

Its

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The Bible is, quite simply, a miracle both in its compilation and preservation. It was written by some forty different writers from different countries and from different walks of life: for instance, a king, a fisherman, a doctor, a herdsman. These penmen wrote over a period of about 1,600 years. The fact that they were the writers but not the originators of the biblical books becomes clear when we notice the wonderful harmony that exists in all their writings. As the first began his work there could be no collusion with those who were to write much later on, and vice versa. And yet, when the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament are put together, they are characterised by a perfect unity. That unity is focussed on Christ, His gracious and glorious person, and His redeeming and reigning work. This book, therefore, is not man's, but God's (2 Peter 1:19–21). It is God's verbally inspired, infallible revelation to man and, consequently, wholly reliable.

Equally as amazing is the preservation of the Bible. Since its inception, the word of God has been the target of satanic attack in every conceivable way. It has been banned and burned, despised and derided as no other book has ever been, and yet it continues to spread over the whole earth in millions of copies and hundreds of languages. Truly, divine inspiration guarantees divine preservation (1 Peter 1:21–25). The continued existence of the word of God is one great argument for the existence of God Himself.

All this leads us to ask, how did God, in a tangible way, preserve His word? And how has it been accurately transmitted to succeeding generations? With respect to the Old Testament, the original documents (none of which now exists) were copied by the hands of careful scribes. The scribes had a reverent regard of the sacred writings and strove for great accuracy in their copies. Words and letters were meticulously counted. A mistake caused the entire page to be destroyed. No word was written from memory and each word was pronounced before writing. The copies, therefore, were extremely accurate. Worn out or faded copies were also destroyed so they could not be mutilated or put to base use.

There is today a single standard Hebrew text of the Old Testament, the Masoretic Text. It draws its name from a group of Jewish scholars known as the Masoretes, who, in order to preserve the historical

pronunciation of the Hebrew text as well as its purity, inserted vowel points into the text. Their invaluable work was completed early in the eleventh century. The Masoretic Text, commonly known as the Textus Receptus of the Old Testament, is recognised by most Jewish and Christian authorities as the true text of the Hebrew Scriptures. Most English translations of the Old Testament, including the Authorised Version, are derived from this transcendent text.

As the Old Testament was copied substantially in Hebrew, so the New Testament was copied in Greek. In the providence of God, there was a quick proliferation of these copies spread over a wide geographical area. This manual copying process continued for about 1,400 years until the invention of printing, and over 5,000 sections or fragments of these copies, known as manuscripts, exist today. The vast majority of these form the basis of what is referred to as the Textus Receptus or Received Text. Further evidence of the original text can also be found in church lectionaries or pulpit readings as well as the writings of the church fathers.

A careful examination of the total available evidence reveals that a remarkably large number of the manuscripts agree in presenting a Greek text that very closely resembles the text underlying the Authorised Version. The united testimony of the church in all centuries since Christ's earthly ministry bears corporate witness that the Lord has preserved the genuine text of the New Testament in those manuscripts. The rapid rise, widespread uniformity, and dominance of the Textus Receptus are unassailable proofs that its text reaches back to the original autographs or writings. It is also a potent tribute to the providence of God in preserving His word at all times, as He promised He would do (Matthew 24:35). The Authorised Version is a faithful translation of the Textus Receptus and as such is God's holy word in our own tongue. Of the thousands of pieces of manuscripts, 80 to 90 percent support the Greek text used by the Authorised Version. Essentially then, the Authorised Version is based upon the most accurate Greek text, the indispensable foundation of an accurate translation.

The textual basis of the modern versions, however, is less than reliable. Almost all recent translations are founded on Westcott and Hort's New Testament Greek Text

of 1881, a text marked by numerous and serious omissions. This is hardly surprising when we realize that in controverted readings they reject the evidence of the large majority of the manuscripts! For the most part, this revised text stems from a number of papyrus fragments dating from the second century and two fourth-century manuscripts of disputed accuracy, the codices Vaticanus (B) and Sinaiticus (Aleph). Using the traditional text as a standard of comparison, we discover that Codex B omits at least 2,877 words while Codex Aleph omits at least 3,455 words; and they disagree with each other more than 3,000 times in the four Gospels alone. The respected Dean Burgon, after studying these often-conflicting codices for over five years, concluded that they were "little more than a single reproduction of one and the same scandalously corrupt and comparatively late copy." If this is so, as available evidence would certainly seem to verify, then virtually all of the modern versions, including the top-selling New International Version, have been built upon a foundation bordering on the unstable.

Put simply, there are in essence two Bibles today. One is based unwaveringly on the Textus Receptus, that being the Authorised Version. The other is built upon a text taken primarily from two dubious manuscripts, that manifesting itself in the rash of modern versions. The question is, are we going to use the text which God "by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages" (Westminster Confession of Faith), or are we not? Despite the multiplication of versions, we unhesitatingly answer that we will continue to use the Authorised Version principally because of the soundness of its textual base.

How faithful the Holy Spirit has been to His word in maintaining a continuous transmission of the original text! Despite the confusion created by the multiplicity of modern versions, God's people can be confident that in the Authorised Version they handle a pure, trustworthy translation of the word of God. Having come to the 400th anniversary of its publication, let us heartily bless God for this time-honoured, unrivalled translation of Scripture as we continue "holding fast the faithful word" (Titus 1:9). ■

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