

The Doctrine of Preservation

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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Bible Text: Psalm 12:6-7
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First Baptist family, again it is my privilege to welcome you to our second Sunday evening with live people in the room, the second of many to come. Before we get into our service tonight though, let me just share with you, shall I say, some matters of business. You may notice behind me that we still have our vacation Bible school decorations that are still up and maybe you didn't have the opportunity to be a part of it, one of the silver linings of having a virtual VBS is it's still accessible. You know, in days past once VBS was over, it was over, and so now you can still go back, all the lessons are online, all the Bible studies, all the crafts, whatever it may be, all of that's there including the family night where we had the Lego Master that built our church out of Lego. You can go watch all that and this Thursday evening, the Missions Challenge will be on full display right out here in front of the children's building. You will discover whether the boys, the girls or if there was enough money, even I get drenched with a whole bucket full of water. So that'll be this Thursday evening, so be sure and to watch and be a part of that. But VBS, you can still be a part of. If you hear of people, this is one of the things that I've had the privilege this, I guess, summer talking to folks, they say, "You know, our church isn't having VBS this year." I said, "That's okay, you can still have VBS, just go to fbcopelika.com, it's all there for you." So VBS really is running all summer long and so that's one of the benefits of having this online technology.

As far as other matters of business. Next Sunday we're gonna have our first Sunday morning worship opportunity in person, 8:30 only. Now for many of you saying why only 8:30? Remember we're doing this progressively. We're watching how you move and maneuver and respect each other and such and we just want to go slowly. So next week is not only Father's Day but it's Graduation Sunday. We normally do that on Mother's Day but this Mother's Day we didn't know what was up or down as far as all that was happening so we're gonna be doing it this Sunday. It's all going to be video driven. But on Saturday, the graduates are actually going to be out in front of the building at a specific time. You can drive by, honk, wave, holler at them and such, so we want to make a big deal because they didn't get the normal stuff that most of our graduates do. But next Sunday we will actually recognize them. Here's the beauty, we normally just did it at 11 o'clock, remember? We can do it all three services now because it's all by way of video. So we're going to have the opportunity to recognize them but at 8:30 we will have a live in person service.

Now next week is what we know as Father's Day so there will not be a Sunday evening service, so the next time we gather on Sunday evening it will actually be in the Worship Center. And so this is the last of our Sunday services in this room at these specific times.

Now if you did not watch or were not a part of one of our morning services this morning, in two Sunday evenings, on June 28, just some things to take note of. We as a church body are gonna come together with three important decisions on the table that we need to discuss and address. One is what we know as the next generation pastor, the hiring therein. Number 2 is the affirmation of our revised, updated 18 month, it's finally over Constitution process. And last but not least, the Missions Committee has a proposal in regards to the Missions House and giving to the deacons to make, or the trustees to make a decision.

Okay, that's all the business. We got it done. All of you that are somewhere other than in this room, I apologize for that very long public service announcement.

Let's pray and get started.

Heavenly Father, as we gather tonight, Lord, we declare how blessed we are to have a copy of your word in our hands. Lord, in a world where there is so much tension and turmoil in this land, God, we recognize in many places of the world there is uprising in the streets over your word, the possession of it, the access to it, that I know that there are places in this world where people are literally taking the pages and dividing it up among themselves so if one of them "gets caught" they still have other pages. God, that love, that desire for your word we confess to you tonight. It often grows cold in our own life when we have access to so many copies, when we have it on our phones, we have it on our shelf, we have it on our tables, God, we have it inscribed on our buildings, it's just everywhere around us and, God, we confess to you that it has become so common in our culture that unfortunately it's become common. So God, tonight we thank you that you give us a chance, an opportunity and the privilege to revisit our passion for your word. Help us, O God, tonight at the end of this study not just to be one who carries our Bible, who has a copy thereof, but has a passion to read it, to learn it, to study it, and ultimately to live it out. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Alright, tonight let me invite you to turn to Psalm 12. As you're turning to Psalm 12, we're gonna look at a passage, particularly verses 6 and 7, which is one of the most strategic passages in all of the Bible and we're going to address a subject matter than when I say rarely gets addressed that's not a shot across the bow at anybody else or any other entity, it's just something we don't talk about a whole lot. We're gonna talk about the doctrine of preservation. In other words, we're gonna address today not only the sufficiency, the fidelity, but the consistency that we have access when we talk about God's word because we'll all recognize tonight that when the Lord inspired Moses, when he inspired Isaiah, when he inspired the Apostle Paul or Luke the Gospel writer, that all of those documents, all of those writings in their original state are nowhere to be found. And so here we are sometimes many thousands of years later with a copy of God's word

either in our hand, on our phone, whatever it may be, and so we have to ask the question about preservation. Tonight's really not an issue about inspiration. I don't think there's many of us that would argue that when God used these men they were writing on behalf of what God asked them to write, the big question is do we have access, has it been faithfully preserved throughout time?

In Psalm 12, particularly verse 6 and 7, we have a statement in regards to this but I'm gonna read the entirety of Psalm 12 just for the sake of context. It says,

1 Help, LORD; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men. 2 They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak.

