

Sunday, March 19, 2017—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
 Lesson 52 The Process of Preservation: Preservation and the New Testament

- Since Lesson 47 we have been looking at the Method and Process of preservation. The process that we have been discussing, which is clearly laid out in the scripture, demonstrates that God’s design was to preserve His word in a multiplicity of accurate reliable copies. According to the word of God, these copies were just as authoritative and reliable as the original autographs themselves. These copies were distributed among the people to be read, studied, and memorized.
- In Lessons 50 and 51 we studied how the Process of Preservation occurred in the Old Testament. In order to accomplish this purpose we considered 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
- We concluded Lesson 51 by discussing the fall of Israel and its potential impact upon the doctrine of preservation. In doing so we concluded that with the fall of Israel, the special group of people God used to preserve His word changed, but the process itself did not change. The design stayed the same; however, the group of people changed.
- With this in mind we want to begin a consideration of the Process of Preservation in the New Testament.

Preservation and the New Testament

- When discussing the preservation of the New Testament we are faced with a unique challenge. There are not any scriptures written after the New Testament from which one can demonstrate that the New Testament was preserved.
- One of the ways I demonstrated to you that the Old Testament was preserved was by looking in the New Testament and seeing that they had copies of the Old Testament. It was not just that God said that He was going to preserve His word. If Jesus can go into Nazareth and open up a copy of the book of Isaiah and read from it and call it scripture, then I know the book of Isaiah had been preserved until 30 AD when Jesus read it in Luke 4. But we do not have anything like that for the New Testament. There is no way to go to any later scripture to authoritatively identify the fact that the New Testament has been preserved like you can with the Old Testament. Therefore, you must understand the doctrine of preservation as outlined in the scriptures and stand upon it by faith as a Biblical FACT.
- When we come to the New Testament, we are placed in a position where we must walk by faith and not by sight. We are required to understand the promise of preservation as set forth in

scripture. By this time, you certainly should understand it. If you have studied through your bible, you should certainly understand the doctrine of preservation, and the process involved; the fact that God designed to preserve His word through a process of copying and that He entrusted that task to a particular group of people. When you come to the New Testament, you no longer need that demonstration. You can rest upon the bible FACT that what God can preserve before our dispensation, He can preserve during the dispensation of grace so that we can have it.

- The reason we know that God preserved the New Testament is because we have demonstrated beyond doubt from the word of God that God promised to preserve the Old Testament, and observed its historical reality by looking at the New Testament. It follows therefore, that God would do the same for the New Testament.
- In this lesson, by looking at six to eight passages, I want you to see that during the lifetime of Paul and the apostles who wrote the New Testament (Mark and Luke were not apostles but Paul, James, Peter, John and Jude were apostles), copies of their writings, i.e. the New Testament books, were being made. The New Testament books were collected together, and distributed among the saints as they were being written. These books were being studied as scripture during the lifetime of the New Testament apostles. They were authoritatively recognized as scripture. They were not recognized as scripture hundreds of years later by the decrees of some apostate church council, but they were recognized as scripture during the lifetime of the men who wrote the New Testament.
- If you can understand the design that God followed to preserve His word, it is not strange when you come to the New Testament and find that copies of the word of God were readily available, and they were recognized as scripture while the New Testament was still in the process of being written.

Preservation and the New Testament

- II Peter 3:1-2—when we looked at that verse previously, I pointed out to you that Peter’s attitude towards the books that he was writing was that they are just as authoritative as what the Old Testament prophets wrote.
- II Peter 3:15-16—do you see Peter’s estimation of what Paul wrote? Peter said that they take Paul’s epistles and they twist them as they do the other scriptures.
- The Apostle Peter obviously considered the epistles of Paul to be scripture. Notice that Peter had all of Paul’s epistles that were written at that time, according to II Peter 3:16.
- It is interesting that Peter had all of Paul’s epistles, and he had them for some time. It was not just Peter that had Paul’s epistles because folks were studying them to the point that some were already wresting them during the first century.
- By the way, these epistles were not written to Peter, nor were any of Paul’s epistles written to the Jerusalem church. Paul’s epistles were written to the Gentile churches, and then copies were made and Peter had copies of them down in Palestine. Peter was not the only one that had copies; all of the people to whom Peter is writing possessed copies as well. They were studying them, and they were getting confused doctrinally by not rightly dividing the word of truth.

