

HOW DO I KNOW THE BIBLE CAN BE TRUSTED?  
GOD HAS PRESERVED HIS WORD  
DOWN THROUGH THE AGES

The Word of God is foundational to our faith and practice, and without its preservation by God, who can know if it is His Word altogether? Floyd C. McElveen assured us that “God promised that nothing would be lost. Every confidence is that the 66 books are the Word of God.”<sup>1</sup> The doctrines of inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility of the Bible have received the majority of attention while preservation has been neglected, and even forgotten. With the onslaught of textual revisionists over the last 150 years, this doctrine has become as important as inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility.

There are three main views regarding the divine preservation of the Holy Scriptures. The first view contends that God’s Word has been preserved to the extent it was re-inspired when translated into the King James Version; this view is called double inspiration, and therefore God’s Word is preserved in a single English version. This view believes that all other translations should be based upon one English version. Some in this camp believe that if an individual was not converted with the King James Version, he has not been saved because he was saved with corruptible seed.

The second view contends that God’s Word has not been preserved, or if preserved, it has temporarily been lost, and must be recovered and reconstructed. This view contends that we must study all the recovered manuscripts to decipher the text in order to reconstruct the Word of God. Thus the text of the Bible is a man-made text. Most

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<sup>1</sup>Floyd C. McElveen, *God’s Word, Final, Infallible and Forever: Compelling Evidence for the Bible’s Inspiration and Preservation* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1985), 9.

of our modern versions are translated from this type of text. This is the critical text, or the eclectic text view.

The third view contends that God has providentially preserved His Word down through the centuries, even though the originals no longer exist in the manuscript form. The God-given text has been preserved in what is known as the Hebrew Masoretic Text of the Old Testament and the Greek Textus Receptus of the New Testament. History demonstrates that there has been a line of manuscripts that God has divinely protected and kept pure, just as He promised numerous times in both the Old and New Testaments.

The view of this pamphlet is that of the third position, and we will discover that this is the correct Biblical view. The Bible claims for itself the preservation of every word. It teaches divine and providential preservation of the very words of God. Robert Wilson summarized this view by saying that “human beings are not responsible even though they were used for transmitting the Word of God but God Himself.”<sup>2</sup>

What is the doctrine of preservation? Preservation has been defined according to Dr. Karl Stelzer as, “The providential act of God whereby He keeps His Word pure and accurate so that believers of all generations have the very Word of God.”<sup>3</sup> God has protected His truth in transmission. Although we do not have the original autographs, we do have over five thousand New Testament manuscript copies, known as apographs.

The doctrine of preservation does not teach that individual copies of the Word of God cannot be destroyed or lost. For example, in 2 Kings 22:8 we read that the high

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<sup>2</sup>Robert Wilson and Edward J. Young, *A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Sunday School Times Co., 1926), 13.

<sup>3</sup>Dr. Karl Stelzer, “An Evaluation of the Transmission and Preservation of the Hebrew Old Testament Text from a Faith Position” (Ph.D. diss., Pensacola Christian College, 2000), 31.

priest Hilkiah found the book of the law in the house of the Lord. Jer. 36:23 records that the wicked king Jehoiakim physically cut the written Word of God with his knife and threw it into the fire, thus destroying it. A troubling fact is that many manuscripts were worn out, lost, or destroyed, and a small number of New Testament manuscripts vary from the larger body of manuscripts. Therefore the obvious questions arise: Do we hold in our hands today the very Word of God? Has God preserved His Word in whole or in part? Do we need to discover more or older manuscripts to dispel any notions of a preserved text? Do we need evidence from archeology? If God's Word is not preserved, infallible, and inspired, then our faith is in vain.

Obviously, if we do not have the autographs, then the doctrine of preservation means that God must providentially protect the transmission of His Word. This God promised to do and did providentially down through the ages. Dr. Karl Stelzer correctly stated that "the presentation of the biblical witness concerning preservation reveals: (1) that God preserves His Word forever, and (2) that God preserves His Word unchanged."<sup>4</sup> The Bible teaches both the time duration and the degree of His preservation.