Let me push pause for a moment. Doesn't that sound like our culture today? I mean, humanity hasn't evolved that much, have we? It speaks about how we have an inferiority when it comes to how we behave and we have a lack of purity. Verse 3,

3 The LORD shall cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaketh proud things: 4 Who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over us?

If that's not an accusation against our world today, I don't know what is. They're literally saying there is nobody above us but us. Verse 5,

5 For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him. 6 The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. 7 Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever. 8 The wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted.

Now I could address verse 8 for a great length of time but we're just gonna focus on verse 6 and 7 and particularly verse 7 when it says, "Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever."

Now as you're reading verse 7, whether you're reading an electronic version of the Bible or an old-fashioned print model like what I've got, there's actually two possibilities that you've read there. Your Bible would either read "you shall preserve them or you shall preserve us." Those are the two options that you have and can we all agree that "them" is not "us" and "us" is not "them"? Those are two different things and so from the very beginning tonight, I want to address a phenomena that has happened at least in the last 150-200 years and then we're gonna address in detail what we call the doctrine of preservation.

Now if you will just give me a little leeway for a moment, I'm gonna get in my nerdism for just a moment, okay? Alright? I'm just gonna get in the weeds of nerdism that I like to

do for a moment. I do not expect you to, nor would I ask you to, nor would I ever encourage you to become a "Hebrew scholar" when it comes to the Old Testament or a Greek scholar when it comes to the New Testament. I've said this before and I'll say it again: I read, I study and I memorize the Bible in English, okay? Now I've taken all the other languages but something you need to know, in verse 7, "Thou shalt preserve them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever." I think we can all agree that "them" is third person, right? If you speak of who "them" are or "they" are, when you're doing a linguistic study, that's third person. I'm here to tell you that every single Hebrew manuscript in the world reads "them" not "us." Every one of them. You can go Google them tonight, Bing them tonight, Yahoo tonight, it doesn't matter what you do, any search engine you use, that word for "them" is a third person. It cannot be translated "us." Here's what's interesting. It is a recent phenomena that it was translated "us."

Now just put up with me for a few moments but what we know as the Bible in the English language came to fruition a little over 400 years ago. In the 100 years after what we know as the Protestant Reformation, obviously with the commissioning of whom we know as the King of England, a group of scholars gathered themselves together and they took the Hebrew manuscripts, the Greek manuscripts, even the Aramaic for those few passages there and they brought them together so that the English speaking world, and by the way, did they realize that it would become the language of the world? I don't know. They took the words of God and we had them in English for the very first time. Originally we know it today as the King James Bible but originally it was called the Authorized Version. It was actually authorized as one that was on behalf of the monarchy. For about 250 years, that was the English Bible until the mid 19th century instead of the AV we had what was called the RV. Do you know what that stood for and it's not a large camper that you tailgate with? It stood for Revised Version. That's what it stood for. And then in 1901 we had the American Standard Version, we had the New American Standard, we had all these versions that came in. In fact, we've got more versions than we can even count now. But the thing that I want you to hear is this, that every one of those whether it was the Authorized, the Revised, the American Standard, the New American Standard, it doesn't matter which one they were, every single one of them translated that word "them" until the '80s, until the 1980s, and in the 1980s for some reason one particular "English translation of the Bible" decided to use the word "us." It's not what the Hebrew word says but it's a perfect picture of the 1980s, was it not? The 1980s was a time period it's all about, what? Us. So instead of saying, "God, you preserved your words," we decided to make it all about us, and in the last 40 years almost every English translation of the Bible has started putting the word "us" when if you just look at it grammatically you can't use the word. The word is "them." It is third person. There is no way you can grammatically defend it other than for your own personal agenda. Y'all get that, don't you because nowadays we live in a world where it doesn't matter what the facts are. It doesn't matter what the documentation is. It's not what I want to propose and so therefore I want to make it what I want it to be.

So when we go back to Psalm 12:6 and 7, I believe it makes it very clear and hopefully your English Bible says "them" tonight, but if not please understand in Hebrew it is

"them," it says, "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." What God is stating there is that his words are accessible to all people at all times. That, my friends, is what we know as the doctrine of preservation. We all agree God inspired them but do we actually have access to them?

So three things I want to do tonight. I want to address this subject matter from three perspectives: from God's perspective, man's perspective, and the skeptics' perspective because, after all, there are those who dismiss the Bible as some kind of just ancient folklore and mythology. And so how do we address this subject matter not only in our own lives but those who maybe we know or have a relationship with that want to speak contrary to the truth of God's word? So let's look at tonight the doctrine of preservation. Let's begin with what we might call from God's perspective. Let's talk about the source of Scripture.

2 Timothy 3:16 says that all Scripture is inspired by God. Even though he used roughly 40 different individuals to give us what we know as the Bible whether it be Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Habakkuk, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, the Apostle Paul, whoever it may be, even though he used them as the human instrument, God inspired or God breathed the Scripture into their lives to give humanity to speak on behalf of him. What's important about 2 Timothy 3:16, yes, it is inspired, yes, that is the source, but it's that one little word, three letters that is so impactful, "for all Scripture." Not just the Scripture we like. Not just the parts of the Bible that are familiar to us or that we find edifying. You know, there are places in the Bible that I personally don't like.

