

## Some Knowledge of Hebrew Possible to All: The Value of Biblical Hebrew for the Church<sup>1</sup>

STEPHEN J. ANDREWS

Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament,  
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

William Robertson Nicoll, the famous expositor of the Greek New Testament, wrote to a colleague in 1903, "What good is Hebrew to the majority of our ministers?"<sup>2</sup> Of course, Nicoll was probably not the first to ask such a question, and as long as seminaries continue to require Biblical Hebrew in their theological curriculum, he will definitely not be the last. Whether first or last, however, Nicoll's question certainly deserves an answer.

### Why Study Hebrew?

But how shall we answer Nicoll? Why should ministers study Hebrew? Of what value is biblical Hebrew to the Church? According to W. L. Michel, Christian interpreters who understand the Hebrew Bible as

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<sup>1</sup>An earlier version of this article was published as "Some Knowledge of Hebrew Possible to All: Old Testament Exposition and Hebraica Veritas," *Faith & Mission* 13 (1995): 98-114. It has been revised and updated here.

<sup>2</sup>T. H. Darlow, *William Robertson Nicoll* (London, 1925), 362; quoted in Allan M. Harman, "The Place of the Biblical Languages in the Theological Curriculum," *Reformed Theological Review* 50 (1991): 91. The entire quote in context reads: "While I hold strongly that there ought to be a good proportion of ministers with a good theological education, knowing Hebrew and Greek and so forth, I feel it is wasted on many. What good is Hebrew to the majority of our ministers? Even in the Presbyterian Churches they never open a Hebrew Bible from one year's end to the other. I should like to see our students taught to read English, to know what English means, which only a small majority do. I am sure that all the theological training which is of the least use could be put into two years handsomely, given the proper teachers." For a different opinion roughly contemporary to Nicoll, see John Adams, *Sermons in Syntax or Studies in the Hebrew Text* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1908): 1-3.

the Old Testament must read it in Hebrew.<sup>3</sup> After all, the Old Testament was originally written in this ancient Semitic language,<sup>4</sup> and anyone who wishes to comprehend its multifaceted treasures must learn “to listen, first of all, to the *Hebrew* text and hear what it has to say in its own context.”<sup>5</sup>

Interpreting the Old Testament for preaching requires an accurate understanding of the text. Before this can be achieved, however, a careful analysis of the text must be done, and since the Reformation, biblical scholars have generally understood this essential task to involve exegesis of the original Hebrew.<sup>6</sup> Since ministers are called to preach and teach the Old Testament, it follows naturally that they must first learn the language the Rabbis called לְשׁוֹן הַקֹּדֶשׁ (*I<sup>e</sup>šōn haqqōdeš*), “the holy tongue.” Thus, for the minister, a knowledge of Hebrew is necessary because it opens up the only truly reliable exegetical window upon the text of the Old Testament.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Walter L. Michel, “How Should the Old Testament Be Read?,” *Dialog* 31 (1992): 190.

<sup>4</sup> Except, of course, for two words in Gen 31:47; and Jer 10:11; Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26; and Dan 2:4-7:28 which were written in Aramaic, a sister Semitic language.

<sup>5</sup> Michel, “How Should the Old Testament Be Read?,” 190. Dick France goes so far as to recommend that all Christians should learn Hebrew and Greek: “For the Christian who is concerned to understand his Bible as accurately as he can, and who has at least a reasonable ability for learning languages, there could be few better uses of spare time.” See Dick France, “Word Study,” in *How to Study the Bible*, ed. John B. Job (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1972), 58. See also the case of Heinrich Bitzer in John Piper, “Brothers, Bitzer was a Banker,” in *Brothers, We are Not Professionals* (Nashville: B&H, 2002), 81-88.

<sup>6</sup> As Bartelt has said, “It is, after all, only logical that those who preach in a church body which so strongly affirms both *sola scriptura* and verbal inspiration should have the ability to look at the very *verba* in *scriptura*.” Andrew Bartelt, “Hebrew, Greek, and ‘Real-Life Ministry,’” *Concordia Journal* 11 (1985): 122. See also Jason S. DeRouchie, “The Profit of Employing the Biblical Languages: Scriptural and Historical Reflections,” *Themelios* 37.1 (2012): 32-50.

<sup>7</sup> This statement is not intended to be taken chauvinistically, disregarding the role of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of the English translations of the Old Testament. Speaking at the inauguration of the London Theological Seminary in

Nevertheless, not all ministers have found this “obvious” answer so compelling in the busy arena of practical ministry. In 1988 several pastors were asked to participate in a discussion group conducted by Bethel Theological Seminary on the use of Greek and Hebrew in the pastoral ministry.<sup>8</sup> Their conclusions raised once again the specter of Nicoll’s question:

The view was expressed that Greek and Hebrew provide integrity to the study of the Scripture and should be evident. The view was expressed that use of the original languages was much less than the desire to have them included in the curriculum. Others expressed the concern that the amount of seminary time that is devoted to study of Greek and Hebrew is not warranted by the amount of use that it [*sic*] received in sermon preparation. Many times the pastor is too busy to use the original languages effectively. The view was also expressed that the more educated the constituency, the more likely that Greek and Hebrew are important. Several pastors who work in rural settings did not feel that this was as important for them in their work. There was agreement that the languages are not equally important for all pastors in all situations. Several pastors indicated that the Greek

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1977, Martin Lloyd-Jones strenuously objected to such a misconception: “So to say that a man cannot preach, and cannot even read his Bible if he does not know Greek and Hebrew, I am afraid, must be categorized as sheer nonsense. This is most serious, for it seems to me to show an ignorance of the spiritual character of the biblical message... The key to an understanding of the Bible is not a knowledge of the original languages. You can have such knowledge and still be ignorant of the message, as so many are and have been, unfortunately. It is the man who has a spiritual understanding who understands the Word of God.” See D. M. Lloyd-Jones, “A Protestant Evangelical College,” *Knowing the Times* (Banner of Truth, 1989), 369-70; quoted in Allan M. Harman, “The Place of the Biblical Languages,” 95. Lloyd-Jones’ point on the spiritual character of the biblical message is well taken. See also Philip H. Eveson, “The Biblical Languages: Their Use and Abuse in the Ministry (Part 1),” *Foundations* 10 (1983): 1-2. Note, however, the discussion below on the *Hebraica Veritas*.

