

# The Necessity of Biblical Languages in Ministerial Training<sup>1</sup>

ROBERT L. PLUMMER

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**Robert L. Plummer** is the Collin and Evelyn Aikman Professor of Biblical Studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, where he has taught for more than twenty years, and which he earned his PhD in New Testament. Dr. Plummer is host of the popular Daily Dose of Greek screencast and author of several books, including *40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible* (Kregel, 2010, rev. 2020). Dr. Plummer is an elder at Sojourn Community Church (East), Louisville, Kentucky. He has served on mission assignments in China, India, Malaysia, Ghana, Israel, Turkey, and Trinidad. He and his wife Chandi have three daughters.

## INTRODUCTION

I want to thank President R. Albert Mohler, Jr., Provost Matthew Hall and Dean Hershael York for the honor of giving this faculty address. What a privilege it is to serve on this faculty among such gifted colleagues. I'd also like to thank my wife for being here. She is a lovely, wise, and holy woman. My parents, Paul and Sonja Plummer, are eighty years old and live outside Nashville, TN. They are not able to be here, but I want to recognize them as wonderful parents. I owe them a debt I can never repay. Also, it is a special privilege to have my *Doctorvater* Mark Seifrid here.

My lecture is entitled, "The Necessity of Biblical Languages in Ministerial Training." As the Fall 2021 semester was about to begin, a blog post appeared in my social media feed. The president of a major evangelical seminary had written a piece entitled, "Is It a Waste of Time for Seminary Students (and Pastors) to Learn the Biblical Languages?"<sup>2</sup> It is not his response but the fact that he had to ask this question in the first place that irks me.

Do we ever see seminary presidents writing blogs entitled "Is it a waste

of time for seminary students to learn systematic theology” or “Is it a waste of time for seminary students to learn preaching” or even “Is it a waste of time for seminary students to learn church history?” What is it about the biblical languages that requires a public apology for their inclusion in a seminary’s curriculum?

Regardless of what got us here, the truth is that many people do question the value of the biblical languages for ministerial training, and I am here to contend, in continuity with the curricular tradition of this great seminary, that the biblical languages are absolutely necessary. Because I specialize in New Testament (NT) studies, in this lecture, I will focus mainly on Greek. I will now enumerate five reasons that the biblical languages are essential for ministerial training, followed by a consideration of four challenges in our day.

## **FIVE REASONS WHY BIBLICAL LANGUAGES ARE ESSENTIAL**

### ***1. Biblical languages are essential in our curriculum because we value the Word of God.***

I have in my hand an English Bible. I do not hesitate to affirm this Bible as the inerrant Word of God. In colloquial usage, no further clarification is needed. But, we must admit, that in the end, English Bible translations differ—dramatically in some places. In 1 John 1:1 the NET Bible translators have rendered the final five Greek words (περι τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς) with a parenthetical remark in English [quote] “concerning the word of life.” In the NET Bible, “word” is not capitalized, indicating the apostle John is referring to the gospel message as “the word of life.” On the other hand, the translators of the New Living Translation make a new sentence of the five Greek words (περι τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς) and capitalize “Word,” resulting in: “He is the Word of Life.” So, does 1 John 1:1 refer to Jesus as the incarnate Logos, or is it a reference to the gospel message received by the congregation. One could argue that John intends some level of ambiguity in his original expression, encapsulating both the NET Bible and New Living Translation meanings—but the English translations do *not* include such ambiguity. They land on distinct and different interpretations. We are forced to admit that one or both translations are wrong or deficient. In the end, we do not affirm that English words of an English Bible are breathed out by the Holy

Spirit. We do make that affirmation of the underlying Greek and Hebrew words. The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (to which this faculty gladly adheres) is correct to affirm the inerrancy and complete truthfulness of the actual Greek and Hebrew words that the apostles and prophets wrote.

