

Sunday, December 18, 2016—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*  
Lesson 40 Why Preservation Matters

### Introduction

- Since Lesson 30, we have been discussing the following three views of preservation identified by Dr. William Combs in his essay “The Preservation of Scripture.”
  - 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
- Last week in Lesson 39 we concluded that View 1 is false and that the scriptures do teach/promise their own preservation. This is the Bible’s claim/promise for itself.
- This morning in Lesson 40, before beginning a secondary consideration regarding the *nature* of preservation, I would like to share a study about why preservation matters.

### The Perspective of Historical Theology

- Lesson 39 demonstrated that a belief in the promise of preservation was maintained by the Reformers and written into their Creeds and Catechisms. This belief in preservation was exemplified by Reformed and Baptist Statements of Faith in both the Old and New Worlds. Setting the standard was *The Westminster Confession of Faith* from 1646 which states the following in Chapter 1 Article VIII:
  - “The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which, at the time of the writing of it, was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and, **by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages**, are therefore authentical; so as, in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them.”
- Louis Gaussen captured the Reformation Era belief in preservation in his seminal 1840 work *Theopneustia (The Divine Inspiration of the Bible)*. Gaussen articulated the prevailing notion that inspiration without preservation is meaningless. Gaussen clearly depicts God as being an active agent in the preservation of scripture. According to Gaussen, preservation was providential, not merely circumstantial or historical.
  - **“The Lord has watched miraculously over his Word. This the facts of the case have demonstrated.**

In constituting as its depositaries, first, the Churches of the Jewish people, and then those of the Christian people, **his providence had by this means to see to the faithful transmission of the oracle of God to us.** . . all these vast labors have so convincingly established the atoning preservation of that text, copied nevertheless so many thousands of times (in Hebrew during thirty-three centuries, and in Greek during eighteen hundred years), that the hopes of the enemies of religion, in this quarter, have been subverted.” (Gaussen, 167-168)

- “When one thinks that the Bible has been copied during thirty centuries, as no book of man has ever been, or ever will be; that it was subject to all the catastrophes and all the captives of Israel; that it was transported seventy years to Babylon; that it has seen itself so often persecuted, or forgotten, or interdicted, or burnt, from the days of the Philistines to those of the Seleucid;--when one thinks that, since the time of Jesus Christ, it had to traverse the first three centuries of the imperial persecutions, when persons found in possession of the holy books were thrown to the wild beasts; next the 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, when false books, false legends, and false decretals, were everywhere multiplied; the 10<sup>th</sup> century, when so few could read, even among princes; the 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the use of the Scriptures in the vulgar tongue was punished with death, and when the books of the ancient fathers were mutilated, when so many ancient traditions were garbled and falsified, even the very acts of the emperor, and those of the councils;--**then we can perceive how necessary it was that the providence of God should have always put forth its mighty power**, in order that, on the one hand, the Church of the Jews should give us, in its integrity, that Word which records its revolts, which predicts its ruin, which describes Jesus Christ; and, on the other, that the Christian Churches (the most powerful of which, and the Roman sect in particular, interdicted the people from reading the sacred books, and substituted in so many ways the traditions of the middle ages from the Word of God) should nevertheless transmit to us, in all their purity, those Scriptures, which condemn all their traditions, their images, their dead languages, their absolutions, their celibacy; which say, that Rome would be the seat of a terrible apostasy, where “the Man of Sin would be sitting as God in the temple of God, waging war against the saints, forbidding to marry, and to use meats which God created; . . .” (Gaussen, 169-170)
- “**This intervention of God’s providence in the preservation of the Old Testament** becomes still more striking in our eyes if we compare the astonishing integrity of the original Hebrew (at the close of so many centuries) with the rapid and profound alteration which the Greek version of the Septuagint has undergone in the days of Jesus Christ (after the lapse of only two hundred years).” (Gaussen, 172-173)
- “**We repeat, these facts, placed in contrast with the astonishing preservation of the Hebrew text** (older than that of the LXX by more than twelve hundred years), **proclaim loudly enough how necessary it was that the mighty hand of God should intervene in the destinies of the sacred book.**” (Gaussen, 174)

