

Scripture—Inspiration and Preservation United

Dear Friends,

I have read that the difference between a singular and a plural form of a word in the ancient Hebrew language was something as small as our apostrophe. That in no way deterred Paul in Galatians 3:16 from building a major argument to correct the Galatians' errant thinking. Paul didn't flinch that the verse from Genesis 22:18 was written by Moses around 1500 years before he quoted it to the Galatians in this lesson. Paul believed those words still were God's faithful words preserved for His people, even to the minuscule distinction between singular and plural word forms. The Christian culture of our time would serve their own faith and spiritual health well if they held the writings of Scripture in similar high regard. I've talked with many of them who strongly hold to the divine inspiration of Scripture, and they rely on 2 Timothy 3:16-17, just as I do. However, they quickly flinch and abandon any thought of divine preservation. Seemingly, they never think; if God preserved the original writing of Scripture, but not the abiding preservation of it, what we have today in the form of the New Testament, regardless the edition or version we read, fails to live up to that original high quality of inspiration of God.

Given the proclivity of sinful humans to abandon the good and right in favor of the bad and inferior, absent an authoritative source of faith and truth wholly outside themselves and their opinions and imaginations, they doom themselves to migrate to the lowest common denominator, not to the high goal of inspired Scripture. We need this truth in our generation, and we need it loudly and frequently affirmed.

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

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Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. (Galatians 3:16 KJV 1900)

One of the most frequent attitudes toward Scripture in today's Christian community cautiously accepts divine inspiration, but wholly rejects divine preservation of what was inspired. This mindset accepts that God passively allowed Scripture to be hopelessly compromised through copy and translation errors. Advocates of this idea frequently advocates that you buy as many different editions of the Bible as you can afford, read them all, and choose the variation that is most agreeable to your preconceptions. Literally, this idea picks and chooses between all the variations verse by verse. In effect, it concludes that there is no reliable or authoritative Bible for today's Christian reader. Further, the final authority in this view is not what is written in God's authoritative writing, but rather each believer's own opinion. You like the reading in Verse A from Bible edition 1, and I like the reading in Verse A from Bible edition 15, each of us basing our acceptance on personal opinion, not on an authoritative writing that says the same thing to both of us. Personal opinion and private interpretation rule. Only chaos can reign in this climate. Scripture records another similar case.

In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes. (Judges 21:25 KJV)

A survey of the Book of Judges will describe a season of unstable and confused failure by the people of God. One chapter describes Israel's latest venture into their own imagination and idolatry. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6 KJV. Biblical faith casts down imagination as a basis for faith. It doesn't magnify our imagination and claim imagination as "Facts.") The next chapter in Judges describes the Lord's sore displeasure and judgment against His people. You read of a brief moment of reality and superficial repentance, but it is always short-lived. Almost immediately the people drift right back into their next idolatrous imagination, and the cycle of chastening judgment repeats itself yet again. Take away a fixed and faithful guide outside a person's mind (And imagination), and that imagination will take over and become the person's authority. "This is fact." Folks, we are reliving the Book of Judges in our Christian culture, and the outcome can be no different. I sometimes ponder a question from a Simon and Garfunkel song, "When will they ever learn? When will they ever learn?"

What is the devoted believer to do in this culture? There is only one answer. We cannot be faithful for another believer, only for ourselves. But the Lord charges us repeatedly in Scripture to do just that in every circumstance of life. Godly examples and godly teaching eventually will attract a few folks away from the religion of personal imagination to the faith of Jesus, and that "Seed" will grow. It will never be the popular option, but it will be the path of stable joy and blessings for those who choose the faithful walk. All of this relates to our study verse intimately.

He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. Moses lived around 1500 BC, so he wrote the words of Genesis 22:18 some 1500 years before Paul quoted them in Galatians. Paul builds a major argument for the faith of Jesus on the reliability of one word in the Old Testament. How many times do you suppose Genesis was copied from 1500 BC till Paul read it in his lifetime? Did Paul doubt the reliability of the copy he read? No, he believed what he read without reservation. The copying process the Jews followed in preserving a written record of their Scriptures across generations is a fascinating read. They practiced numerous habits to fully ensure that each copy was an exact duplicate of the source document, and they applied these safeguards page by individual page. If they copied a page and discovered a single copy error, one simple word, they immediately destroyed that page and started over. Only the flawless copies were preserved.

With very good reason Paul accepted the singular form of the word "Seed" not "Seeds," in his reading of Genesis 22:18. We find no indication that he sought multiple versions of the Old Testament to compare before deciding which version he'd accept for his argument in Galatians 3. He had one "Version" in his hands and used it as his exclusive authority for his faith. Contemporary Christians would serve their faith well to follow Paul's wise example.

