

Sunday, October 16, 2016—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
Lesson 32 Preservation: Examining the Relevant Passages, Psalm 12:6-7 (Part 2)

Introduction/Review

- In the previous lesson we began our investigation into whether or not the scriptures teach a formal doctrine of perseveration. Please recall the following three views laid out in Lesson 30:
 - View 1—Denial of a Doctrine of Preservation
 - View 2—Preservation in the KJV/TR/MT Tradition
 - View 3—Preservation in the Totality of Manuscripts
- We commenced this process by initiating an examination of the relevant passages commonly used to teach the doctrine of preservation. Our investigation began with Psalm 12:6-7.
- By way of review, we observed the following general points about Psalm 12:6-7 in Lesson 31:
 - Many believe it to be the clearest and most important promise in the entire cannon regarding God’s promise to preserve His word.
 - Controversy surrounds the passage regarding who or what is being preserved: 1) the “words” or 2) the people i.e., “poor” and “needy” from verse 5.
 - Those who maintain that the passage is teaching the preservation of the people generally make two arguments to support their position: 1) Grammatical Arguments and 2) Contextual Arguments.
- As we investigate Psalm 12 we will consider the following points:
 - Grammatical Arguments: Gender Discordance
 - Contextual Arguments: Preservation of the Righteous
 - Correct Exposition: Preservation of the Words
 - Extreme uses of Psalm 12:6-7 in pro-King James argumentation
- The bulk of Lesson 31 focused on point one; “Grammatical Arguments: Gender discordance”. It was concluded that arguments based upon gender agreeance were inconsistent, irregular, and therefore inadequate for proving that Psalm 12:6-7 does not teach the preservation of the “words.”

- In this lesson we want to focus our attention on points two and three; namely: “Contextual Arguments” and the “Actual Teaching” of the passage.

Psalm 12:6-7

Contextual Arguments: The Preservation of the Righteous

- For the sake of consistency, let’s begin our discussion by looking at William W. Combs’ essay “The Preservation of Scripture.” Combs summarizes the contextual arguments as follows:
 - “David’s subject in the Psalm is stated right in verse 1: “Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases to be, for the faithful disappear from among the sons of men.” David is concerned about the righteous who are being oppressed by the wicked of “this generation.” In the midst of this he declares his assurance that God will preserve the righteous forever. Taken in this sense, this passage has no bearing on the doctrine of preservation.” (Combs, 15)
- In other words, according to Combs, the context of the passage is about the preservation of God’s people not the “words” of God.
- W. Edward Glenny agrees with Combs regarding the context of Psalm 12 and offers the following expanded explanation in his essay, “The Preservation of Scripture”:
 - “The psalm is an expression of David’s confidence in the pure words of God. In verse 4 he prays for deliverance from the proud flatterers all around him who cannot be trusted (v. 2b). Verse 5 gives the source of David’s confidence; he is assured that the Lord will deliver him from those maligning him. In verses 6-8 David declares that his confidence is in God’s Word. In this context, David’s expression of confidence in God’s Word in verse 6 refers to his confidence in God’s affirmation that He will deliver the afflicted (v. 5). Then, in verse 7, on the basis of his confidence in God’s Word (vv. 5-6), David declares his assurance that God will preserve forever the righteous, who are being afflicted, by the wicked of “this generation.” The pronoun “them” in verse 7 (“thou shalt keep them”) does not refer to the “words” of verse 6. It refers to the “poor” and the “needy” of verse 5, and the “godly” and “faithful” men of verse 1, whom the Lord will “preserve” (v. 7b). Furthermore, in context the “generation” (v. 7) must be the wicked who are all around the psalmist and dominate his society (vv. 1-4). It would not make sense to say that God will preserve His Word from the generation of David throughout eternity. What about the generations before David? Was God not concerned about His Word then? The point of the psalm is that the godly man will never cease; the faithful will never “fail from among the children of men” (v. 1). The righteous will never disappear from the face of the earth because God will “preserve them from this generation forever” (v. 7). Verse 8 clinches the contextual arguments. It again returns to the topic of the wicked all around from whom David and future generations of the righteous will be delivered.” (Glenny, 90-91)

