

## Commentators who Support a Reference to the Preservation of Words in Psalm 12:7 (Hebrew Psalm 12:8)

For contextual and grammatical reasons discussed elsewhere, there are good reasons to believe that Psalm 12:7 is a promise to preserve God's Words, rather than being a promise that God will preserve His people (although He certainly does this also). A number of commentators support the view that Psalm 12:7 (which is Psalm 12:8 in Hebrew, since the title of the Psalm is v. 1 in Hebrew) refers to the preservation of words. This view is certainly not the unanimous view, as there are many writers who affirm that Psalm 12:7 refers to the preservation of the poor and needy (often without a clear exegetical discussion validating their position). The list below provides examples of some of the commentaries that contain support for the view that Psalm 12:7 refers to the preservation of words. While this is the position taken in some of these commentaries, in others the view that Psalm 12:7 refers to words and some support for this view is provided, while the commentator himself takes a different position for a variety of reasons.

### **Abraham ibn Ezra, c. A. D. 1148:**

Ver. 7. *Thou shalt keep them, O Lord, &c.*] . . . Aben Ezra explains it . . . [of] the words before mentioned . . . God has wonderfully kept and preserved the sacred writings; and he keeps every word of promise which he has made; and the doctrines of the Gospel will always continue from one generation to another[.]<sup>1</sup> “THOU WHILT KEEP THEM. The *mem* [Heb. “them”] of *tishmerem* (Thou wilt keep them) most probably refers to *The words of the Lord* (v. 7 [Heb.]).”<sup>2</sup>

### **Michael Ayguan, A. D. 1446:**

*Keep them:* that is, not as the passage is generally taken, (Ay. [Michael Ayguan]) Keep or guard Thy people, but *Thou shalt keep*, or make good, *Thy words* . . . Thou shalt keep Thy word[.]<sup>3</sup>

### **John Calvin, A. D. 1557:**

Some give this exposition of the passage [in Psalm 12:7], *Thou wilt keep them*, namely, *thy words*[.]<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Gill, *An Exposition of the Old Testament*, vol. 3, The Baptist Commentary Series (London: Mathews and Leigh, 1810), 574.

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Ezra, Abraham, *Commentary on the First Book of Psalms: Chapter 1-41*, trans. & ann. H. Norman Strickman (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2009) 103.

<sup>3</sup> J. M. Neale, *A Commentary on the Psalms from Primitive and Mediæval Writers: Psalm 1 to Psalm 38*, Second Edition, vol. 1 (London; New York: Joseph Masters; Pott and Amery, 1869), 177–178.

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin and James Anderson, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 178. This edition of Calvin's commentary mentions that the view that the preservation of words is in view in Psalm 12:7 is “adopted by Hammond. He refers the *them* to *the words of the Lord* mentioned in the preceding verse.”

**Matthew Poole, c. A. D. 1670:**

*Thou shalt keep them* [Psalm 12:7] . . . Thy words or promises last mentioned, ver. 6. These thou wilt *observe* and *keep* (as these two verbs commonly signify) both now, and *from this generation for ever*.<sup>5</sup>

**John Wesley, A. D. 1765:**

V. 7. *Thou shalt keep them*—Thy words or promises: these thou wilt *observe* and *keep*, both now, and *from this generation for ever*.<sup>6</sup>

**Charles Briggs, c. A. D. 1907:**

8. אָתָּם [Thou] emph.—תִּשְׁמְרֵם [“shalt keep them”] . . . J, Aq., Θ [that is, the Latin Version of Jerome, the Greek Version of Aquila, and the Greek Version of Theodotian] agree with H [the Hebrew Masoretic text] and refer [the suffix] of the first [verb] [that is, “them”] to the divine words.<sup>7</sup>

**Hans-Joachim Kraus, A. D. 1993:**

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**Samuel Terrien, A. D. 2003:**

Thanks to the double chiasmus that encircles the core verse, the structure clearly offers its design:

- I. The Duplicity of the Sons of Adam (vv. 2–3)
- II. The False Words (vv. 4–5)
- III. The Divine Promise (v. 6)
- IV. The Pure Words (vv. 7–8)
- V. The Aberration of the Sons of Adam (v. 9)

An *inclusio poetica* appears in vv. 2 and 9; Strophe III constitutes the summit of the psalm. Here as elsewhere for the genre of Complaint, Strophes I and II are echoed in Strophes IV and V, as the false words of the human brood are contrasted with the true and pure words of the Lord. Both sets are articulated around the core verse, which is a prophetic oracle introducing the proclamation of confidence. . . . The psalmist . . . knows

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew Poole, *Annotations upon the Holy Bible*, vol. 2 (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1853), 18.

<sup>6</sup> John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Bristol: William Pine, 1765), 1642.

<sup>7</sup> Charles A. Briggs and Emilie Grace Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1906–1907), 99.

<sup>8</sup> Hans-Joachim Kraus, *A Continental Commentary: Psalms 1–59* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993).

that the Lord will keep his word (v. 8).<sup>9</sup>

As the sampling of commentators above demonstrates, the view that Psalm 12:7 refers to the preservation of God's Words has precedent from medieval times among Jewish commentators and in Christendom. The view persisted in the Reformation and post-Reformation periods and into the modern era. The view is recognized both by conservative writers and by theological liberals. This fact buttresses the conclusion established by grammatical-historical exegesis, namely, that Psalm 12:6-7 is indeed a promise of the preservation of God's Words.

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<sup>9</sup> Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary*, The Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 152–156.