

# **Is the Bible True?**

*Reasons for Accepting the Authority of Scripture*

*David Gooding*

A Myrtlefield House Transcript



**MYRTLEFIELD**  
HOUSE

[www.myrtlefieldhouse.com](http://www.myrtlefieldhouse.com)

David Gooding has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Author of this work.

Copyright © The Myrtlefield Trust, 2019

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the English Revised Version (1885), the *King James Version*, or are Dr Gooding's own translations or paraphrases.

This text has been edited from a transcript of a talk given by David Gooding at the GLO Conference, Castlewellan, County Down (N. Ireland) on 8<sup>th</sup> April 1989.

All rights reserved. Permission is granted to reproduce this document in its entirety, or in unaltered excerpts, for personal and church use only as long as you do not charge a fee. You must not reproduce it on any Internet site. Permission must be obtained if you wish to reproduce it in any other context, translate it, or publish it in any format.

Published by The Myrtlefield Trust

PO Box 2216

Belfast, N Ireland

BT1 9YR

w: [www.myrtlefieldhouse.com](http://www.myrtlefieldhouse.com)

e: [info@myrtlefieldhouse.com](mailto:info@myrtlefieldhouse.com)

Myrtlefield catalogue no: bib.0098/jf

# Is the Bible True?

The topic of the authority of Scripture is enormously wide, and we have no hope of covering it in all its many ramifications in the short time that is now available to us. What I propose to do therefore is to introduce three or four aspects of the topic in the talk that I am required to give. Then I shall cease and ask for your comments and suggestions and questions, if you have any.

## The authenticity of the manuscripts

I want to deal with the question of the authenticity of the copies of the Bible that we have. I don't know whether you have found it so in your experience but, from time to time, one will find people who are not believers arguing against believing the Bible. One argument that some of them will sometimes use is that the Bible has been copied out so many times that you can't possibly believe that what you now have in your hands is anything like what the original writers wrote. *The Belfast Telegraph*, that eminent newspaper, at one time carried a half-page article on the back in which their regular religious writer advanced the argument that the Bible has been copied out so many times that you can't really have any confidence that what you have in your hand when you pick up an English translation of the Bible is what was originally written.

It is wise therefore for us to collect the information on this kind of thing as best we can and to have it, so to speak, up our sleeve and ready to use if we find people that have a genuine difficulty. There are some folks for whom it isn't a genuine difficulty; they are merely using it as a smokescreen to hide behind, because they don't really want to change their lifestyle, and they know if they would believe the Bible, it would radically change their lifestyle. So they hide behind all sorts of questions that sometimes they don't even understand themselves, but it seems to them a good defence.

On the other hand, there are people for whom this is a genuine difficulty. How do we meet it? Of course, it is the fact that the Bible has been copied out many times; and when the New Testament, to take that for a moment, was first written it was not printed, it was copied out by hand. Therefore, it is the fact (let me tell you if you don't already know) that when you take the more than five thousand manuscripts of the Greek New Testament that have survived and compare them, you will find that there are thousands of differences between those manuscripts. Let me hasten to add that I believe in the inspiration of Scripture. I believe, actually, in its *verbal* inspiration. The fact that there are thousands of differences in the manuscripts does not perturb or shake my faith in the verbal inspiration of holy Scripture.

## Manuscripts and mistakes in copying

When we talk about the verbal inspiration of holy Scripture, we are talking about the documents as originally written. Those documents were copied out by hand. You probably have seen pictures of such manuscripts. I've brought along a couple of books giving you

pictures of such a manuscript of some of the New Testament epistles. These were written, according to their learned editor, about AD 200. This is part of the famous collection of Chester Beatty Papyri. That means they are written on the stuff called papyrus, but every Irish Christian (I think bar about two) has long since gone down to Dublin to see them. The greatest claim to fame Dublin has in this world is the Chester Beatty Museum which, as you well know, is a marvellous place to go on a Saturday afternoon, instead of going to the rugby match, because it has all sorts of marvellous things. There are jade and silk prints and marvellous Irish tooled leather bindings. Even so, its chief joy and delight is its collection of New Testament manuscripts known as the Chester Beatty Papyri. As far as large manuscripts go, they are the earliest of the New Testament in the world, apart from one or two small specimens. And of course, all evangelicals who believe in the inspiration of Scripture have long since been to the Chester Beatty Library just to see the manuscripts, haven't they? And if they haven't, they will go forthwith, of course. They wouldn't think of stopping in the shops on the way, not until they'd been to the Chester Beatty Library to see these manuscripts.

