

Sunday, March 5, 2017—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
 Lesson 50 The Process of Preservation: The People of Preservation in the Old Testament

Introduction

- In Lessons 48 and 49 we observed that God’s design was to preserve His word in a multiplicity of accurate reliable copies that were just as authoritative as the original autographs. According to God’s word, it was never His design to preserve His word by preserving the original documents.
- Today in Lesson 50 we want to look at the details of how this preservation would occur during the Old Testament. In order to accomplish this task we will be looking at the following three points:
 - Israel: The Institution for Preservation in the Old Testament
 - Importance of the Words “Keep” and “Preserve”
 - The Means of Preservation Within the Nation
 - The Role of Individuals and Families
 - The Role of the Levites and Scribes

Israel: The Institution for Preservation in the Old Testament

- Thus far, we have learned that God has promised to preserve His word. We have seen that the promise of preservation was accomplished through a multiplicity of accurate, reliable copies that are just as authoritative as the originals themselves. In this lesson, we will discuss the people God used in time past to accomplish the preservation of His word.
- God has always had an appointed group of people to copy and preserve His word. When it comes to the preservation of the Old Testament, there was a distinct group of people that were charged with the responsibility of preserving and copying the word of God in time past, specifically, the nation of Israel.
- Romans 3:1-2— according to Paul, the word of God was given to the nation Israel. One of the reasons, purposes, and functions for which God chose the nation of Israel was to have a vehicle through which He could give and preserve His word. In time past God entrusted His word to that nation.
 - Acts 7:38
 - Romans 9:3-5
- In an essay titled “Israel, the Means of Preservation in the Old Testament”, Dr. Kent Brandenburg identifies the nation of Israel as the “institution” whereby God accomplished the preservation of the Old Testament. Regarding the matter, Dr. Brandenburg states in part:

- “God spoke to mankind in the Old Testament through the leadership of Israel. From the New Testament, there is the clear sense that the Jews considered the Law and the Prophets to be given to them for the keeping. Israel was God’s depository and repository for His Words in the Old Testament.” (Brandenburg in *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, 105)
- We have seen that God has always taken the initiative with respect to preservation. God gave Moses the commandments, and Moses destroyed them. Then, God Almighty took the initiative to reproduce them by re-inspiring original number two. God is the one who took the initiative in preservation. Preservation is not something that God leaves for man to do because man wants to do it. Rather, it is God’s design, His purpose, and His plan.

Importance of the Words “Keep” and “Preserve”

- Psalm 12:6-7—we already established back in Lessons 31 and 32 that these verses are talking about the preservation of God’s word not the people. Verse 7 contains two Hebrew words that are significant to our discussion this morning in Lesson 50 regarding the process of how preservation occurred.
 - *Shamar*—or “keep” in Psalm 12:7
 - *Natsar*—or “preserve” in Psalm 12:7
- *Shamar*—“is used with the meaning of “to hedge about, guard, protect, attend to, or exercise great care over.” *Shamar* appears in Genesis 3:24 as the activity of the Cherubim in protecting or guarding the Garden of Eden after God had evicted Adam and Eve. Other locations give this same sense of guarding against intruders with reference to gatekeepers (Is. 21:11) or to watchman (Song 5:7). In Genesis 2:15 *shamar* is used for Adam’s activity in taking care of or tending to the things of the Garden of Eden. In this way it is also used for the keeping of a flock (Gen. 30:31) or a house (II Sam. 15:16). In Proverbs 6:24, *shamar* characterizes the guardianship of a young man from the strange woman, in essence, the instruction of a parent protecting his moral purity. Cain in Genesis 4:9 asked, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” This use of *shamar* applies to the defending or attending to someone for his safekeeping.” (Brandenburg in *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, 98-99)
- *Natsar*—“has the understanding of “protect, maintain, obey, and preserve.” Proverbs 27:18 clearly uses it in the sense of protecting or preserving an item of agriculture, saying, “Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof; so he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured.” *Natsar* was used to communicate the function of protecting military or agricultural properties (Job 27:18; Nah. 2:1), and those employed in this activity were called watchmen (Jer. 31:6; II Kin. 17:9; 18:8). In Psalm 141:3 *natsar* decries the ethical maintenance of one’s mouth or vocal mechanism (Prov. 13:3). The same use of *natsar* related to the preservation of one’s heart (Prov. 4:23), tongue (Ps. 34:14), and path of life (Prov. 16:17).” (Brandenburg in *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, 98)
- “Both of these words as witnessed in their usage, contain the strong sense of “guarding, protecting, tending, preserving, or maintaining.” Any object toward which these two verbs might direct their action would receive this same essential trust. How these verbs are used with objects other than “words” or some synonym of “words” should be applied to their understanding when they are used with “words” or some synonym of “words.” (Brandenburg in *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, 99)

