

PSALM 12:6-7

* * * DID GOD PROMISE TO PRESERVE HIS WORDS? * * *

S.L.H.
Soli Deo Gloria!

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

God's Promise to Preserve His Words. Bible-believers treasure God's promise to preserve His words. We find solace in such verses as:

The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations. (Ps33:11)

Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever. (Ps119:160)

As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD: My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and forever. (Isa59:21)

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. (Matt24:35)

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever ... The grass withereth, and its flower falleth away, but the word of the Lord endureth forever. (1Pet1:23-25)

However, the clearest presentation of God's promise to preserve His words to be found in the Bible would seem to be:

The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation forever. (Ps12:6-7)

Modern Objections and Biblical Answers. Psalm 12:6-7 records the promise of God to "preserve" His "purified" (i.e., uncorrupted) "words" for the use of every "generation". On it's face, this promise destroys the assertion of modern (so-called) biblical scholarship that the pure words of God were corrupted in the earliest centuries of the Church Age, they disappeared from common use in churches, and they were only rediscovered by means of archeology and are in the process of being restored by application of the methods of modern textual criticism beginning in the late 19th century. If this fairy tale of modern scholarship is true, Bible-believers in their Christian churches were without the "purified" words of God for the better part of two

millennia, or as many as fifty generations! According to scripture, such a scenario is simply impossible.

Nevertheless, in a diabolical effort to suppress the truth (cf. Rom1:18) of God's promise to preserve His words (and thereby rescue the continuing work of textual critics to further corrupt the text of scripture) translators of modern versions have twisted Psalm 12:6-7 to mean something altogether different. For ease of comparison, Psalm 12:6-7 is shown in Table 1 as translated in the KJV versus the NIV, NASB, and ESV, with the significant alterations of the modern versions highlighted in red.

Note that in the KJV, the pronoun "them" is used twice in verse 7, taking as its antecedent "the words of the LORD" in verse 6; thus, the promise of preservation to every generation clearly applies to "the words of the LORD". This is the most natural grammatical conclusion to draw, since (in general) the antecedent of a pronoun is the nearest noun or substantive that precedes it.

In the modern versions, however, the translations of the Hebrew pronouns¹ in verse 7 are changed to "the needy" (NIV), "us" (NIV, ESV), or "him" (NASB), skipping over verse 6 and taking as their antecedents "the poor" and "the needy" found in verse 5. Thus, in the modern versions, God's promise of preservation does not apply to the words of the LORD, but to the poor and needy among the people of God. Prior to considering the reason modern translators give (and assessing its validity) for these very different translations, the Bible-believer should consider whether these new renderings could possibly be correct. If the promise of preservation in Psalm 12:7 applies to the poor and needy among the people of God, clearly God has not kept such a promise (which is blasphemous to suggest). It is an historical fact that the people of God have been persecuted and killed in every generation, to which scripture itself testifies (cf. Ps44:22; Rom8:36; Rev6:9-11). Thus, if one presupposes the inspiration of scripture (2Tim3:16) and its testimony to the veracity and immutability of all that God has said (Heb6:17-18), the modern renderings of Psalm 12:7 cannot be correct.

What is the argument advanced by modern scholars for translating the pronouns in Psalm 12:7 differently than in the KJV? The issue relates to *gender discordance* between the pronouns in Psalm 12:7 and their proposed antecedent in verse 6. The pronouns in verse 7 translated "them" in the KJV are masculine in gender, whereas "words" in verse 6 which is assumed to be their antecedent is feminine. Modern scholars insist that such gender discordance between pronouns and their antecedents is not permitted by Hebrew grammar, making it impossible that the antecedent of "them" be the "words of the LORD". In contrast, the "poor" and "needy" in verse 5 are masculine substantives. It is alleged, therefore, that verse 7 must be referring back to the poor and needy among the people of God as the objects of God's preservation.

In this case, we have two grammatical principles competing against one another. The one is that a pronoun generally takes the nearest noun or substantive that precedes it as its antecedent, the other is that a

¹ There is the additional issue that the Hebrew pronouns in verse 7 are 3rd person-plural. They are correctly translated "them" in the KJV; they are improperly translated as 1st person-plural in the NIV and ESV, and 3rd person-singular in the NASB.

pronoun and its antecedent generally agree in gender. Which principle takes priority when they cannot both be satisfied. It turns out that although translators of the modern versions wanting to defend their rendering of Psalm 12:7 insist that in Hebrew pronouns and their antecedents must agree in gender, that is not necessarily the case. In fact, in their modern textbook on Hebrew grammar, Waltke and O'Connor² affirm that "the masculine pronoun is often used for a feminine antecedent". This principle of Hebrew grammar was well known, even in the 19th century, since Kautzsch³ also asserts that "masculine suffixes (especially in the plural) are not infrequently used to refer to feminine substantives". Apparently, this "rule" of Hebrew grammar is not as immutable as translators of modern versions would have us believe. In fact, they have no problem linking masculine pronouns with feminine antecedents in other places, as shown in Table 2.