I'm gonna be honest with you, there's places in the Bible that I wish weren't written the way they are. You say, "Really?" Yes, James 1. It says that patience only comes by trials. I don't like that. I want patience just because I need it. I don't want to go through the trials. I don't like the fact that in Matthew 18 it says I'm to forgive my brother 70 times 7 times. I don't like that. I don't like the fact the Bible says, "Revenge is mine, saith the Lord." I want to take things in my own hands. But all Scripture is inspired by God so don't let the facts get in the way of your personal agenda, folks.

How often do we twist and we turn or we leave out or we just don't pay attention to because it doesn't fit our presubscribed agenda, whatever it is or what we like or what we prefer? So when we talk about from God's perspective, the source of Scripture, he breathed it, he gave it, he used these instruments. In fact, we addressed this in our Tuesday morning Bible study last week with the men at the end of 1 Thessalonians which is the first letter of the Apostle Paul chronologically that we've received. The Apostle Paul who grew up Jewish going to synagogue worship said, "When you gather together, read these words." The only thing you ever read in a synagogue is Scripture. He recognized that God was utilizing him.

But what is God's standard? I want you to turn over to 1 Corinthians 15. Now remember, it is Sunday night which means that's basically code for Bible drill night or sword drill if you grew up that way. 1 Corinthians 15, I want to show you God's standard when it

comes to the Bible. Now remember, chapter 15 is the great resurrection chapter. This is the chapter that says if Jesus Christ didn't raise from the dead our faith is in vain. In other words, if the tomb is not empty, then there's no reason to be here tonight, alright? That being said, the resurrection chapter of the Bible beginning in verse 1, "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins," notice the next phrase, "according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day," how? "According to the scriptures." So God himself has set the standard. He said if you want to know that the Bible is true, then even that which determines man's eternity is not according to a personal testimony, not according to archaeology, not according to some sign or wonder or Pentecost event, but according to the Scriptures.

Now I want you to think about this just from a practical standpoint. What was he addressing? What would the Scriptures have been to the church at Corinth? This is 30 years after the resurrection. Well, they might have had a couple of, if you want to do the math there, there was a couple of the Gospels that were floating around, one or two of the Apostle Paul's letters, but primarily he's talking about the Old Testament. And so what we know as the Old Testament, here's what God is saying: if you want to know that Jesus rose from the dead, if you want to know that's the only means of salvation, don't take his word, her word, their word, our word, according to the Scriptures. Here's the thing I want you to hear: from God's perspective when we talk about what we know as the Bible, he makes it the standard for all truth. You know, in John 17 Jesus is there in the garden of Gethsemane, he's praying to the Father, and there in verse 17 of John 17 he makes this statement to the Father, he says, "Thy word is truth." Even Jesus Christ, God in flesh, recognized that it is according to the Scriptures.

Last but not least when it comes from God's perspective, let's talk about supremacy, the supremacy of Scripture. Hopefully you have Psalms somewhat marked because we're going to be going back from Psalm 12, but Psalm 138:2. Now before we turn to Psalm 138 or as you're turning there, you know, the Bible says that at the name of Jesus, at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue will confess, right? The Bible says in Acts 4:12 neither is there salvation in any other name but the name of Jesus. I think we'd recognize the name of Jesus is pretty critical, is it not? However, look at Psalm 138:2, "I will worship toward thy holy temple, praise thy name for lovingkindness and for thy truth, for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name." Isn't that interesting that God not only says that he inspired those whom he used to give us the Scriptures, he claims that the Scripture is the standard for truth for all of humanity and for all of creation, and he even says that his word is exalted above his name. Now that's an interesting series of statements. I believe that when we come to a study of the Scriptures, a study of the Bible, you know, oftentimes we've got questions and concerns and skepticism, we'll deal with that in just a moment, but God sets the standard so high that I don't think we as humanity can set it any higher. He has said that the resurrection is based on Scripture, that Scripture is above his own name.

So let's look at it from man's perspective. So how do we take those facts, the fact that he has breathed or he has inspired Scripture, that it's the standard for truth and that it is even above his name, how's about our perspective? Well, let's use this word "preserved." That's one of those words that we'll address in just a moment as far as at length as far as its definition is concerned, but the very fact that Scripture is preserved. Matthew 5:17 and 18. Jesus is there in what we know as the Sermon on the Mount and before he gets into all of the discourse on the specific issues of life and questions of life and behaviors of life and whatever it may be, he makes an interesting statement. Now remember the Beatitudes have already been spoken, "Blessed are these and blessed are those," for all these reasons, and then he makes this statement. He says, "Heaven and earth will pass away but my word will never pass away." Now I want you to think about that. That means that the dirt that we're technically seated or standing on, the air that we're breathing will one day be gone. Now we know that scripturally speaking, the Bible says in 2 Peter 3 and then fulfilled in Revelation 20 that one day in a great ball of fire the Lord is going to remake all this mess, alright? So don't get too attached to it, it's all gonna go away, but he says his word, that heaven and earth will pass away but his word is forever. It will always be.