- When Paul says to rightly divide the word, the saints of the first century had access to the scriptures. Part of what they had access to was the prophetic program and part it was the mystery program (Paul's epistles), and they had to rightly divide it. The scriptures were being written, copied, and placed into the hands of the people. Then those copies were being distributed far and wide, and they were recognized, at that time, as being the word of God. Peter calls the copies of Paul's epistles scripture i.e., of equal authority to the originals. The only way that could happen is just to have a bunch of people with copies of Paul's epistles and copies of the rest of the word of God. They had copies and none of them possessed the original manuscripts. If one thinks that Peter is referring to the original manuscripts then Peter, a circumcision apostle, would have needed to have stolen the Gentile church's epistles in order to have them in his personal possession.
- The subject of verse 16 is "as also in all *his* epistles." People were studying them and twisting them like the other scriptures. "His epistles" in verse 16 are clearly considered to be scripture. Peter has them and the people that Peter is writing to in the Jewish church have them, and they have had them for some time because they had them long enough to have been studying them.
- I Timothy 4:13-16—notice the instructions that Paul gave to Timothy in verse 13 – "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." What is Timothy supposed to read? From what is Timothy supposed to exhort the people? From where does his authority come? Paul is telling Timothy to read the scripture. He is to exhort the people from the scripture. He is to teach them doctrine from the scripture. Paul expects Timothy to have the scripture to teach, and to preach, and to read for these people. When he says in verse 15, "Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all," Paul is telling Timothy to pay attention to his own personal study. Paul is telling Timothy to be a student.
- I Timothy 5:17—"To labor in the word" is to spend time studying the scriptures. According to this passage, there were people who had been studying the book and teaching it to others. Paul is instructing them to look out among themselves and to take notice of those elder(s) that are studying their bibles and teaching it to the saints. They were already doing this before they received this epistle from Paul, and that is my point. Paul is not telling them to study this epistle (I Timothy) and preach this epistle, but Paul is telling them to look out among themselves and find the men who were already studying the scriptures before Timothy received the epistle. Thus, they have scripture other than I Timothy that they had been studying. Timothy is instructed to give double honor to these men who were laboring in the word.
- I Timothy 5:18—in other words, these people that Paul is writing to have the word of God. Paul quotes Deuteronomy, but he also quotes Luke. Paul says, "The scripture says that." Do you know what Paul is doing? Paul is saying, "Go look it up for yourself." Those people had the book of Deuteronomy so they could look it up, but they also had access to the book of Luke. They had the Old Testament, and they had portions of the New Testament already. What they did not have was the original autographs.
- Acts 1:1-2—notice the phrase "the former treatise." It is obvious that there is a former book and that its existence is known during the 1st century. The people at Ephesus, where Timothy was pastoring, had copies of the book of Luke. Luke was a traveling companion to the apostle Paul, and he was a close friend of both Paul and Timothy. These people did not have the original manuscript of the book of Luke. Theophilus had the original manuscript of the book of Luke, and these people had copies of the book of Luke. All of this is incidental to what is being taught in the text. The subjects of these passages are something else, but as you read the passages you pick

up on the fact that these people had the New Testament scriptures in their hands. These scriptures were being collected together, copied, disturbed among the people, and were just as authoritative as the original autographs. According to God the Holy Spirit, the copies of the book of Deuteronomy, for example, were just as much “God-breathed” as what Moses placed in the ark at the end of Deuteronomy.