Although the original autographs were written by sinful men, they were totally inspired. Likewise, God chose to also keep His Word pure down through the ages using sinful men. In other words, God gave His Word through imperfect men and God transmitted His Word through imperfect men. These are foundational truths of the faith based belief in the doctrine of preservation.

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 28.

Would God inspire His Word only to let it be lost or portions deleted down through the centuries? Francis Turretin explained in the *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*:

Nor can we readily believe that God, who dictated and inspired each and every word to these inspired (*theopneustois*) men, would not take care of their entire preservation. If men use the utmost care diligently to preserve their words (especially if they are of any importance, as for example a testament or contract) in order that it may not be corrupted, how much more, must we suppose, would God take care of his word which he intended as a testament and seal of his covenant with us, so that it might not be corrupted; especially when he could easily foresee and prevent such corruptions in order to establish the faith of his church.<sup>5</sup>

All students seeking to examine the preservation issue should begin with examining the doctrine of inspiration. The foremost Scripture in the Bible regarding inspiration states, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). This verse specifies that all the Scriptures are God-breathed. The word “all” means the entire Scriptures, the totality of Scriptures. This is also known as plenary inspiration, meaning that the entire Bible is equally derived from God. This verse states that the source of the text was God Himself. If all Scripture is from God, then it must be inspired, “God-breathed.” If we doubt some words in the Bible, then the doctrine of inspiration is irrelevant. Edward Hills, in his book, *The King James Version Defended*, stated: “Since the Bible was infallibly inspired, it must have been preserved down through the ages by God’s special providence. And this providential preservation took place not in holes and caves but in the usage of the Church. And it did not cease with the invention of printing.

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<sup>5</sup>Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 1926), 71.

Hence the true text of holy Scripture is found today in the printed Masoretic text, in the Textus Receptus, and in the King James Version and other faithful translations.”<sup>6</sup>

If anyone says that God has not preserved His Word, then they ought to say He has not inspired it either. According to 2 Tim. 3:16, we have the complete Word of God. McElveen explained that “around 3800 times the Bible claims for itself to be the words of God.”<sup>7</sup> Inspiration of the Bible demands preservation of the Bible.

When the apostle Paul penned 2 Tim. 3:16, it was in view of all Scripture, not just the Old Testament. We know this because in 1 Tim. 5:18 we find both Old and New Testament scripture quoted in the same verse: “For the Scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn and, The labourer is worthy of his reward.” This verse quotes Deut. 25:4 and Luke 10:7. All Scripture, both Old and New Testament, is inspired by God.

A crucial passage in securing the validity of how God has inspired His Word is found in 2 Pet. 1:20-21: “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” The very words of God were given by the Holy Spirit, and He dictated the words through men who recorded them without error. The Apostle Peter said that the prophecies did not come (originate) from the prophets but by the Holy Spirit. God breathed His Word through holy men who wrote down the very words of God. According to *Strong’s Concordance*, the word *write* occurs in the Old Testament well over two hundred times. We find God-given commands to

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<sup>6</sup>Edward F. Hills, *King James Version Defended* (Des Moines, Iowa: Christian Research Press, 2000), 239.

<sup>7</sup>McElveen, *God’s Word, Final, Infallible and Forever*, 9.

write down the Holy Word of God. If God took meticulous care having His Word written down, would He then let His Word go unprotected during transmission? The world is sustained by God, why not His Holy Scriptures? According to W. S. Taylor, “The Lord has miraculously watched over His Word.”<sup>8</sup> Inspiration and preservation are intertwined doctrines of the Bible, and they are equally important and interdependent. The doctrine of inspiration teaches that God used men to record His very words, and that all of His words were inspired. The doctrine of preservation speaks to the keeping of His words for all eternity.