<sup>8</sup> See Edward A. Buchanan, *Final Report: An In-Depth Study of Pastoral Roles and Functions and Their Relationship to the Development of Curriculum at Bethel Theological Seminary* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Bethel Theological Seminary, 1988).

was more valuable than the Hebrew and that there should be more emphasis upon the use of the English text, since this is the text that is used for teaching and preaching.<sup>9</sup>

What was the value of Hebrew for these Bethel pastors? They found themselves too busy to use it effectively. Some even questioned whether the perceived limited use of the biblical languages in sermon preparation justified the amount of seminary study devoted to them. After all, to spend a year or more studying a language only to use it infrequently, if at all, after graduation appears to be absurd and futile.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, these pastors, like Nicoll, concluded that it would be far better to remove the biblical languages from the theological curriculum altogether, or at least make them optional, and invest this time in the study of the English Bible.<sup>11</sup>

Pastors, as well as students, need an answer that will justify not only the seminary study of Hebrew, but will also motivate them to maintain and enhance their language skills within the busy context of ministry.

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 129-130.

<sup>10</sup> Goodrick estimates that 90% of those who begin the study of Greek and 99% of those who begin Hebrew do not continue with their language studies after seminary training. See Edward W. Goodrick, *Do It Yourself Hebrew and Greek* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1980), 1.

<sup>11</sup> For Nicoll's view, see note 1 above. On the debate concerning the place of the biblical languages in the theological curriculum, compare the following: James Barr, "The Position of Hebrew Language in Theological Education," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 15/3 (April 1962): 16-24; E. Earle Ellis, "Language Skills and Christian Ministry," *Reformed Review* 24 (1971): 162-63; Scott J. Hafemann, "Seminary, Subjectivity, and the Centrality of Scripture: Reflections on the Current Crisis in Evangelical Seminary Education," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (1988): 129-43; Allan M. Harman, "The Place of the Biblical Languages in the Theological Curriculum," *Reformed Theological Review* 50 (1991): 91-97; Walter Harrelson, "Biblical Languages in the Theological Curriculum," *Theological Education* 3 (1967): 441-47; and Wayne G. Strickland, "Seminary Education: A Philosophical Paradigm Shift in Process," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 32 (1989): 227-35. For a non-Western perspective see Bernard L. M. Embree, "Report on the Teaching of Greek and Hebrew in the Seminaries of ATSSEA," *South East Asia Journal of Theology* 19 (1978):112-17.

They need an answer that will constantly remind them of the practical value of Hebrew. Accordingly, we must go beyond the obvious in order to answer Nicoll's question.<sup>12</sup> For the obvious answer, while certainly correct, does not really address the practical and personal needs expressed by the pastors in Bethel's survey. George Bernard Shaw once observed, "No question is so difficult to answer as that to which the answer is obvious." Here too, we find ourselves in the same circumstance.

### Theological Motivation

In the middle of my first semester of teaching elementary Hebrew, a student who suffered from poor grades abruptly informed me that he was dropping the class. When I asked him why, he claimed that I did not sufficiently "motivate" him to study Hebrew. His previous teacher, he explained, spent ten to fifteen minutes at the beginning of each class giving a "devotional" highlighting some aspect of the Hebrew Bible. But since I did not open my class in the exact same way, however, I did not effectively inspire him to open his Hebrew textbook often enough.

Now despite the natural inclination to place the blame on the student's lack of study, I had to admit that he had a point. The best teachers motivate their students to love and be enthusiastic for the subject taught. Acquiring and maintaining effective Hebrew language skills requires adequate motivation. According to Jacques B. Doukhan and Bruce K. Waltke, this motivation must be theological in nature.<sup>13</sup> In a paper presented to a gathering of the National Association of Hebrew Professors, Waltke gave a personal example of theological motivation:

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<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, as Baker astutely opined, "Learning Hebrew for learning's sake is not an acceptable option to most of today's students." See David W. Baker, "Studying the Original Texts: Effective Learning and Teaching of Biblical Hebrew," in *Make the Old Testament Live: From Curriculum to Classroom*, ed. R. S Hess and G. J. Wenham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 162.

<sup>13</sup> See Jacques B. Doukhan, *Hebrew for Theologians: A Textbook for the Study of Biblical Hebrew in Relation to Hebrew Thinking* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993) and Bruce K. Waltke, "How I Changed My Mind About Teaching Hebrew (or Retained It)," *Crux* 29 (1993): 10-15. Eveson addresses motivation to study the biblical languages from four angles: theological, historical, biographical, and practical. See Philip H. Eveson, "The Biblical Languages: Their Use and Abuse in the Ministry (Part 2)," *Foundations* 11 (1983): 27-37.

I became motivated to comprehend the biblical languages when I realized that most of my knowledge of God was derived from Holy Scripture, and the accuracy of that knowledge was contingent upon the correctness with which I handled its languages. God incarnated himself in those languages, not only in the body of Jesus Christ to whom they point.<sup>14</sup>

For Waltke, the authenticity of the knowledge that God revealed himself through the Scripture “rested on a precise understanding of the biblical languages.” Consequently, the desire for sound theology provides a critical incentive to study the biblical languages:

True theology and precise exegesis are, to use modern jargon, systemically dependent upon one another. Without a right relationship to the Spirit who inspired Scriptures, good exegesis is impossible, and without grammatico-historical exegesis, good theology is impossible... Once students grasp how essential precise exegesis is to sound theology, they tune in. In fact, many informed students begin their study of Hebrew highly motivated for theological reasons.<sup>15</sup>

Many students do begin their study of the language highly motivated. But unfortunately, somewhere between the first and last class, a large number of students seem to abandon all hope of using their newly acquired Hebrew language skills to expound the Old Testament.<sup>16</sup> What happened to the motivation? Jacques B. Doukhan argues that the real culprit is the traditional deductive method of teaching Hebrew.