Let's think about the word "preserved" or "preserves." Particularly those of you who are here in what we geographically would call the South, we get that word, right? We're good at making preserves, are we not? We like preserves and I have eaten preserves out of stuff I never would preserve but nonetheless, you know, one of the blessed curses of being a pastor throughout time is oftentimes I have been supplemented with calories rather than cash. Does that communicate? I've been the beneficiary that when my wife didn't even have kids, 10 gallons of onions as a gift, 5 gallons of radishes. What do you do with 5 gallons of radishes? I have no idea. But nonetheless, I have been the recipient of watermelon rind preserves. I heard that they're good. God bless y'all. I have probably seen, tasted and had access to any conceivable amount of anything that can "be preserved." That's what we do in this part of the world, we can stuff, right? We preserve it.

Now I want you to think about that for just a moment and I'm just gonna use a simple illustration because of where we are located in the geographical area of the world. Just a little bit east of us they have massive huge peach orchards, do they not? I mean, you can drive for miles through these peach orchards. So I'm just gonna take the concept of a peach and what we know as preserves. If you were to go today and if it were the season were ripe and you were to pick a peach, right, it would be wonderful, it would be tasty, it would be incredible, correct? But what if you want that peach to last a year? What do you do? Put it on the counter? No. What's it gonna look like in about 30 days? It's gonna be nasty, is it not? What if you said this peach is so good I want my grandkids to get to enjoy it so I'm gonna lock it up in the safe and in my will I'm gonna leave my grandkids this peach? What do you think it would look and smell like when you opened it up? It'd be nasty, would it not?

Now there's a purpose for that illustration. When it says that the words of the Lord are preserved and when it says that heaven and earth will pass away but my word will never

pass away, what do we do when we preserve or can something? We take that peach per the illustration and we change its form. It is no longer in its single content with the fuzzy cover. We change its form. We put it with other substances, do we not? And by the way, the more the sugar, the better the preserve, is that not correct? And then we seal it. It can be a year, two, five, 10, I don't know how long you can technically can something but I want to be honest with you, if there's a layer of dust on the top, I just get nervous. But nonetheless, what is the purpose of doing it? So that in the off season you can enjoy peaches. You could technically if you had the proper equipment and such, you could take that same peach and you could leave it for your grandkids if you had the right means to preserve it in the right manner.

Now if you pull out a can of peach preserves, I highly recommend you do a little bit of ice cream on the side but that's between you and the Lord, you bring out the peach preserves, is the consistency inside that jar different than the peach off the tree? Well, of course it is, alright? The shape of it is different, correct? In fact, it's a little bit sweeter, is it not? But it does not change the fact that you're eating a peach. It's the same fruit in a different form, that's all it is. You cannot, you would never open up a peach preserve and go, "Hm, that's an apple." No. You would never say that's a watermelon rind, whoever said they liked that. You would never say that. And by the way, jalapenos preserves, woo, they will light you up. But nonetheless, we would never claim that it was a different fruit. It's the same fruit, the purpose is for it to taste the same, it's just in a different form.

Why is that so important? On a very practical level and I'm just gonna go there, you don't have the ability, neither do I anymore to be honest with you, to go pick out the old Hebrew scrolls, the original letters of the Apostle Paul, even if I could find them and bring them to you, what would you do with them? It would, by the way, it would look really strange, the way that it's all written and the style and all, it would not, you would be like, "Oh, I'm lost here." Why do we use the phrase, "It's Greek to me"? Because we look at something and go, "I can't get this. I don't understand it." In other words, here's what God's saying, when he says heaven and earth will pass away but my words will never pass away, what he's essentially saying is this, that it may not be in the original form in which it was inspired but you're still gonna have access to it for all of eternity.

Now let's take that Matthew 5 passage and dig a little deeper. What do you think that the language of heaven is going to be? I don't know. King James [laughter]. I don't know what the language of heaven is going to be, I don't have a clue. In fact, the Apostle Paul came back in 2 Corinthians 12 and he made this statement, he said, "I have heard things uttered I can't even repeat to you." In other words, one day heaven and earth are gonna pass away but according to Matthew 5 we're still gonna have the word of God.

Now let's talk about the residents of heaven for just a moment. Are they gonna be from all backgrounds? All nations? Absolutely they are, and yet at the same time we will have access to his words and I think the thing that is so critical for us to understand today and this goes kind of into the skeptics section, I know we're gonna get there in just a moment, we don't have the original five scrolls of Moses, we don't have it, we don't have the original letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, we don't have it in our

possession. It's not there and so you're right, we don't have that peach that we pulled off the tree but what God says is, "I've preserved it for this generation forever," and the last time I checked, even though peach preserves are still peaches, they're a little bit sweeter, are they not? They go really good with Blue Bell.

But nonetheless we've got a problem. You say, "What do you mean we've got a problem?" The book of Jude, go to the book of Revelation, hang a hard left, in the book of Jude verses 3 and 4 there's this really interesting statement. He says, "You know, I wanted to come to you and encourage you. I wanted to tell you flattering words. I wanted to basically speak positive affirmations into your life." But what does it say here beginning in verse 3? It says, "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ." Even in the early days of what we know as Christianity, it says that these men of ill repute were sneaking into the body of believers and they were twisting the message.