- “We desire, however, to give such of our readers as are strangers to sacred criticism, two or three other and still more intelligible means of estimating **that providence which has for thirty centuries watched over our sacred text.**” (Gaussen, 175)
- “Here, then, the thing is evident: such is the real insignificance of the various readings about which so much noise was made at first. **Such has been the astonishing preservation of the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament that have been transmitted to us.**” (Gaussen, 186)
- Yet, now in our day, Protestant Theologians have spilt much ink arguing that the Bible never promises its own preservation and that no such doctrine exists. Standard Systematic Theology books are completely silent and devoid of any discussion of preservation in their chapters/discussions of Bibliology (See [Lesson 4](#)). Evangelical scholars have asserted that *a priori* belief in the Biblical promise of preservation has no seat at the table of textual criticism. In fact, it is only when the *dogma* of preservation is jettisoned that true objectivity can be obtained and progress made in evaluating the historical/textual data, according to leading Evangelical scholarship (See comments by Wallace in Lesson 39.).
- How did we get to this place? How did we go from having a belief in the promise of preservation written into the major Creedal statements of the Protestant Reformation to the outright denial of a clear Biblical promise?
- The answer is the crucible of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. During the period between 1859 with the publication of *On the Origin of the Species* by Charles Darwin till the end of the century, Biblical Christianity was turned inside out by a torrent of destructive forces including: 1) Evolution, 2) Liberalism, 3) Modernism, and 4) German Higher Criticism. The net effect of these forces was the reshaping of Protestant Bibliology.
- Important doctrines such as inspiration and inerrancy experienced complete overhauls during the years between 1860 and 1900. Moreover, the entire field of textual criticism was transformed by naturalists who asserted that the Bible was like any other book and should be treated accordingly.

### *Inspiration*

- Throughout church history prior to 1860, Christian theologians conceived of verbal inspiration as having been accomplished through a process of dictation (see Lessons [14](#) & [15](#)).
- During the thirty years between the publication of Gaussen’s *Divine Inspiration* in 1840 and Charles Hodges’ *Systematical Theology* in 1871 the theological landscape had changed drastically. The intervening thirty years saw the publication of *On the Origin of the Species* by Charles Darwin, the growth and influence of German Higher Criticism, and the resulting theological liberalism of the Modernists. In response to the controversy, these men and their contemporaries altered many Protestant doctrines in an attempt to answer their critics. The doctrine of inspiration is one such example.

- It has only been in the last 150 years or so that the notion of Divine Dictation has fallen out of favor among professional theologians. For the majority of the history of the dispensation of grace, Christian thinkers, theologians, and philosophers had no problem with viewing dictation as the means by which inspiration was accomplished.
- It was also during this time period (1860-1900) that the phrase “in the original autographs” was added to doctrinal statements on inspiration (See [Lesson 4](#) for a discussion of the “Originals Only” position.). This language is completely foreign to the doctrinal statements of the Reformation Era. In fact, creedal statements of the Reformation Era clearly extend inspiration between the original languages themselves. There was no notion that translations were incapable of extending the inspired text beyond the original documents or languages. Consider the rest of Chapter I Article VIII from *The Westminster Confession of Faith* as a case in point:
  - **“But, because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated in to the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come,** that, the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship Him in an acceptable manner; and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope.”
- In 1840, Louis Gaussen comments on the relationship between inspiration and translation in his seminal work *Theopneustia (The Divine Inspiration of the Bible)*. Gaussen outlines the four forms God’s word passed through via inspiration so that it could be intelligible to human beings:
  - “First, it was from all eternity in the mind of God. Next it was passed by Him into the mind of man. In the third place, under the operation of the Holy Ghost and by a mysterious process, it passed from the prophets’ thoughts, into the types and symbols of an articulate language it took shape in words. Finally, after having undergone this first translation, alike important and inexplicable, men have reproduced and counter-chalked it, by a new translation, in passing from one human language into another human language.” (Gaussen, 154-155)
- Regarding the fourth form of translating from one human language (Hebrew or Greek) into another human language such as French or English, Gaussen writes:
  - “The operation by which the sacred writers express with words the mind of the Holy Ghost, is, we have said, itself a rendering not of words by words, but of divine thoughts by sensible symbols. Now this first translation is an infinitely nice matter, more mysterious and more liable to error (if God puts not his hand to it) than the operation can be afterwards, by which we should render a Greek word of that primitive text, by its equivalent in another language. . . **The divine thought being already incarnated, as it were, in the language of the sacred text, what remains to be done in translation is no longer the giving of it a body, but only the changing of its dress, making it say in French what it had already said in Greek, and modestly substituting for each of its words an equivalent word. Such an operation is comparatively very inferior, very**