It is a fact that the early copies were copied out by hand, hence the many mistakes in the copying. But now let me tell you something about that, namely that it was a great mercy that the first copies of the New Testament writings were copied by hand and were not printed, and the reason for that is this. If the first copies had been printed, they would have all have been the same, wouldn't they? And if the printer had made a mistake, you couldn't have found it out. If you are reading *The Irish News*, *The Independent*, *The Belfast Telegraph* or any other such newspaper, you might read down a column and suddenly say, 'This doesn't make sense. There must be some words left out here or something.' It's no good going next door and saying to the neighbour, 'Let me have a look at your paper,' because it comes off the same press; and if yours lacks some words, so will his. You will have no way of finding out what the original intention was of the man or woman who wrote the piece, unless you could go and find the editor of the newspaper and say, 'Did you mean to say this, or has the printer made a mistake?' And if the early copies of the Bible had been printed, and the printer had made a mistake, you couldn't get back the missing words unless you could go and see the original author. The fact that they were written by hand by many different people is a great advantage because, while people will make mistakes in copying out by hand (if you don't believe that, try copying out the whole works of Shakespeare and see whether you can get through without making at least one mistake; I guarantee you'll make hundreds), they won't all make the same mistakes. So you can compare the manuscripts with each other and then deduce where the mistakes have been and so forth and so on.

### **The verdict of textual critics**

Now, that is a long and enormously complicated matter. I don't hide it from you. It is not a matter for amateurs. It is a matter for experts, the *textual critics*, as we call them. They are people who look after the manuscripts and see to the text of Scripture. That said, however, the verdict of some of the leading textual critics in these last one hundred years will tell you that the amount of uncertainty as to what was actually written will be less than two percent. And of that two percent, the most part contains things of very little importance indeed. The Greek, for instance, has two words for 'and'. It doesn't make any difference to the sense which one

you use. You'll find some manuscripts use one and some use the other. Well that is a difference, but it is not a substantial difference. It does not affect the meaning whatsoever.

Moreover, as you'll be aware, there is another side to the question. That is to say, no major doctrine of the New Testament depends on simply one verse or one sentence or one passage in the New Testament, so that there is no major doctrine in doubt whatsoever because of any remaining uncertainties as to what exactly the original said in this place or that.

One more thing that you should know about the manuscripts concerns the large number there are. And when we talk of *manuscripts* we are talking strictly about copies copied out by hand until printing was invented. There are, I think, at the last count, well over five thousand manuscripts that come from the New Testament. When you compare that with other works that have come down from the ancient world, like Julius Caesar's account of his wars, and the writings of Tacitus the historian, and people like that, some of those works have survived but only in one or two manuscripts, and they are very late ones. Compared with them, the evidence for the New Testament is overwhelming.

One more observation, and then we can leave that topic. We should note the great age of some of the New Testament manuscripts. The Chester Beatty manuscript we considered contains Paul's Epistles (and incidentally the Epistle to the Hebrews as well), and it is dated AD 200. Now, just consider what that means. That means that it was actually written out within one hundred and fifty years of the time Paul lived. And why is that remarkable? Well, when you go to Dublin and see the actual manuscript there (or, I ought to say when you *went* to the Chester Beatty Library and saw the manuscript), you won't be allowed to touch it; but there it is—a manuscript in front of your eyes that somebody wrote around AD 200. That manuscript is still in existence. And this is the year 1989, at the last count, so this manuscript in the Chester Beatty Library is one thousand seven hundred and eighty-nine years old. The manuscript is nearly two thousand years old, yet it still survives. It was written in AD 200, but it isn't the original; it was copied from another manuscript. How old do you suppose that other manuscript might have been? The manuscript from which it was copied could have been one of the earliest copies ever written. It could have been copied out in the time of Paul himself. So do remember the tremendous age of some of the manuscripts of the New Testament. There is one tiny fragment of the Gospel of John that is even earlier than this.

