

Sunday, November 13, 2016—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
Lesson 35 Preservation: Examining the Relevant Passages, Isaiah 40:8 & I Peter 1:23-25

Introduction

- Recall from Lesson 30 that we laid out the following three views of preservation:
 - View 1—Denial of a Doctrine of Preservation
 - View 2—Preservation in the KJV/TR/MT Tradition
 - View 3—Preservation in the Totality of Manuscripts
- Please remember that we are in the process of looking at passages that establish the fundamental promise of preservation before we consider the extant and location of preservation.
- In Lessons 31 and 32 we commenced our consideration of whether or not the Bible teaches its own preservation by looking at Psalm 12:6-7.
- In Lesson 33, we studied a cluster of verses regarding preservation found in Psalm 119.
- Last week in Lesson 34, we considered the impact of Isaiah 30:8 upon the doctrine of preservation.
- In this Lesson, we study the impact of Isaiah 40:8 and its New Testament cross-reference I Peter 1:23-25 upon the doctrine of preservation. Please note that the comments below were originally part of Lesson 34 but that we did not have sufficient time to cover them last week. Consequently, I decided to round out our discussion of Isaiah 40:8 in this Lesson by also touching on its sister verse in I Peter.

Isaiah 40:8

- This verse has attracted more attention in the scholarly literature than has Isaiah 30:8.
- Remaining true to his non-preservationist stance, Dr. W. Edward Glenny sees the verse as a general statement of the infallibility of God’s promise to deliver Israel from their captivity.
 - “This OT context speaks of the infallibility of God’s promise to deliver His people from their captivity in Babylon. His promises will come to pass. Second . . . it is speaking of the infallibility and incorruptible nature of the Word of God not of the preservation of the text of Scripture.” (Glenny, 89-90)
- To bolster his position, Glenny quotes Grudem’s commentary on I Peter:

- “. . . the Isaiah passage is a statement about the character of God’s words generally, without reference to any particular form in which they occur.” (Glenny, 90)
- Taking the middle of the road position once again is Dr. William W. Combs of Detroit Baptist Seminary. Not willing to go as far as Glenny (see above) or Strouse (see below), Combs concludes that Isaiah 40:8 “should not 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.” (Combs, 20)
- Combs reasons as follows to support his conclusion.
 - “In this verse we are again faced with the problem of identifying “the word of our God,” as well as the meaning of “stands forever.” The Hebrew word for “stands” (מַעֲמִיד) when it is used figuratively can have the ideas of “fixed,” “confirmed,” “established,” “endure,” and according to BDB in this verse the particular sense is “be fulfilled.” BDB also suggests parallels with Isaiah 14:24, “The LORD of hosts has sworn saying, ‘Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand,’” and Isaiah 46:10, “Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure.’” Thus, the idea would be that “the word of our God stands forever” in the sense that it will “be fulfilled.” However, commentators universally understand the emphasis to be more that of “permanence”— the permanence of God’s word in contrast to “the grass” and “the flowers.” Motyer says that in verses 6–8 “the message is the contrast between human transience and divine permanence, designed to affirm that what the Lord promises he will most surely keep and perform.” Thus, Isaiah says that the plans and purposes of the nations will fail, “but the word of our God stands forever”—his plans are fixed, established, permanent; they cannot be “annulled by the passage of time.” Alexander suggests that “there is a tacit antithesis between the word of God and man; what man says is uncertain and precarious, what God says cannot fail.” What God says, his word, cannot be changed; it is immutable.” (Combs, 19-20)
- In summation, Combs views the verse as being more about the immutability of God’s word than its preservation.
- In his essay, “Preservation of the Bible: Providential or Miraculous? The Biblical View?” Jon Rehurek comments on Isaiah 40:8 in a section titled Infallibility Texts. Rehurek, like Combes, sees the passages as indirectly applying to the doctrine of preservation.
 - “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.” 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” has the idea of being “fixed,” “confirmed,” “established,” “enduring,” and in this verse, means “be fulfilled.” . . . 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.” (Rehurek, 84-85)