**immaterial, without mystery, and infinitely less subject to error than the preceding.**

It even requires so little spirituality, that it may be performed *to perfection* by a trustworthy pagan who should possess *in perfection* a knowledge of both languages...

The more, then, one reflects on this first consideration, the more immeasurable ought the difference to appear between these two orders of operations; to wit, between the translation of the divine thoughts into the words of human language, and the translation of the same thoughts into the equivalent terms of another language. No longer, therefore, be it said, "What avails it to me, if the one be human, that the other is divine?" (Gaussen, 155-157)

- This is a high view of inspiration that extends the results of inspiration beyond the original autographs alone. It was a rationalistic response to German Higher Critics that caused Christian theologians of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to limit inspiration to the autographs only.

### *Inerrancy*

- During the Grace History Project, I taught two Lessons ([63](#) & [64](#)) on the history of the doctrine of inerrancy. Lesson 63 laid out the pre-modern history of the topic by looking at the writings of Irenaeus, Augustine, Luther, and Calvin. *The Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter I Article V* states the following regarding infallibility and inerrancy:
  - "We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to a high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it does abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God: **yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.**"
- Our investigation of these writings revealed that these men believed the scriptures were inerrant simply because they were the word of God. The belief that the scriptures were infallible was based upon "the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts." There was no formal theological doctrine of inerrancy and it was certainly not limited to the original autographs only.
- The Civil War in the United States in the 1860s and changes in science after Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of the Species* in 1859 led many to challenge the idea that the Bible was literally the word of God and factually true in every respect. Arguments about evolution and biblical authority for slavery divided churches and led to a revised view of inerrancy among some factions that claimed only the original manuscripts of the Bible to be without error.

- A.A. Hodge and B.B. Warfield expressed a new view on inerrancy in the April 1881 edition of the *Presbyterian Review*. The expression “original autograph(s)(ic)” is found six times in the 1881 “Inerrancy” article by A.A. Hodge and B.B. Warfield.
- “Verbal and inerrant inspiration was claimed not for the Bible as we now find it, but for the books of the Bible as they came from the hands of the authors—the original autographs. This emphasis upon the original manuscripts is another example of the way in which the Princeton doctrine of the Scriptures was refined and tightened in the face of growing critical opposition. A.A. Hodge said nothing of the original autographs in the first (1860) edition of his *Outlines of Theology*, but saw fit to introduce it into the 1879 edition. The collaborative article of A.A. Hodge and B.B. Warfield in the *Princeton Review* (1881) elevated the concept to an especially prominent place in the Princeton doctrine of inspiration. That this concept of the original autographs had been recently added to their apologetic was never mentioned by Warfield and Hodge.” (Sandeel, 127- 128)
- “This new emphasis was introduced just at the time that the number of biblical errors or discrepancies turned up by the critics was growing too large to be ignored. One could no longer dismiss them as had Charles Hodge—as flecks of sandstone in the Parthenon marble. A.A. Hodge and B.B. Warfield retreated. In the first place, they stated that their theory of inspiration did not cover the preservation of the accuracy of the biblical manuscripts; inerrancy was claimed for the manuscripts only as they came from the hands of their authors. Copyists’ errors could not invalidate the inerrancy of the Bible. Even this much hedging on the part of the Princeton professors has been widely criticized. As we have seen, the Princeton theology of inspiration served to define and describe the way in which God had provided an inerrant source of knowledge concerning Christianity. But what possible good can a nineteenth-century Christian derive from a Bible which, although once inerrant, is now riddled with mistakes through the carelessness of copyists? The Princeton claim to an inerrant Bible was maintained only by resource to lost and completely useless original autographs. Once again, the completely scholastic, theoretical nature of the Princeton mind is illustrated. And once again Princeton is caught propagating a dogma which is flatly contradicted by the Westminster Confession. In that creed, the Scriptures are declared to be authentic not only at the moment of their description but now: “being immediately inspired by God, and, by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical.”” (Sandeel, 128)
- Defenders of an inerrant Bible assumed that the Bible was true as a starting point; however, their defense took shape as a logical syllogism that worked backward toward the rationalists. Since the Bible is true as an assumption, and since only verifiable historical events can be true (thus accepting the premise of the rationalists), then the Bible must contain only actual and verifiable historical events and can contain no error. Thus, inerrancy as a very rationalistic response to the rationalists, was born. (Bratcher)
- The rationalistic doctrine of inerrancy forged at Princeton during the crucible of controversy was picked up by fundamentalists during the later 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and codified into their revised doctrinal statements where it has become the new orthodoxy. Mark well that it was a new understanding of inerrancy that was impacted by the era of controversy between 1860 and 1900.