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<sup>14</sup> Waltke, 10.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 11-12. See also Bitzer’s admonition: “The more a theologian detaches himself from the basic Hebrew and Greek text of Holy Scripture, the more he detaches himself from the source of real theology! And real theology is the foundation of a fruitful and blessed ministry.” Heinrich Bitzer, ed., *Light on the Path: Daily Scripture Readings in Hebrew and Greek* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 10.

<sup>16</sup> Don Parker, *Using Biblical Hebrew in Ministry: A Practical Guide for Pastors, Seminarians, and Bible Students* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995), 9.

According to him, this dry, boring, and time-consuming approach has killed the Hebrew language a second time:<sup>17</sup>

Rules which have been taught apart from the biblical text and apart from a reference to the religious dimension, hence apart from what essentially motivates the student of biblical Hebrew, will hardly be grasped and memorized. Not to mention the fact that this artificial and abstract systematization of the language does not do justice to the complex life of the language or to the biblical text. The student may succeed, but in many cases he will not be able to cope with the reality of the text and apply the rules he has learned.<sup>18</sup>

The traditional approach emphasizes the memorization of vocabulary lists, complicated rules, and verbal paradigms.<sup>19</sup> “Relying on delayed

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<sup>17</sup> Doukhan, xxiv.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiv-xxv.

<sup>19</sup> Doukhan and Waltke both believe that a combined deductive and inductive approach should be used. See Doukhan, xxiv-xxv, and Waltke, 12-13. Others have proposed that the traditional approach should be revitalized with insights culled from modern applied linguistics. For biblical languages in general, see Gary G. Cohen and C. Norman Sellers, “The Case for Modern Pronunciation of Biblical Languages,” *Grace Theological Journal* 5 (1984): 197-203; Richard J. Erickson, “Linguistics and Biblical Language: A Wide-Open Field,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 26 (1983): 257-63; Eugene V. N. Goetchius, “New Developments in Language Teaching,” *Theological Education* 3 (1967): 466-81; and William S. LaSor, “Learning Biblical Languages,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 13, no. 6 (1987): 50-55. On Hebrew, specifically, see also J. H. Eaton, “The Teaching of Hebrew for Degrees in Theology,” *Theology* 72 (1969): 352-55; David Freedman, “Hebrew for Communication and Hebrew for Specific Purposes: Some Thoughts on Methodology and Materials,” *Hebrew Studies* 23 (1982): 181-186; J.H. Hospers, “Some Observation about the Teaching of Old Testament Hebrew,” in *Symbolae Biblicae et Mesopotamicae Francisco Mario Theodore De Liagre Böhl Dedicatae*, ed. M. A. Beek, et al. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), 188-98; and *idem*, “The Teaching of Old Testament Hebrew and Applied Linguistics,” in *Travels in the World of the Old Testament: Studies Presented to Professor M. A. Beek on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. M. Heerma van Voss, *Studia Semitica Neerlandica*, 16 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974), 94-101.

gratification and bordering on overkill, the acquired language skills are easily lost apart from regular use.”<sup>20</sup> Without the proper incentives to continue, students and pastors quickly forget the rules and paradigms. A harried pastor is not likely to carry flashcards on hospital visitation in order to memorize vocabulary lists or the paradigms of weak verb forms.<sup>21</sup> At least, not unless the motivation to do so is extremely high. When Bruce Waltke asked the students majoring in Old Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary what was wrong with the department, their answer was that “the department taught the nuts and bolts of Hebrew but without an adequate theological dimension.”<sup>22</sup>

Now, the value of theological motivation for the study of biblical Hebrew has not gone unnoticed. Utilizing this type of motivation, however, to encourage and promote the practical value of Hebrew in the ministry is a different story. There are, in fact, many reasons that can be

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<sup>20</sup> Parker, *Using Biblical Hebrew in Ministry*, 9.

<sup>21</sup> On the fate of using the biblical languages in the real world, Eugene H. Peterson bemoaned: “Post-academic life is demanding and decidedly unsympathetic to anything that doesn’t provide quick and obvious returns. We are handed job descriptions in which our wonderful languages don’t even rate a footnote; we acquire families who plunge us into urgencies in which Hebrew radicals provide no shortcuts; we can’t keep up with all the stuff thrown at us in easy English—who has time for hard Greek? It isn’t long before the languages are, as we say, “lost.” See Eugene H. Peterson, “Foreword,” in David W. Baker, and Elaine A. Heath, *More Light on the Path: Daily Scripture Readings in Hebrew and Greek* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 5. The various problems associated with maintaining language skills in the ministry are discussed in: Andrew H. Bartelt, “Hebrew, Greek, and ‘Real-Life Ministry,’” 121-23; John Bright, “The Academic Teacher and the Practical Needs of the Clergy,” *Theological Education* 1 (1964): 35-52; Paul M. Doriani, “A Pastor’s Advice on Maintaining Original Language Skills,” *Presbyterion* (1993): 103-115; David Ford, “Keeping Up Biblical Languages while in the Ministry,” *Foundations* 14 (1984): 41-44; and D. Johnson, “The Perils of Pastors without the Biblical Languages,” *Presbyterian Journal* (10 September 1986): 23-24. For Hebrew in particular, see Don Parker, *Using Biblical Hebrew in Ministry* and Dennis R. Magary, “Keeping Your Hebrew Healthy,” in Scott M. Gibson, *Preaching the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 29-55.

<sup>22</sup> Waltke, 13.



adduced to prove that Hebrew is practical and necessary for the pastor.<sup>23</sup> But, as Johnson has suggested, the fault lies more with the teachers and professors of the biblical languages:

Perhaps they haven't "caught" from us—at least not often enough—the thrill of exploring the Word as God gave it, the joy of discovering the connection between an Old Testament and a New Testament passage, a connection which may be disguised by a dynamic-equivalence translation but stands out clearly in the original languages; or of seeing one line of Hebrew poetry amplify the meaning of another in the Psalms; or of experiencing the crescendo of Paul's thought in an extended Greek sentence that holds beautifully together to display the wonder of God's grace—even though no English translation can do it justice.<sup>24</sup>

The following discussion, therefore, seeks to focus on just three of the many ways a knowledge of Hebrew practically benefits the church and the local church minister. It is offered with the distinct but humble hope that through it both seminary students and busy pastors will be theologically motivated to formulate a personal and positive answer to Nicoll's question.