Notice that in Psalms 119:111, 119:129, 119:152, and 119:167 the translators of all the modern versions have properly concorded masculine pronouns with feminine antecedents, as is also the case in the KJV. It turns out that in the Psalms it is actually quite common for a feminine antecedent to take a masculine pronoun, particularly when that antecedent is a synonym for scripture⁴.

Finally, the grand theme of Psalm 12 is "words", which should naturally lead to the expectation that the subject of God's preservation in verse 7 is "words". In addition, the basis of Hebrew poetry is parallelism, which figures prominently in the Psalms, and Psalm 12 is no exception. Consider the antithetical parallelism that exists between vv2-3 and vv6-7:

- v2 – The words of men (v1) are vain
- v3 – The LORD will cut them off
- v6 – The words of the LORD are pure
- v7 – The LORD will preserve them forever

If the subject of God's preservation in verse 7 is people, rather than "words", the intended parallelism is destroyed.

Conclusion. Psalm 12:6-7 is the clearest presentation of God's promise to preserve His words found in the Bible. Modern objections to its translation in the KJV, that would obscure or remove this promise, are without foundation. The gender discordance between pronouns and antecedents found in the Hebrew text is not uncommon in the Psalms, especially when the subject is scripture; this is recognized even by modern translators in numerous other places. Rather, it is modern translators who violate grammatical norms, mistranslating pronouns in person and number. Finally, even apart from grammatical considerations in the original language (Hebrew), the English reader would naturally conclude from the theme and parallelism of Psalm 12 that the intended subject of God's preservation is His "words". The Bible-believer

² Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, IN, 1990) p. 361.

³ E. Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1898) p. 463.

⁴ The fact that feminine synonyms for scripture often concord with masculine pronouns might be related to the identification of the written words of the LORD with the second Person of the Trinity as the living Word of God (Jn1:1; 1Jn5:7), who is male.

should continue to understand and treasure Psalm 12:6-7 as properly translated in the King James Bible.

Table 1. Psalm 12:6-7 in the KJV, NIV, NASB, and ESV.

KJV	NIV	NASB	ESV
<p>⁶The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.</p> <p>⁷Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation forever.</p>	<p>⁶And the words of the LORD are flawless, like silver purified in a crucible, like gold refined seven times. ⁷You, LORD, will keep the needy safe and will protect us forever from the wicked,</p>	<p>⁶The words of the LORD are pure words; As silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times. ⁷You, O LORD, will keep them; You will preserve him from this generation forever.</p>	<p>⁶The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times. ⁷You, O LORD, will keep them; you will guard us from this generation forever.</p>

Table 2. Examples of Masculine Pronouns with Feminine Antecedents.

KJV	NIV	NASB	ESV
Psalm 119:111			
<p>Thy testimonies (fem.) have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they (masc.) are the rejoicing of my heart.</p>	<p>Your statutes (fem.) are my heritage forever; they (masc.) are the joy of my heart.</p>	<p>I have inherited Your testimonies (fem.) forever, For they (masc.) are the joy of my heart.</p>	<p>Your testimonies (fem.) are my heritage forever, for they (masc.) are the joy of my heart.</p>
Psalm 119:129			
<p>Your testimonies (fem.) are wonderful; therefore my soul keeps them (masc.).</p>	<p>Your statutes (fem.) are wonderful; therefore I obey them (masc.).</p>	<p>Your testimonies (fem.) are wonderful; Therefore my soul observes them (masc.).</p>	<p>Your testimonies (fem.) are wonderful; therefore my soul keeps them (masc.).</p>
Psalm 119:152			
<p>Concerning thy testimonies (fem.), I have known of old that thou hast founded them (masc.) for ever.</p>	<p>Long ago I learned from your statutes (fem.) that you established them (masc.) to last forever.</p>	<p>Of old I have known from Your testimonies (fem.) That You have founded them forever (masc.).</p>	<p>Long have I known from your testimonies (fem.) that you have founded them forever (masc.).</p>
Psalm 119:167			
<p>My soul hath kept thy testimonies (fem.); and I love them exceedingly (masc.).</p>	<p>I obey your statutes (fem.), for I love them greatly (masc.).</p>	<p>My soul keeps Your testimonies (fem.), And I love them exceedingly (masc.).</p>	<p>My soul keeps your testimonies (fem.); I love them exceedingly (masc.).</p>