When we look at Scripture itself, we find God’s clear and forthright promises to preserve His Word for all generations. These Scripture that lay the biblical foundation and basis for preservation will now be the focus. This biblical material is called the internal evidence and is found throughout both the Old and New Testament Scriptures regarding the doctrine of preservation. The Book of Psalms has much to say concerning the endurance of Scriptures. In Ps. 12:6-7, the Bible states, “The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O Lord, Thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.” Ps. 12 differentiates between the Godly and the ungodly, between the vain words of men and the pure words of God. This psalm opens with a plea for help. God gives the help to man in His Word—words that are promised to be preserved, words that are pure and tested. This refers to the quality of God’s Word as silver was refined seven times in the refiner’s fire for purity. God’s Word is pure—perfect words preserved perfectly. God’s Word is what helps man—it will be here for man forever. Ps. 12 argues pointedly to the promise of a forever unchanging Word—preserved by God, as God is everlasting, so is His Word.

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 39.

Therefore, the Word of God is immutable and immutability is preservation. The Word of God will not fail for it is fully dependable.

The Bible says that His truth shall endure, “For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations” (Ps 100:5). Ps. 111:7-8 says, “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.” And Ps. 117:2 gives us a heart of praise: “For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the Lord endureth for ever. Praise ye the Lord.” Because His truth endures forever, we certainly should praise the Lord.

Many psalms teach that God’s testimonies are everlasting: “Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever; for they are the rejoicing of my heart” (Ps. 119:111). Ps. 119:144 declares, “The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding, and I shall live.” Ps. 119:152 continues, “Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that Thou hast founded them for ever.” Again in Ps. 119:160 we read, “Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.” All of God’s righteous judgments—all of His statements—from the beginning are true and will last forever. This affirms the preservation of God’s Word for eternity. These psalms, and many others, proclaim the doctrine of preservation.

The Scriptures of the New Testament further declare divine protection of the text. 1 Pet. 1:23-25 declares, “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the

gospel is preached unto you.” God’s Word liveth and abideth forever, thus proclaiming its own permanency. This verse gives us great confidence that the Holy Scriptures which are able to save us will last for all eternity. The grass and flower will fade and perish, but the Word of God remains. It is imperishable, enduring, and eternal.

Jesus declared in the beginning of His ministry that He did not come to teach or practice anything contrary to the Law in even the slightest way, but to uphold it entirely. At the outset of His ministry, He made clear that His authority and the Scripture’s authority were the same. Jesus speaking in Matt. 5:17-18 states, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.” The word *destroy* means to tear down, render useless, or to nullify. Jesus’ mission was not to destroy but to fulfill the holy teachings of Scripture. The word *fulfill* does not mean to add to the Scriptures, but to complete it. Jesus fulfilled the Law by fully meeting its demands. These verses are also very explicit in proclaiming that not one jot or tittle from Scripture would be lost from Scriptures according to the very words of Christ. The *jot* is the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The *tittle* is the smallest Hebrew mark that distinguished similar Hebrew letters of the written Word of God. These verses promise that not even in a miniscule way would any part of a word be lost. The Scriptures themselves teach that not one letter or one stroke would falter from being preserved. This speaks to the durability of the Word. This is a clear promise of the extent of the preservation of God’s Word. The *law*, referring to the entirety of the Old Testament Scriptures, has greater stability than the

heavens or earth. This is very strong language that Jesus used to teach us the preservation of Scripture.

Jesus, speaking once again in Matt. 24:35 said, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.” The earth shall perish, but His words will be preserved. This refers not just to His thoughts, will, or intentions, but His actual words. Jesus Christ promised their preservation, and the very words of God shall be established forever. Verbal inspiration means that every word is inspired. Verbal preservation means that every word inspired will be preserved. The Bible teaches verbal and plenary inspiration; therefore, the doctrine of inspiration and the doctrine of preservation are inseparable. In Matt. 4:4 Jesus said, “It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” Jesus identified every word signifying the totality of Scripture.

