

LESSON 4

BIBLICAL SUPPORT FOR THE DOCTRINE OF VERBAL PLENARY PRESERVATION (II)

-- Psalm 12:6-7 and Psalm 19:7-10

I. INTRODUCTION

The unending attacks on the Word of God know no bound. God's people must be vigilant and sober for the day of deliverance is nearer than we think. To let our guard down would signify the spiritual death of our present and future generations.

When the doctrine of inspiration came under attack the defenders of the Word of God in times past had only one clear-cut verse to support the doctrine. It was 2 Timothy 3:16. They fought tooth and nail defending this truth amidst all the distortions and misinterpretations.

Finally the battle was over and the line was clearly drawn. On the one side there were the fundamentalists who held on to the doctrine of inspiration as stated in our church Constitution which is our heritage. On the other side were the modernists and neo-evangelicals who believe in limited inerrancy and infallibility where inspiration was only in spiritual matters or matters that pertain to man's salvation. Anything else would have mistakes, which they called minor ones.

Today we thank God that we have more than one verse from God's Word defending the doctrine of preservation. Even though there are many verses that teach preservation, the same attack that was used to undermine the doctrine of inspiration is also employed today. Re-interpretation or misinterpretation of Bible verses is also used.

II. INTERPRETING PSALM 12:6-7—Perfect Word of God preserved

Psalm 12:6-7: *"The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever."*

The teaching from these two verses appears quite clear that God would preserve His Holy Word for ever. Yet many have argued otherwise. They say that the preservation in verse 7 refers to people only.

A. Grammar and Syntax arguments

1. Those who interpret Psalm 12:7 as referring to people and not the Word of God say that since the pronominal suffix "keep them" in verse 7a is in the masculine gender (plural) and "the words of the LORD" in verse 6 is in the feminine gender (plural), "them" must refer to "people." In order for it to refer to God's Word the pronominal suffix must also be in the feminine gender like the substantive. This is a faulty reasoning based upon a wrong assumption. As Gesenius, a classic Hebrew

grammarian teaches, “Through a weakening in the distinction of gender, which is noticeable elsewhere And which probably passed from the colloquial language into that of literature, masculine suffixes (especially in the plural) are not infrequently used to refer to feminine substantives.” [**Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar**, edited and enlarged by E. Kutsch, second edition by A. E. Cowley, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910, 2nd edition), page 440, Section O].

Some examples from the OT where this phenomenon occurs include:

Genesis 31:9, "Thus God hath taken away the cattle of your [**masculine plural pronoun suffix** -- referring to Rachel and Leah) father, and given them to me."

Genesis 32:15, "Thirty milch camels with their [**masculine plural pronoun suffix** - referring to the thirty female camels) colts, forty kine, and ten bulls, twenty she asses, and ten foals."

Exodus 1:21, "And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that he made them [**masculine plural pronoun suffix** -- a reference to the midwives] houses."

Psalm 119:111, "Thy testimonies [**feminine plural noun**] have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they [**masculine plural pronoun**] are the rejoicing of my heart."

Psalm 119:129, "Thy testimonies [**feminine plural noun**] are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them [**masculine plural pronoun suffix**]."

Psalm 119:152, "Concerning thy testimonies [**feminine plural noun**], I have known of old that thou hast founded them [**masculine plural pronoun suffix**] for ever."

Psalm 119:167, "My soul hath kept thy testimonies [**feminine plural noun**]; and I love them [**masculine plural noun suffix**] exceedingly."

These are only a few examples cited to demonstrate the nature of feminine plural nouns in relation to their masculine pronouns. According to the Hebrew language, it is most legitimate to refer the suffix pronoun "them -- **masculine plural pronominal suffix** (verse 7a)" to "the words -- **feminine plural substantive** of the LORD (verse 6)." For them to insist that the gender must be the same is eisegesis. We cannot force the Word of God to say what we want it to say. Also it is wrong to insist that biblical Hebrew grammar and syntax must conform to the English grammar and syntax.