## Textual Criticism

- It was also during the time period in question (1860-1900) that naturalistic textual criticism gained a foothold within Protestant scholarship thereby replacing the traditional Greek text of the Protestant Reformation with a completely new text developed using rationalists' precepts and critical methodology.
- As we saw in [Lesson 28](#), Drs. Westcott and Hort were the chief architects of the critical methodology and authors of the new and improved Greek text. They began their work with the presupposition that the Bible was like any other book and should be treated using the same rules of textual criticism as the writings of Plato, Aristotle, or any other work of antiquity. Moreover, they infer that textual corruption could have entered the text via the hands of the original authors or their amanuensis.
  - "The principles of criticism explained in the foregoing section hold good for all ancient texts preserved in a plurality of documents. In dealing with the text of the New Testament no new principle whatever is needed or legitimate. (Westcott and Hort, 73)
  - "Little is gained by speculating as to the precise point at which such corruptions came in. They may be due to the original writer, or his amanuensis if wrote from dictation, or they may be due to one of the earliest transcribers." (Westcott and Hort, 280-281)
- On this point Hort stands in opposition to modern Evangelical scholarship in that he allows for "corruption" to have entered the text via the "original writer." Such a position explains why Hort is reluctant to ascribe infallibility to the text in any form. In a letter addressed to J.B. Lightfoot dated May 1, 1860, Hort stated in part:
  - "I am convinced that any view of the Gospels, which distinctly and consistently recognizes for them a natural and historical origin (whether under a special Divine superintendence or not), and assumes that they did not drop down ready-made from heaven, must and will be 'startling' to an immense portion of educated English people. But so far, at least, Westcott and I are perfectly agreed, and I confess I had hoped that you (Lightfoot) would assent. . . If you make a decided conviction of the absolute infallibility of the N.T. practically a *sine qua non* for co-operation, I fear I could not join you, even if you were willing to forget your fears about the origin of the Gospels. I am most anxious to find the N.T. infallible, and have a strong sense of the Divine purpose guiding all its parts; but I cannot see how the exact limits of such guidance can be ascertained except by unbiased a posteriori criticism. . . (Regarding the question of "Providence" in Biblical Hort writes) Most strongly I recognize it; but I am not prepared to say that it necessarily involves absolute infallibility." (Hort, 419-421)
- This is the type of textual criticism that Dr. Edward F. Hills is referring to when he talks about the "naturalistic method" in the *King James Version Defended*. He is speaking about an approach to the scriptures that doubts their supernatural origin, doubts their infallibility even in the original autographs, and treats the Bible as though it were any other book. Such was the approach of Drs. Westcott and Hort.