A.T. Robertson (And, prepare yourself. I'm going to quote A.T. Robertson a lot, so get used to it!), no doubt, was provocative when he said this:

The real New Testament is the Greek New Testament. The English is simply a translation of the New Testament, not the actual New Testament. It is good that the New Testament has been translated into so many languages. The fact that it was written in the *koiné*, the universal language of the time, rather than in one of the earlier Greek dialects, makes it easier to render into modern tongues. But there is much that cannot be translated. It is not possible to reproduce the delicate turns of thought, the nuances of language, in translation. The freshness of the strawberry cannot be preserved in any extract.<sup>3</sup>

Because we value the breathed-out, inerrant Word of God as the final authority for our Christian beliefs and practices, we must be students of the original languages.

In 1518, Martin Luther's companion Philip Melanchthon said it this way:

Since the Bible is written in part in Hebrew and in part in Greek, ...we must learn these languages, unless we want to be "silent persons" as theologians. Once we understand the significance and the weight of the words, the true meaning of Scripture will light up for us as the midday sun. Only if we have clearly understood the languages will we clearly understand the content... If we put our minds to the [Greek and Hebrew] sources, we will begin to understand Christ rightly.<sup>4</sup>

Modern English Bibles go through periodic revisions. The wording in them is changed. Is this not an implicit acknowledgement that, though the translations are accurate, changes must be made so that they would read more accurately?

God inspired the underlying Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic words of Scripture and if the Scripture is the ultimate authority for our lives and ministries, when disagreements happen and push comes to shove, we must ultimately appeal to those Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic grammatical constructions.

Many Christian traditions no longer affirm the Bible as uniquely authoritative. It is no surprise that we see mainline seminaries abandoning the biblical languages. In fact, when a community affirms that the Bible is no longer authoritative, it is completely logical to conclude that studying the biblical languages is a waste of time. The rejection of biblical authority goes hand-in-hand with the removal of biblical languages from a seminary's curriculum.

In these days of catastrophic moral and cultural decline, if we are not moored by the never-changing Scripture, we will soon look no different than the culture around us.

I confess I find it embarrassing that evangelical seminaries are reducing languages to an optional part of the MDiv curriculum. When I see a CV or resume having the words "with languages" added after the letters MDiv, I cringe. I cringe because I think of the many hundreds or thousands of graduates who graduated "without languages." We're sending soldiers into battle with muskets and powder horns rather than with the most powerful and accurate weaponry.

You may remember years ago when the president of the United States encouraged the public schools to improve with a competitive "Race to the Top." Removing the biblical languages from the seminary curriculum is nothing other than a "race to the bottom." It's a marketing ploy to make the MDiv degree faster, easier and in the end, devoid of necessary foundational skills and knowledge.

In his first convocation address at Westminster Theological Seminary in 1929, J. Gresham Machen declared, "If you are to tell what the Bible does say, you must be able to read the Bible for yourself. And you cannot read the Bible for yourself unless you know the languages in which it was written. . . in his mysterious wisdom [God] gave [his Word] to us in Hebrew and Greek. Hence if we want to know the Scriptures, to the study of Greek and Hebrew we must go."<sup>5</sup>

So, to recap point #1, the biblical languages are essential to the seminary curriculum because we as Christians value the Word of God as our inerrant and ultimate authority. God gave this Word in Greek and Hebrew.

***2. The biblical languages are an essential part of ministerial training because we value teaching and preaching that is both biblical and original, fresh, relevant.***

Many of you know that I provide free Greek instruction through an online platform called The Daily Dose of Greek ([www.dailydoseofgreek.com](http://www.dailydoseofgreek.com)).

I receive emails from people of many different Christian backgrounds. I received a note from a Methodist minister who lamented that many of his fellow Methodists pastors not only were not preparing sermons from the Greek NT but were preaching other people's sermons as their own (apparently not doing any sermon preparation at all!). This Methodist pastor told me that what kept his teaching fresh, original, and engaging was the work of preparing weekly messages from the Greek NT and Hebrew OT.

In Jeremiah 23:29, God said, "Is not my word like a fire and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces" (NIV). You cannot enter the blinding forge of God's Word and fail to emerge with a fresh, timely and faithful message.

When people come to your house to eat, do you reheat yesterday's leftovers to serve them? Or, worse, do you go to the neighbor's house and ask them for their leftovers and warm them up in your microwave for your guests? Perhaps you sprinkle a bit of cheese on top first to freshen them up?

