How We Got the Bible

Preservation

The question we want to answer today is: Do we have today, and will the future generations have tomorrow, the same revelation that was recorded in the autographs? Does God *preserve* that revelation for us? In other words, when you and I hold a translation of the Bible do we really have God's Word in our hands?

The answer is the doctrine of *Preservation.*

Four views of Preservation of the Bible.

God's "Words" have not been preserved. To those who believe the Bible is less than revelation from God the Bible is not His preserved 'Word'. It is just myth or legend or the words of man.

God's Words are only preserved in a certain English translation. This is a view held by a minority of people that the Word of God is only preserved in the King James Version of the Bible even to the exclusion of the Greek and Hebrew. A more common view is that the King James Bible is the only preserved Word of God for English speaking people.

God's Words are preserved in one particular Hebrew and one particular Greek text. Those that hold this position believe the Word of God is only perfectly preserved in one particular Masoretic Hebrew text and the Textus Receptus Greek text.

God's Words are preserved in the totality of the manuscripts. This position holds that the Word of God is preserved in all of the existing Hebrew and Greek manuscripts.

The Bible teaches that God has providentially preserved His written Word. This preservation exists in the totality of the ancient manuscripts and God has enabled His people to compare copies and their variations in order to arrive at an accurate representation of the original inscription. God's Word has not passed away but has been transmitted in a manner that preserves the truth that He gave in a form that is consistent with the original writings. We are certain therefore that we have the very Word of God.

- The Bible teaches that God has providentially preserved His written Word. First we want to look at a couple of the popular verses used to teach the preservation of the Bible. One of the most frequently quoted passages is Psalm 12:6-7. The specific question is this: When taken in context, what is the word '*them'* in verse 7 referring to? (The third person plural pronominal suffix on the verb is masculine, referring back to the "oppressed" and "needy" in v. 5 (both of those nouns are plural in form), suggesting that the verb means "protect" here. The suffix does not refer to אִמֳרוֹת ('imarot, "words") in v. 6, because that term is feminine gender.)
  A second commonly used verse is Matthew 4:4. This is a reference to Deuteronomy 8:3. Let us also consider these verses: Isaiah 40:8 / 1 Peter 1:23-25; Matthew 5:18.

- This preservation exists in the totality of the ancient manuscripts. There are over 3,000 preserved copies of various portions of the Old Testament and over 5,000 preserved copies of portions of the New Testament. The oldest copies are written on long rolls made of papyrus and later parchment. Later manuscripts were put into "book" form called a *codex.* Reproducing copies requires no change in form. From this we can draw three conclusions: (1) Nothing of the autographs is lost: everything is preserved among the copies. (2) What differences there may be among the copies are minimal and solvable. (3) We have adequate methods for reconstructing the text satisfactorily where it does have differences.
- God's Word has not passed away but has been transmitted in a manner that preserves the truth that He gave in a form that is consistent with the original writings. Here we see the preservation of God's Word through translation. The oldest ancient translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek is the Septuagint (LXX). It was begun by the 3rd century B.C. and completed before 132 B.C. Translation is a more involved process than making copies. Other early language translations are found in Latin, Egyptian, Syriach, and Ethiopic. Translating requires great skill and understanding. It is important, when God's thoughts are transferred from the original language to the target language that they remain God's thoughts as they were in the copies.

Where is the Word of God preserved?

The Word of God is preserved without error. Since we do not have the actual originals we must rely on the most accurate copies we have available. We should be thankful that God, in His providence, has allowed men to make copies, preserve copies, locate copies and translate those copies.

The Word of God is preserved in a faithful, accurate, translation.

St. Augustine (354 – 430)

> " We must either endeavor to get a knowledge of those languages from which the Scriptures are translated into Latin, or we must get hold of the translations of those who keep rather close to the letter of the original, not because these are sufficient, but because we may use them to correct the freedom or the error of others, who in their translations have chosen to follow the sense quite as much as the words."