

PS 12:6-7 GOD'S PROMISE TO PRESERVE HIS PEOPLE

“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.”

(An answer to: “Did God Promise to Preserve His Words?: Interpreting Psalm 12:6-7” by Rev Quek Suan Yew, The Burning Bush, July 2004).

Proponents of the Perfect King James Bible Verbal Plenary Preservation (“KJV-VPP”) view interpret Ps 12:6-7 as a promise of preservation of God’s words, rather than of God’s people.

However, conservative theologians down the ages have held in common that Ps 12:6-7 refer to the saints. John Calvin in his “Commentary on the Psalms of David” held so. The Geneva Bible (1560), translated by John Knox, Coverdale, William Whittingham et al states, *“Thou wilt keep them, O LORD: thou wilt preserve him from this generation forever.”* And in the margin: *“That is, thine, though he were but one man.”* The Westminster Divines in their commentary of the Bible, concurred, and omitted this verse as a proof text in the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 1 Sect VIII on the Bible. The Matthew Henry Commentary, 1706 says this refers to the preservation of the saints, as does the Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary, 1866.

In Charles H Spurgeon’s colossal “Treasury of David”, 1869, he says verse 7 refers to the saint, *“In life many a saint ...; preserved for ever from the generation that stigmatised him...”* Spurgeon included a voluminous “Explanatory Notes and Quaint Sayings” section - a verse by verse compilation of notes and quotations of numerous other commentators to explain points of difficulty - stating in the Preface that his “friend and amanuensis Mr John L. Keys, most diligently aided me in investigations at the British Museum, Dr. Williams’s Library, and other treasuries of theological lore. With his help I have ransacked books by the hundred ... Readers little know how great labour the finding of but one pertinent extract may involve; labour certainly I have not spared...” For Ps 12:7, he gives no entry in this section, indicative that commentators are mostly agreed.

The great Bible expositor G Campbell Morgan (“Notes on the PSALMS”, 1947), was perhaps among the first and few to differ. He says, *“The “them” here refers to the words. There is no promise made of widespread revival or renewal. It is the salvation of a remnant and the preservation of His own words which Jehovah promises.”* His Bible text however is “the American Standard Version of the Revised Bible”, not the KJV!

Here are reasons why I believe that Ps 12:7 clearly refers to the saints: -

1. Theme of the Psalms

Psalm 1 provides the theme of the entire Book of Psalms: - “Blessed is the godly man, who shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, whose leaf also shall not wither; whereas the ungodly are not so; but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away... The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.”

On arriving at Psalm 12 however, an anguished cry rings out, “HELP, LORD; for the godly man ceaseth! The faithful fail from among the children of men!” David, fleeing for his life, had heard the report that Saul had slain 85 priests of the Lord in one day and smote the city of Nob (1Sam 22:17-19). As he makes his anguished prayer of complaint, the Lord’s answer comes, (verse 5) “Now will I arise, saith the Lord; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him.” At these words from the mouth of Jehovah, David

gratefully responds (verse 6) in humble magnificence, “The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.” For David, God’s words meant full release in the perfect assurance that God shall intervene and shall preserve him and every of His saints “from this generation for ever.”

2. The Hebrew grammar

In the Hebrew, “Keep them” is *masculine plural*. “Preserve them” is *masculine singular*, i.e. “Preserve him” rather than “them”, as explained in the KJB margin. “The words of the Lord” however is *feminine plural*.

Basic grammar rules dictate that this verse refers to people and not to “the words”. Rev Quek cites one Hebrew Grammarian, Gesenius¹, as authority for possible gender rule exceptions, “Through a weakening in the distinction of gender ... masculine suffixes (especially in the plural) are not infrequently used to refer to feminine substantives.” Rev Quek then adds, “*Besides Psalm 12:7*, here are a few other examples from the OT where this occurs...” This could mislead some readers to think that Gesenius applied a gender rule exception to Ps 12:7. However: -

- a) Gesenius did not apply the exception to Ps 12:7; otherwise Rev Quek would have quoted him ad verbatim. This is Rev Quek’s own application and the onus is on him to offer clear proof that a gender rule exception could directly apply here to this verse.
- b) The difficulty for Rev Quek’s view is that in this verse, not one but two “gender rule exceptions” would be required! David, moved by the Holy Spirit, repeated the masculine term (so that there is a strengthening, not a weakening in the distinction of gender!) as if say that no one should misinterpret that God’s people are here the object!
- c) The final implausibility for Rev Quek’s view is that the numerical rule also must be broken! David, moved by the Spirit, changed the second time from the masculine plural to the masculine singular, “him”! This clearly refers to a person, and in no way can refer to the plural “the words”!

Taking a step back then, as reasonable thinkers would, we ought to ask, “Would the Holy Spirit, writing through the sweet psalmist David, set out to confuse His people with clouded grammar?” If God meant “the words”, it would be a simple thing for David to use the feminine plural. God’s Word is always simple and clear (complicated only in the hearts of rebellious, unyielding sinners) for He is not the author of confusion (1Cor 14:33)!