Thomas Strouse agrees and wrote, ". . . it is not uncommon, especially in the Psalter, for feminine plural noun synonyms for the ‘words’ of the Lord to be the antecedent for masculine plural pronouns/pronominal suffixes, which seem to ‘masculinize’ the verbal extension of the patriarchal God of the Old Testament. . . . As the KJV/TR bibliologists have argued all along, both the context and the grammar (proximity rule and accepted gender discordance) of Psalm 12:6-7 demand the teaching of the

preservation of the Lord's pure words for every generation.”
[<http://www.wayoflife.org/fbns/strouse-psalm127.html>]

2. Another argument they cited is that the pronominal suffix “preserve them (verse 7b)” is in the singular and KJV translators have no right to change it to “them (plural).” It is true that the pronominal suffix for “preserve them” in verse 7b is a third person masculine singular suffix (him).

Why did the KJV translators translate it as “them”?

The key is that in the addition of the suffix, the Holy Spirit wanted to emphasize the verb “preserve” so that an “energetic nun” (the letter “n”) is added before attaching the pronominal suffix. When this occurs an additional rule comes into operation in the Hebrew language. **There is no masculine plural pronominal suffix in the third person when the energetic nun is applied to a verb.** [See Gesenius, page 157-158 Section 4, I]. Hence the Scripture writer, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, used the singular masculine pronominal suffix, retaining the same gender as in “keep them (verse 7a).”

Therefore it is very legitimate and consistent with Hebrew grammar for the KJV translators to translate the masculine singular pronoun suffix with the energetic nun as a masculine plural pronoun -- “them.”

B. Contextual argument

When we speak of context, it is the immediate context that is considered first, and not the distant context. The immediate context is of course the Words of the LORD. Hence the preservation and keeping (guarding) would be the Words of the LORD. We know that the syntax and grammar allow it.

Verse 6 is what is known as an emblematic parallelism where the purity of God's Word is likened to the sevenfold purification (as pure as you can ever get) process of purifying silver where every bit of dross is burned away leaving behind the purest silver [Tremper Longman III, **How to Read the Psalms**, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 100]. This verse teaches that the Words of the LORD are without error or fallibility and it is 100% perfect.

Verse 7 is known as a synonymous parallelism where the second line restates what is mentioned in the first, but using different words (Longman III, 99). As mentioned before, the use of the energetic “nun” emphasizes the act of preservation. This preservation is forever.

The relationship between verses 6 and 7 is what we call synthetic parallelism where the second verse adds or expands on the teaching mentioned in the first verse. These two verses combined together teach that the Words of God which are perfect like silver purified seven times will be preserved by God forever!

The contrast within the entire psalm would be the words of these evil men pitted against the Words of the LORD. These evil men speak vanity and flattery (verse 2) and boast that their words will prevail and no one is lord over them (verse 4). The Words of the LORD counter that it is the Lord's Word that will prevail over the words of the evil ones.

This is the assurance and comfort that the LORD gives to His people. Do not fear the words of these evil flatterers and boasters; trust in the Words of the LORD that is purified seven times as opposed to the words of the evil men which are vain, proud and stem from a double heart (verse 2). God will keep (guard) His Holy Words and preserve (action is emphasized by the energetic nun) them from this generation forever. The LORD gave this verbal assurance to that generation and after because He knew they needed it. God's people were plagued by the many wicked words that came from evil men to confuse and confound them.

The faith of the believers was put to the test, they had to choose to believe and trust in the inerrant, infallible and divinely inspired Word of God Almighty or the errant, fallible words of sinful men. The same decision is asked of every Christian today on the issue of the doctrine of preservation of God's Holy, inerrant, infallible Word.

It must not be intimated that from before this time, God did not preserve His Holy Word. This is faulty hermeneutics. Argument from silence is very dangerous and can lead to all kinds of wrong doctrine. For example, Ephesians 1:4 teaches us that the believers' salvation have been chosen in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world. Does it mean that the believers in the Old Testament were not chosen before the foundation of the world? Of course we cannot arrive at this erroneous conclusion. Progressive revelation teaches that it took more than one thousand five hundred years for the Bible to be given to us completely intact and perfectly [from Moses around 1445 B.C. to the Apostle John who wrote Revelation, the last book of the New Testament, around 95 A.D.]. When a truth is revealed to God's people, it does not mean that this was the "activation" of that truth. It simply points to the fact that this was the first time God has revealed or taught this truth to His people, something which He has been doing all the time. The doctrines of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, Election, the doctrine of the Trinity, the Trinitarian involvement in the giving of gifts, God giving gifts according to His sovereign will, and every Christian being given at least one gift are some of the doctrines which are found clearly taught in the New Testament but not taught or implied only in the Old Testament. These doctrines are clearly taught in the New Testament.