- Later in this class we will study the textual theories of Westcott and Hort in great detail. For the time being, understand that their approach to the text was completely different from the approach adopted by the Reformers. Moreover, their methodology is the seedbed for all modern textual criticism. In other words, their work has given rise to the modern eclectic method. Put another way, modern eclecticism is built over the top of the foundation laid by Westcott and Hort. Modern textual critics who follow the eclectic method are the intellectual great grandchildren of Westcott and Hort.

### *Conclusion*

- Thus, was Protestant Bibliology completely reshaped by the forces of science, liberalism, and German Higher Criticism during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Preservation was abandoned altogether, inspiration and inerrancy were confined to nonexistent original autographs, and textual criticism was reinvented under rationalistic and naturalistic principals.
- These core changes to the Protestant view of the Bible have shaped Fundamentalism and later Evangelicalism throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

### **The Agnosticism of Bart Ehrman: The Logical Conclusion of the Prevailing View**

- Dr. Bart Ehrman is a New York Times Bestselling author and professor of Religious Studies at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is one of North America's leading scholars in his field, having written and edited thirty books, including three college textbooks. He has also achieved acclaim at the popular level, authoring five *New York Times* bestsellers. Ehrman's work focuses on textual criticism of the New Testament, the historical Jesus, and the development of early Christianity. (Wikipedia Entry)
- In the introduction to his bestselling book *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* from 2005, Dr. Ehrman recounts his personal history. After recounting his early years in a conservative household in Lawrence, Kansas, Ehrman was “born-again” as a sophomore in high school. In 1973, Ehrman entered Moody Bible Institute where he decided to major in Bible and Theology. Naturally this required taking a lot of Bible study and Systematic Theology courses. It was while at Moody the he first encountered the prevailing Evangelical orthodoxy with respect the scripture:
  - “Only one perspective was taught in these courses, subscribed to by all the professors (they had to sign a statement) and by all the students (we did as well): The Bible is the inerrant word of God. It contains no mistakes. It is inspired completely and in its very words— “verbal, plenary inspiration.” All the courses I took presupposed and taught this perspective; any other was taken to be misguided or even heretical. . .

There was an obvious problem, however, with the claim that the Bible was verbally inspired—down to the very words. As we learned at Moody in one of the first courses in the curriculum, we don’t actually have the original writings of the New Testament. What



we have are copies of these writings, made years later—in most cases, many years later. Moreover, none of these copies is completely accurate, since the scribes who produced them inadvertently and/or intentionally changed them in places. All scribes did this. So rather than actually having the inspired words of the autographs (i.e., the originals) of the Bible, what we have are the error-ridden copies of the autographs. One of the most pressing of all tasks, therefore, was to ascertain what the originals of the Bible said, given the circumstances that 1) they were inspired and 2) we don't have them.” (Ehrman, 4-5

- The position described by Ehrman above is the same one I was taught in Bible College. Ehrman has summarized the “Originals Only” position in a nut shell. Ehrman describes an experience very similar to my own; many of his friends at Moody were content to rest on the claim that the autographs were inspired despite the obvious problem that they no longer exist. It was this problem that first interested Ehrman in the field of textual criticism.
  - “For me, though, this was a compelling problem. It was the words of scripture themselves that God had inspired. Surely we have to know what those words were if we want to know how he had communicated to us, since the very words were his words, and having some other words (those inadvertently or intentionally created by scribes) didn't help us much if we wanted to know His words.

This is what got me interested in the manuscripts of the New Testament, already as an eighteen-year-old.” (Ehrman, 5)

- After completing his studies at Moody in 1976, Ehrman enrolled in Wheaton College, one of the most prestigious Evangelical institutions of higher learning in the country and the alma mater of Billy Graham. It was at Wheaton that Ehrman began his study of the Greek language thereby increasing his misgiving regarding inspiration.
  - “At the same time, this started making me question my understanding of scripture as the verbally inspired word of God. If the full meaning of the words of scripture can be grasped only by studying them in Greek (and Hebrew), does this mean that most Christians, who don't read ancient languages, will never have complete access to what God wants them to know (this was not the position of Gaussen in 1840)? And doesn't this make the doctrine of inspiration a doctrine only for the scholarly elite, who have the intellectual skills and leisure to learn the languages and study the text by reading them in the original? What does it do to say that the words are inspired by God if most people have absolutely no access to these words, but only to more or less clumsy renderings of these words into a language, such as English, that has nothing to do with the original words?