When it comes to the Old Testament, the situation is somewhat different. I'm not going to discuss that with you now, but I point out to you that some of the manuscripts that we now have of the Old Testament are, once again, exceedingly ancient. I have here a photograph of a very ancient scroll, which you can come up afterwards and look at if you want to. This is a scroll of your favourite book in the Old Testament—Leviticus. It is of course written in Hebrew, and it is not the square script; it is the older script. That manuscript still survives. This is but a photograph of it taken along its length, because that manuscript was written as a scroll and not as a book. The date of the writing of this manuscript is about 100 BC, so it is well over two thousand years old now. That is not the earliest manuscript of an Old Testament book that we have. There are some earlier still, and they tend to be fragments. You might say, 'How old was the manuscript from which this was copied?' Well, I can't tell you. It could have been hundreds of years old itself of course.

So, to come back to the beginning, we needn't pretend that there are no uncertainties. There are mistakes in biblical manuscripts, of course, but you should bear in mind the old age of some of our manuscripts. You should also bear in mind the large numbers of them that we have, which makes it possible for scholars working in these areas to come to their decisions as to what the original writing was. At that level, you need have no fear to meet your unconverted friends and to assure them that, when you hold your Bible in your hand, it is substantially what God intended you to have.

### **The truth of what is written**

That deals with the question of the authenticity of our copies of Scripture, but of course there are bigger questions. You can be sure that what you have in front of you here in the New Testament is what the New Testament writers originally wrote. The question now arises: is what they wrote true? Here there are all sorts of questions relating to historical events that the writers mention, and liberal critics have called into question the accuracy of the history. They will tell us that there are historical mistakes in holy Scripture.

One little book that is exceedingly helpful in this regard, and a very good place to begin, is the little book by Professor F. F. Bruce—*The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* If you don't possess a copy you might like to take notice of the title. He will discuss with you not only the question of the manuscripts of the Bible, but the question of the historicity of the events it records. He will answer for you how reliable the New Testament is where you can check the historical things that are mentioned in the New Testament because you have outside sources.

This is a little book that has been worth its weight in gold. It has now gone into many editions. He constantly brings it up to date, and it constantly goes out of print because it is in such demand. It is certainly well worth having and keeping in your armoury.

### **History**

You may think this is very remote, but in the swinging '60s (I was alive then) there came to Dublin's fair city a young lady who had been convinced that the hippy lifestyle was the life for her. She was an exceedingly intelligent young lady but was living with I don't know how many men, but one at a time generally, and she had given up on society in general. And as for anybody who believed the Bible, she thought that they were absolutely primitive cavemen and must, by definition, be ignorant people. One of the things that brought her to the Lord was not simply the witness of her Christian friends, but this little book by F. F. Bruce. For, when she read it, she found out that there was a world famous scholar, an absolute expert in history and in the original languages (and I don't know how many other disciplines) who actually believed the Bible. That was a shock to her system from which she never recovered. She found out that it wasn't that she was being very scientific and modern in doubting the Scripture. She didn't really know what she was talking about, actually, and she'd taken her ideas about the New Testament from second-hand sources like the BBC, and other such things, and had never really read the evidence for herself. She thought you had to be bonkers to start reading the Bible and taking it seriously, but coming across an actual scholar who

could argue the historical facts with her brought her up with a jolt and showed her that she was the ignoramus for being ignorant of the history and other evidence connected with Scripture. It eventually brought her, in repentance, to taking the Bible seriously, and the woman came to personal faith and trust in Christ, and has lived all the years since to prove it. It is a useful book for yourself of course, but also if you get that type of person that you are trying to help.