- First, it is important to note that Glenny’s contextual argument is predicated and depended upon the grammatical argument regarding “gender discordance.” We have already concluded in Lesson 31 that grammatical arguments based upon gender accordance are inconsistent and inconclusive. Consequently, since Glenny’s contextual argument is so grammar dependent, I find his exposition based upon contextual consideration to be inconclusive.
- Second, to argue that since David states, “from this generation for ever” in verse 7 means that God was not concerned about the preservation of His word before David’s generation, is not a sound argument and disregards a host of relevant cross references.
 - Exodus 24:4—is Glenny saying that God did not care what happened to the words written by Moses before the time David.
 - Isaiah 30:8—does this verse mean that God was not concerned about His word before the book of Isaiah was written?
- In Psalm 12, David is speaking from the point of view of the scriptures he is in the process of penning.
- Third, where are the relevant cross-references to support Glenny’s contextual interpretation that God’s people will be perpetually preserved in an earthly sense from evil doers? God’s people continue to suffer many things at the hands of wicked men even in the dispensation of grace. While there are no cross-references to support the notion that God will preserve His people from evil doers, there are ample parallel passages to support the teaching that God will preserve His word “forever.”
 - Psalm 119:152, 160; Isaiah 30:8; Matthew 24:35; I Peter 1:23-25
- Combs and Glenny are not the only writers to deny that Psalm 12:6-7 is referring to the preservation of God’s written word based upon grammatical and contextual arguments. Jon Rehurek’s “Preservation of the Bible: Providential or Miraculous? The Biblical View” uses Combs, Glenny, and J.J. Stewart Perowne’s *Commentary of Psalms: 2 Volumes in 1* to argue similarly. Rehurek concludes:
 - “. . . this passage does not speak of the preservation of God’s written Word; it only addresses the purity and trustworthiness of His words and the preservation that is being spoken of concerns the righteous men.” (Rehurek, 83)
- After considering the relevant writings, it is evident that grammatical and contextual arguments are working in concert with each other by those who seek to deny that Psalm 12:6-7 are teaching the preservation of the written word.

Correct Exposition: Preservation of the Words

- Preservationist Thomas M. Strouse acknowledges that the King James rendering of Psalm 12:6-7 stands in contradiction to that of modern versions. Strouse views the passage as one of the “clearest promises” of preservation in the Old Testament.
 - “Psalm 12 is a psalm of contrasts. It contrasts the Godly with the ungodly and the Words of the Lord with the words of men. The latter contrast provides the backdrop to one of the clearest promises in the OT of the preservation of God’s Words.” (Strouse, 29)
- Structurally, Strouse sees the psalm as one of asymmetric contrasts:
 - “The structure of the psalm is asymmetric. This structure causes the focus to be on C, God’s Promises (see below). David’s lament carries the reader from the need for Divine help, because of the words of the ungodly, to focus on the promises of God for deliverance, which include the permanent preservation of His Words, the antidote to the words of the ever-present wicked.
 - (A) The recognition of the need for Divine help (v. 1)
 - (B) The threat of the words of the ungodly (vv. 2-4)
 - (C) God’s promises (v. 5)
 - (A’) The antidote of the Words of God (vv. 6-7)
 - (B’) The recognition of the need for Divine help (v. 8) (Strouse, 30)
- Without reproducing the totality of his article, Strouse draws his reader’s attention to verse 5, or statement C above.
 - “The structure of the psalm focuses on the promises of God. The Lord promised that, because “of the oppression of the poor,” and “of the sighing of the needy,” He would “arise and set him in safety from him that puffeth at him.” Since the “poor” were despoiled and the “needy” were groaning, the Lord made significant promises.” (Strouse, 31)
- Psalm 12:5—notice that the protection of the “poor” and “needy” is based upon what the LORD said i.e., His words. In the near context, the psalmist has already expressed that the Lord will “arise” to help the “poor” and “needy”.
 - Psalm 9:18-19—contains the Lord’s promise to “arise” and protect the “poor” and “needy.”