My questions were complicated even more as I began to think increasingly about the manuscripts that conveyed the words. The more I studied Greek, the more I became interested in the manuscripts that preserve the New Testament for us, and in the science of textual criticism, which can supposedly help us reconstruct what the original words of

the New Testament were. I kept reverting to my basic question: how does it help us to say that the Bible is the inerrant word of God if in fact we don't have the words God inerrantly inspired, but only the words copied by scribes—sometimes correctly but sometimes (many times!) incorrectly? What good does it to say that the autographs (i.e., the originals) were inspired? We don't have the originals! We have only error-ridden copies, and the vast majority of these are centuries removed from the originals and different from them, evidently, in thousands of ways.” (Ehrman, 6-7)

- These lingering doubts drove Ehrman deeper into his studies of textual criticism in hopes of understanding “what the Bible really was.” As a result, he decided to attend Princeton Theological Seminary and study textual criticism from the world's leading expert, Bruce M. Metzger. Doubts raised via Ehrman's continued study of textual criticism coincided with a difficulty in expounding upon the text of Mark 2:26 regarding the identification of the high priest in opening up the floodgates of agnosticism. Ehrman's professor (not Metzger) wrote at the end of his term paper regarding his exposition of Mark 2:26, “Maybe Mark just made a mistake.” This coupled with his lingering doubts, over a long period of time, were the catalysts that led to Ehrman's complete reevaluation of the doctrine of inspiration and the Bible itself. (Ehrman, 8-10)
- Ultimately, it was a lack of understanding regarding the promise of preservation that caused Ehrman to doubt inspiration. Nowhere in his formal education in Christian Academia did he ever encounter instruction in the doctrine of preservation. Why? Because preservation was discarded in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century response to German Higher Criticisms.
  - **“If one wants to insist that God inspired the very words of scripture, what would be the point if we don't have the very words of scripture? In some places, as we will see, we simply cannot be sure that we have reconstructed the original text accurately.** It's a bit hard to know what the words of the Bible mean if we don't even know what the words are!

This became a problem for my view of inspiration, **for I came to realize that it would have been no more difficult for God to preserve the words of scripture than it would have been for him to inspire them in the first place.** If he wanted his people to have his words, surely he would have given them to them (and possibly even given them the words in a language they could understand, rather than Greek and Hebrew). **The fact that we don't have the words surely must show, I reasoned, that he did not preserve them for us. And if he didn't perform that miracle, there seemed to be no reason to think that he performed the earlier miracle of inspiring those words.”** (Ehrman, 11)

- Ehrman is simply following the contents of his theological training to its logical conclusion. While I do not agree with Ehrman, I at least can applaud him for being intellectually honest. Without preservation inspiration is in jeopardy. Notice also that Ehrman is working off the standard of “verbatim identity” or “exact sameness.”