By the way, this is not a new scheme. If we were to go back to Genesis 3, do you remember the first statement that the devil makes to humanity? "Yea hath God said?" Isn't that interesting? The very first doubt that Satan puts in humanity's mind is, "Did God really say what God said?" That's the first thing he brings up and do you know what he does? He "quotes" God from Genesis 2:16 but he leaves out a word. You know the best lies are 90% true, right? So when it says here that men have crept in unawares, that they are perverting, they are twisting, they are turning the word of God, and so what that says to me is if the Scriptures are the standard by which God uses for truth, they're elevated above his name, they will be even when this earth and heaven pass away, then just like their forefather, the devil himself, it makes perfect sense that the means of these men of lasciviousness would be somehow infiltrate, twist and turn and get you to doubt that you have access to what God said because do you know what Adam and Eve did right after Satan did that? They began to make it up on their own. They began to just make it up. There's proof there. You can go to Genesis 3 when he says, "Yea hath God said," and he twists and he turns. Do you remember the conversation thereafter? Here's what they say. They said, "You're right. God said that we should not eat, in fact, he said we shouldn't even touch it." Is that what God said? No. Now I wouldn't advise touching it but nonetheless what did they do? They added to it. They changed it. They altered what God said because that was their personal agenda. What was their agenda? They thought somehow in their minds that God had set them up in this harsh environment, it wasn't fair, it wasn't this, it wasn't that, and they needed the knowledge of good and evil, they needed to be like the gods, they needed more than what they had. Again, folks, don't let the facts get in the way of your personal agenda.

Humanity had an agenda, the devil had an agenda. Interesting that in Genesis 3 the whole what we know as garden of Eden scene that all went sideways was based on removing words and adding words to what God said. So why do you think the enemy would

change? If we have those according to Jude 3 and 4 that are gonna twist, then they're going to attack the words of God because that is the standard that God has given us. If his standard was the personal testimony of the apostles, they'd still be alive today. He'd have the ability, could he not? He could keep their life. He could preserve their life so that we could have 2,000 year old guys walking around saying, "I was there at the empty tomb. I'm the guy that outran Peter. I was there." We could have that but he said, "No, no, no, the standard is gonna be Scripture."

So back to Psalm 12. So what is the process from man's perspective? It's been purified seven times like silver. When the heat comes in and the dross is poured off the top, you shall keep them, O Lord, you shall preserve them from this generation forever. Humanity has a multiplicity of cultures and backgrounds, demographics, whatever it may be, but there's an odd thing that has happened in humanity's existence is we've always had a common language. Now not everybody has had access or been privy to that language but there's always been a common language. Just do a simple linguistic study whether it's Hebrew, Greek, Latin, German, English, you can pick it out. If you don't believe me, just travel overseas. I've had the opportunity to go to a taxicab in a foreign country and ask them for a ride. They look at me, "I don't understand you. No English." I pull out a \$20 bill, "Yes, sir, where would you like to go?" I mean, they know, they know. What do missionaries do in foreign countries? They oftentimes impact a community by teaching ESL, English as a Second Language.

Now the reason I address that is if you look at history from just a broad perspective that even though God speaks to individuals in their own language, don't get me wrong, there's always been the language of the people. When the Old Testament was written, guess what the language of the world was? It was Hebrew. When the New Testament was written, what was the language of the world? Greek. And so therefore what is God doing? He is communicating to humanity as humanity needs to be communicated with.

Now [unintelligible] because I happen to speak it but, you know, you give it 50-60 more years, it may be Chinese. Have you ever thought of that? This idea that we will always be "the superpower of the world" is built on a false concept, to be honest with you. You say, "Well, how do you know that's a false concept?" Because study the Greek, study the English, study the Romans, study them all. Cultures come and cultures go. And here's the beauty of this and God is so good to us that no matter what the language of the world is, God gives us his word in that language.

Now today it's not 50 years from now, it's not 60 years from now it's right now, and whether it's a taxicab in a foreign country or a UN, I guess, display or forum, what we know as English has become and is the language of the world so it only makes perfect sense that we don't have to go back and dig up old scrolls and search for old parchments, that we have access to the words of God. So real simply God has inspired it, God has set it as the standard, humanity has the privilege at whatever stage we find ourselves in of having access to what God intended and inspired to say. What does this mean for us? This means that we have access and we have privilege to say, "I know what God said and I don't have to question it. I don't have to doubt it. I don't have to ponder. I don't have to

question. I know that I have access because he has," what? "Preserved it from this generation forever." Do we have the original peach? No, but we've got an incredible jar of peach preserves in our language for our day that we have access to.

So let's talk about the skeptics, and by the way, you may be one of those skeptics tonight. Let's talk about the skeptics. What about those folks who say you can't trust the Bible? What about those folks who say there's mistakes, there's errors, there's this, there's that, there's textual variances. I could get in all the weeds and I won't do that tonight. I want to address three things or three items that skeptics use. You may be a skeptic in this room, on the other side of the camera, or you may have a family member that's a skeptic. I have people who call me all the time, "I've got a son, I've got a daughter, I've got a cousin, I've got a coworker, they don't believe the Bible is accurate. They don't believe it's true. Can you help me out?" And so this is one of those privileges that I have and so I've just kind of summarized three ways that skeptics like to be skeptical about the Bible.

