the doctrines of inerrancy and infallibility than it is to a doctrine of preservation. God’s words are absolutely dependable because they do not contain any untruth or error (i.e., they are pure and, therefore, infallible) and will never fail (i.e., they are reliable). Combs concludes, “God will preserve the righteous forever. Taken in this sense, this passage has no bearing on the doctrine of preservation.”<sup>53</sup>

**Isaiah 40:8.** Isaiah wrote in his prophecy, “The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever [קִיָּם לְעֹלָם], *yāqûm kē ’ôlām*” (Isa 40:7-8). To set the context, Oswalt writes,

Chapters 40–48 particularly address the questions concerning God’s ability and desire to deliver that the exile would pose. This focus is evident immediately in ch. 40. . . . Thus, ch. 40, the introductory chapter, makes two points: God is the sole ruler of the universe (vv. 12-26), and he can be trusted to deliver (vv. 1-11, 27-31). . . . Verses 1-11 provide a stirring opening for the new section of the prophecy. In four evenly balanced strophes the prophet lays the groundwork for the rest of the book. He establishes that the theme

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Hebrew manuscripts, the Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate (‘will watch us’ and ‘will guard us’). These latter two interpretations of the textual evidence have better support than the KJV reading (which has no support for its translation ‘preserve *them*’ for the second verb). Furthermore, neither of these two preferred readings teaches the doctrine of preservation of Scripture; both indicated that David is speaking of the preservation of the righteous from the wicked people around them” (ibid., 91-92). Cf. Perowne, *Commentary on the Psalms* 178.

<sup>52</sup>Combs, “The Preservation of Scripture” 15.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

from this point on will no longer be judgment but restoration (vv. 1-2), that this restoration will be through the personal intervention of God (vv. 3-5), *that no human force or condition can prevail against God's promise* (vv. 6-8), and that there is good news of divine might coupled with divine compassion. *Through the entire segment, speech is the prominent element.* Eleven words relating to speech appear. Three times the speech of God is mentioned.<sup>54</sup>

This portion of Isaiah is about the ability of God to deliver His people from their captivity in Babylon so that they might return to their homeland in Judah. In the opening verses of chapter 40, the frailty of humankind (“the people are grass,” v. 7b) contrasts with the absolute imperishability of the words that God speaks (“the word of the Lord stands forever,” v. 8b) because of who He is. Keil and Delitzsch have written,

Men living in the flesh are universally impotent, perishing, limited; God, on the contrary (ch. 31:3), is the omnipotent, eternal, all-determining; and like Himself, so is His word, which, regarded as the vehicle and utterance of His willing and thinking, is not something separate from Himself, and therefore is the same as He.<sup>55</sup>

The promises of God are sure and reliable. Once again, the focus is on the abiding truthfulness of the words of the Lord; whereas men fail, the words will never fail. And, even more specifically, the text emphasizes that important truth. Oswalt says, “Whatever may lie ahead for the Israelites, they may know that God’s word of promise will not fail them.”<sup>56</sup> This may apply indirectly to the preservation of the written word of God, but it is not the direct meaning of the statements of Isaiah. In comparison to the frailty of flowers and grass, the promises of God “stand forever,” firmly established, unshakeable, immovable, and unfailing. “Stands” (יָקֻם, *yāqûm*, *qal* imperfect) has the idea of being “fixed,” “confirmed,” “established,” “enduring,” and in this verse means “be fulfilled.”<sup>57</sup>

Young writes,

<sup>54</sup>John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, NICOT, eds. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 45, 46, 48 [emphases added].

<sup>55</sup>C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, vol. 7, Commentary on the Old Testament (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1866-91; reprint, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996) 394. They continue: “Surely grass is the human race; such grass withereth and such flower fadeth, but the word of our God (Jehovah, the God of His people and of sacred history) *yāqûm k’ôlām* [“stands forever”], i.e., it rises up without withering or fading, and endures forever, fulfilling and verifying itself through all times” (ibid.).

<sup>56</sup>Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66* 54.

<sup>57</sup>Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “יָקֻם” in *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-Aramaic Lexicon* 878. This verb appears a number of times in the following chapters to characterize that which stands up or rises up: 43:17; 49:7; 51:17; 52:5; 54:17.