- Psalm 119 brings together the use of the Hebrew verbs *shamar* and *natsar* along with a bunch of synonyms for the “words.” As we saw in Lesson 33, throughout Psalm 119 a host of different yet synonymous words are used interchangeably to refer to the scriptures. Please note that the number in parenthesis indicates that number of times that the word or phrase occurs in Psalm 119.
 - Psalm 119:1— “law of the Lord” (24 times)
 - Psalm 119:2— “testimonies” (22 times)
 - Psalm 119:3— “his ways” (6 times)
 - Psalm 119:4— “thy precepts” (21 times)
 - Psalm 119:5— “thy statutes” (22 times)
 - Psalm 119:6— “thy commandments” (21 times)
 - Psalm 119:7— “righteous judgements” (18 times)
 - Psalm 119:9, 11— “thy word” (38 times)

- Virtually every verse in Psalm 119 contains a reference to the words of God. There are 176 verses in the Psalm and 172 of them contain one of the words identified above. As the preeminent chapter regarding the word of God in all of scripture, Psalm 119 combines these synonyms for scripture with the two Hebrew verbs in question. Unless otherwise noted, the verb in each of the following verses is *shamar*.
 - Psalm 119:2 (*natsar*), 4, 5, 8, 17, 22 (*natsar*), 33 (*natsar*), 34 (*natsar*), 55, 56 (*natsar*), 57, 60, 63, 67, 69 (*natsar*), 88, 100 (*natsar*), 101, 106, 115 (*natsar*), 129 (*natsar*), 134, 136, 145 (*natsar*), 146, 158, 167, 168

- Psalm 12:6-7—God has seen to the keeping, guarding, protecting, and preservation of His words because He promised that He would (see also Psalm 146:5-6). God has His part in the preservation process and ensures it. That being said, the way God executes the process is through the cooperation of believing men. Simply stated, what God is keeping He wants men keeping. God ensures the keeping but He uses men to do it. “No one should doubt that God will keep His Words, but this does not take away from the responsibilities that man has in preservation. Repeatedly, God instructs man to keep His Words.”
 - Exodus 15:26; 20:5-6—“keep” = *shamar*
 - Leviticus 18:4-5—“keep” = *shamar*
 - Deuteronomy 4:2; 11:22; 29:9—“keep” = *shamar*
 - Joshua 22:5—“keep” = *shamar*
 - I Kings 2:3—“keep” = *shamar*
 - II Kings 17:13—“keep” = *shamar*
 - I Chronicles 29:19—“keep” = *shamar*
 - II Chronicles 34:31—“keep” = *shamar*

- Nehemiah 1:9—“keep” = *shamar*
- Psalm 78:7—“keep” = *shamar*
- Ecclesiastes 12:13—“keep” = *shamar*
- Ezekiel 11:20—“keep” = *shamar*
- Daniel 9:4—“keep” = *shamar*
- Some might argue the word “keep” is essentially a synonym for “do” or “obey”; according to Dr. Kent Brandenburg there are several reasons why that is not true.
 - First is the meaning or usage of *natsar* and *shamar*. These words do not mean “do” or “obey.” They do mean “keep, protect, preserve, or guard.”
 - Second, there are Hebrew words for “do” and “obey.” Deuteronomy 12:1 uses “do” with reference to God’s Word when it says, (quotes verse) . . . There is more to *natsar* and *shamar* than just “doing” or “obeying.”
 - Third, there are several verses which highlight a difference between “keep” and “do” or “obey” in the same verse.
 - Leviticus 25:18—“keep” = *shamar*; “do” = *asah*
 - Deuteronomy 13:4—“keep” = *shamar*; “obey” = *shama*
 - Ezekiel 36:27—“keep” = *shamar*; do = *asah*
 - Ezekiel 37:24—“observe” = *shamar*; “do” = *asah* (Brandenburg in *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, 102-103)
- In summation of this point Dr. Brandenburg writes:
 - “The word “keep” (*natsar* or *shamar*) is not used as a synonym for “do” or “obey.” Instead, it has its own meaning that was used to distinguish a particular activity with reference to His Words.