The first way is this: the issue of consistency. The book of Hebrews 4:12, it says the word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword, correct? Now that's an interesting statement that God has given that it is sharper than any two-edged sword. Now there are television shows that are out there, I don't know if your family has watched them, where people actually make their own knives, they make their own swords, they make their own blades, and one of the big questions, you know, is it tough enough? You know, will it bend? Will it break? Will it this, will it that? I find it interesting that when one of these workers is producing a blade, that the number 1 concern is to remove all impurities and to make sure that it maintains its shape and its form and does not get altered in any way. If you're gonna produce a good solid blade whether it's a long sword or a short knife, whatever it is, you've got to make sure that the entire edge, you guessed it, is consistent. Why? Because if you have any nicks, if you have any folds, if you have any cracks that are there, when it comes under pressure or when it is put in a certain position it will be compromised.

One of my favorite statements by one of these shows is when one individual just basically just beats these blades to death and he turns to the one who created it and he said, "It will cut." You know, or "It will kill," whatever statement he's using for the test that they are using. But the issue is with consistency. You ever try to cut with a dull knife? It's actually more dangerous. Why? Because that dull blade on whatever you're cutting, whatever it may be, it can slip and it can slide. Have you ever used a knife that had nicks in it or had cuts on the edge? Why? Because what will happen is as you're using it, what will it do, it will hang on it, will it not? And it cannot do, in fact, if you're trying to make a perfect slice, what will it do if it has a nick in the blade? It will tear whatever you're trying to cut smoothly and it won't be what you had designed to do.

You know, when we talk about that the word of God is consistent, what that means is this: not just that the story from Genesis to Revelation but all of the details in between. And I've heard lots of people over time say, "Well, there's issues here and there's issues there. It's not that big a deal." It is a big deal because did you know that a blade in a wartime endeavor, one of the most fascinating studies I've ever done is that when you

have a blade if you're in a warfare battle and you're using some type of blade as your instrument of warfare, it's not the entrance of the blade that's most important. Do you know what it is? The exit. Why? Because if your blade gets hung up on a bone or on a rib, you can't get out of the situation and you are exposed to your enemies on the backside.

When the Bible says that it is sharper than any two-edged sword, it's not only able to divide and cut the soul from the spirit like it says there in Hebrews 4:12 but we can get in and, listen, we can get out. Have you ever been in a Bible conversation you couldn't get out of? You ever had somebody knock on your door with pamphlets or a book or riding a bicycle and the next thing you know you're all twisted and turned upside down? You got into that conversation, didn't you, but were you able to get out of it? A lot of times if we have nicks in our sword we can't get out of it. By the way, you know that's why I quote in the old days we called it sword drill, right? You know, we call it Bible drill today. We called it sword drill because the Bible's described as sharper than any two-edged sword.

So one of the issues that skeptics will use about the Bible and these may be your own family members, it may even be you, is they'll claim that there's mistakes here, there's errors there, there's problems there, and pretty soon you've got all these little nicks and you can get in a conversation, the struggle is getting out. Now that leads to the next one, the sufficiency of Scripture. Now what did Jesus say in Matthew 5? He said that heaven and earth will pass away but my words will never pass away. He made it very clear that you have preserved them, O God, from this generation forever. How many times have you been in a conversation with somebody or maybe you've been in a Bible study and say, "Well, I kinda know what it says but, you know, generally speaking this is what it says"? That is an apathetic excuse for a nick in the proverbial sword.

Now there are several places in your Bible that you may not realize but in "some of your Bibles" you've got some nicks and gnashes in your sword and you don't know it. How about Matthew 17:21? Look it up. Matthew 17:21, Jesus has come down from the Mount of Transfiguration, there's a boy that is possessed by a demon, he's flailing in the fire, he's all upset, and Jesus tells his disciples, "Don't worry, I got this." Heals the little boy and they say, "How did you do this? We couldn't do it." Look in verse 21, what does Jesus say? It's a very famous passage. Some of you are having a hard time finding it, aren't you, because it's not there. "This kind only comes out by prayer and fasting." Some of your Bibles go from 20 to 22, don't they? First time you may have ever seen that. You say, "Where did it go?" Don't you remember what Satan did in Genesis 3? He took it out. What has happened in Jude 3 and 4? Certain men have crept in unawares. Some of you, don't worry, some of you have got brackets and there's a little note at the bottom that says some manuscripts. Oh, that's authoritative. Boy, that'll win a battle in an argument, will it not?

Alright, while you're in Matthew, go over to chapter 18. Matthew 18. I mean, while we're in Matthew. There's a very simplistic statement that Jesus makes. I think it's pretty important. Some people don't think it's that big a deal. Some of y'all struggling with verse 11? Brackets, parentheses not there at all? What does Jesus say? "For the Son of Man has

come to seek and save that which was lost." Why would you not put that in there? Why would you take that out? Why would you put that in margin and go, "Well, some manuscripts don't have that"? I'll tell you why, because you're just like Satan in Genesis 3. "Did God really say that? Ah, it's not that big a deal." But if I'm a skeptic, why does it go from verse 10 to 12? Why does it tell me some manuscripts don't have it?

