

Sunday, December 4, 2016—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*  
 Lesson 38 Preservation: Examining the Relevant Passages, Matthew 24:35

### **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 studying the relevant passages that establish the fundamental promise of preservation. This is an important first step before we consider the extant and location of preservation.
- As part of this first step, we have considered the following relevant passages regarding preservation.
  - Psalm 12:6-7 (Lessons 31 & 32)
  - Psalm 119:111, 152, 160 (Lesson 33)
  - Isaiah 30:8 (Lesson 34)
  - Isaiah 40:8 and I Peter 1:23-25 (Lesson 35)
  - Matthew 4:4 (Lesson 36 & 37)
- Today in Lesson 38 we want to look at one more passage that is often used to establish the fundamental promise of preservation – Matthew 24:35.

### **Matthew 24:35**

- Non-preservationist Daniel B. Wallace argued in his 1992 essay “Inspiration, Preservation, and New Testament Textual Criticism” found in the *Grace Theological Journal* that Matthew 24:35 does not teach the preservation of scripture. A note at the bottom of page 43 reads:
  - “Occasionally Matt 24:35 (“Heaven and earth will pass away. but my words will not pass away”) is used in support of preservation. But once again, even though this text has the advantage of now referring to Jesus' words (as opposed to the OT), the context is clearly eschatological: thus the words of Jesus have certainty of fulfillment. That the text does not here mean that his words will all be preserved in written form is absolutely certain

because (1) this is not only foreign to the context, but implies that the written gospels were conceived at this stage in *Heilsgeschichte*—decades before a need for them was apparently felt; (2) we certainly do not have all of Jesus' words recorded—either in scripture or elsewhere (cf. John 20:30 and 21:25).” (Wallace in *Grace Theological Journal*, 43)

- Wallace sees Matthew 24:35 as dealing with the eschatological fulfillment of Christ’s prophecy not the preservation of the written text of scripture.
- Writing in 1997, W. Edward Glenny discusses Matthew 24:35 in a section titled Eschatological Fulfillment in his essay, “The Preservation of Scripture.” As the section heading suggests, Glenny, like Wallace before him, sees the verse as pertaining to the fulfillment of prophecy as opposed to textual preservation. Glenny writes:
  - “That Matthew 24:35 also refers to fulfillment, not textual preservation, is evident from verse 34. These two verses read . . . (quotes the verse 34 & 35). 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). Also, Luke 16:17 states that no part of the Law will fail; in other words, it will all come to pass. 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 prophecies will all come to pass; none will fail.” (Glenny in *The Bible Version Debate*, 87-88)
- Please note that Glenny provides essentially the same argument as Wallace for why Matthew 24:35 is not talking about the preservation of scripture.
- Unwilling to state that Matthew 24:35 has nothing to do with preservation like Drs. Wallace and Glenny, Dr. William W. Combs of Detroit Baptist Seminary sees the verse as having an indirect application similar to Isaiah 40:8.
  - “Jesus’ statement, “My words will not pass away,” might first seem to be a direct promise of preservation . . . (quotes Waite) . . . However, this verse would seem to promise too much. It is simply not true that *all* of Jesus’ words have been preserved. The apostle John reminds us that “there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25). Certainly, Jesus must have said some things that were not recorded in the NT, and some of those words have passed away. Though it is true that God (or Jesus) is the ultimate author of Scripture, this verse is not directly referring to any written revelation.