### The Hebraica Veritas

According to Don Parker, a computer employed in a Russian Bible project several years ago translated the well-known phrase "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" as "the Vodka is strong, but the meat is rotten."<sup>25</sup> This example points out in a humorous way the various pitfalls

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<sup>23</sup> In addition to the studies cited above in note 20, see also, Lester J. Kuyper, "Endurance or Enjoyment?," *Reformed Review* 16 (1962): 44-46; James Lewis, "On the Value of Hebrew," *London Quarterly and Holborn Review* 178 (1953): 11; and Walter L. Michel, "Why Study Hebrew," *Dialog* 18 (1979): 61-62. Compare from a different perspective, Samuel M. Blumenfield, *Why Study Hebrew?* (Chicago: Board of Jewish Education, 1951), 3 and Lewis Glinert, *The Joys of Hebrew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3-8.

<sup>24</sup> Johnson, "The Perils of Pastors without the Biblical Languages," 24.

<sup>25</sup> Parker, *Using Biblical Hebrew in Ministry*, 2.

encountered in the process of translation.<sup>26</sup> But the truth is, transferring the particular idioms and rich nuances of one language into another is risky business. The Italians had a saying for it, “Traduttore traditore,” or “Translations are treacherous.”

Translations cannot provide the power and intimacy of the original. “Word-plays, sound effects, repetitions, word nuances, sentence emphases, Hebrew idioms and constructions make the text live and breathe.”<sup>27</sup> Bialik, the great Hebrew poet, is reported to have said: “Reading the Bible in translation is like kissing your bride through a veil.”<sup>28</sup> Or, to pick up on Parker’s more modern analogy, using a translation of the Bible is like watching a color movie on a black and white television set. In either case, something really essential is missing.

Two short examples will suffice to point out some of the limitations of our English language translations. The KJV renders 245 occurrences of the Hebrew word חֶסֶד (*hesed*) with nine or ten different translations. Chief among these are “mercy” (120 times) and “loving-kindness” (30

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<sup>26</sup> For the special problems associated with the translation of Scripture, see among others, John Beekman and John Callow, *Translating the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974); Eugene A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1964); and Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969).

<sup>27</sup> Parker, *Using Biblical Hebrew in Ministry*, 3.

<sup>28</sup> See Jacob Milgrom, “An Amputated Bible, Peradventure?” *Bible Review* 10:4 (1994):17. A more passionate view is taken by William Chomsky: “Who can render in suitable translation the overtones, the cluster of associations and allusions attached to such expressions as *shema’ yisrael*, *kiddush ha-shem*, *hillul ha-shem*, *mesirut nefesh*, and a host of others? It cannot be done. Yet such expressions symbolize the warp and woof of our historical religious and national experiences. These expressions stir in every conscious Jew feelings and images such as could never be evoked in any other language. In the words of *Shema’ Yisrael*, for example, we hear echoes and reverberations of the agonized cries of our martyrs from the days of Akiba down to the ‘rebels’ of the Warsaw Ghetto. In comparison the English equivalent, ‘Hear, O Israel,’ sounds flat and insipid.” See William Chomsky, *Hebrew: The Eternal Language* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1957), 11.

times).<sup>29</sup> The trouble arises when the KJV translates other distinct Hebrew words with “mercy” as well.<sup>30</sup> There is no way to tell which Hebrew word is meant without the original text.

Paronomasia, or word-play, is generally impossible to recognize from the English translation.<sup>31</sup> Recourse to the Hebrew text points out clearly the power behind the use of this unique figure of speech. Isaiah’s audience clearly heard the castigating pun in the “Song of the Vineyard” (Isa 5:7). Isaiah reported that the Lord looked for מִשְׁפָּט (mišpāt) “justice,” but instead found מִשְׁפָּח (mišpāh) “bloodshed”; מִשְׁפָּח (mišpāh) “righteousness,” but instead מִשְׁפָּח (mišpāh) “a cry.”

The grandson of Ben Sirach recognized this peculiar limitation of translation in 132 BC. In the prologue to Ecclesiasticus, he asked his readers to make allowances for any inadequate expressions that he may have used in translating his grandfather’s collection of late wisdom teaching from Hebrew into Greek. In addition, he acknowledged:

For the things said in Hebrew do not have the same power in them when translated into another language. Not only these things, but even the law, the prophets, and the rest of the books, have not a little difference when spoken in their own language.<sup>32</sup>

This same issue resurfaced in the work of Jerome (c. AD 342-420), the famous translator of the Latin Vulgate.<sup>33</sup> While in Rome around AD 383,

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<sup>29</sup> See Stephen J. Andrews, “Loving-Kindness,” in *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Watson E. Mills (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1990), 529.

<sup>30</sup> See idem, “Mercy,” in *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Watson E. Mills (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1990), 567-68.

<sup>31</sup> Kudos to the CSB for trying to capture the wordplay (paronomasia) בִּזְמַן, זְמַן בִּזְמַן, זְמַן בִּזְמַן of Nahum 2:10 in “Desolation, decimation, devastation!” The NRSV does the same, but the other translations miss the boat.

<sup>32</sup> My translation.

<sup>33</sup> See Sarah Kamin, “The Theological Significance of the *Hebraica Veritas* in Jerome’s Thought,” in “*Sha’arei Talmon*: Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East Presented to Shemaryahu Talmon,” ed. Michael Fishbane and Emmanuel Tov (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 243-25; J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 153-67; and Stefan Rebenich, “Jerome: The ‘*Vir Trilinguis*’ and the ‘*Hebraica Veritas*,’” *Vigiliae Christianae* 47 (1993): 50-77.

Jerome began a revision of the Latin version, the *Vetus Latina*, on the basis of the Greek Septuagint (LXX) under the patronage of Pope Damasus. The LXX had long been regarded as the only true and legitimate divinely inspired version of the Old Testament. But Jerome soon recognized that since it was based upon the LXX, the old Latin version, the *Vetus Latina*, was twice removed from the original Hebrew text. Little by little, Jerome became convinced of the superiority of the Hebrew text.