- Preservationist Dr. Thomas Strouse comments on the verse in *The Locus Classicus Passages* section of his essay titled “The Translation Model Predicted by Scripture.” Regarding Isaiah 40:8, Strouse states:
 - “Isaiah contrasted the frailty of man with the permanence of God’s Word when he uttered, “the grass, withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever” (40:8; cf. v. 7). Surely Isaiah alluded to the very words which he preached and ultimately inscripturated in his book. Isaiah could write (8:1), was commanded to write (30:8), and did write (34:16). Isaiah taught the perfect, verbal, plenary permanence of Scripture.” (Strouse in *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, 245)
- Donald L. Brake includes a discussion of Isaiah 40:8 as “direct biblical evidence” of preservation in his essay “The Preservation of Scriptures.” Brake writes:
 - “Isaiah 40:8 adds the thought of endurance to the concept of the stability of the Word. . . . Isaiah 40 begins the third major section of the prophecy of Isaiah. It has as its general theme the idea of comfort while awaiting deliverance. In verses 1 through 11, Isaiah tells the nation of the endurance of God’s Word, which becomes a source of comfort. The theme of verses 1 through 11 is the proclamation of the perishable nature of all flesh and the imperishable nature of the Word of God, . . . What comes out of man’s mouth is uncertain and temporary, but what God speaks is as eternal as his very character.” (Brake in *Counterfeit or Genuine*, 182)
- Dr. David H. Sorenson states the following regarding Isaiah 40:8 in his book *Touch Not the Unclean Things: The Text Issue and Separation*:
 - “Isaiah 40:8 says (quotes the verse)...The word translated as “shall stand” also has the sense to be established or to persist. The prophet, in essence, wrote that God’s Word will persist forever.” (Sorenson, 54)
- Preservationists Jack McElroy, Dr. Jack A. Moorman, and Dr. Thomas Holland all include Isaiah 40:8 in their respective lists of verses that teach the preservation of scripture. Dr. David Cloud states the following regarding Isaiah 40:8 and Isaiah 59:21 (see discussion in Lesson 34) in his book *Myths About the Modern Bible Versions*:
 - “Isaiah adds his “amen” to the doctrine of preservation. According to Isaiah 59:21, it is the very words of God which will be preserved. Note the preservation of God’s Word is

connected with its usage among believing people. The Scriptures will be preserved by use, not disuse.” (Cloud, 108)

I Peter 1:23-25

- Given that Peter quotes Isaiah 40:8 in I Peter 1:23-25, it made sense to insert our discussion of the passage into the reworked notes for this lesson. Regarding I Peter 1:23-25, preservationist D.A. Waite states:

- “That is a reference to Bible preservation, isn’t it? The Word of God is incorruptible. Strong defines his words as follows:
 - “862. *apthartos* (ä'-fthär-tos) from 1 (as a negative particle) and derivative of 5351; undecaying (in essence or continuance): not (in, un-)corruptible, immortal.”

God’s words cannot be corrupted, corroded, 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 illustration of that is given in verse 24: (quotes verses 24-25)

This teaches preservation, the opposite of what happens to the flower or the grass. You know full well what happens to pretty flowers when it begins to snow. They perish. They go away. The Words of God do not go away. They do not perish. They endure.” (Waite, 14)

- Please recall from above that Dr. William W. Combs does not believe that Isaiah 40:8 does not “affirm a specific and direct promise of the preservation of God’s written revelation.” Rather Combes views the verse as having a more “indirect application to the doctrine.” Consequently, Combes does not view Peter’s citation of Isaiah to be affirming a doctrine of preservation either.
 - “But does this verse directly teach that God’s written revelation is “imperishable”; in other words, does it directly affirm a doctrine of preservation. There are several problems with that interpretation. First, it is not certain that the phrase “living and enduring” in verse 12 modifies “word.” A case can be made that it modifies God— “through the word of the living and enduring God (marginal reading of the NRSV and the NEB).” The same two participles are applied to God in Daniel 6:27 (LXX). However, it must be admitted that this reading is rejected by most commentators. Second, Peter is quoting Isiah 40:8 in verses 24 and 25, and we have already noted that his text is probably not a direct promise of the preservation of Scripture. Third, it is not clear that Peter’s reference to the word of God in verse 23 and the “word which was preached” in verse 25 is a reference to Scripture. As was previously explained, in the New Testament the “word of God,” more often than not, has reference to the gospel message, rather than God’s special written revelation. Finally, the passage in Peter ends with the words: “And

this is the word which was preached to you.” This would seem to indicate that Peter’s emphasis though has been on the gospel message as proclaimed to his readers, not on God’s written revelation. That gospel message may have included references to God’s Word written, but it does not appear that this is Peter’s primary emphasis. Therefore, any reference to the preservation of Scriptures in these passages is probably indirect at best.” (Combs, 25-26)