Matthew 24:35 uses the same hyperbolic language as Matthew 5:18. “Not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law” is saying much the same thing as “My words

will not pass away.” Both the words of the Law and the words of Jesus are immutable; they cannot be set aside; they are unalterable. As the words of God, they “stand forever” (Isa. 40:8). And just as “not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law” speaks of the authority and validity of the Law, so the fact that Jesus’ “words will not pass away” give them equal authority to the OT. Carson notes “The authority and eternal validity of God’s words (Ps 119:89-90; Isa 40:6-8). But unlike Matthew 5:18, which clearly refers to the 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.” (Combs, 24-25)

- In summation, Combs argues that Matthew 24:35 is referring to the authority of Jesus’ spoken words all of which were not necessarily written down. Consequently, the passage only applies to the preservation of the scriptures indirectly. Please note that this is different from what Drs. Wallace and Glenny argued (see above).
- Dr. Kent Brandenburg is the general editor of *Thou Shalt Keep Them: A Biblical Theology of the Perfect Preservation of Scripture* as well as being the author of Chapter Five titled, “My Words Shall Not Pass Away: Matthew 24:35.” In his comments on the context of Matthew 24, Dr. Brandenburg points out that God puts his own credibility on the line when it comes to the issue of predictive prophecy. Given the fact that Matthew 24 and 25 constitute one of the great prophetic passages of the New Testament, its speaker; the Lord Jesus Christ, is likewise, putting His credibility as Israel’s Messiah on the line.
  - “The Lord Jesus Christ is God, so He can speak prophetically, and He does in this text. Since He says that the events prophesied in these two chapters are going to occur, one can count on them occurring. . . The generation that witnesses the previously described signs will live to see the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the answer to the disciples’ question concerning the “when” of his coming in v. 3. The generation of people that will see these things is the generation that will enter the tribulation period. . .” (Brandenburg in *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, 59-61)
- Dispensationally, we know that Matthew 24 and 25 await a yet future fulfillment. Moreover, we know that the revelation of the mystery and the formation of the body of Christ interrupted the prophetic time table outlined by Christ in Matthew 24 and 25. Therefore, the generation that will see the fulfillment of Matthew 24 is still in the future. Yet, the words Christ uttered that day on the Mount of Olives have been recorded in the book of Matthew, a book we have access to during the dispensation of grace. Those to whom these words will directly apply during the Ages to Come will need access to what Christ said that day upon the Mount of Olives. They will have it the same way we have it, via the book of Matthew.
- In that context, there is no reason to assume that Christ’s words that “shall not pass away,” are anything other than the words recorded in Matthew 24. There is no reason to assume that this somehow violates that statement found in John 20:30 and 21:25. If words and deeds referred to

in these Johannian verses were necessary for us to know they would have been added to the eternal written record.

- Contextually, Matthew 24:35 is referring to the words uttered by Christ during the Olivet Discourse. These words must be preserved in written form so that the people living in the ages to come, to whom these verses will directly apply, will know what God said. This is consistent with Isaiah 30:8 and why God wrote anything in a book. The same could be said for any prophetic statement whether spoken by Christ in His earthly ministry and later recorded by the gospel writers or the Old Testament prophets. In that context, Matthew 24:35 is stating that Christ's words in the Olivet Discourse "shall not pass away", by extension we could also conclude that none of the other words of Christ that the Holy Spirit elected to record for us via inspiration will pass away either.
- Dr. D.A. Waite presents the following Biblical argument for why Matthew 24:35 extends the fundamental promise of preservation to the totality of the New Testament in addition to the Old. Please note that all the text formatting exhibited in the following quotation below belongs to Waite.
  - "The Lord is talking of **His Words**, the New Testament. Not the Masoretic Hebrew Old Testament only, but His **Words** will not pass away. That means the promise extends to the New Testament. I believe, personally that the Lord Jesus was the Source and Author of every word of the Hebrew Old Testament text. He was the Revelator. He is the Word of God. In a very real sense, therefore, His *Words* include the entire Old Testament. He is also the Source and Author of all the New Testament books. Though we had human writers, the Lord Jesus Christ is the Divine Author and SOURCE of it all.
  - a. **Christ's Authorship of the Gospels.** In John 14:26 Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would "*bring all things to your remembrance*," whatsoever I have said unto you." This includes the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. John 14:26 says: (quotes the verse). He is talking to His disciples in the Upper Room. This includes **everything** He said in the four Gospels. His Words shall not pass away. The Holy Spirit of God will bring to these Apostles the exact words so that nothing is forgotten. The Holy Spirit is the MEANS.
  - b. **Christ's Authorship of the Acts of the Apostles.** Let us look at John 15:26-27 (quotes the verse). The Apostle bearing "*witness*" is written about in the Acts of the Apostles. The Holy Spirit of God bore witness through the Apostles, and the book of Acts is the record of their *witness*. When the Lord Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would *bring all things* to their remembrance, His statement included the book of Acts.
  - c. **Christ's Authorship of the Epistles.** Let us turn to John 16:12-13. The Lord Jesus said:
    - *I have yet many things to say unto you* [He's talking to His disciples], *but ye cannot bear them now.* [They couldn't understand them] (13) *Howbeit when he,*