God’s Words, all and each of them, are kept by more than just doing or obeying them. “Keep” elevates the task beyond solely “obeying” or “doing.” God’s Words are preserved by His people through their believing, preaching, teaching, practicing, and defending them (in addition, I would say by copying them). Every one of these tasks is taught in God’s Word and they are all interrelated. Belief leads to teaching and practice. Teaching leads to belief and practice. Practice leads to belief and teaching. If Scripture is lost because it is not defended, then it cannot be believed, taught, or practiced. God’s word is defended by believing, teaching, and practicing it. . . When Scripture becomes less valued or important because of wrong belief, teaching, and practice, then Scripture will be ignored and lost by the ones responsible for keeping it. Vigilance in keeping (*natsar* and *shamar*) requires more than just doing or obeying; it involves all of the

activities that will allow God's Word to be passed down from one generation to the next for the glory of the Lord." (Brandenburg in *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, 103)

The Means of Preservation within the Nation

- The "keeping" or preservation of the scriptures in time past was both a corporate and individual charge. This is observable by noting the use of both singular and plural personal pronouns with "to keep."
 - Psalm 119:17—the individual believer is responsible for the preservation of Scripture.
 - Leviticus 26:3—the entire nation of Israel was also responsible for the preservation of Scripture.
- We see therefore that the job of preserving God's word was both individual and corporate. Individual families played a role in keeping/preserving God's word as did the God ordained religious hierarchy of the nation.

The Role of Individuals and Families

- "Part of the continuation of any aspect of Israel's worship was dependent on the practice of individual families as led by their fathers. Worship at the temple only continued when fathers preserved it by bringing their animals to that location for sacrificial offerings. Passing down God's Word relied upon the diligent transfer to the children. As the nation was God's preserving institution, the family accomplished this task on the most fundamental level." (Brandenburg in *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, 106)
 - Deuteronomy 6:6-9
 - Deuteronomy 11:18-21
- "When parents keep God's Words themselves, and pass them down to their children, then nations also keep and pass them on." (Brandenburg in *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, 106)

The Role of the Levites and Scribes

- Deuteronomy 31:24-26—Moses took the initial section of the word of God when it was completed there, and he put it in the ark for keeping. He committed that text that he began to write to the priest, (the Levites). Those Levites were charged with the responsibility of keeping the book.
- Moses did not put the word in the ark because he no longer wanted it. He was not trying to get rid of it. Neither did Moses put the word in the ark because he knew he would die, and he wanted it kept safe. If Moses was just worried about the fact that he would die, what do you think he would have done with it? Who would he have given it to? He surely would have given it to Joshua because Joshua would be his successor. But, Moses did not give it to Joshua, rather, he put it in the ark, and he committed it to the Levites to take care of. Moses put the word in the ark because God's design was not just that Joshua had the word, but that there would be a group of people selected out and charged with the responsibility of taking care of His word. In time past the Levites were charged with the care and oversight of God's word.

- Deuteronomy 10:1-9— God said to put the word in the ark, and then He raises up an entire group of people to take care of the ark. God sets up an entire tribe of people to do the job of preserving His word. It is important that you see that. The Old Testament is to be preserved by the tribe of Levi, especially the issue of the priesthood. One of their primary functions has to do with preserving the word of God and teaching the word of God. God never designed to preserve His word by writing it and putting it up on a library shelf somewhere, just like they did not put the word in the ark just to put it away.
- Deuteronomy 31:9-12, 19—the idea is that the word is to be copied, and it is to be taught to the people. There is a group of people, an entire tribe in Israel (the Levites), chosen by God and separated from all of their brethren and given the responsibility, among other things, of keeping that book, and copying that book, and preserving that book, and teaching that book to the nation.
- We will continue our discussion of this point in Lesson 51.

Works Cited

Brandenburg, Kent. "Israel, the Means of Preservation in the Old Testament" in *Thou Shalt Keep Them: A Biblical Theology of the Perfect Preservation of Scripture*. El Sobrante, CA: Pillar & Ground Publishing, 2003.