John Piper warns us, "Secondhand food will not sustain and deepen our people's faith and holiness... What is more important and more deeply practical for the pastoral office than advancing in Greek and Hebrew exegesis by which we mine God's treasures?"<sup>6</sup>

In his book *Clash of Visions*, Robert Yarborough explores the actual handwritten notes of Martin Luther on the text of Romans.<sup>7</sup> In doing so, it becomes clear Luther did not get his ideas on righteousness by listening to a podcast or looking it up in Gregg Allison's *Historical Theology*. His understanding of God's gift of righteousness in Christ to wicked sinners exploded out of Romans and the Psalms as he studied the biblical texts in the original languages.

Luther speaks of this experience himself when he wrote, "Although the Faith and the Gospel may be proclaimed by preachers without the knowledge of languages, the preaching will be feeble and ineffective. But where the languages are studied, the proclamation will be fresh and powerful, the Scriptures will be searched, and the Faith will be constantly rediscovered through ever new words and deeds."<sup>8</sup>

### ***3. The biblical languages are an essential part of ministerial training because we have limited time.***

This third point may initially seem counter intuitive. If we have limited time, shouldn't we just run to an English translation and homiletical helps?

Allow me to offer this parable: if you must chop a stack of kindling, is it a

waste of time to pause and first sharpen your axe? A. T. Robertson observed, “If theological education will increase your power for Christ, is it not your duty to gain that added power? . . . Never say you are losing time by going to school. You are saving time, buying it up for the future and storing it away. Time used in storing power is not lost.”<sup>9</sup>

As I work through biblical texts in classes, I’m always struck by how many excellent questions the students ask that are not addressed by commentaries. Even very good commentators neglect pivotal questions. I tell students, “Do you not realize that the people who write these commentaries are flawed and short-sighted persons like you? Perhaps the published commentator did not notice the insight that you are raising, or maybe he had a similar question to what you are asking, but not knowing the answer, he avoided the matter completely in his writing. Only by you engaging the inspired text of Scripture for yourself, do you consistently have access to the most central questions and the data for the answer to those questions.”

Scott Hafemann once noted, “One hour in the text [of the original languages] is worth more than ten hours in the secondary literature.”<sup>10</sup> To read the Scripture only in translation is like kissing your bride through a veil, as one Jewish poet has said.<sup>11</sup>

Without a doubt, commentaries can be very helpful in wrestling through the meaning and implications of a biblical text. And, with limited time, pastors want to be able to use and understand the *best* commentaries on the passages they are preaching. The *best* commentaries are often tracking closely the Hebrew and Greek text, and without a working knowledge of the biblical languages, the minister is shut out from the most helpful tools.

My grandmother Lucille Plummer used to tell the grandchildren that when my father (Paul Lewis Plummer) was a young boy learning to read, if he didn’t know a word or could not pronounce it, he would just say “steamboat” and keep reading. (that is, he would replace each word he did not know with the word “steamboat”)

I pulled off my shelf the very helpful technical commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Romans by John Harvey.<sup>12</sup> I wondered what it would be like to try to read it without a knowledge of Greek grammar. Perhaps it would be like replacing every Greek or grammatical term with the word “steamboat.” Let’s listen. From page 91, reflections on Romans 3:21: “The steamboat steamboat could be steamboat, but it is more likely steamboat, modifying steamboat

steamboat. The present tense is steamboat; steamboat + steamboat indicates the steamboat of the simple steamboat. The steamboat with steamboat is steamboat; the steamboat with steamboat is steamboat. “Law and Prophets” occurs nowhere else in Paul. See Longenecker for Jewish background on the phrase. “Prophets” is a steamboat for their writings.”

One can see that a minister untrained in Greek and Hebrew is at a significant disadvantage for reading and understanding the best resources. As we already noted, Melancthon said that without the biblical languages, we will be “silent persons” as theologians. We might add that without the biblical languages, we are deaf and blind theologians too, unable to benefit from the insights of church’s best scholars and teachers.

Time is limited. A working knowledge of Greek and Hebrew saves time by connecting the pastor directly with the text and directly with the best resources.