Seven years later, in a “corner of his monastery” in Bethlehem, he started on a new Latin translation of the complete Old Testament *iuxta Hebraeos*, i.e., according to the Hebrew. Jerome’s action drew controversy primarily because he insisted on a revolutionary idea for his time: the Old Testament should be translated into the vernacular from the Hebrew. Thus, when a discrepancy was found to exist between the LXX and the old Latin, Jerome appealed to what he called the *Hebraica veritas*, “the Hebrew truth.” For Jerome, the *Hebraica veritas* was to be found in the pure and original Hebrew text of the Old Testament:

In dealing with the New Testament, whenever among the Latin writers a doubt arises and there occurs a discrepancy between individual copies, we have recourse to the original Greek in which the New Testament was written. So, also, in the Old Testament, if there are discrepancies between the Greek and Latin texts, we go back to the Hebrew.<sup>34</sup>

Thereafter, the *Hebraica veritas* became for Jerome “a norm for quantitative accuracy and a means to the correction of wild, paraphrastic and ignorant translations.”<sup>35</sup> For him, in contrast to the LXX, the *Hebraica veritas* was “the original word of God which, he believed, prophesied the coming of Jesus.”<sup>36</sup> One might use the LXX in liturgy, “but

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<sup>34</sup> Epistle 106:2. Cited and translated in Kamin, 243–44.

<sup>35</sup> James Barr, “St. Jerome’s Appreciation of Hebrew,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 49 (1967): 289.

<sup>36</sup> Kamin, 249. In Epistle 121:2 Jerome noted that a prime example could be found in the LXX treatment of the phrase *מִמִּצְרַיִם קָרָאתִי לְבָנִי* “From Egypt I called my son” (Hos 11:1). The Greek renders the phrase as *ἐξ Αἰγύπτου μετεκάλεσα τὰ τέκνα αὐτοῦ* “Out of Egypt I have called his children.” Jerome commented: “If we do not follow the *Hebraica veritas*, it is clear that this does not pertain to

the *Hebraica veritas* should be studied by scholars for an understanding of the sacred writings.”<sup>37</sup> It is no surprise then that Jerome maintained the necessity of being a *vir trilinguis*, a student of the Word, competent in the Latin vernacular, Greek, and Hebrew.<sup>38</sup> And, even though Augustine severely criticized Jerome, he also had to admit that a Christian teacher who wishes to understand the sacred Scriptures must know Greek and Hebrew in addition to Latin, the vernacular of the day.<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps because of the influence of Augustine, the study of the *Hebraica veritas* during the interval between Jerome and the Reformation was somewhat uneven. Nevertheless, there were a number of Christian Hebraists in that period who advocated the study of the original Hebrew text of the Bible.<sup>40</sup> However, the majority of exegetes were mostly content to rely upon the Greek or the Latin translations of the Old Testament.

The Reformation with its emphasis on *sola Scriptura* rejected the LXX and the Vulgate and inaugurated an intense study of Biblical Hebrew. Unqualified reliance upon an ecclesiastically sanctioned translation was seen as an abdication of the expositor's responsibility to “correctly handle the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). Only the *Hebraica*

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the Lord.” That is, “only according to the Hebrew text does the verse speak of Jesus” (Kamin, 251, n. 27.)

<sup>37</sup> Epistle 106. Cited and translated in Kamin, 253

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Rebenich, 56.

<sup>39</sup> See Philip Schaff, ed., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), 2:539-40.

<sup>40</sup> On Christian Hebraism after Jerome, see, for example, Jerome Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1983), 12-52; idem, “Sixteenth-Century Christian-Hebraica: Scripture and the Renaissance Myth of the Past,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 11, 4 (1980): 67-85; Aryeh Grabois, “The *Hebraica Veritas* and Jewish-Christian Intellectual Relations in the Twelfth Century,” *Speculum* 50 (1975): 613-34; Raphael Loewe, “Hebraists, Christian,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., Ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2007), vol. 8: 510-551; and David Rudavsky, “The Study of Hebrew Among Christians,” *Immanuel* 2 (1973): 73-76.

*veritas*, the “Hebrew truth,” could guarantee orthodoxy in the exposition of the Old Testament.<sup>41</sup>

It is academically and theologically bankrupt to teach students that the difficult and time-consuming work of translation has already been accomplished. In fact, the abundance of English translations proves exactly the opposite point. Students must be taught not only the limitations of translations, but also how to look into the riches of God’s Word for themselves. In the face of all these translations (including those that are theologically and ecclesiastically sanctioned, e.g., 1611 KJV), they must be shown how to search for and find the *Hebraica veritas*, the “Hebrew truth.” Certainly, students need to learn the English text. But the church urgently needs those who will commit to be a *vir trilinguis*, competent in Greek, Hebrew, and the vernacular, whether that be English or a tribal language on the foreign mission field. In fact, the church itself, will not be reformed by doctrine or theology without first being reformed by Scripture alone.<sup>42</sup> For this the study of the biblical languages is essential.

### Interpreting the Old Testament for Preaching

A proper and right understanding of the Old Testament cannot be obtained by merely offering a prayer before reading the pertinent passage. Paul reminded Timothy that “rightly dividing the word of truth” required diligent study (2 Tim 2:15).<sup>43</sup> Stibbs puts it eloquently:

We cannot be truly sound in the faith unless we let the Scriptures inform all our beliefs; nor can we arrive at orthodox convictions unless we first set ourselves to understand exactly what Scripture does teach. This goal of true understanding is not one easily reached. Its pursuit requires prayerful diligence, painstaking labour, and sustained quest. If I have not as yet grasped the true meaning of the Word of God, I cannot as yet either properly obey it or intelligently proclaim it. If I covet to stand before men, glorying in the Bible as the Book of God-given revelation, and professing to be its expositor, surely I ought first to take care to see that what I am going to say is a faithful and