To God's word there is a permanence of character. Unlike the flesh of man, which withers and fades, it stands forever. It rises up, stands, and endures. In contrast to all flesh with its perishable nature, the word of God is imperishable and endures forever. . . . When God speaks, His word expresses the truth; and that truth cannot be annulled or changed.<sup>58</sup>

Keil and Delitzsch conclude, "Thus the seal . . . is inviolable; and the comfort which the prophets of God are to bring to His people, who have now been suffering so long, is infallibly sure."<sup>59</sup> Because the focus is on the permanence of God's promises (v. 8), this certainly has application to the written words of God, albeit indirectly and by implication. Combs concludes, "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."<sup>60</sup>

**First Peter 1:23-25.** In his first epistle, Peter writes in 1:23-25,

[F]or you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable [φθαρτῆς ἀλλὰ ἀφθάρτου, *phthartēs alla aphthartou*], that is, through the living and abiding word of God [διὰ λόγου ζώντος θεοῦ καὶ μένοντος, *dia logou zōntos theou kai menontos*]. For, "ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF, BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ABIDES FOREVER." And this is the word which was preached to you.

Verses 24-25a are a quotation from Isa 40:6b-8. Can the same conclusion be drawn from Peter's words and quotation as from Isa 40:8?

Waite seems to think not. He cites these verses as proof of a direct promise from God to preserve His written words in the Bible. He comments on the 1 Peter passage as follows:

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. When we die and are put into the earth, our bodies see corruption. They are decayed and vanish away into dust, but 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*. . . . He has kept His promise to preserve His exact Bible Words, right down to the present.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 35.

<sup>59</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, *Isaiah* 394.

<sup>60</sup>Combs, "The Preservation of Scripture" 20.

<sup>61</sup>Waite, *Defending the King James Bible* 14-15.

But it has already been established that Isa 40:8 does not refer to the actual written words, but to the truth and permanence of what God says. Waite is quoting from the KJV when he writes “incorruptible” instead of “imperishable,” as found in the NASB and NIV. So, which is correct? The context and word’s use throughout 1 Peter 1 shows the meaning to be “imperishable.”<sup>62</sup> “Not . . . perishable but imperishable” in v. 23 repeats the thought and word (“perishable things,” φθαρτοῖς, *phthartois*) of 1:18-19. In those verses the emphasis is on the lacking value of silver and gold, which perish as opposed to the “precious blood” (τιμίῳ ἅματι, *timiō haimati*) of Christ, which is infinitely valuable and will never perish. As in 1:4, the emphasis is on permanence (“to obtain an inheritance which is *imperishable* and *undefiled* and *will not fade away, reserved in heaven* for you,” emphasis added), not incorruptibility.

What is of permanence here? Peter focuses on the gospel message, not necessarily on the written Word of God.<sup>63</sup> Glenny interprets,

Here Peter’s point has nothing to do with the words of Scripture being preserved perfectly, but instead it has everything to do with the lasting and life-changing effect of God’s Word in the lives of believers (vv. 21-23). This Word will continue to work in the lives of those who have received it (2:2, 3). It is a seed in believers which is living and abiding.<sup>64</sup>

The gospel message will never fail because it is “living” and it is reliable because it is “enduring.” It cannot become obsolete.

The exegesis of this passage reveals something further about “the word of the Lord” as quoted from Isa 40:8 in v. 25. Hiebert explains,

“But” (*de*) adds the contrasting fact of the abiding nature of God’s word, “but the word

<sup>62</sup>Cf. William Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: A Translation and Adaptation of the Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition of Walter Bauer’s Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch Zu Den Schrift En Des Neuen Testaments Und Der Ubrigen Urchristlichen Literatur* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) 125.

<sup>63</sup>Combs writes, “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” (“The Preservation of Scripture” 26).

<sup>64</sup>Glenny, “The Preservation of Scripture” 89. Hiebert adds, “In what follows, Peter identifies that Word with ‘the word of glad tidings’ (v. 25, ASV), the gospel message that was preached to the readers. . . . The two participles [ζῶντος . . . καὶ μένοντος, *zōntos . . . kai menontos*, ‘living and abiding’] portray the continuously living and enduring nature of the gospel message. It has the very character of God whose message it is (Phil. 2:16; Heb. 4:12). It is also ‘enduring,’ never obsolete or irrelevant” (D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter* [Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH Books, 1984] 115-16).

of the Lord stands forever” (v. 25a). The term rendered “the word” (*to rhēma*) is not the same term rendered “the word” (*logou*) in v. 23. *To rhēma* is the term used in the Septuagint. The same transition occurs in Peter’s sermon in Acts 10:36-37. *To rhēma* is more concrete and denotes that which is spoken—the utterance itself. *Logos* is more comprehensive and includes the thought as well as its expression. The term *rhēma*, “utterance” or “message,” pointedly designates the message spoken by the mouth of God; it is the divine revelation made known in the Christian gospel (cf. Heb. 1:1-2). The repetition of the term in the next phrase identifies that divine utterance with the gospel proclaimed to the readers. It is indeed “the word of the Lord.”<sup>65</sup>