- So Comb’s first reason that I Peter 1:23-25 is not teaching preservation is on account of a technicality regarding what the phrase “living and enduring” refers to; a point upon which he admits that “most commentators” reject. His second, reason follows from his teaching that Isaiah 40:8 is not a “direct” promise of preservation. Thirdly, he wants his readers to embrace the notion that the phrase “word of God” refers primarily to the “gospel message” and not “God’s special written revelation.” Personally, I find none of this reasoning compelling to say the least.
- Like Waite, preservationist Gary La More views I Peter 1:23-25 as clearly establishing a doctrine of preservation. La More is the author of Chapter Seven of *Thou Shalt Keep Them: A Biblical Theology of the Perfect Preservation of Scripture* titled, “Words Which Abide Forever: 1 Peter 1:23-25.” In this chapter La More states the following with respect to I Peter 1:23-25:
 - “Verses 23-25 of 1 Peter 1 reveal to the reader that God has provided for him the vehicle of his salvation. The purifying of the soul in v. 22 that results in the holiness of vv. 15, 16 comes because of the regeneration experience that is described in v. 23 as: “Being born again, not of (ἐκ, *ek*, “out of,” “from”) corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by (διὰ, *dia*, “through,” “by means of”) the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.” So, how does this regeneration come about? It comes about by the Divine Word. The Divine Word is the incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth forever. This Divine Word is the means God uses to impart new life in an unbeliever (cf. Rom. 10:17; Jas. 1:18). Moreover, Peter’s emphasis on the fact that the Word of God is living (cf. Heb. 4:12) suggests its power—unlike that of any merely human words—to generate new life in Christ. . .

Therefore, in order to be regenerated, a man must have a Divine Word that is living and abiding forever. Without a living and abiding Word being preserved continuously by God, the believer would not have what he needs to be born again. God has promised perpetuity to His Word because He knows that without it there would be no hope of eternal salvation. An eternal God has given an eternal Word that results in an eternal salvation.

In verses 24 and 25, God refers to Isaiah 40:6-8 and contrasts the perishable nature of the flesh with the eternal viability of the Word of God. The saints, with all the blessings of verses 3 through 13, are born from above of imperishable seed (verse 23). All else, all undegenerated flesh on earth, however affluent and currently powerful and prestigious, is like grass—perishable. The flower that stems from it is destined to fade and fall.

Corruptible seed, standing in sharp contrast with incorruptible, must exist somewhere. The words of men are corrupt and corruptible seed, including words of men posing as words of god. This passage explicitly teaches that Scripture is categorically incorruptible seed. . .

In contrast to the corruptible seed, the Word of God, which gave life to the believer is eternal. The “but” of verse 25 is adversative. Without a doubt, earthly glory fades (see verse 24) but the word of God abides forever (v. 25).” (La More in *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, 70-71)

- Regarding the question of whether I Peter 1:23-25 is simply referring to the preached gospel as Combs suggested or the written Word of God, La More writes:
 - “The gospel message proclaimed was preached using His Word (*rhama*). The Word that abides forever in v. 23 is (present tense) the Word (the Gospel text) that is preached (v. 25), equating the two (*logos* in v. 23 and *rhama* in v. 25). The Old Testament was used, for the Gospel was “per the Scriptures” (I Corinthians 15:2, 3), so this passage does apply to the written Word of God (and not merely to the oral Word). Since this Word was the text of the Old Testament, no Old Testament passages were lost at the time of I Peter. The teaching here is that the Word that believers preach on earth is eternal. Believers preach the whole counsel of God’s Word (Acts 20:27), therefore, every Word must be available.” (La More in *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, 72)
- While I take exception with some of La More’s exposition on dispensational grounds, his core message appears sound. I Peter 1:23-25 does teach the preservation of God’s word.

Other Old Testament Passages

- Besides Psalms 12:6-7, Psalms 119:89, 111, 152, 160 as well as Isaiah 30:8; 40:8, there are other Old Testament passages that some preservationists have identified as having an impact upon the doctrine of preservation. Some of these include the following:
 - Proverbs 22:20-21—“Here is a clear statement by the Lord that He has given us things in WRITING so that we might have “certainty” about them. The only way we can have that certainty today is for God to have preserved every one of His “words of truth.” This truly is a promise of Bible preservation.” (Waite, 8)
 - Ecclesiastes 3:14—“If God has done anything or given us anything, it is perfect. He has given us His words, therefore His Words are perfect. We can’t add to it or take away from it. It has been **preserved exactly**.” (Waite, 8)
- Please note that Waite’s standard of preservation as well as the one set forth by Strouse, and McElroy is none other than “exact sameness.” It is on this point, i.e., the extent of preservation, that I would disagree with these brothers.

Conclusion

- Only an extreme position that seeks to deny any doctrine of preservation advanced by Drs. Wallace and Glenny sees Isaiah 40:8 and its sister passage I Peter 1:23-25 as having no bearing upon the preservation of scripture. Even moderates such as Combs and Rehurek acknowledge the verses' application to the doctrine of preservation even if it is just indirectly.
- These two verses from Isaiah (30:8; 40:8) stand out as clear internal witnesses to Biblical doctrine and promise of preservation. Preservation is a Biblical doctrine that cannot be ignored, swept under the rug, or explained away. The cumulative force of the relevant passages is clear and irrefutable, God has promised to preserve His word.

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