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<sup>41</sup> See Stephen J. Andrews, “Unsung Heroes of the Reformation: Christian Hebraists and *Sola Scriptura*,” forthcoming.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Paul most likely considered “the word of truth” to be the Old Testament.

justifiable interpretation of Scripture and not merely some hanging of my own fancies on a Scripture peg?<sup>44</sup>

Interpreting the Old Testament for preaching is not an easy task. Perhaps for this very reason the church today faces a subtle kind of “implicit Marcionism” in the pulpit.<sup>45</sup> The difficulty with which most pastors handle the original Hebrew text may actually discourage serious exegetical study of the Old Testament. While it is certainly reasonable to expect many Sunday sermons to be preached from New Testament texts, pastors must make sure that they do not neglect proclaiming the entire counsel of God by excluding sermons from the Old Testament.<sup>46</sup>

So how can the minister be motivated to do the necessary spade work required to wrestle with the text—to know “what God says in that text, not because Commentator X, Y, and Z have told him so, but because he’s seen it there in the Word.”<sup>47</sup> Perhaps the best way is to understand what practical value the hard work of Hebrew study provides for the interpretation and exposition of the Old Testament. We can say that a knowledge of Hebrew and a careful study of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament provides two benefits.<sup>48</sup> It makes it possible for the pastor to be an independent interpreter as well as a better expositor of the Word of God.

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<sup>44</sup> Alan M. Stibbs, *Understanding God’s Word* (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1950), 9-10.

<sup>45</sup> See George L. Klein, ed., *Reclaiming the Prophetic Mantle: Preaching the Old Testament Faithfully* (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 7, 9-10. On the term “implicit Marcionism” see D. L. Baker, *Two Testaments: One Bible* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1976), 84-85. I have also heard the term, “Neo-Marcionism” in less favorable circumstances.

<sup>46</sup> For two good examples on using Hebrew in preaching, see Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *From Exegesis to Exposition: A Practical Guide to Using Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) and Paul D. Wegner, *Using Old Testament Hebrew in Preaching: A Guide for Students and Pastors* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009).

<sup>47</sup> Johnson, 24. See also Wegner, 17.

<sup>48</sup> DeRouchie, “Profit,” offers four reasons to use the biblical languages based on Ezra 7:9c-10.

### **An Independent Interpreter**

I. *A knowledge of Hebrew enables the minister to be an independent interpreter.*

A general principle of scholarly research holds that the study of primary material is a priori better than an examination of secondary literature. Secondary literature is by nature based on the primary text. A knowledge of the primary Hebrew text, however, frees the pastor to function as an independent interpreter. This ability has several practical implications.

A. A knowledge of Hebrew will keep the minister and the church doctrinally sound.

Because we are talking about Holy Scripture, this issue is very serious. First, doctrines of the church must be founded on a careful analysis of the text in the original languages, not on translations or warmed-over theologies from the past. Second, ministers must understand the biblical truth in order to expound the key doctrines to their congregations. A knowledge of the Hebrew text will prevent ministers and churches from accepting doctrines which cannot stand the test of scriptural justification. A knowledge of Hebrew will effectively enable pastors "to respond to the bogus appeals to 'the original' by false teachers."<sup>49</sup>

B. A knowledge of Hebrew acts as a corrective to the speculation of secondary literature.

Because the minister has direct access to the original biblical text, he can check the opinions advocated by various scholars and expositors. This is true not only for critical commentaries, but devotional ones as well. With a knowledge of the primary text, the minister can more readily discern between objective fact and subjective opinion.

C. A knowledge of Hebrew provides the minister with access to the best scholarly and devotional sources.

The best commentaries for the study of the Old Testament assume a knowledge of Hebrew and familiarity with the Hebrew text. A knowledge

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<sup>49</sup> Johnson, 23.



of Hebrew also opens the door for a deeper study of Scripture through the best Hebrew lexicons, grammars, and concordances.<sup>50</sup>

D. A knowledge of Hebrew gives the minister a more confident ability to evaluate the ancient and modern versions and translations of the Bible.

As Johnson has correctly noted, the abundance of English translations of the Bible make a knowledge of the original languages more necessary: “God’s people need the confidence that *their own shepherds*, whom they know and who care for them, can guide them through the labyrinth of modern translations.”<sup>51</sup> The pastor must be able to explain “the reasons for the often sharply differing translations of the same verse as presented by the various new Bible translations such as the Jerusalem Bible, the New English Bible, the New American Bible, the Living Bible, the Today’s English Version, etc.”<sup>52</sup>

### **A Better Expositor of the Word of God**

II. *A knowledge of Hebrew equips the minister to be a better expositor of the Word of God.*

Saturday night specials cannot provide adequate exposition of Holy Scripture. A knowledge of Hebrew equips the minister with practical expository skills.

A. A knowledge of Hebrew deters the minister from making mistakes in the exposition of the biblical message.

Being able to judge the arguments of others by the primary text of the Old Testament will enable the minister to bypass the faulty interpretations of inadequate sources and base his exposition—both teaching and preaching—on the solid foundation of a faithful and correct interpretation of God’s Word.

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<sup>50</sup> For different lists of helpful Hebrew tools, see, for example, LaSor, 51-52; Michel, “How Should the Old Testament Be Read?,” 193-95; Parker, 40-54, 226-34, and Wegner, 29-66. Wegner is especially helpful in navigating through the computer software available up to 2009.

<sup>51</sup> Johnson, 23.

<sup>52</sup> Michel, “Why Study Hebrew,” 62.

B. A knowledge of Hebrew provides the minister with a greater understanding of the world-view of the original audience to whom the text was addressed.

The Hebrew Bible was written by individual humans “who belonged to a specific culture and tradition, lived a specific experience, spoke a specific language and therefore had a specific way of thinking.”<sup>53</sup> A knowledge of Hebrew opens the door to the world of oriental thought, a world quite different from today.

C. A knowledge of Hebrew enables the minister to be a more profound expositor of the New Testament.

Even though the New Testament is written in Greek, it is full of Hebraisms and Hebrew expressions. The Old Testament offers “background, quotations, allusions, prophecies, types, proper names, loan words, figures of speech, and idioms for the New Testament.”<sup>54</sup> The New Testament cannot be read apart from the Old Testament. Both constitute the whole counsel of God.