Glenny adds, “The point of Peter’s use of Isaiah 40 is that the Word of God which has been planted in the hearts of his recipients by the Spirit when they were born again is alive and incorruptible and by means of that implanted Word they can and should grow to maturity.”<sup>66</sup> It would appear then that “the Word of God” refers primarily to the gospel message spoken by the apostles, not to the written Word. But even if this subtle distinction is not intended, the emphasis in the text remains on the enduring reliability of God’s promises, not on the preservation of the Scripture. Combs concludes, “Therefore, any reference to the preservation of Scripture in this passage is probably indirect at best.”<sup>67</sup>

### Preservation Texts

Although the passages considered up to this point do not directly support a specific doctrine of the preservation of Scripture, they may be applied indirectly to preservation due to the implications of the statements made about the enduring reliability of the promises of God. Yet, two passages remain to be considered as to whether or not they explicitly teach the preservation of the written Word of God. The two passages are Pss 119:152 and 119:160.

**Psalm 119:152.** The Psalmist writes in 119:150-52, “Those who follow after wickedness draw near; they are far from Thy law. Thou art near, O LORD, and all Thy commandments are truth. Of old I have known from Thy testimonies, That Thou hast founded them forever.” Does this passage support a doctrine of preservation when speaking of the “testimonies” of the LORD being “founded forever”? Kidner writes this regarding תִּדְבָר (‘*ēdūt*, “testimonies”):

Israel was told to place the book of the law beside the ark of the covenant, ‘that it may be there for a witness (‘*ēd*) against you’ (Dt. 31:26). The outspokenness of Scripture, with

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<sup>65</sup>Hiebert, *1 Peter* 117.

<sup>66</sup>Glenny, “The Preservation of Scripture” 90.

<sup>67</sup>Combs, “The Preservation of Scripture” 26.

its high standards and frank warnings (e.g. Dt. 8:19, using this root), is implied in this expression, but so too is its dependability, as the word of the 'faithful and true witness'. Therefore, 'thy testimonies are my delight' (24).<sup>68</sup>

Glenny explains concerning the Psalmist's words, "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>69</sup> Although this is true, does it allow "testimonies" its fullest meaning? Based on Kidner's assessment of testimonies, the passage seems to indicate that the reference is to more than just the spoken Word of God. The "testimonies" of God are His words upon which the Psalmist was able to meditate (v. 148). If he is able to "observe" the Lord's "statutes" (v. 145) and to keep his "testimonies" (v. 146) and to "meditate" on them, they would have to be written down. But, not only are they written down, they are also "founded forever" (עָמְדוּ לְעֹלָם וָעֶד, *lē 'ôlām yēsadām*).

עָמְדוּ (*yāsād*) means "establish, found, fix" and in this context means that the Lord's commandments are "established" forever.<sup>70</sup> Combs clarifies:

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.<sup>71</sup>

Thus it appears that this text does directly support the preservation of the truth contained in the Torah, although it does not tell how that preservation had taken place or would take place or how details of certain words are preserved. The simple assertion is that the Lord has established His Law to last forever, and that certainly pertains to the written Law. But, again, it does not cite a particular scroll or copy of the Law, let alone any reference to the New Testament. Zemek writes,

What he [the Psalmist] had specifically come to know was that the LORD had established, founded, or firmly fixed His testimonies *forever* (v. 152b). . . . Deeply internalized recognitions of the presence of God (v. 151a) and the purity (v. 151b) and perpetuity (v.

<sup>68</sup>Kidner, *Psalms 73-150* 2:418.

<sup>69</sup>Glenny, "The Preservation of Scripture" 88.

<sup>70</sup>Brown, Driver, and Briggs, "עָמְדוּ" in *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-Aramaic Lexicon* 413.

<sup>71</sup>Combs, "The Preservation of Scripture" 18.

152) of His Word are very practical sufficiencies in the face of all kinds of suffering.<sup>72</sup>

The passage refers not only to the trustworthiness of God’s Law but also to the eternal nature of its preservation. Yet, no form or method of preservation is given. The text simply says it is preserved. As a result of the assertions made in this verse and in the surrounding context, Combs concludes, “Verse 152 appears to be a fairly direct promise of preservation.”<sup>73</sup> Yet, that preservation applies to the truthfulness of God’s promises that cannot be toppled because they are established forever and not to a specific text or manuscript.