## Science

Incidentally, going back just for a moment to topics we were talking about last night,<sup>1</sup> there are a lot of modern people who will say, 'You don't believe the Bible, do you?' When you reply, 'Oh, yes, of course I do,' they will say, 'But the Bible teaches God created the world.' They think that damns it forthwith, because it shows the Bible to be unscientific.

Well, the reverse is true actually, and here are two books that I have personally found helpful. The first is *Christ and the Cosmos*, by Professor E. H. Andrews, an expert engineer. The second is by Alan Hayward and is called *Creation and Evolution*. Hayward is also an academic, and his book is particularly useful, because he offers a critique of evolution from the writings of the evolutionists themselves, which is fair enough, isn't it? He collects what leading scientists who are not believers (some of them are atheists) have said and *their* very devastating criticisms of the theory of evolution. In fact, his own critique of evolution is in the words of people that do not believe the Bible.

So, that makes a very useful critique of the whole situation. Then of course he goes over to the positive side. Moreover, he is not so extreme as some. He doesn't himself believe in what is called a 'young earth'. Nonetheless, the man believes in the inspiration of Scripture and does not believe in atheistic evolution, nor even in so-called theistic evolution either.

## Knowing the truth of the New Testament

Let's go over to the positive. How do we know that what the New Testament says is true? With some people it is good to start by showing that, for instance, when the Bible talks of Pilate we may know it is not talking about a fable. If you go to Caesarea in Israel at the moment, you can see an engraving to Pilate: there is the man's name on it. And there are many other such things. It is good to have that confirmation from outside the Bible of the historicity of the things the Bible records.

Of course, the things that we are really interested in are the bigger things: that God is love, for instance. How would you prove that? Just saying that the manuscripts are reliable, and that the history of the New Testament is reliable, is not enough. When it comes to the great doctrines of Scripture, how can you show that they are true? If you talk of the authority of the New Testament, in that sense, one of the first things you will come to is the basic thing—the story of the resurrection. It is this that stamps Christianity as authentic beyond all, of course. That is why in the Acts of the Apostles you will find the apostles preaching the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

---

<sup>1</sup> See the first talk in the series entitled, *What it Means to be a Believer: Hebrews 11 Defines the Term*.  
<https://www.myrtlefieldhouse.com/en/resource/251/what-it-means-to-be>

*The truth of the resurrection*

What is the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Is it something that you have to take simply in blind faith, or is there any evidence for it? The answer is that there is a tremendous amount of evidence for the resurrection. The New Testament itself will quote you some.

Now, some people are in the habit of saying, 'Ah, but you don't expect me to believe what the New Testament says about the resurrection, do you?'

Why not?

'Well, it was written by Christians. Show me a non-Christian who believes in the resurrection, and then I'll start talking. You can't, can you? Can you cough up any book from New Testament days that was written by a non-Christian that tells that Jesus Christ is risen?'

It's a little bit of a silly question, isn't it?

You say, 'Why?'

Well, normally, if you believed Jesus Christ was risen you became a Christian, didn't you? The fact to get hold of is that people who became Christians weren't Christians when they first heard about the resurrection. In fact, it was the message of the resurrection that led them to faith in Christ. Saul of Tarsus, for instance, not only wasn't a Christian, he was a bitter opponent of Christianity. What converted him to Christianity? Well, the evidence that Jesus was risen.

The first people to tell the world that the grave was empty were not Christians, were they? It was the Jewish religious authorities who bribed the soldiers to say that when they examined the tomb on the first Sunday morning, it was empty. They didn't offer any explanation, but that's what they said. Why do you think they said that? Why did they put that about? It was because they were afraid, as Matthew explains, that the Christians were going to say, 'Look, well the tomb is empty, isn't it? He's risen from the dead' (see 27:62-66). So in trying to squash that rumour, they thought they'd better get in first, and they told the world the tomb was empty, but that the disciples had come and stolen the body away while the soldiers slept. That is a funny story, because if they were asleep, how did they know who came and stole it (see 28:11-15)? But never mind. So they told the world the tomb was empty, and the Christians had stolen the body away. Then the Christians didn't say anything for the next fifty days. It was the non-Christians who first told the world that the grave was empty. If you can't believe their account of why it was empty and how it became empty, well you'd better listen to the Christians then. They'll give you another account.