C. Bible Translations—past and present on Psalm 12:6-7

David Cloud wrote correctly, "The bifurcation of the Reformation Bible tradition and the post-19th century English Bibles is seen in the New Revised Standard Version render[ing of] Psalm 12:7, "You O Lord, will protect us; you will guard us from this generation forever." In a similar manner, the New International Version translates verse 7, "O Lord, you will keep us safe and protect us from such people forever." In spite of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* reading "keep them" and "preserve him," both the NRSV and

NIV have elected not to translate the Hebrew and have, in its place, substituted a translation from the Greek and Latin rendering of these two pronouns. By so doing, the editors of these translations have endorsed one exegetical tradition, the Greek-Latin, to the exclusion of the other, the Hebraic, and by doing so have censured any further debate within the Hebrew exegetical tradition itself.

"This essay will show the diversity of the textual and exegetical tradition of Psalm 12:6-7 ... By so doing, the inadequacy of modern renditions of Psalm 12:7 will be exposed...

"*Michael Ayguan (1340-1416)* ... On Psalm 12:7 Ayguan comments, Keep them: that is, not as the passage is generally taken, Keep or guard Thy people, but Thou shalt keep, or make good, Thy words: and by doing so, shalt preserve him--him, the needy, him, the poor--from this generation...

"*Martin Luther's German Bible* ... Following the arrangement of this Psalm, Luther penned a hymn, two stanzas of which reflect his understanding of verse 6 and 7: ... "Thy truth thou wilt preserve, O Lord, from this vile generation..." In poetic form, Luther grasps the significance of this verse both for the preservation of those who are oppressed and for the Word of God. The two-pronged significance of this interpretation to both people and God's words in Luther's Psalter was to have wide-ranging significance in the English Bible tradition.

"*Calvin's Commentary on the Psalms* ... in the body of the commentary he writes, 'Some give this exposition of the passage, Thou wilt keep them, namely, thy words; but this does not seem to me to be suitable.' [Thus while Calvin did not believe Psalm 12:7 referred to the Word of God, he admits that others did hold this view in his day.]

"*Coverdale Bible, 1535* ... reads for [verse 7] of Psalm 12: "Keep them therefore (O Lord) and preserve us from this generation for ever." With the absence of "Thou shalt" to begin verse 7, there is a direct connection between 'words' and 'keep them.' In the first clause, Coverdale intended the words to be kept; in the second clause people are in view..."

"*The Matthew Bible 1537.* ... In Psalm 12:67 Rogers translated, "The words of the Lord are pure words as the silver, which from the earth is tried and purified vii times in the fire. Keep them therefore (O Lord) and preserve us from this generation for ever." Following Coverdale, Rogers makes a clear connection in his translation between the words being the antecedent to "them." ... The significance of Roger's marginal note is that two of the greatest Hebrew scholars referred to by the Reformation writers differed on the interpretation of "them" in Psalms 12:7. [Thus we see that the interpretation of this verse was also divided among Jewish scholars.]

"*The Third Part of the Bible, 1550.* Taken from Becke's text of 1549 this edition of the scriptures contains the Psalter, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs. ... In verse 7 there is a note at them which states, 'some understand here certain men, some others word.' Again, the translators and exegetes allowed breadth of interpretation of "them" to include people and words.

"*The Geneva Bible, 1560.* ... The preface reads, "Then comforting himself and others with the assurance of God's help, he commendeth the constant vigil that God observeth in keeping his promises." The text reads, "The words of the Lord are pure words, as the silver, tried in a furnace of earth, fined seven fold. Thou wilt keep them, O Lord: Thou wilt preserve him from this generation forever." [The margin reads, "Because the Lords word and promise is true and unchangeable, he will perform it and preserve the poor from this wicked generation." Thus the Geneva took a position that verse 7 applies both to the preservation of the Bible and of God's people.]