One semester, after overseeing a final exam in Greek Syntax and Exegesis, in the grassy areas just west of the Norton building, I ran into a female student from the class. She said to me (I paraphrase), “You know, Dr. Plummer, I’ll never be a Greek scholar, but after two semesters of Greek, I think I can detect both sound and unsound argumentation in the commentaries.” To which I say, “Mission accomplished. Well-done, faithful student.”

#### ***4. The biblical languages are essential to the seminary curriculum because they are the sap in the tree which nourishes the other disciplines.***

What are some of the most debated topics of our day? If we were to list these issues, in the top five would certainly be matters of sexuality, gender and marriage. Within the last few years, I have been contacted multiple times by people inside and outside the seminary looking for a clear and accurate understanding of the terms in the Greek NT related to homosexuality. You are surely aware that there are creative exegetes who claim that the Bible does not condemn homosexual behavior. Such flawed assertions are often grounded in the inaccurate meanings of particular Greek and Hebrew expressions. In other words, a biblical understanding of sexual ethics must be grounded in a proper understanding of Greek semantics.

If we are going to respond to an ever-shifting ethical landscape, we need Greek and Hebrew. If we are going to be effective in sharing about the true identify of Jesus Christ with Jehovah’s Witnesses, we need Greek for

evangelism. If we are going to reflect the structure and emphasis of the inspired authors in our own proclamation, we need Greek and Hebrew for preaching. If we are going to rightly understand the doctrine of sanctification and submit our articulation of that doctrine to the contours of Scripture, we need Greek and Hebrew for Systematic Theology.

Ethics, Counseling, Evangelism, Missions, Preaching, Music & Worship, Systematic Theology—these and other important theological disciplines are undergirded and informed by knowledge of and submission to the Hebrew OT and Greek NT.

***5. The biblical languages are essential to remain true to our heritage as Southern Baptists and specifically to the heritage of The Southern Baptist Theology Seminary, a seminary which is Trusted for Truth, a truth we know from the inspired Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic words of Scripture.***

It's hard to imagine a more fitting spokesman for our denomination than the 90-year old patriarch Jerry Vines. Dr. Vines is the Pastor-Emeritus, First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida and Two-time President, Southern Baptist Convention. In a personal email, he wrote to me,

From my first class in New Testament Greek Grammar through a fifty-year pastoral ministry and now my itinerant ministry, Greek has been indispensable to me. As a pastor I led my people through all the New Testament books many times. I could not have done this effectively without some working knowledge of the language.

The faithful interpreter and preacher of God's Word should make it his goal to be the best student of the Greek New Testament he can possibly be. To be sure there is much to be gained from a study of English translations. But, there are some insights and interpretations that can only be derived through the study of Greek.

Through the years I have pursued a constant review of new Grammars, syntactical studies and specialized books on the Greek language. This has enabled me to stay fresh and current in the language. I am daily amazed at what the Lord reveals to me through a study of the Greek text.<sup>13</sup>

On another occasion, Dr. Vines mentioned to me that he has long had the practice of reading through the Greek NT once per year.

Let us think specifically about our seminary and the legacy we have



inherited. In 1923, ninety-eight years ago, A.T. Robertson wrote, “In the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. . . three hundred young ministers were enrolled during the past session in the various classes in the Greek New Testament, besides those who had carried such works in previous sessions. This is nearly three-fourths of the total number of students and shows conclusively that Greek is not dead in this institution.”<sup>14</sup>

I’m glad to report that in the Fall term of 2021 at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 427 Masters-level students are enrolled in Greek classes, not counting undergraduates or doctoral students.

Both in our denomination and specifically in our seminary, we have been given a unique stewardship. In addition, the Lord has opened up for us place of influence around the world. Through the Daily Dose online platform, our own Roberto Carrera is teaching Greek to native Spanish speakers around the globe. Recent PhD graduate Dr. Hanbyul Kang is providing daily Greek insights in Korean on the Gospel of Matthew to Korean pastors. Student Ivan Chagas is preparing to launch a similar service in Portuguese. Boyce faculty members Adam Howell, Tyler Flatt, and other Daily Dose hosts have recorded thousands of instructional videos that are viewed regularly in well over 100 countries (including Saudi Arabia and the Vatican!). In fact, videos from the various Daily Dose websites (centered here at Southern Seminary) have had more than 2.3 million views last year. None of this would be possible without Southern Seminary PhD student Jonathan Ahlgren skillfully overseeing the technology. In engaging in this work, we (overwhelmingly Southern Seminary faculty and doctoral students) are doing nothing other than receiving the baton that an earlier generation of Southern Baptists has passed to us.

