

INSPIRATION AND PRESERVATION OF SCRIPTURE

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The biblical and historic fundamentalist view on the inspiration of the Scripture is that only the original manuscripts are God-breathed and therefore inerrant (2 Tim 3:16). Historically fundamentalists have not declared one translation or a particular manuscript family to be the only written Word of God. With the proliferation of translations in the last two or three decades has come a concern among some fundamentalists that somehow the Word of God is being lost. As long as the King James Version was the best selling Bible, this concern was minimal. But with other versions seriously challenging, and in some cases overtaking, the popularity of the KJV, an effort has been mounted relatively recently to elevate the KJV and/or its textual background to a special status of miraculous preservation so that it is the only true Word of God written. Others even argue for the miraculous inspiration and inerrancy of the KJV itself (i.e., one of its editions) or its historical text type.

Out of these recent attempts has come a noticeable division within fundamentalism. Some are claiming that one cannot be a fundamentalist who uses a version other than the KJV, or who does not believe in the inerrancy of the KJV or its text type. DBTS has had aspersions cast at its fundamentalist testimony because it does not hold a King James-only position. Therefore we feel that a brief but clear statement on the inspiration and preservation of the written Word of God is appropriate. We lament the division which some have brought into our fundamentalist ranks on this issue, and we have no interest in furthering the debate or controversy for its own sake since we hold to the position that Bible believers have held for well over a hundred years. The following is our statement.

The Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary recognizes the multiplicity of translations and versions of the Word of God in many languages and dialects. We hold that inspiration is a direct miracle of God by which human authors and human languages were employed by God to give human beings His revelation in written form (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21). It is the *original text* (words, script, autograph—*graphie*, 2 Tim 3:16) that partakes of inspiration proper. All other texts, copies, reproductions, translations, and versions partake of inspiration in an indirect, linear fashion from previous copies and translations to the extent that they reproduce the text of the original manuscripts. We hold that only the autographs of Scripture are inerrant and that copies and translations of Scripture are inerrant insofar as they are true to the inerrant autographs. Thus any translation or version of Scripture in any language is the Word of God if it accurately reproduces what is in the original manuscripts.

We do not hold that the Word of God is to be found exclusively in one English translation or any one translation in any other language since all such have mistranslations, miscopying, or misprinting, however minor, and are not therefore inerrant. On the other hand, even as a New Testament author could use the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, as the authoritative Word of God (e.g., Heb 2:7 quotes Ps 8:5 from the Septuagint; Heb 11:21 likewise quotes Gen 47:31), so may any translation that is faithful to the autographs be held up as the Word of God.

While the Bible clearly teaches the ultimate indestructibility of the verbal revelation of God (Matt 24:35; 1 Pet 1:25), it does not tell how and where the written manuscript lineage of that Word is preserved. We believe that God has providentially preserved His word in the many manuscripts, fragments, versions, translations, and copies of the Scriptures that are available, and that by diligent study, comparison, and correlation, the original text (words) can be ascertained. We therefore hold that the integrity of any text, text type, translation, version, or copy of the Scriptures is to be judged by the autographs only and not by an English translation or any other reproduction or translation.

We acknowledge the right of all Christians to study the manuscript evidence regarding the text of Scripture and to come to a preference for a text, text type, translation, or version. We do not grant the legitimacy of regarding one text, text type, or translation as the very Word of God to the exclusion of all others.

In light of the considerable discussion and controversy among fundamentalists about versions, translation theories, manuscripts, texts, and text types, we hold that no particular beliefs about the best textual and translation theories should be elevated to the place of core fundamentalist beliefs or articles of distinctively fundamentalist faith. That is, fundamentalists may hold the doctrine of the verbal inspiration/inerrancy of Scripture with equal strength without embracing common beliefs about text-critical matters and philosophies or theories of translation.