

preservation through the process of copying. Here we must ask the question, "Has God caused His inscripturated revelation to be purely preserved?" To this question we must give a mixed answer. If by "purely preserved" one means "inerrantly preserved," the answer is no. But if by "purely preserved" one means "uncorruptedly preserved" in the sense that no teaching of Scripture (either in whole or in part) has been corrupted, then the answer is yes.

For example, in the more than 600 manuscripts of the Hebrew Old Testament there are about 284,000,000 letters. Among these 600 plus manuscripts there are about 900,000 variations in the text. At first blush, 900,000 variations certainly seem to indicate that the text has become hopelessly corrupt! However, of these 900,000 variations, 750,000 are the negligible variations between the similar-appearing Hebrew letters *waw* and *yodh*. The remaining 150,000 do not affect any part of the system of doctrine discoverable in Scripture nor any individual teaching of the Bible as a whole. It should be pointed out that 900,000 variations sounds like a great many, but 900,000 variations distributed 284,000,000 letters amounts to 1 variation in 316 letters. And if the 750,000 negligible variations between *waw* and *yodh* are discounted, 150,000 variations distributed among 284,000,000 letters amounts to 1 variation in 1893 letters. Think of that level of accuracy for an ancient text, parts of which are anywhere from 2,400 years to almost 3,400 years old! By way of comparison, that would amount to the misspelling of one letter in about a half page of the manuscript of this paper!

John H. Skilton, in whose article some of these statistics are to be found, makes a statement which neatly summarizes this point. He writes:

We will grant that God's care and providence, singular though they have been, have not preserved for us any of the original manuscripts either of the Old Testament or of the New Testament. We will furthermore grant that God did not keep from error those who copied the Scriptures during the long period in which the sacred text was transmitted in copies written by hand. But we must maintain that the God who gave the Scriptures, who works all things after the counsel of his will, has exercised a remarkable care over his Word, has preserved it in all ages in a state of essential purity, and has enabled it to accomplish the purpose for which he gave it. It is inconceivable that the sovereign God who was pleased to give his Word as a vital and necessary instrument in the salvation of his people would permit his Word to become completely marred in its transmission and unable to accomplish its ordained end. Rather, as surely as that he is God, we would expect to find him exercising a singular care in the preservation of his written revelation.

That God has preserved the Scriptures in such a condition of essential purity as we would expect is manifestly the case.³

The fourth step in the transmission of God's Word is that of the construction, via textual criticism, of an original-language text which most closely approximates that of the original manuscripts. Here we must ask the question, "is it possible, via textual criticism, to arrive at a text about which, in a probability sense, we can be morally certain regarding its accurate representation of the autographs?" To this question we may confidently reply that we have such a text in our possession. Our confidence of this lies in the agreement of the many manuscripts of the New Testament writers; and the agreement of various lines of witness to the Old Testament text, together with the connecting link of the Jews