In July of this last summer, Southern Seminary hosted the bi-annual “Greek and Hebrew for Life” conference. We welcomed not only many Southern Baptist alumni, but Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans and even some Benedictine monks – in their full monkish attire. One of them emailed me prior to coming (I quote):

And I am even more grateful that you and those gathering this . . . weekend are keeping scholarship and interest in God’s word alive for Catholics like me who, rightly or wrongly, rely more heavily on devotional practices than we do the Bible! Oh that more Catholics would be as interested in the Bible. . .!<sup>15</sup>

What a joyful and unique stewardship we have been given in our day—not only to keep alive the legacy we have received, calling Southern Baptists to know and love the Scriptures but to trumpet the value of the Word of God around the world—and to expect a new Great Awakening, a new Reformation—a personal revival of Scripture-infused passion, spilling over to churchly renewal and (we pray) societal transformation.

#### **FOUR CHALLENGES IN TEACHING THE BIBLICAL LANGUAGES TO THE NEXT GENERATION OF MINISTERS**

##### ***Challenge #1: Bad models***

It is unfortunate that many students, pastors and professors have been turned off to the value of Greek and Hebrew by the experiences they have had sitting under the preaching and teaching of those who have used the languages poorly.

Tim Beougher related to me this saying of Charles Spurgeon: [quote] “Our Lord was crucified under a sign written in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and since then, many congregations have been crucified weekly by their pastors under those same languages.

Sadly, we could all recount examples of misguided grammatical reflections under which we have suffered—etymological fallacies, illegitimate totality transfers, and so on. We do not have the time to explore such exegetical fallacies in detail and I have written about them elsewhere, but one can understand why many people question the value of the biblical languages if they have not seen them used rightly.

I regularly and frequently appeal to my students that explicit references to Greek and Hebrew should be quite rare in their sermons. As a general rule, Greek is like underwear. It should provide support but not be visible.

For example, in 1 John 1:5, we read, ὁ θεὸς φῶς ἐστὶν καὶ σκοτία ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδεμία. God is light and in him is no darkness at all. Now even a superficial reading of the Greek quickly notes a double negative—with both the words οὐκ and οὐδεμία employed. Literalistically, “God is light and none darkness is not him.” It would be a misstep, in my opinion, for the pastor to offer grammatical commentary on double negatives in Koine Greek or to even mention the words οὐκ and οὐδεμία. Better is to let the strength of this assertion infect the preacher’s passion, so that he can say something like: “God is light—completely holy—there is not the tiniest

particle of darkness or sin in him at all!” There’s a wonderful feeling as a preacher of standing on the sold ground of the text’s actual assertions and structure.

Otherwise, you might end up like the pastor whose notes were discovered and alongside the margin of the manuscript at one place were scribbled the words, “Weak point. Yell loud here.”

Students sometimes ask me how they should deal with a pastor in their home church who uses Greek poorly. Most likely, you should say nothing. You should be glad, based on when and where he went to seminary, that he is a faithful Christian. You should pray for him. And when he asks you about the Greek in his sermon and what you thought about it, you can honestly say, “Sir, your sermon laid bare my sin. Thanks be to God.” Because, in honesty, your sins of pride and judgmentalism were exposed by his preached word.

### ***Challenge #2: Distraction and Laziness***

We may think distraction and laziness are modern problems, but nearly 100 years ago, A. T. Robertson wrote, “The chief reason why preachers do not get and do not keep up a fair and needful knowledge of the Greek New Testament is nothing less than carelessness, and even laziness in many cases.”<sup>16</sup>

How many hours per week does the average seminary student or professor or pastor spend on Instagram, FaceBook, Twitter, on other social media, or watching Netflix or sports, or doomscrolling the News?