I've recently pondered a fascinating thought. Prior to Damascus Road, Paul was well studied in the Old Testament. However, after Damascus Road, he viewed those writings differently. If, prior to Damascus Road, Paul followed the prevailing Jewish view of the Old Testament and of Abraham's life in Genesis, he'd have regarded Abraham as the "End-all-be-all" of godly faith. Based on his argument from God's promise to Abraham in Galatians 3, post-Damascus Road, Paul saw the ultimate fulfillment of God's rich promises to Abraham as fulfilled in Jesus, not in Abraham. Notice Paul's conclusion to his Abraham argument in Galatians 3.

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:26 KJV)

The context of Galatians 3 is not about salvation, but about believers, born-again people, holding to the faith-way and not turning aside to dead end paths that lead to shipwrecked faith. Further, in the verse, and writing to saved people, Paul used a present tense verb to describe an ongoing situation, not a past tense verb to describe a completed past action, something he would have done if writing about salvation. All these points agree in urging a “Discipleship” view of the verse and not a salvation view. Paul was not suggesting the idea of get-born-again “Children” by faith, but rather the behavioral or imitation idea of children by faith. Paul uses this father-child idea in this manner in describing his relationship with both Timothy and Titus. In fact, he used it in the Galatian letter. (Galatians 4:19 KJV)

Likely, had Paul considered a teaching role with a group of people pre-Damascus Road, he would have written, “Ye are all the children of God by faith in Abraham.” This verse underscores the incredible change that Jesus made in his life. We should cultivate that same faith-transformation in our lives. Does our daily path, how we deal with life and its trials, speak to our faith in Jesus or to our fear of everything else? Have we made another human our “Hero,” the primary “GPS” guide for how we live? Even an Abraham, however good his example of faith, cannot—and should not—supplant Jesus. Or have we settled our hearts on Jesus and His guiding hand to lead the way?

Paul’s example in our study passage leaves no doubt. He believed in both the supernatural inspiration (Origin) of Scripture and also in the supernatural preservation of those same Scriptures. A careful reading of 2 Timothy 3:16-17 will discover an equally clear testimony of both Scripture’s supernatural origin and preservation. “...**by inspiration of God,**” literally by His breathing, the only appearance of this word “inspiration” in the New Testament. Paul’s use of present tense verbs in these two verses speaks loudly for Scripture’s supernatural origin and preservation. Paul is not alone in this testimony.

*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.** (Psalm 12:6-7 KJV)*

Some contemporary editions of the Bible make no claim to being a word-for-word translation of the earlier text. They rather claim a literary “Dynamic equivalence” to those earlier manuscripts. However, to the extent we abandon the most literal word-for-word translation (Occasionally stiff or difficult as a casual reading of the text might be), we immediately fall onto the slippery slope of human opinion and private interpretation. Who chose the “Equivalent” words to the source manuscript? As we choose this path of relying on one man’s or group’s opinion of equivalency, a thought. I have more than my share of commentaries. Some I read regularly, not because I always agree with them, but because they stimulate my thinking and study of Scripture. Some have given me rich and worthwhile thoughts occasionally regarding a particular passage. However, they present their “Comments” in a book clearly labeled and

copyrighted as their own thoughts. They don't obscure their personal opinion by calling their writing an edition of the Bible. When I want to read my Bible, what I hope to be God's inspired and preserved words and truth, I want the nearest I can find to a literal word-for-word translation. And when I want to read a commentary, I put a good Bible filter over my mind, and read it as another human's sincere reflection and beliefs, not as God's inspired revelation. For that reason alone, I make no apology for not reading or respecting those "Dynamic equivalency" books, much less regard them as the Bible.

David makes his points simply. How can we miss them? He didn't write, "The word of the Lord is...." He wrote, "The **words** of the Lord are pure words." He applied the literary microscope to the individual words of the Lord, and he affirmed that they are reliably "**pure words**," not a near equivalency. He further wrote that the Lord would "**preserve them...for ever.**"

I make no apology for my strong reliance on my King James Bible. That various editions of the King James Bible spell some proper names differently does not weaken my reliance on it at all. Does a different spelling of a proper name alter our faith in any way? Not at all. I have no problem with variations in upper or lower case, or in punctuation here and there. Again, a contextual reading of the passage will lead the praying studious reader to the same truth. And the "Stiff" reading complaint of those "Thee" and "Thou" idioms serves to remind me that the translators worked diligently to make their work as literal and as faithful to the source documents as possible. I thank the Lord for such a noble preservation of His Word.

Elder Joe Holder