- Psalm 10:12-14—the Lord will “arise” to help the “poor.”
- The promise of hope offered in verse 5 is only as good as the Lord’s ability to perform/execute His promise.
- Psalm 12:6-7—with the promise of God in mind in verse 5, the words of the Lord are contrasted in verses 6 and 7 with the words of the ungodly in verses 2 through 4. Regarding verses 6 and 7 Strouse writes:
 - “The content of God’s help was the assurance of His ever-present Words with promises of deliverance as an antidote to the words of the wicked. The psalmist reflected on this quality and endurance of the great tangible help that the Lord desires to give man—His perfect words. The quality of the Lord’s Words is likened to purified silver from a refining furnace. The result of the seven-fold refining process produced one hundred percent perfect silver in the ancient world, an apt illustration for the quality of the perfect Words of the Lord. David revealed the endurance of God’s Words, indicating that they would be preserved from that generation forever.” (Strouse, 31)
- The expression “from this generation for ever” reflects that David is referring to the “words” of hope he has been in the process of penning. In other words, the statement applies to the words David is in the process of writing under inspiration. Attempts to argue that the verse is not teaching the preservation of God’s “words” because it only mentions the current generation and nothing before David, are weak and fail to take into account how Psalm 12 fits into the book of Psalms as a whole.
- Psalm 12:8—David concludes the psalm by recognizing his need for the Lord’s help given that the wicked surround him on every side. Consequently,
 - “David recognized that the proud words of the wicked flatterers were a constant problem, but the perfect words of God will always counter man’s lies.” (Strouse, 31)
- Without the preservation of the “words”, what hope do the poor and needy have of their foretold future deliverance. Arguing that this passage does not teach the preservation of the “words” throws the content of the Lord’s promise in verse 5 into question. Not only that, as we have already pointed out, the poor and needy have not been perpetually and supernaturally kept safe from the wicked since the generation of David.
- The entire psalm is about the words of the wicked versus the words of God.
- In the end, I believe that the passage is teaching the preservation of the “words.” That being said, I would disagree with Strouse that His promise necessitates “exact sameness” or “verbatim” wording.

Extreme uses of Psalm 12:6-7 in pro-King James Argumentation

- Many King James advocates hold either explicitly or implicitly that Psalm 12:6-7 is referring to the KJB. In other words, they have in their thinking the notion that David is speaking directly about the KJB in this passage.
- The expression “as silver tried in a furnace of earth purified seven times” at the end of verse 6 is taken to be a direct reference to the KJB. This argument is made because the KJB is the seventh translation of the *Textus Receptus* into the English.
 - 1525—Tyndale
 - 1535—Coverdale
 - 1537—Matthews
 - 1539—Great Bible
 - 1560—Geneva Bible
 - 1568—Bishops Bible
 - 1611—King James Bible
- This assertion is based upon the numerical argument that seven is the number of perfection coupled with King James having been the seventh transition of the TR into English; therefore, it is argued that the King James is “perfect.” In order to make this argument one must make the following assumptions:
 - David is speaking about the KJB when he wrote Psalm 12.
 - All the various editions of the six earlier TR translations into English should not be counted.
- In her booklet, *The Hidden History of the English Scriptures: Given by Inspiration to All Generations* commemorating the 400th anniversary of the KJB, Gail Riplinger includes a section titled ““Purified Seven Times” Not Eight.”
 - “The KJB translators would not approve of further tampering with the English Bible. . . The KJB translators did not see their translation as one in the midst of a chain of ever evolving English translations. They wanted their Bible to be one of which no one could justly say, ‘It is good, except this word or that word. . .’ They planned: “to make . . . out of many good ones (Wycliffe, Tyndale, Coverdale, Great, Geneva, and the Bishops’) one principal good one, not justly to be expected against; that hath been our endeavor, that our mark’ The translators said that their translations was “perfected.” . . . The KJB translators’ assertion that their edition “perfected” leaves no work left for the new version translators. The enemy is at war with the word of God.” (Riplinger, 48-49)
- Gail Riplinger’s comments above typify the type of reasoning regarding Psalm 12:6-7 present in much pro-King James literature and teaching.

- A less extreme view of Psalm 12:6-7 might hold that the verses in question necessitate a sevenfold refinement process in any receptor language in order for God's "perfect" word to exist in that language.
- The dictionary defines a simile as a comparison between two things using the words "like" or "as". Psalm 12:6 contains a simile to explain how pure God's "words" are. How pure are the words of God, "as silver tried in a furnace of earth purified seven times."
- While I believe that Psalm 12:6-7 is teaching the preservation of the "words" I do not believe that the psalmist penned these verses with an early 17th century English translation in mind. Rather David is referring to the "words" he is the process of writing in Hebrew.
- It was those Hebrew words that God preserved thereby giving the King James translators something to translate into English. This is not to say that translations cannot be part of the preservation process, it simply means that David is not referring to or speaking about the KJB in Psalm 12.

Works Cited

- Combs, William W. "[The Preservation of Scripture?](#)" in *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*. Fall 2000.
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- Rehurek, Jon. "Preservation of the Bible: Providential or Miraculous? The Biblical View" in *The Master's Seminary Journal*. Spring 2008.
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