"*Annotations by Henry Ainsworth, 1626.* Briggs commends Ainsworth as the "prince of Puritan commentators" and that his commentary on the Psalms is a "monument of learning." ... Ainsworth states that "the sayings" [of Psalm 12:7] are "words" or "promises" that are "tried" or "examined" "as in a fire." He cross references the reader to Psalm 18:31; 119:140; and Proverbs 30:5, each reference having to do with the purity of the word.

"*Matthew Poole's 1685 Commentary of the Psalms* ... writes at verse seven, "Thou shalt keep them; either, 1. The poor and needy, ver. 5 ... Or, 2. Thy words or promises last mentioned, ver. 6. ...

"In summary ... [t]he only sure conclusion is that there is no consensus within the English Bible tradition for the interpretation of "them" in Psalm 12:7 and it was precisely this lack of agreement within the tradition which was the genius of the ambiguity of the King James Version's rendering. ... by choosing a Greek-Latin basis the modern versions elect to overlook the Reformation's Hebrew basis for translation in Psalm 12:6-7; and the churchly tradition in the new versions is censored by not including a translation that is broad enough to include both interpretations--oppressed people and God's words" (Peter Van Kleeck, *The Translational and Exegetical Rendering of Psalm 12:7 Primarily Considered in the Churchly Tradition of the 16th and 17th Centuries and Its Expression in the Reformation English Bibles: The Genius of Ambiguity*, March 1993). [Taken from <http://www.wayoflife.org/fbns/fbns/fbns88.html>]

III. INTERPRETING PSALM 19:7-10—Nature of the Word of God explained

Psalm 19:7-10:

"The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb."

Contextual Observations

Psalm 19 teaches God's revelations. Psalm 19:1-6 refers to the general revelation of God through His creation. Psalm 19:7-14 teaches special revelation through God's Holy Word.

The Word of God is described by the Psalmist in these six ways: the law, the testimony, the statutes, the commandments, fear and judgments. The nature of the Word of God is described as: perfect, sure, right, pure, clean and true. The effect of the Word of God in the heart and lives of the believer is described as: converting the soul, making wise the simple, rejoicing the heart, enlightening the eyes, enduring for ever and righteous altogether.

The totality of the richness of the Word of God is seen here by the use of these six different nouns. Its infinite value is seen in the description by the Word of God in using “**perfect**” which means “without blemish” i.e. absolutely no mistakes; “**sure**” which means “faithfulness and trust worthy”; “**right**” which means “straight and righteous”; “**pure**” which means “clean and clear and void of impurities”; “**clean**” which means “pure in the moral sense”; and “**true**” which means “trustworthiness or verity i.e. contains no falsehood or errors,” to capture the depth and breadth of the Word of God in its totality.

On the meaning of the word “perfect” as used here Barnes wrote, “The meaning is that it lacks nothing in order to its completeness; nothing in order that it might be what it should be. It is complete as a revelation of divine truth; it is complete as a rule of conduct. As explained above, this refers not only to the law of God as the word is commonly employed now, but to the whole of divine truth as revealed. It is absolutely true; it is adapted with consummate wisdom to the wants of man; it is an unerring guide of conduct. There is nothing there which would lead men into error or sin; there is nothing essential for man to know which may not be found there. [**Albert Barnes’ Notes on the Bible**, Swordsearcher 4.7]”

That the Word of God was perfect to the Psalmist is an understatement. For the Psalmist to ever think that the Word of God contains the slightest degree of impurity or error or mistake was unthinkable. The highest regard the psalmist gives to the Word of God is clearly seen in the use of the six nouns.

IV CONCLUSION

The Word of God is the only “catalyst” used by the Spirit of God to transform lives and make children of darkness into children of God’s marvelous light, why would God then after more than 1,500 years of inspiration and writing of God’s Word not preserve all His words for future generations? We thank God that He did.

Psalm 12:6-7 teaches us that God has preserved His perfect Word perfectly for His people. God inspired His Word perfectly, inerrant, infallible and He also preserved the same Word for His people throughout the ages so that every generation can assuredly say, “Thus saith the LORD!” with absolute confidence.

Psalm 19:7-10 teaches us that the Word of God is more than perfect in all its glory but also purity, verity, surety, righteousness and truthfulness. The Word of God cannot have mistakes and must be perfect at inspiration and perfectly preserved by God Himself throughout the ages for all of God’s people. Anything less would be foolishness like a man shooting his own foot! AMEN.