

The Preservation of the Bible

Introduction:

Many Christians use the expression, “I believe in the divine, verbal, plenary, and inerrant inspiration of the original Scriptures,” — a true statement, but

We DO NOT HAVE the original Scriptures in our possession, and never will.

So, making such a statement without qualification can be rather convenient. Believing in the inspiration of the originals gives license to anyone wishing to “correct” the Bible when it suit their purpose.

How often do we hear or read statements such as:

“That’s what the Bible says...but...if the original Greek it really means...”

“A better translation would be...”

“This verse is not found in the most ancient manuscripts...”

We need to face some very relevant questions:

1. Is the Bible intended for every man - or just the scholars? Should we who are not scholars have to rely upon the scholars for a full interpretation of God’s Word?
2. Do we need to know Hebrew and Greek to fully understand the Bible?
3. If some verses in the Bible are questionable in their translation, can we really be sure of any?
4. Does the average “three years of Bible College” Baptist preacher have the scholastic right to “correct” the Bible on the basis of the Hebrew or Greek text?

We must accept the doctrine of Divine Preservation of the Scriptures. Without this doctrine coupled with that of divine Inspiration, we could never be 100% sure we actually have God’s Word.

I. The Doctrine of Preservation

The divine preservation of the Scriptures is just as much a doctrine as that of divine inspiration. Both doctrines are taught in Scripture and evidenced by internal and external proofs.

A. Psalm 12:6, 7

1. The extent of preservation - “words.”
2. The Agent of preservation - “Thou” [God]
3. The period of preservation - “for ever.”

B. Psalm 33:11

“The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.”

C. Psalm 100:5

“For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.”

D. Psalm 111:7, 8

“The works of his hands are verity and judgment; all his commandments are sure. They stand fast for ever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness.”

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- E. Psalm 117:2
“For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the Lord endureth for ever. Praise ye the Lord.”
- F. Psalm 119: 89, 152, 160
89 - “For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven.”
152 - “Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever.”
160 - “Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.”
- G. Psalm 146:6
[God] “Which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is: which keepeth truth for ever:”
- H. Isaiah 40:8
“The grass witherite, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.”
- I. Isaiah 59:21
“As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed’s seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever.”
- J. Matthew 24:35
“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”
- K. Luke 16:17
“And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.”
- L. Luke 21:33
“Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.”
- M. John 10:35
“...and the scripture cannot be broken;”
- N. John 12:47, 48
“And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.”
- O. I Peter 1:23, 25”
23 - “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.
25 - “But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.”

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The doctrine of the preservation of the Scriptures is based squarely upon the PROMISE of God, and falls within the realm of His PROVIDENCE. (Isaiah 46:9-11)

II. The Logic of Preservation

Preservation is a logical doctrine.

Why would God give us the Bible, taking meticulous care with the very words of Scripture, then allow their distortion or loss to occur over time?

Would not God, Who through the miracle of inspiration gave us His very words in written form, also be able to keep them through a miracle such as preservation?

Ecclesiastes 3:14

III. The Extent of Preservation

The doctrine of Inspiration reveals that God was concerned with words. The Bible teaches verbal inspiration.

The verse above shows clearly that God has preserved the words also.

Thus preservation goes beyond the Books, chapters, thoughts, concepts, and sense (all of which have indeed been preserved.) It extends to the words.

It is at this point many encounter some difficulty in comprehending the doctrine of preservation, and it is here we contrast reason with faith.

A. The Application of Reason.

The logic of reason would argue thus:

1. Let us say the actual, original writing by the hand of the apostle Paul in a particular passage is "*theopneustos*."
2. Allowing for the fact that this word may be translated into English (which can be argued against on the grounds of strict "word preservation,") we should come up with a word such as "God-breathed."
3. To have this passage written "given by inspiration of God" in our English Bible is to:
 - a) Add words (1 word becomes 5 words.)
 - b) Change words ("inspire" means "breathe in;" "*theopneustos*" should mean "expire" or breathe out.)

Reason then asks, "How can this be word preservation?"

B. The Application of Faith.

1. We do not have any "original" autograph. Neither did Timothy, but he did have the Scriptures. II Timothy 3:15-16
2. When the New Testament quotes the Old Testament, there are several instances where the Holy Spirit used different words, e.g. Deuteronomy 8:3 is quoted in slightly different words in Luke 4:4, without loss of meaning.
 - a) In the first place, the quotation was from the Hebrew to Greek.

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- b) In the second place, Timothy had available both the Book of Deuteronomy (written in Hebrew) and the Book of Luke (written in Greek) since I Timothy 5:18 cites both Books as Scripture.
- c) In the third place, the Spirit of God is well qualified to use different words since He is the Author of Scripture.

Faith concludes that God will keep His promise to preserve His Word, working providentially by the same Spirit through the processes of copying and translation to give us the very words He desires.

God's words are still His words when copied or translated. We may not fully understand this fact, but the Bible clearly teaches it.

The French infidel, Voltaire (d. 1778) once boasted that Christianity would be a dead religion within 100 years of his day. He wrote many volumes against Christianity and the Bible. Within 50 years of his death, his own printing works was being used by the Geneva Bible Society for the printing of Bibles! Ninety-two volumes of Voltaire's works once sold at an auction for just a few dollars — at the same auction, one ancient Bible manuscript sold for over \$500,000.

Down through the many centuries, God has marvelously and miraculously preserved His Word from destruction.