D. A knowledge of Hebrew keeps the expositor's teachings, sermons, and messages fresh and alive.

A knowledge of Hebrew will provide the preacher with a never-ending supply of expository sermon points and illustrations. Concerning the need for freshness in the exposition of the Holy Scriptures, Martin Luther had this to say:

Although faith and the gospel may indeed be proclaimed by simple preachers without a knowledge of languages, such preaching is flat and tame; people finally become weary and bored with it, and it falls to the ground. But where the preacher is versed in the languages, there is a freshness and vigor in his preaching, Scripture is treated in its entirety, and faith finds itself constantly renewed by a continual variety of words and illustrations.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Doukhan, 191. For a brief discussion of Hebrew thought, see *Ibid.*, 191-218.

<sup>54</sup> Parker, 4. See the examples listed in the same place.

<sup>55</sup> Cited in Michel, “How Should the Old Testament Be Read,” 192. Compare also Bartelt, 121.

Years later, Adams put it another way, “Let the Hebrew student apply himself . . . to the science of Hebrew grammar and to the exposition of Hebrew thought, and he will yet find, alike in the study of the language, and in the treatment of Biblical Theology, that expository preaching, like his native air, has become the joy and strength of his ministry.”<sup>56</sup>

E. A knowledge of Hebrew opens a whole new area for the Holy Spirit to work within the expositor’s heart and life.

The psalmist wrote, *בְּלִבִּי צִפְנֹתֵי אִמְרֹתֶיךָ לְמַעַן לֹא אֶחְטֵא-לְךָ* “In my heart, I have treasured your words—in order that I might not sin against you” (Ps 119:11). What a precious privilege to cherish the text of the original in our hearts. It is difficult, if not impossible, to read God’s great self-revelation to Moses in the Hebrew text of Exodus 34:6-7 without a sense of the awesome glory of His presence. A. T. Robertson, the great Greek grammarian, once said, “I have never looked into the Greek New Testament five minutes without finding something I never saw before.”<sup>57</sup> He also said, “Grammar is a means of grace.”<sup>58</sup> Both of these statements are also true for the Hebrew Old Testament.

### Some Knowledge of Hebrew Possible to All

A. T. Robertson began the first chapter of his book, *The Minister and the Greek New Testament*, with the challenging sub-heading, “Some Knowledge of Greek Possible to All.”<sup>59</sup> Conventional wisdom suggests that this might be a reasonable expectation for the study of Greek, but not for Hebrew. Is some knowledge of Hebrew possible to all?

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<sup>56</sup> Adams, *Sermons in Syntax*, 3. Compare also his earlier work, John Adams, *Sermons in Accents, or Studies in the Hebrew Text* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1906), iii-iv.

<sup>57</sup> Everett Gill, *A. T. Robertson: A Biography* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1943), 189.

<sup>58</sup> A. T. Robertson, *The Minister and His Greek New Testament* (New York: George H Doran, Co., 1923), 23.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 15. Robertson maintained that “There is no sphere of knowledge [i.e., the study of the biblical languages] where one is repaid more quickly for all the toil expended” (*Ibid.*).

A basic misconception and prejudice has arisen—a kind of sacred cow—that considers Hebrew to be a much more difficult language to learn than Greek.<sup>60</sup> But this is simply not true. Michel has enthusiastically stated that anyone can learn Hebrew: “The basics of Hebrew are easily mastered by anyone—even by those who are convinced that they cannot learn a foreign language.”<sup>61</sup>

Actually, like learning most languages, Hebrew does require quite a good bit of study time. Still, it is one of the easiest languages to learn. Hebrew contains a simpler grammar than Greek or Latin. There are no declensions, and the basic vocabulary is small (only about 225 words occur more than 200 times in the Hebrew Bible). Even the so-called irregular verbs are regular in their irregularity. The alphabet appears to be a major obstacle in the path of the student. But the Latin alphabet is a descendent of the Semitic by way of Phoenician and Greek. Once the student realizes a *lamed* (ל) became a *lambda* (λ) in Greek and finally an “l” in English the reading of Hebrew can be mastered quite quickly.

But perhaps the biggest deterrent to the study of Hebrew is a misunderstanding of a different sort. There is a misconception about how much Hebrew is needed. The classical theological curriculum has always required formal study of both biblical languages, Hebrew and Greek. But many seminaries have not clearly stated what level of proficiency the student is expected to achieve after a year or more of instruction.

Students who assume that a high level of competency is required before Hebrew can be utilized in ministry are more likely to quit before they ever get started. Likewise, busy pastors may not have the time to retain an idealistic level of language fluency, and because they also assume a higher level is mandatory, they may not attempt to do the exegetical homework necessary to undergird the sound exposition of the Scriptures.

Neither one realizes that there are levels of proficiency in the study of biblical Hebrew. Moving from one level to another takes time and

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. Doukhan, xxi-xxii. For other objections, see Eveson, “Biblical Languages (Part 1), 3-6.

<sup>61</sup> Michel, “How Should the Old Testament Be Read?,” 193

practice.<sup>62</sup> But it can be done, for it is far better to use Hebrew at any level than to never use it at all. And if the objection is raised that “a little learning is a dangerous thing,” we need only to ask with Huxley, “Where is the man who has so much as to be out of danger?” Acquiring Hebrew skills is a life-long process, a marvelous and blessed journey that begins with a first single step.

Based on levels of proficiency developed by Foreign Service Institute of the United States Department of State and by the Educational Testing Service, a publisher of standardized language tests, David A. Black proposed four reading levels for Greek. These same levels were adapted for biblical Hebrew fluency by Parker and Wegner.<sup>63</sup> My own are as follows:

### *1. Reading Level One.*

Readers at this level are just beginning with the alphabet, vowels, and other Hebrew basics such as nouns, particles, and other parts of speech. They may be able to read isolated nouns and verbal forms. Students are able to look up words in English concordances keyed to Hebrew dictionary. Interlinears and Hebrew-quoting commentaries are not so bewildering. Pastors are able to incorporate some Hebrew into their messages at this point. Elementary Hebrew courses are generally designed to reach this level.