- The following paragraph captures the net effect of all this upon Ehrman's views on inspiration and the Bible. In the end, Ehrman takes the naturalistic/rationalistic starting point of the current Evangelical Orthodoxy to its logical conclusion; the Bible was not inspired and is a human work that is no different from any other book.
  - "In short, my study of the Greek New Testament, and my investigation into the manuscripts that contain it, led to a radical rethinking of my understanding of what the Bible is. This was a seismic change for me. Before this—starting with my born-again experience in high school, through my fundamentalist days at Moody, and on through my evangelical days at Wheaton—my faith had been based completely on a certain view of the Bible as the fully inspired, inerrant word of God. Now I no longer saw the Bible that way. **The Bible began to appear to me as a very human book.** Just as many scribes had copied, and changed, the texts of scripture, **so too had human authors originally written the texts of scripture. This was a human book from beginning to end.** It was written by different human authors at different times and in different places to address different needs. Many of these authors no doubt felt they were inspired by God to say what they did, but they had their own perspectives, their own beliefs, their own views, their own needs, their own desires, their own understandings, their own theologies; and these perspectives, beliefs, views, needs, desires, understandings, and theologies informed everything they said. In all these ways they differed from one another. Among other things, that meant that Mark did not say the same thing that Luke said because he didn't mean the same thing as Luke. John is different from Matthew—not the same. Paul is different from Acts. And James is different from Paul. Each author is a human author and needs to be read for what he (assuming they were all men) has to say, not assuming that what he says is the same, or conformable to, or consistent with what every other author has to say. **The Bible, at the end of the day, is a very human book.**" (Ehrman, 11-12)
- In Ehrman we see the next affect the naturalistic/rationalistic approach to scripture first advanced in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is only by ignoring the obvious questions and inconsistencies that the prevailing Evangelical Orthodoxy is held together. Without the promise of preservation, the system comes crashing down upon the one honest enough to take things to their logical conclusion.

### Conclusion

- As the title of this Lesson suggests (Why Preservation Matters) our goal herein has been to demonstrate the high cost associated with denying the promise of preservation by providing a practical real life example in Bart Ehrman.
- In his book *On Guard: Defending Your Faith With Reason and Precision*, William Lane Craig offers the following advice for dealing with a determined skeptic.

- “Now the determined skeptic can deny any conclusion if he is willing to pay the price of rejecting one of its premises. But what you can do is raise the price of rejecting the conclusion by giving good evidence for the truth of the premises. . . we want to raise the price of denying the conclusion as high as we can. We want to help the unbeliever see what it will cost him intellectually to resist the conclusion. Even if he is willing to pay that price, he may at least come to see why we are not obligated to pay it. . .” (Craig, 25)
- Following Professor Craig’s advice, notice how Ehrman’s denial of inspiration is identical with the position on the Bible enunciated by atheist Richard Dawkins.
  - “To be fair, much of the Bible is not systematically evil but just plain weird, as you expect of a chaotically cobbled-together anthology of disjointed documents, composed, revised, translated, distorted and ‘improved’ by hundreds of anonymous authors, editors and copyists, unknown to us and mostly unknown to each other, spanning nine centuries.” (Dawkins, 268)
- This is why the promise of preservation matters. Theologically, the promise of preservation protects what God gave by inspiration. Next time we will begin to study the extent of this linkage by considering whether preservation is the corollary of inspiration.

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## Appendix A

### *Protestant Bibliology Before and After 1860*

Before	1860	After
<i>Preservation</i> --"... being immediately inspired by God, and, <b>by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages</b> , are therefore authentical . . ." ( <i>Westminster Confession of Faith</i> )		<i>Preservation</i> —the promise of preservation was dropped from doctrinal statements; Systematic Theology books completely over look the topic; modern theologians argue that the scriptures do not promise their own preservation.
<i>Inspiration</i> —Divine Dictation accepted descriptor for how inspiration was accomplished; not limited to the original autographs and extended to vernacular languages via translation. (WCF)		<i>Inspiration</i> —Divine Dictation falls out of favor as a descriptor for how inspiration was accomplished. Inspiration is limited to the nonexistent original autographs.
<i>Inerrancy</i> —no formal doctrine of inerrancy; the scriptures were believed to be inerrant because they are the word of God; the Holy Spirit bears witness the believer's spirit that the scriptures are infallible. (WCF)		<i>Inerrancy</i> —formal doctrine was developed that limited infallibility and inerrancy to the original autographs only. Took shape in a logical syllogism that meet the German Higher Critics on their own terms. Rewrote Protestant Bibliology.
<i>Textual Criticism</i> —began with the notion the scriptures were the inspired word of God and of Divine origin; what God gave by inspiration was preserved and "kept pure in all ages" and was available to be translated into the vernacular languages of the nations.		<i>Textual Criticism</i> —was completely reworked starting with the rationalistic/naturalistic notion that the Bible is like any other book and should be treated like any other book of antiquity. Replaced the text of the Reformation (TR) with a "new and improved" Greek text. Modern Textual Criticism is built on top of the Rationalistic suppositions of Westcott & Hort.
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## Appendix B

### Why Preservation Matters: Flow Chart of Ehrman's Error

Between 1860 & 1900 Protestant Bibliology was rewritten in response to the following forces: 1) Evolution, 2) Liberalism/Modernism, 3) German Higher Criticism, and 4) Rationalism.