Perhaps we say that we wish we had more time to study, more time to use or revive our knowledge of the biblical languages, but *it is what we actually do that shows what we want to do*. We don’t have time to explore this topic more fully, but James K. A. Smith speaks poignantly to it in his book *You are What you Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Brazos, 2016).

We are weak creatures who find ourselves easily addicted to technology and entertainment. If we are not going to fall into a new dark age of ignorance and passivity, we need Spirit-empowered habits and discipline. Ben Merkle and I have tried to provide practical solutions to these problems in our book, *Greek for Life: Strategies for Learning, Retaining and Reviving New Testament Greek* (Baker, 2017). And there’s a companion volume for Hebrew—*Hebrew for Life* (Baker, 2020), with Adam Howell as the lead author.

***Challenge #3 (for language professors): There's a danger that we will not adapt to a quickly changing environment with the best pedagogy and technology.***

There's a danger that we will not adapt by shifting to the best technology and pedagogical methods. We must continue growing as teachers, or we will wither and die in ineffectiveness and obsolescence.

The teaching of Greek faces a challenge that economists call the problem of “Lock in.” We can illustrate this with the Qwerty typewriter keyboard. (I'm drawing heavily here on a recent podcast on the Qwerty keyboard by the podcast “50 things that made the modern economy” with Tim Hartford.)

In my office I have a manual typewriter. One of the challenges of typing quickly on a manual typewriter is that multiple keys can become enmeshed and get stuck—like the club of multiple golfers crashing together as they all hit the same ball (Tim Hartford's excellent analogy). So, apparently one of the purposes of the order of the Qwerty keyboard was to slow down typing and prevent this crash of the levers.

A gentleman named August Dvorak patented a different keyboard layout in 1936 that multiple studies have shown allows superior typing speed, especially with modern computer keyboards where there is no concern about physical key levers becoming stuck together.

Even though objective studies have shown that it is economically worthwhile to retrain typists to type on Dvorak keyboards. And with computers now, it's easy to change any keyboard to work on the Dvorak pattern, and there are countless free videos online about how to retool yourself to the Dvorak keyboard... why do 99% of us still use the Qwerty keyboard. We're “locked in.” When we took a typing class online or in school, that's the keyboard pattern we learned. Every keyboard we buy—virtual or real—is Qwerty. So what if it will make us slightly faster to learn to type on the Dvorak model. It will be annoying and slow us down for a few weeks—and is the increase in speed really worth the short-term pain?

The comparison of Qwerty and Dvorak keyboards is similar to a number of issues in Greek pedagogy. Professors are locked-in to inferior textbooks. Professors are locked-in to a particular form of pronunciation, and though most of you do not know it, the battle is raging fiercely over what the most accurate and pedagogically sound system of Greek pronunciation is. Professors are locked into a grammar-translation method, when research challenges us to incorporate living language acquisition techniques to aid the long-term

retention of biblical languages. Professors are locked-in to in-person instruction and are slow to adapt class structures and pedagogical methods to online and modular students. I have written more extensively on these issues elsewhere and time limits force me to move on.

***Challenge #4: It's difficult to prioritize biblical language instruction when professors and pastors whom students admire have not learned Greek and Hebrew or have not retained their skills.***

If I may just speak bluntly, I am sure in a gathering of this size, there are multiple people who regret either (a) not learning the biblical languages or (b) letting their skills seriously atrophy. Perhaps, if you close your eyes for a moment, you'll find that in your imagination, you're staring out over a valley of dry linguistic bones and you hear a voice say, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

I'm happy to tell you that they can. I've seen so many persons successfully revive their knowledge of Greek. It has never been easier. We live in an unparalleled moment of world history—it has never been easier to learn, revive or progress in your ability to read the Scriptures in the original languages!

I don't think it would betray his confidence to tell you the story of one of our former colleagues, Dr. Bill Curtrier. Dr. Curtrier sadly passed away on Saturday, July 13, 2013. He was 62 years old. I was teaching at an underground seminary in the mountains of China when I heard the news. Bill graduated from Dallas Theological Seminary and had a solid foundation in Greek but had allowed his skills to erode over time. It was 2013. This was back in the day when we mailed out DVDs to online students, and Bill checked out two sets for himself. He worked through two Masters-level courses—Elementary Greek and Greek Syntax and Exegesis. Then, he sat in an on-campus course, the Greek exegesis of the Epistle of James.