*the Spirit of truth, is come, he will **guide you into all truth**: for he shall not speak of himself [from Himself, Himself being the SOURCE]; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.*

The guiding *into all truth* includes the Epistles. Notice also that it is clear that the Holy Spirit is not the Source and Author of the Words of God, but it is the Lord Jesus Christ Who is the Source and Author.

d. **Christ's Authorship of Revelation.** In John 16:13b, the Lord Jesus continued,

- "... and **He will shew you things to come.**"

Although it refers to the other New Testament prophetic books, the phrase "*things to come*" certainly refers also to the book of Revelation. So you have the book of Revelation, the Epistles, the Acts of the Apostles, all the Gospels written by the Lord Jesus, working through the Holy Spirit, using human writers.

When He says, "**My Words shall not pass away**," the Lord Jesus is including the Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Revelation. All of them are His *Words*. The whole New Testament is tied up in a bundle and can be held in your hand. He has promised to **preserve** the *Words* of the New Testament as well as the Old Testament. I want you to notice also in John 16:14, Jesus says:

- "*He [the Holy Spirit] shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.*"

That certainly is an answer to the Charismatic Movement which glorifies the Holy Spirit instead of glorifying Christ.

In Matthew 24:35 the Lord Jesus Christ said: "*Heaven and earth shall pass away. . .*" What could be more stable than the heavens and earth? Now, we do have earthquakes, but we think of the earth as being solid. We call it *terra firma*. That means "firm earth." But the Lord Jesus said that *heaven and earth shall pass away*. Look at unbelievers and Christians who do not believe in God's preservation of His Words. They take the earth for granted. We walk on it. We assume it won't give way when we walk on it. It is a solid thing. But Jesus said, "*Heaven and earth SHALL pass away, but My Words shall not pass away.*" There will be a new heaven and a new earth, but the Words of God will continue. They are *forever settled in Heaven*; they are preserved words. They are even more preserved and more settled than either the heaven or the earth!" (Waite, 11-13)

- In [Lesson 19 The Living Word's Attitude Toward the Written Word](#) we studied how the Lord Jesus Christ gave "Advanced Authentication of the New Testament" before it was written. In doing so we utilized the exact same verses from John 14 and 16 that Waite just used in the above argument.

- Moreover, in [Lesson 20 The New Testament Writer's Attitude Toward the Written Word](#) we discussed how Paul and the other New Testament writers were penning the words of Christ.
  - Acts 22:14-15—And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, **and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. 15) For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard.**
  - Galatians 1:1-12—But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. 12) For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught *it*, **but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.**
    - Read the verse closely, it was not *by* the revelation from Christ, not just something sent to him, but it was the revelation *of* Jesus Christ. In other words, the Lord revealed himself to Paul and spoke with Paul face-to-face just like he did with Moses. He put his words in Paul's mouth, and Paul went out to preach and write those things down.
  - I Corinthians 14:37—If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that **the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.**
  - I Timothy 6:2-3—. . . **These things teach and exhort.** 3) If any man teach otherwise, and **consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ**, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness;
    - The words that Paul wrote down in I Timothy were the very words of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul's words were the words of the glorified Christ. Not only are these passages from the pen of the Apostle Paul strong with regard to Pauline authority, but they are also strong in regard to the doctrine of inspiration. The words of Christ to us today are found in Paul's epistles. Paul's epistles are not made up of Paul's interpretation of the things that Christ gave him. It is not just Paul's interpretation of the ministry of Christ, but you have the very words of the Lord Jesus Christ given to Paul and written down for you and for me.
  - II Corinthians 13:3—Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you.
    - That is something, isn't it? Who is speaking in Paul? Christ is speaking in Paul. The words that Paul speaks came from Christ.
- If this line of argumentation was valid in establishing the inspired nature of the entire New Testament, it is not all of sudden falsified when speaking about preservation. One cannot just