In summary then, “Keep ‘them’” refers to God’s people: the godly man and the faithful of verse 1 and the poor and the needy of verse 5 (masculine, plural). And “Preserve ‘him’” means preserve every one of them! None of them is lost (John 17:12). The Hebrew, “Keep” is *shamar* - “to hedge about, guard, to protect, attend to, to preserve, to save.” “Preserve” is *nâtsar* - “to guard, to protect, to hide.”

3. Verse 6, the Adjunctive Response to Verse 5

We have seen above that verse 6 is the adjunctive response to verse 5. God speaks and says, “I will arise!” David gratefully responds, “Thy words are *pure words*.”

¹ On another occasion, he cited Dr Spiros Zodhiates as his authority, without realizing that Zodhiates’ Hebrew Greek Key Study KJV Bible ascribes Ahaziah’s age of 42 instead of 22 in 2 Chr 22:2 as an “unintentional scribal error.”

Unlike men's words that are oft impure and unreliable, God's words are one hundred percent pure, sure and reliable! God's words are *pure words* of justice, mercy and faith (Mt 23:23, Rom 10:17)! Sufficient for His crying saints that God has said, "I will arise"! (See for example also Ps 3:4, 4:1, 5:2, 7:1, 10:1, 11:1, etc...) He has promised and will assuredly be with us unto the ends of the earth, and shall never, never fail us!

The KJB cross references to "*pure words*" are Ps 18:30 (or also 2Sam 22:31, which "David spake in the day that the Lord had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies") and Prov 30:5 "Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him." God's pure words as pertaining to us, always speaks of His goodness to us, in delivering us, shielding us, and preserving us until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory (Eph 1:14).

4. Scripture Cross References of Verse 7 "Keep & Preserve"

Continuing to let Scripture explain Scripture: the cross references to verse 7, given in the "Treasury of Scripture Knowledge," also *all* indicate the preservation of His saints: -

Ps 16:1 Michtam of David. Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust.

Ps 37:28 For the LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off.

Ps 121:8 The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.

Ps 145:20 The LORD preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy.

Deut 33:3 Yea, he loved the people; all his saints are in thy hand: and they sat down at thy feet; every one shall receive of thy words.

1 Sam 2:9 He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail.

1 Pet 1:5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Jude 1:1 Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called:

How encouraging and wonderful that God our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour, have made all these wonderful promises to preserve us, His saints and His people!

Final Points about KJV-VPPism

1. If Ps 12:7 refers to "the words", it would not prove but rather self-refute the VPP postulate that the pure apographs were lost until 1611 "when it was completely and uniquely restored perfect to the jot and tittle" by the translators of the KJB! The verse reads "*preserve them from this (David's) generation forever*"!
2. VPPism claims itself as a crusade for "A Perfect Bible" but if it truly was, they would not attack fundamental brethren who hold to the Perfect Bible Autographa doctrine, and who love and know the KJB no less than them. (There is only One Bible, the Infallible Divinely Inspired Original Autographa. All other "Bibles" are but versions or translations from transcriptions transmitted down the ages.)

3. VPPism is really not about the Perfect Bible but is propaganda for an extreme minority view that places the KJB on a unique supreme pedestal (tantamount to KJV worship?), as having underlying Hebrew and Greek texts that are jot and tittle exact to the original Autographa! All other translations or versions by implication are rendered as imperfect, including Tyndale (based on Erasmus 4th edition), Luther's German Bible, the Septuagint, the Syriac-Peshitto, the Arabic, Jerome's Latin Bible, all 22 Textus Receptus renditions, the Chinese United Bible, etc, as none share identical KJV underlying texts! Using a common VPP argument, should we say that all the readers of these various Bibles that have scribal errors are without assurance of salvation? Is this not divisive in the Church of the Living God?
4. Our VPP brethren shy distinctly away from evidential truths because they know that KJV-VPPism cannot stand in its light. They quote oft from the solid evidential truths adduced by sound and godly textual critics like Dean John William Burgon by which we know assuredly that the TR is far more reliable and to be preferred than Westcott and Hort's modern "de-conflated" text. They would however like forgotten that this same solid evidence also simultaneously disproves KJV-VPPism: and this our VPP brethren sadly cannot face up to!

In conclusion, what then is the outcome of all this?

First, the Holy Spirit is grieved and quenched (1 Thess 5:19, Eph 4:30). We pray for revival in our churches, but how can there be revival when error is mingled into the sermons that we hear, and when the Holy Spirit of Almighty God is denied free reign in our midst?

Secondly, instead of "charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned" which is the end of the commandment; the final purpose of the Word of God, if we really and truly love God's Holy Word, we "swerve unto vain jangling" (1Tim 1:5-6).

O for peace to return to our churches, freer reign of the Holy Spirit and more fruitful proclamation of the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! Trouble makers whoever they are will bear their judgement, except they repent (Luke 17:1-2). To know the Almighty is to fear with trembling. May we humbly and earnestly seek the Lord's face, and pray for His mercy and grace in this, our dire hour of need. For Jesus Name and for His sake, Amen.

Lim Seng Hoo, 24 September 2004
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