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<sup>62</sup> See Ford, 42-43, and Doriani, 109-113, for practical tips for keeping up and developing a knowledge of biblical Hebrew while engaged in a busy ministry.

<sup>63</sup> David A. Black, *Using New Testament Greek in Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 27-29. See Parker, 224 and Wegner, 20-22. Wegner's compilation includes computer software up to 2009. The value of computer programs in helping students to obtain proficiency in reading Hebrew is not as clear. Wegner allows for the introduction of such resources at level one. A problem arises in the tendency to rely on the computer parsing before laying a solid basic foundation in the grammatical and syntactical principles of Hebrew study. The ultimate goal would be to employ the software programs to support the learning development of the student and not to supplant or replace it. Use of the computer programs is a great boon for the active pastor, but they will prove to be of the most help if a solid foundation is set first.

### *2. Reading Level Two.*

Students at this level have an introductory knowledge of general Hebrew grammatical concepts and a knowledge of the most common vocabulary. Students rely mainly upon set procedures for finding Hebrew roots, and extensive use of the lexicon is a mainstay of this stage. Paradigms and analytical lexicons are consulted frequently for anything beyond the strong verb forms. Reading out loud is slow and tortuous. Translation proceeds at a snail's pace, although the student at this level is easily capable of critically interacting with Hebrew-based commentaries and tools. Uncomplicated texts with basic sentence patterns and common words are read without much difficulty. Seminaries hope that students will reach this level of proficiency before graduation.

### *3. Reading Level Three.*

At level three, students possess a working proficiency of basic Hebrew grammatical principles and a vocabulary of words occurring 200 times or more in the biblical text. Readers are beginning to recognize forms and roots without extensive recourse to analytical lexicons or paradigms. Reading is often with expression and comprehension. Basic narrative texts are read without difficulty. Handling poetic and prophetic texts is slower.

### *4. Reading Level Four.*

Level four represents an advanced proficiency requiring an extensive vocabulary and a detailed knowledge of Hebrew morphology and syntax, including historical grammar and comparative Semitic linguistics. Lexicons, concordances, and reference grammars are routinely employed to understand the most challenging of passages. Most narrative and poetic texts are read with a minimum aid of a dictionary. The development of solid Hebrew vocabulary skills is critical for this stage.

## **The End of the Matter**

So back to Nicoll's question, "What good is Hebrew to the majority of our ministers?" How should we answer him? Hebrew will be as good to our ministers as they make it. They can forget it, ignore it, and even disparage its study. But if they do, they are the losers for it. A knowledge of Hebrew can literally transform a ministry, whether that ministry be

preaching, counseling, Christian education, or otherwise. Indeed, Hebrew and Greek provide a sure foundation for all practical ministry skills. W. L. Michel summed it up quite nicely:

Theological education is like a house and the knowledge of the biblical languages is like the foundation of that house. A house built on sand cannot stand (cf. Matt 7:26-27). How foolish and sinful any program of theological education which jeopardizes all of theological education by not providing a thorough foundation.<sup>64</sup>

Despite the best intentions, however, a great disparity exists between the desire of the seminaries to equip theological students with effective and ongoing original language skills and modern pastors who sincerely plan to use Hebrew and Greek in their own pastoral ministry but find little time to do so. Perhaps, the key to this problem lies in theological motivation. Motivation communicated to the students in class and to the pastor in ministry. "Putting time and effort into language study is like putting money in the bank. As one's capital increases, so does the interest."<sup>65</sup>

Interpreting the Old Testament for preaching can be done effectively with a working knowledge of Hebrew. Students and pastors alike need to be encouraged by the example of professors and denominational leaders to direct their study of the biblical languages toward the goal of practical application in the ministry. They must be encouraged to maintain and even increase their facility in the use of the languages. Hebrew and Greek refresher and exegesis courses should become a staple of continuing education courses for seminary graduates.

Learning Hebrew is like learning to ride a bicycle. First, one rides with the help of training wheels. Then, the training wheels are removed, and the rider launches forth on an unassisted, though precarious trip. As confidence mounts, a whirl around the block poses no problems or fears. Skill in bicycling is maintained to the extent that the rider exercises the ability to ride on a regular basis. But even if the bicycle is old and rusty, it can be dusted off and properly lubricated, and with the missing parts

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<sup>64</sup> Michel, "How Should the Old Testament Be Read?," 193.

<sup>65</sup> A. Berkeley Mickelson, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 114.

replaced, taken down the lane for a shaky spin. The moral is, of course, to keep practicing, and this is true also for the biblical languages. Whether a student can ride his Hebrew bicycle with ease and grace, or shaky at best, he still can arrive at his destination, the sure and faithful interpretation of Holy Scripture.

In the end, tragic consequences occur when the original languages fall into disuse in the church.<sup>66</sup> Without the confidence to interpret properly, pastors won't be able to preach with power and certainty. Expository preaching will fall into disfavor. Doctrine will lapse. Pastors will need to rely on translations, elite professionals, and secondary literature. "Secondhand food will not sustain and deepen our people's faith and holiness."<sup>67</sup> According to John Piper, pastors need to maintain "the most important pastoral skill—exegesis of the original meaning of Scripture."<sup>68</sup> What is at stake is the Gospel itself. At least, so argued Martin Luther:

Let us be sure of this: we will not long preserve the gospel without the languages. The languages are the sheath in which this sword of the Spirit [Eph. 6:17] is contained; they are the casket in which this jewel is enshrined; they are the vessel in which this wine is held; they are the larder in which this food is stored. . . . If through our neglect we let the languages go (which God forbid!), we shall . . . lose the gospel.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> For sobering elaboration on this point see Piper, "Bitzer," 82-85.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>69</sup> Cited in DeRouchie, 32. For a slightly different context and translation, see Piper, "Bitzer," 81: "Languages are the scabbard that contain the sword of the Spirit; they are the casket which contains the priceless jewels of antique thought; they are the vessel that holds the wine; and as the gospel says, they are the baskets in which the loaves and fishes are kept to feed the multitude ... As dear as the gospel is to us all, let us hard contend with its language."