You know I could keep going on and on and on, but for the sake of time let's go to Acts 8. Acts 8, we have the first personal evangelism encounter in the New Testament, one-on-one. Philip is gonna talk with the Ethiopian eunuch. There he is, he's in the chariot, he's got the scroll of Isaiah out which, by the way, is just an amazing picture to begin with, must have been a big chariot because that's a big scroll, nonetheless they have this conversation. He doesn't understand and he says, "How can I understand unless somebody tells me?" Verse 36 of Acts 8, Philip asked him a very important question, "Do you believe this?" Look at verse 37, some of y'all go straight to verse 38, don't you? Some of you got parentheses. Some of you have got a note that says, "Well, the manuscripts this, the manuscripts that." I guess it's not that important, it just says, "If you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ thou shalt be saved. Oh, this I believe." You realize that the Ethiopian eunuch's complete profession of faith is verse 37 and if you take it out, you have a witnessing opportunity and a baptism and no profession of faith in between.

Oh, but it's not that big a deal. Yes, it is that big a deal because what I've just done for you, I know what you're thinking, "Oh, well, there's other passages." But a skeptic says, "What about this one?" And I know what you're thinking, "Well, if you take the Bible in its totality," I get it but what about this one? Anybody know anybody that believes in what we call baptismal regeneration? It means that if you don't get under the water you can't go to heaven? They love Acts 8 because if you take out verse 37, you've got a guy that's baptized with no profession of faith.

How about questioning the legitimacy of hell? Is hell real? Jesus talked about it twice as much as he did heaven but in Mark 9:44 and 46 some of your Bibles don't even have them in there. They just skip right on over them. It goes 43, 45, 47, 48, and last time I checked, that's bad math. Why? Well, because certain men have crept in unaware but what did God say? "I've preserved it from this generation forever." And so one of the things that we tend to do is say, "Oh, it's okay, though, because I can take you to other passages." I get that, you can take me to other passages but I'm a skeptic, I'm a doubter, I'm a questioner and I want to know why is it not, why hasn't this and that's total verses.

Let's get even more specific for just a moment. Let's go to Acts 4. Acts 4:27. This is where we're gonna talk about fidelity. Now for those of you who have grown up in Sunday school, trust me, I get it, you can kind of push back a little bit and say, "Well, but generally speaking." But what did God say? "Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will never pass away." So it's not just about intent or thought or ideas, it's about words.

Acts 4. There's this experience where the early believers have been persecuted, they're about to have a prayer time and God's gonna answer that prayer, the building's gonna

shake, they're gonna be filled with the Holy Ghost and a revival is gonna break loose, alright? Verse 27 is actually a part of the prayer that is offered. It says, "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus." Some of your Bibles will say "servant." There's a big difference between a servant and a child, is there not? At least in my home there is both growing up and parenting. Was Jesus a servant or was Jesus the child of God? You see, a servant is one who you have no relationship to and a child is one that is of you. Now I know what the argument is, "Oh, but Jesus served the Lord." Yeah, he served the Lord but a child can serve and not be a servant, and a servant no matter how good they serve can never be a child. You say, "Well, it's just one little word. It's not that big a deal." If I'm a skeptic it is. Was Jesus a servant or was Jesus a child? Now I know the Bible says he came to serve, not to be served, but a child can serve. Guess what, as a parent, as a dad, I can serve. As a believer, I can serve. The act of serving is different than the title of a servant.

Go a little bit further to the right to the book of Colossians 1. By the way, I'm just showing you some of the nicks in the sword here because you can get a lot of conversations that you can't get out of. Maybe y'all don't deal with the skeptics that I do but I deal with them every day.

Colossians 1. I'm gonna begin reading in verse 15. It is a great incredible passage of Scripture. It says speaking of Jesus, "Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell." I want you to notice verse 20. I mean, that's a great declaration. "And, having made peace through the blood of his cross," some of your Bibles will say "by a cross" or "by the cross." Last time I checked, Jesus' cross was different than everybody else's. A lot of people died on a cross but when it's his cross, that means that his piercing and his blood that was shed is different than other cross that has ever existed.

Now I know what some people will say, "Oh, but, but pastor, there's other passages and you put them all together and you make a big stew with it and you get the general concept." But God said that heaven and earth will pass away but his words will never pass away. If you'll allow me to kind of go full circle for a moment, you go back to Psalm 12, at least in the modern era for almost 400 years humanity agreed with God that the words of God had been preserved, but about 40 years ago we decided, "No, we're gonna make it all about us," and when we make it all about us, then we want it to sound the way we want it to sound, we want it to be the way we want it to be because here's the hard cold truth: when we look at the word as it is written and as it is preserved, it is not politically correct. When we say that Jesus' cross was different than every other cross, when we make the statement that he was the child of God, not the servant of God, when we say he came to seek and to save that which was lost, when we make the statement that we profess faith in him in our sinful condition before we are "baptized," those are major

tenets of the faith that in just a few brief moments I've showed you, certain men have crept in unawares and they've changed it. But here's what they did, see, they listened to the originator. Did Satan come to Adam and Eve and make an entirely new statement? No.