- II Timothy 2:15—as previously mentioned, in order to have the ability to rightly divide the word of truth; they needed to have access to the word of truth in order to rightly divide it. There is not any other reasonable/logical conclusion one can reach. These first century saints must have had the scriptures; they had some books containing the prophetic program and some books containing the kingdom program. Just as you and I today, they had to rightly divide between prophecy and mystery. However, there were some people at that time who were not doing such a good job of rightly dividing the word.
 - II Timothy 1:15—we see here the apostasy from the doctrine that Paul had given already. Hence, Paul exhorts Timothy to study to be approved of God, rightly dividing the word. Paul said, “Do not make the mistakes of mixing the two together like these other men.”
- II Timothy 4:1-2—they are to take the book and preach the word. The reference is obviously not just to the Old Testament, but to Paul’s epistles as well. Paul wants them to preach the doctrine committed to His trust. When Paul says, “Preach the word,” he is not just telling them to go out and preach any part of the bible, especially not after II Timothy 2:15.
 - II Timothy 1:13—I submit to you that Paul’s epistles present to you that “form of sound words” which are to be preached today. Paul’s epistles are what equip the man of God in II Timothy 3:16, 17 “unto all good works.”
- Acts 20:28-32—is Paul talking about the Old Testament? No, Paul is not talking about the Old Testament. The Old Testament is not what we are to teach in this age, and it is not what Paul commends them to teach. The Old Testament is not called “the word of his grace” in the scriptures. The word of his grace is that word that is committed to Paul.
 - Ephesians 3:2—that is what was committed to Paul. Thus, when Paul says, “I commend you to the word of his grace,” he is talking about the word of God that had been written down by him. Paul wrote the book of Galatians, I Thessalonians, II Thessalonians, I Corinthians, II Corinthians and the book of Romans by the time Acts 20:1-3 took place. They had a considerable amount of the word of God written down, collected together, and in their hands.
 - Colossians 3:16—the word of Christ is that word that the Lord Jesus Christ, from heaven’s glory, committed to him through the apostle Paul. Folks, it has to do with the word of God.
 - Colossians 2:7—Epaphras and these Colossians had copies of the word of God with them, and Epaphras could teach them, and they could go home and study.
 - Ephesians 3:1-4—before this writing, Paul wrote down some things about the mystery. He said, “I wrote them afore, whereby, when you read them.” Well, where had he written them before? He wrote I Thessalonians, II Thessalonians, Galatians, I Corinthians, II Corinthians, and Romans. Paul said, “When you read those things, you will

understand.” The implication is that these people at Ephesus had copies of those prior books. Now, these people are the same people in Acts 20:32 that he commends to the word of his grace. The elders from the church at Ephesus are the people that we just read about in Acts 20. The implication about the Ephesian church is that they had Paul's prior epistles. They read what he wrote earlier.

- I am simply trying to drive home the fact that these 1st century saints had copies of God's word. The New Testament text was being written down, copied out, collected together, and distributed just like we studied with respect to the Old Testament. Thus, one can have faith that the same process that existed back in the Old Testament, demonstrated in the New Testament to have worked for 1500 or 2000 years, was also at work during the dispensation of grace.
- I Thessalonians 5:27—this is one of the earliest epistles, if not the first then the second epistle that Paul wrote. There is a possibility that Paul wrote the book of Galatians before he wrote Thessalonians. But in the earliest epistles that Paul wrote, he tells them that he expects them to see that this epistle is read and distributed among all the holy brethren. By the way, I Thessalonians 5:27 is quite clear that Paul sees the design of preservation existing in copies of his epistles being made and distributed among the various churches.
- Galatians 1:1-2—the book of Galatians was a circular letter. It was one letter written to a number of different churches in the region of Galatia. Now, you know what would have happened when it got to the church in Lystra before they sent it to the church in Iconium, don't you? You know good and well that someone made a copy of that epistle before passing it along to the next assembly. Paul intended the book to make the rounds and to be a norm and a standard for doctrine in those churches.
- Colossians 4:15-16—Paul wants this epistle read, not just at Colosse, but at the Laodicean church as well. Colossians is one of the prison epistles, and it was one of the last books Paul wrote. Paul's design, from the very beginning to the very end, was that his epistles were to be read obviously by the people he wrote them to, but also in all the other churches too. Paul wants the information, and the doctrine, to get out to everybody everywhere.

Conclusion

- I Corinthians 5:9 – “I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators.” Where is the epistle that contains that information that Paul wrote? It is obviously prior to this epistle, but this is I Corinthians. Paul is saying that he wrote them a letter before this one. This epistle is I Corinthians in our bible, but Paul is saying that he wrote them a previous letter. If that is not bad enough, Paul says in II Corinthians 1, “I wrote you a letter between I Corinthians and II Corinthians.” Thus, there are at least four letters that you can identify, but only two of them show up in your bible. Therefore, I know that there are many things that the apostle Paul wrote that were not the divinely inspired word of God. But, what was divinely inspired was being collected together and authoritatively identified as such. In the next lesson, we will study how they distinguished between one epistle and another and how they knew which one was the inspired word of God and which one was not. God had a group of people whose function in the church, at that time, was to authoritatively identify which epistles were the word of God. They identified which epistle was not the word of God. They identified the word of God and made authoritative copies of it and made sure it was distributed.

- There is one other thing that I want you to notice. Obviously, these people are collecting and sharing copies of the word of God. They are commanded to do so. In summation, the process of New Testament preservation was the same as the Old Testament process –through copies. God had a special group of people charged with the responsibility of seeing that the task was carried out. I wanted you to see in this lesson that the process was the same in the New Testament as it was in the Old Testament. You have to base your faith on the fact that the New Testament has been preserved.