Jesus often quoted the Old Testament. He gave Moses, David, and others credit for penning God’s Holy Word. Luke 24:44 says, “And He said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.” Jesus spoke strongly in affirming the Old Testament Scriptures and authors: “Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:34-35). This text proclaims that God’s Word is indestructible; it cannot be broken or dismantled. Edward F. Hills commented that “the Lord Jesus Christ appealed unreservedly to the very words of the Old Testament text, Matt. 22:42-45, John 10:34-36,

thus indicating His confidence that this text had been accurately transmitted.”<sup>9</sup> Jesus “expressed this conviction in the strongest possible manner.”<sup>10</sup> With His words, we can believe in the infallibility, dependability, trustworthiness, and reliability of the Old Testament. Finally in Matt. 23:35 Jesus teaches us “that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.” By confirming the martyrs of Abel through Zacharias, Jesus was referencing and approving the canon of the Jewish Old Testament.

The written Word of God was originally entrusted to the care of the Levites: “And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished. That Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee” (Deut. 31:24-26). God used people to protect and preserve His Word. The Jewish scribes, also known as the Soferim, demonstrated great care and precision in transcribing the Word. These copyists kept the reverence needed to produce an unadulterated text. We read in Neh. 8:1 that Ezra was one of these scribes: “All the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel.” Chapter 12 and verse 26 of this same book mentions Ezra as a priest and a scribe. Ezra was himself partially responsible for the protection of the transcribed Word, as were the men of Hezekiah (Prov. 25:1).

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<sup>9</sup>Edward F. Hills, *Believing Bible Study* (Des Moines, Iowa: Christian Research Press, 1977), 6.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

Later, the Jewish Masoretes were the professional copiers of the Old Testament Scriptures. Their detailed care is unquestioned in the handling of God's sacred text. Even though the Jews were dispersed, God's powerful hand protected and provided great care in the transmission of the Old Testament. The New Testament reaffirms that the Jews were the custodians of the Old Testament words. In Rom. 3:2 the Bible says that "unto them were committed the oracles of God." This clearly states that the oracles of God were committed to the Jews. The Jews were entrusted with, and became, the custodians and guardians of the Word of God.

If God promised in the Old Testament that His Word shall never fail and Jesus repeated this conclusion along with New Testament teachings, then we must believe that the Word of God has been preserved by God down through the ages just as He promised. We possess a trustworthy reproduction of the Holy Scriptures.

If preservation was not important, why would God give us the following warnings not to add to or take away from His Word? The Bible says of itself: "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you" (Deut. 4:2). In the twelfth chapter of this same book Moses wrote, "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it" (Deut. 12:32). Proverbs 30:6 says, "Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar." Jer. 26:2 declares: "Thus saith the LORD; stand in the court of the LORD's house, and speak unto all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the LORD's house, all the words that I command thee to speak unto them; diminish not a word." And finally in Rev. 22:18-19 the warning is given, "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words

of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.” Therefore God is explicit that every word will remain as He gave it. The psalmist declared, “Forever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven” (Ps. 119:89).

The Bible clearly teaches, both in the Old or New Testament, the verbal plenary inspiration and providential preservation of each word of the Old and New Testament. Men who believe that the Word of God has been lost in part or in whole are trying to recover the Holy Scriptures. Thus the Bible becomes a guessing game, leaning upon men and textual criticism. Would God let His Word be lost? Can man decipher what is the Word of God and what is not? We must maintain that the Word of God has been preserved perfectly. Anything short of this leads eventually to a liberal and low view of the doctrine of bibliology. Turretin wrote, “If the Hebrew edition of the Old Testament and the Greek edition of the New Testament are not authentic, there would be no authentic version, since none besides this has a divine testimony of its own authenticity. Thus there would be no authentic Word of God in the church, no end of contentions because there would be no sure rule of faith and practice in which we might have full confidence.”<sup>11</sup>

The Traditional Text—Received Text in printed form—is the true text that has been acknowledged and preserved by the church down through the centuries. It is from the majority manuscripts that evidence the Received Text in which God has preserved His Word. It should be evident that the doctrine of preservation pervades the entire Bible.

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<sup>11</sup>Turretin, *Institutes of Eclectic Theology*, 114.

God makes many clear promises of His providential care of His own Word. Those who reject the doctrine of preservation reject the Word of God. God has preserved by divine power and given us an unaltered and pure text of Scripture. Do we hold the Word of God in our hands? According to the Bible, the answer is a definite yes. If God said He would protect His Word then we must believe it.