

The Preservation of Scripture

By Pastor Roger Pierce

A few months ago I was talking to a man who strongly questioned the value of our English Bible. He was of the opinion that only the original scrolls and manuscripts could be considered inerrant. His position was that, in every translation, personal and denominational bias and error have crept in, leaving us with a document that is no more inspired or dependable than the fallible men who translated it. I certainly agree that some translations have been produced by a person or group who had an agenda they were attempting to put forth: e.g., a Bible that leaves all references to gender, or that makes all gender references neuter. But I am fully persuaded that in the authorized King James Version, we have the original text so providentially preserved that we can say, without a doubt, that it is inerrant. I am also convinced that there are dependable translations in other languages, although I am not personally familiar with them. What convinces me of this? God is certainly not the God of English-speaking people only! I'm sure He would not require an individual to learn another language in order to hear the gospel and to be able to read His Word. Now, let's look at some evidence that our Bible is, in its entirety, God's infallible Word.

First Of all, the fact that God has spoken to mankind through inspired "holy men of God" (II Peter 1:21) demonstrates His desire for us to have a written record, His communication to us. It was necessary to have a permanent record of what "thus saith the Lord", not just word of mouth passed down from one generation to the next. Since He desired to commune with us, and the message was so important that He "inspired" His words, doesn't it just sense that a God so great, giving a message so important, would also **preserve** that message by guarding it and guiding the minds of those who translate? (if indeed these translators are seeking the truth and help of the Holy Spirit)

Secondly, let's go back to the time hundreds years before there was any translating done. While it is true that none of the original autographs (manuscripts) are in existence today, and the manuscripts we have are copies of copies of copies, the painstaking care of the scribes and monks who laboriously made handwritten copies of the original languages is well documented. It would take about ten months to make a single copy, and each line and every leaf or page was read and reread to insure there were no mistakes. The result of this meticulous care is that in the 5000 or so manuscript copies of the Greek New Testament known today, there are only minor variations in a very few of them. The fact that copies from Israel, Egypt, and other locations display such agreement, certainly demonstrates that God **preserved** the text.

Thirdly, let us go back to the translators. Prior to the 1300's there were only partial translations in the English. John Wycliffe was the first to translate the entire Bible into modern English. In the 1500's, notable translations were made by William Tyndale, Miles Coverdale, and Thomas Matthew, among others. These were probably good translations, but in 1604 King James I of England, desiring to have a more universally accepted English version, employed 54 of the best language scholars of that day to undertake the task. The resulting work, finished in 1611, has enjoyed more acceptance and, more importantly, has endured for almost 400 years. As the English language has changed, it has undergone some revising, (mostly spelling variations) but the simple fact of it's enduring nature shows God's stamp of approval on it. We can be confident that, certainly, this is the "very Word of God". Many later English translations don't stand up to this test. The King James translators produced an English version that is faithful to the original languages. Once again, God Himself superintended over these men's work to protect and **preserve** His Word .

Fourthly, and finally, let us go to the scriptures themselves for evidence of preservation and purity of the Word. Over sixty times in the New Testament we read the words: "it is written" or "These are written". This a translation of the Greek verb *gegraptai*, which is in the perfect tense. In the Greek, the perfect is a past tense which means: a completed action with results that continue to the present. Another example of the perfect tense is when the angel told the women at the tomb of Jesus, "..... He is risen", a completed action the results of which continue today. So each time you read, "it is written", remember that the writing has been completed for a long time, but the results of it continues to the present. God has spoken, God inspired men to write, and with certainty, God has **preserved** an inerrant record of His Son.

It has been said that the two greatest challenges the Bible has faced over the centuries are (1) the opposition of it's enemies and (2) the neglect of it's friends. It has well withstood the enemies and critics. In fact I have read of a Medieval ruler who, upon tacking the throne, boasted that he intended to be *the hammer* that would stamp out the Christian's Holy Book. An older advisor replied to him, "Sire, that Book is an anvil that has worn out a hammer". (And that ruler found out for himself. The Book still lives and thrives!) Now lets ask ourselves a final question: Am I guilty of neglecting this wonderful record God has **preserved** for us? God help us "to delight in the Word".