Bill passed away suddenly on a bike ride. I like to imagine him instantly transported into the presence of God, and I know there was no hesitation as he joined with the heavenly chorus saying, ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ, ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος ("Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, the one who was and is and is to come").

## CONCLUSION

Today, we've considered five reasons why teaching Greek and Hebrew is

essential for ministerial preparation. We've also looked at four challenges to prioritizing that instruction. Let's end with a biographical vignette from the life of a famous NT scholar.

In the early 1900s, one of the most respected Greek grammarians in the world was James Hope Moulton (1863-1917). Some of you know his last name as one of the authors of the British multi-volume Greek reference grammar known as MHT (Moulton, Howard, Turner). Moulton's devotion to the text of Scripture and the God who inspired that Scripture drove him to missionary service in India. (ASIDE: You must understand, the deeper someone goes into the Greek NT, the more he or she is propelled as a witness, or a preacher or a missionary for Christ into this world! Think of Jim and Elizabeth Elliott! Think of Granville Sharp and his fight against slavery! Think of our recent graduates David and Stacey Hare who are pouring out their lives in West Africa to proclaim the gospel and translate the Bible into a new language!)

So, Moulton had been in India (propelled and ignited by his study of the Greek NT). After some time of missionary work, he was journeying home to his native Great Britain in April 1917 (in the midst of WWI). His ship was torpedoed by a German submarine. Moulton survived for several days on a lifeboat but finally passed away and was buried at sea.

As I close today, I want to read to you a poem Moulton wrote in Bangalore, India, on Feb 21 1917 (just a few weeks before he died). It's a prayer in poetic form, and I offer it up today as a closing petition to the Lord. It is entitled, "At the Classroom Door."

Lord, at Thy word opens yon door; inviting  
Teacher and taught to feast this hour with Thee;  
Opens a Book where God in human writing  
Thinks His deep thoughts, and dead tongues live for me.

Too dread the task, too great the duty calling,  
Too heavy far the the weight is laid on me!  
O if mine own thought should on Thy words falling  
Mar the great message, and men hear not Thee!

Give me Thy voice to speak, Thine ear to listen,  
Give me Thy mind to grasp Thy mystery;

So shall my heart throb, and my glad eyes glisten,  
Rapt with the wonders Thou dost show to me.<sup>17</sup>

(Amen)

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1. This lecture was given as Dr. Robert Plummer's Faculty Address on September, 2021 at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky.
  2. <https://www.michaeljkruger.com/is-it-a-waste-of-time-for-seminary-students-and-pastors-to-learn-the-biblical-languages-4/>
  3. *The Minister and His Greek New Testament*, Reprint (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 17.
  4. From Melancthon's inaugural address on "The Reform of the Education of Youth" (1518), cited in Hans J. Hillerbrand, ed., *The Reformation: A Narrative History Related by Contemporary Observers and Participants*, new ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 59-60.
  5. "Westminster Theological Seminary: Its Purpose and Plan," in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. D. G. Hart (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 188-89; orig. published in *The Presbyterian* 99 (Oct. 10, 1929): 6-9.
  6. John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry*, updated and expanded ed. (Nashville: B&H, 2013), 100.
  7. Robert W. Yarborough, *Clash of Visions: Populism and Elitism in New Testament Theology*. Reformed, Exegetical and Doctrinal Studies (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2019), 48-49.
  8. Martin Luther, "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools" (1524), in *The Christian in Society II* (ed., Walther I. Brandt, trans. Albert T. W. Steinhäuser and Walther I. Brandt; vol. 45 of *Luther's Works*; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1962), 365.
  9. A. T. Robertson, "Preaching and Scholarship" (inaugural faculty address), The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, October 3, 1890, as cited by S. Craig Sanders, "A. T. Robertson and His 'Monumental Achievement,'" *Baptist Press*, September 22, 2014, <http://dev.bpnews.net/43400/at-robertson-and-his-monumental-achievement>.
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