**Psalms 119:160.** This verse appears in the same context as v. 152.<sup>74</sup> The Psalmist writes, “The sum of Thy word is truth, And every one of Thy righteous ordinances [קִרְבַּי צַדִּיקוֹתֶיךָ, *kol-mišpat šidqeḵā*] is everlasting [לְעוֹלָם, *lə ’ôlām*].” This verse combines the integrity of the Word of God and the eternity of His righteous ordinances. Zemek writes about v. 160,

[T]he psalmist looks at that Divine revelation first wholistically then atomistically. By juxtaposing the word שֵׁרֵשׁ (*rôš*), literally “head,” with דְּבַרְךָ (*deḇārēḵā*), “Your word,” he draws attention to the “sum” of God’s written communications to mankind, that is, the “totality” of the word. He associates with the “sum-total” of his LORD’s inscripturated directives for life a primary attribute of אֱמֶת (*’emet*), “truth” (v. 160a; cf. v. 142 and John 17:17 again). Then as he shifts his perspective slightly, moving to the various parts of the whole with the phrase קִרְבַּי צַדִּיקוֹתֶיךָ (*kol-mišpat šidqeḵā*), “(each and) every one of Your righteous judgments,” the grateful child of God spotlights the Word’s attribute of permanence (v. 160b; cf. Isa 40:6-8). Consequently, whether surveyed as one piece or as parts of a unit, God’s Book has proven itself to be both dependable and imperishable.<sup>75</sup>

This assessment certainly agrees with the previously examined verses in this chapter

<sup>72</sup>George J. Zemek, *The Word of God in the Child of God: Exegetical, Theological, and Homiletical Reflections from the 119th Psalm* (Mango, FL: self-published, 1998) 332. Allen agrees, “Fervent prayers for assistance are accompanied by the assurance of Yahweh’s closeness and the permanence of his revelation to which the psalmist has allied himself. Yahweh’s Torah gives the promise of his living presence with the believer. It is doubtless for this reason that earnest early prayer is matched by an even earlier study of the written Torah” (*Psalms 101–150* 144).

<sup>73</sup>Combs, “The Preservation of Scripture” 18.

<sup>74</sup>Combs writes, “This verse is similar to Psalm 118:152 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)” (*ibid.*).

<sup>75</sup>Zemek, *The Word of God in the Child of God* 347-48. He goes on to write, “For needy pilgrims it exudes its never-failing reliability which enables them through a transcendent perspective to endure and persevere amidst the tempestuous tribulations of life in a hostile world” (*ibid.*, 348).

that discuss the immutable and infallible nature of God's promises. Glenny comments, "His [the Psalmist] confidence is in the fact that God's Word is true and infallible."<sup>76</sup> Yet, once again, this verse makes specific reference to the Word of God in part, and then in totality;<sup>77</sup> i.e., to the trustworthiness and permanence of it all, in part or in whole. God's truth is "everlasting." Combs writes, "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."<sup>78</sup> Yet, that preservation does not have any particular form of tablet, manuscript, text, or writing, i.e., the Scriptures. God's words are preserved in that what He says is true and everlasting, both in part and in whole.

### Summary and Conclusion

The exegesis of relevant Scriptures demonstrates that the doctrine of preservation is not directly taught as some evangelicals and KJV-only advocates believe. In fact, the evidence presented indicates that many of the verses that have been used "to directly prove the doctrine of preservation have been misinterpreted and misapplied."<sup>79</sup> The verses do teach the preservation of God's revelation, but nothing specifically applies them directly to the written Word.<sup>80</sup> God's promises are truthful and, therefore, will endure forever because they cannot be thwarted or changed. Conclusions from scriptural data strongly assert that the truth of the written Word of God stands forever and cannot be shaken or moved. His decrees are absolutely immutable and infallible. Yet history proves that His written revelation is also preserved, but not miraculously, in a specific tablet, scroll, or document. So, the case for providential preservation rests on theological grounds through historical and manuscript evidence rather than on purely exegetical grounds.

<sup>76</sup>Glenny, "The Preservation of Scripture" 89. He also writes, "Therefore, when he says, 'every one of thy righteous judgments endureth forever,' he must be expressing his confidence in the infallibility and absolute trustworthiness of God's Word. Every statement in God's Word is dependable" (ibid.).

<sup>77</sup>Keil and Delitzsch write, "שׁוֹרָ [šō 'š] in v. 160 signifies the head-number of sum. If he reckons up the word of God in its separate parts and as a whole, truth is the denominator of the whole, truth is the sum-total" (Keil and Delitzsch, *Psalms* 747). Cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, "שׁוֹרָ," in *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-Aramaic Lexicon* 911.

<sup>78</sup>Combs, "The Preservation of Scripture" 19.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>80</sup>Combs is correct when he writes that these passages "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" (ibid.).