sweep away the doctrine of preservation just because they do not like the implications. Dr. David Sorenson points out that the mere fact that the Bible exists today serves as *prima facie* (accepted as correct until proven otherwise) evidence that God preserved it.

- “. . . the fact that the Bible exists today is *prima facie* evidence that God has preserved it. History is replete with examples of attacks against the Bible down through the ages, yet it has stood the test of time. Roman emperors ordered Scripture to be burned and large quantities of Bibles were. Yet, it continued. The Roman Catholic hierarchy hid it away in its cloisters, yet it continued. Catholic authorities burned at the stake men who translated the Scripture into vernacular tongues, yet it continued. Most are aware of the anecdote told of Voltaire who sneered that the day was coming when the only place one could find a Bible would be in a museum. Yet, his home today houses a Bible Society. The Communists banned and burned untold numbers of Bibles. Yet, even in places such as the former Soviet Union, the Word of God abounds. There is no question that whether it is the Old Testament or the New Testament, God has preserved His Word.” (Sorenson, 55)
- Sorenson tackles the assertions of Wallace and Glenny regarding Matthew 24:35 head on:
  - “Some allege that Jesus was simply foretelling that His words would be fulfilled (reference in the footnote is to Glenny’s essay quoted above). That is to be sure. However, Jesus clearly said that His words would not pass away. First, the context of the verse lends itself to this view. The heavens and earth indeed someday will pass away. See 2 Peter 3:12-13. The earth in its present form will not last in perpetuity. However, in distinction to that, Jesus said that His words would. Second, the etymology of the word translated as “pass away” is instructive. Thayer’s *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* lists a number of possible ways in which the word might be translated. One sense is perish. Another is to go away. Jesus in effect said that though the heavens and earth will perish, His words will not. Or to put it another way, though the heavens and earth will go away, His words will not. Common sense dictates that if the plain sense makes sense to seek no other sense. In the eschatological context of Matthew 24, verse 35 clearly bespeaks the preservation of the words of Christ.

The same critics object that these are His *spoken* words and not His *written* Word (again the reference in the footnotes is to Glenny). Thus implied is that though His spoken words may last forever, His written Word will not (Glenny’s notion is contrary to what we saw in Isaiah 30:8. The whole reason God had Isaiah “note it in a book” is so that it would stand forever. )! However, what these selfsame critics seem to miss is that the Holy Spirit inspired the very words of Jesus which he saw fit to record as Scripture. To infer that the written Word of God is anything less than eternal is inconceivable. The Psalmist wrote, “Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou has founded them for ever” (Ps. 119:152). The word translated founded also has the sense of established. David clearly implied that God’s Word is established forever. . . Likewise, Ps. 119:160 says, “Thy word is true from the beginning; and every one of thy righteous

judgements endureth for ever” (Please recall from Lesson 33 that Dr. Combs views both Ps. 119:152 and 160 as clear promises of preservation.) . . . The Bible clearly teaches that God has promised to preserve His Word.” (Sorenson, 52-55)

### **Conclusion**

- The totality of the Biblical evidence is overwhelming, Matthew 24:35 is teaching the eternal preservation of the words of Christ. To claim otherwise creates more problems than it solves. As Dr. Sorenson stated, common sense dictates that we seek no other sense.

### **Works Cited**

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