On the question of evidence, there are many, many books that have been written. If you want a summary of the evidence, one book is *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell. In your witness to people who think that belief in the resurrection is believing a legend that has no historical basis, it is good to have some of those facts up your sleeve and not just to know about them vaguely, so that you can show yourself informed and really meet people and their difficulties.

If you want something more high powered and philosophical on that subject, then you should perhaps consider reading *Space, Time and the Incarnation* by Professor T. F. Torrance. He shows that, far from being unscientific, the modern, up-to-date philosophy of science does not rule out things like the resurrection as being unscientific.



Why do I say that? Well, we in the UK have been troubled, as we are from time to time, not only with extreme cold winters or excessively hot summers, but also by the Bishop of Durham. He and others like him are constantly encouraged by the BBC to tell the world that, while he believes in the resurrection, he doesn't believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. Well, all right, that's fair enough if he tells us he's a non-believer, then we must accept what he says. The troubling thing is that he is for everlastingly saying that you can't believe in the bodily resurrection of Christ and be a scientist, or be up to date in your modern scientific thinking. And the general public thinks this is marvellous, because everybody wants to be scientific, don't they?

Now, literally, the man is talking bosh, as far as science goes. He got his ideas when he was a young man going through theological training; and in those days in most theological seminaries they were taught the theories of a German professor called Rudolf Bultmann. He is now deceased, and his theories are *passé*, but in those days, Professor Bultmann told the world that you can't live in the scientific world and still believe in the actual historicity of events like the virgin birth and the resurrection, the bodily resurrection and the ascension of the Lord Jesus. Why did they say that? Well, because of Professor Bultmann's ideas of science.

I cannot trouble you now with the philosophy of science and the discussion that is involved, but if you read the volumes that Professor Torrance has put out in these last years, you'll discover that that old science—the scientific view of the world advocated by Bultmann—would not be recognized by any self-respecting scientist nowadays. It is quite false science.

Don't you be ashamed of Scripture, its doctrine of the incarnation, or the bodily resurrection and bodily ascension of Jesus Christ, and be led to think that this is unscientific and therefore, at best, you must take it as a myth. If you are interested in that topic read some good science and not only just science but, what is more important in this connection, the philosophy of science.

#### *Why it matters that Scripture is true to the facts*

You may think this is very remote. Let me tell you a little story. In Belfast we have a teacher training college. In this teacher training college, some twenty years ago I suppose, there were a number of students, and they were studying religious education and how to teach the Bible to schoolchildren. Among these students there were some believers. They asked the head of their department if he could arrange a debate; they'd like to have a seminar. Could they invite one Protestant and one Catholic to come and spend five or ten minutes giving their views of what happens after death? And then there was to be a general discussion.

I went first. I was the Protestant pitched upon to do this, so I did my best. The Catholic representative was at that time a lady who was the head of her department in a very large teacher training college, and she was teaching the students how to teach the Bible in school. She asked would I mind going first, because she didn't want to be tied down to any particular viewpoint, so I went first and said what I believe Scripture teaches on the topic of what happens after death. Then she came on. She spent her first five minutes saying what the Roman Catholic Church has taught in times past: the beatific vision, limbo, purgatory, the lake of fire and so forth. Then she said, 'But now we know that that is not true. In fact, we now

know that we know nothing about what happens after death.’ She went on to say, ‘You know Jesus Christ and his apostles did say a lot of things about what happened after death, but we can’t believe what they say. That’s irrelevant nowadays, because they lived in a pre-scientific world, and they believed in a universe that was in three decks: heaven above, earth in the middle and hell somewhere below the earth; and they thought that Jesus Christ came out of the top deck and came down to earth, and then he died and went down to the bottom deck, and then he rose up and came to the middle deck, and he’s gone back to the top deck again. And we now know the universe isn’t like that so what Jesus Christ and his apostles said about what happens after death is utterly irrelevant.’