- *Inspiration*—was limited to the nonexistent original autographs, Divine Dictation is dropped a descriptor for how inspiration was accomplished.
- *Preservation*—the promise of preservation was dropped from doctrinal statements.
- *Inerrancy*—formal doctrine developed that limited inerrancy and infallibility to the nonexistent original autographs; took shape in a logical syllogism that meet the German Higher Critics on their own terms.
- *Textual Criticism*—was completely reworked starting with the rationalistic/naturalistic notion that the Bible is like any other book and should be treated in like manner to any work of antiquity. Replaced the text of the Reformation (TR) with a "new and improved" Greek text. Modern Textual Criticism is built on top of the Rationalistic suppositions of Westcott & Hort.

Became the new Protestant Orthodoxy on the Bible and was carried forward into the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Fundamentalists in their doctrinal statements.



In the 1970s Bart Ehrman attended Moody Bible Institute and Wheaton College where he was taught the new Protestant Orthodoxy on the Bible that had been forged in the crucible of controversy between 1860 & 1900 (See previous box.). This Orthodoxy is devoid of the promise of preservation. Having been removed from Protestant doctrinal statements for the better part of a century, modern Systematic Theology books as well as Christian higher education do not teach the doctrine of preservation. Ehrman questioned the feasibility of his formal education along the following lines: 1) only the original autographs were inspired, 2) the original autographs are not extant, 3) all we possess are copies which are subject to error, 4) therefore, the doctrine of inspiration was a doctrine of the scholarly elite since it required knowledge of Hebrew and Greek in order to really know what God said, 5) knowledge of the original languages is of no practical consequence given the nonexistent nature of the inspired original autographs.



In the 1980s Bart Ehrman enrolled in Princeton Theology Seminary to study textual criticism from Bruce M. Metzger, the world's leading expert in the field. While at Princeton, Ehrman came to believe that Mark made a mistake in Mark 2:26 in identifying the high priest. This along with his previous misgivings led Ehrman to completely rethink what the Bible is. Ehrman explains this process in his 2005 book *Misquoting Jesus* in which he states that if God could not **preserve** His words there was no reason to think He **inspired** them perfectly in the first place. Recall that Ehrman was not taught to believe in the promise of preservation because it had been dropped from Protestant Bibliology in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In this way Ehrman is following his education to its logical conclusion and reasoned that without preservation, inspiration is meaningless.



Ehrman's denial of inspiration lead to the logical conclusion that the Bible "was a human book from beginning to end." Recall from above that Westcott & Hort began their textual work with the premise that the Bible was the same as any other book and should be treated accordingly. In this way, we see in Ehrman, the logical outcome of the train of thought initiated by Westcott & Hort. When dealt with honestly, in the absence of the promise of preservation, the Protestant Bibliology forged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century logically leads to the conclusion enunciated by Ehrman. In his argumentation there are no formal or informal fallacies that I am aware of and his conclusion naturally follows from his premises. To follow the same line of reasoning and arrive at a different conclusion is dishonest and fallacious. More recently, theologians such as Daniel B. Wallace and W. Edward Glenny have spilt much ink denying the Biblical promise of preservation. The *a priori* belief in the dogma of preservation is excoriated by Wallace as a hindrance to objectivity. Yet Wallace insists upon "faith" in the scholars ability to reconstruct the text in order to avoid Ehrman's conclusion. Ehrman essentially says, "you Christians don't actually have the word of God." Meanwhile, Wallace who is supposed to be opposing him says, "you are right Bart but some day we will and when we do you will be sorry." In the end, it seems that Ehrman the Agnostic, has been more honest about where the prevailing Orthodoxy leads.

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