By the way, allow me to do it in English because that's what we read and study regularly. Did you know the statement that God made in Genesis 2:16 has 10 words? Satan's declaration had nine. He just took out one word. You know what the word was? Freely. He took out freedom. Isn't that what happens in our life when we decide to do it our own way? We end up in bondage just like Adam and Eve did. They end up on this side of the garden of Eden where thorns are coming out of the ground, where pain is in childbirth and the home is in great disagreement. Why? Because we wanted it to be our way and not God's way.

Tonight when we began I don't think there's anybody here that would have argued that God inspired what we have as the Bible but you may have never thought about that he has preserved it and that throughout time he has kept it pure as the silver, as it speaks of, but let me warn you there are certain men that have crept in unawares and they've taken this word and they've changed it, and they've taken this verse and they've taken it out, and they love to hide behind academia, they love to hide behind all of the scientific study and the textual criticism and all these fancy words that I want to address, but tonight I want to shift gears as we close. I don't know about you and I know we have some younger people here tonight, but every day I wake up is a fresh reminder that my body is eroding. It is. You know the old statement if it doesn't hurt, then it doesn't work? Amen. I get it. And I know there's some of you saying, "Well, just wait a little bit." I get it. I get it. Our bodies are eroding and according to 1 Corinthians 15 I'm gonna get a new body one day, one that will not perish. How do I know that? According to the Scriptures. The Bible says that. I don't know about you but I have days in life that I don't know about you, maybe I'm the only one in the room and maybe this is a good confession time, there are days in life where you feel distant from the Lord. Do you ever have days in life where you're disappointed with God and you know he's disappointed with you? Please tell me I'm not the only one here. Alright, thank you. What does he say in his word? "I'll never leave you. I'll never forsake you." Have you ever been a believer for 10, 20, 30 years and woken up one day realizing that you've done something you never thought you'd ever do? John 10 says, "No man can pluck them out of my hand." How do we know that? According to Scripture.

I want to close on a really interesting, I think it's interesting statement. If God can't preserve his word, how is he gonna preserve your soul? You realize we're talking eternity, right? If God can't keep his word, how is he gonna keep your soul? I am trusting my entire eternity based on what he said. That's it. And if he can't keep what he said, then how is he gonna keep me? If he can't take his word for every generation and keep it pure, then how is he gonna keep me for all of eternity? This isn't just an issue of how to deal with skeptics and how to strengthen our faith, this has everything to do with the sufficiency of our salvation through Jesus Christ. He said that, "I will forgive you. I will save you. I will never forsake you and nothing and nobody can pluck you out of my

hand." How can we believe that he'll preserve us for all eternity if he can't preserve his own word?

That being said, I think we all tonight subscribe to the doctrine of inspiration. Maybe tonight has challenged you to believe in the doctrine of preservation because heaven and earth are gonna pass away, folks, but his word will never pass away. Maybe tonight you've been one of those skeptics, maybe you've been one of those individuals, maybe you're in the room, maybe you're outside of the room, maybe you're one of those persons who for whatever reason it may be have said, "Well, but what about it? What about?" Well, I think tonight that we've demonstrated God has preserved his word not only from the generation of David but for all generations, so let me encourage you to do something. I know that tonight's a little bit different because it's a Bible study format not necessarily a worship service where we stand and sing and such, but if you need to speak with somebody, if you need to talk with somebody particularly for those of you that are on the other side of the camera, reach out, call us, text us. The best thing to do is text. And by the way, last week several of y'all did and we had the privilege of having conversations with you, and thank you again for reaching out. Let me give you the number both for those in the room, outside of the room. It is 334-231-2313. By the way, feel free to use that number and just send us a nice little message. We don't mind what you say but if you text the word "yes," y-e-s, or for those of you who like to abbreviate, "y," that's all you put, it's okay, if you respond with an affirmative "yes" or a "y" to that number, we're gonna give you a call back. It doesn't matter what it's about. It may have nothing to do with what we talked about tonight, your life, your home may be falling apart and you just need somebody to pray with, that's okay. That's why we're here. We want that opportunity. We want that privilege to do so.

So tonight as we close, I'm gonna pray and I am praying with the assurance that in spite of who I've been, what I've done or what I might do in the future, God is going to keep me because he's kept his word.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, as we close tonight, God, I know that as we started this service we have been guilty, oh too many times, of taking your word for granted, for looking at it through mere human earthly eyes but, God, we confess that we are simple creatures, we have a disposition that is contrary to you, we naturally, God, we gravitate toward sin more than we do righteousness and, God, we admit tonight that if it weren't for your goodness, your grace and your mercy, we'd be in trouble for all of eternity. But God, according to your Scriptures, you lived, you died and you rose from the grave so that we could be saved and you made us the promise that you'd never leave us or forsake us, you promised us that nobody or nothing could take us out of your hand. And so God, tonight, we claim those promises not because we want to, because it's what you said. And God, I pray that as we leave this time of study, as tomorrow morning we wake up and we dig into the Psalms or whatever private Bible study we do, God, I pray that we would not look at the Bible as just a series of old documents that somehow, someway ended up in our living room, but that we would see that the words that we're reading and studying,

God, that they're the same words today that you used thousands of years ago who are able to convert the soul, to convict the rebellious, and to comfort the hurting. So God, wherever we find ourselves this night and in future days, may we not just believe that you inspired it, God, may we trust that you preserved it. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.