And she was teaching students how to teach the Bible in Roman Catholic schools. Now of course, she’s not alone. There are multitudes of Protestants that have taught their students just the same thing, and those students have gone off into their schools to teach it. It has the air of being scientific, and therefore they say you can’t believe what the Bible says, except you take it as a myth.

So if you ask the dear Bishop of Durham to which I alluded, ‘Do you believe in the resurrection?’ he would say, ‘Yes, of course I do.’ And if you didn’t know to ask him anything more than that you would say, ‘Marvellous, he believes in the resurrection.’ If you were to ask him, ‘Do you believe in the resurrection as a historical event?’ the likelihood is he would say, ‘No, I don’t. It is a myth made up by the church to express the church’s faith that Jesus didn’t come to an end when he was buried in the tomb, but somehow or other he does live on.’

I mention that all in this context. I don’t know about you, but there are many folks that I meet who don’t begin to think about believing the Bible because they’ve got it into their heads that believing the Bible will involve them in believing things like the resurrection of Jesus Christ, his incarnation and his ascension that they think are somehow contrary to science. That is a tremendous shame, because their concept of science is itself at fault. They are very old fashioned in their science; and if they listened to some of the more modern scientists that are working at the frontiers of knowledge in the realm of science, they wouldn’t find any conflict between that kind of science and what the New Testament is saying.

### **The truth of the Bible and the word of Jesus**

Finally, the other point I want to make is this. I’m not about to decry all I’ve said so far about the importance of having the facts about the way the Bible was copied out and so forth and so on, and the matter of manuscripts. That is important. Likewise, the question of the historicity of the events that the New Testament refers to is important. It is important to know how they stand up when you check them and, where it’s possible, to check them with external historical sources. What is fundamental is the historical evidence for the resurrection of Christ. But when you have considered all the evidence for the resurrection of Christ (and it is enormous) it still will leave you in the position that we were talking about last night, where you will have to take a personal step of faith to come to have the final and overwhelming evidence that he is alive, because only by faith can you make contact with that living Lord. Being convinced that there is a power station down the road and that the pylons are carrying wires, and being convinced that they are carrying electricity, and being convinced it is wired up to the house

won't be enough for me to see the light, will it? I've got to turn the switch before I do that. And therefore there has to be a step of faith if I'm finally going to discover that the Lord Jesus is really alive and gets in touch with me.

### **A question of believing Jesus Christ**

That brings me to another big point. If you were to ask me why I believe that Jesus is the Son of God, I wouldn't reply to you, 'Because the Bible says so.' I should put it the other way round. Why do I believe the Bible? 'Well, because Jesus Christ tells me to.'

I don't know what you normally say to your friends. I've had many friends and many contacts, and the serious difficulty they have is this. I say that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. They say to me, 'But how do you expect me to believe that when I don't believe the Bible? Of course, if I believed the Bible, I should say, "Yes, he's the Son of God; the Bible says so," but I don't believe it. You believe the Bible, so you accept everything it says. And because you accept what the Bible says, you believe that Jesus is the Son of God. But we don't grant you the first thing. We don't believe the Bible is the word of God. If we have first got to believe the Bible is the word of God and after that believe that Jesus is the Son of God, we shall never come round to believing that Jesus is the Son of God, for we don't start by believing the Bible.'

And you know, I can see the logic of their position, can't you? I don't know what you say to your friends who talk like that. I'll tell you what I say, and I hope it doesn't shock you too much. I tell them they don't have to start by believing the Bible. I say, 'Do you believe everything in *The Belfast Telegraph*?'

They say, 'No, of course not.'

'So you don't read *The Belfast Telegraph*?'

'Oh, we do sometimes, but we don't believe everything that's in it.'

'No, you wouldn't even of *The Irish Times*, if you come to think about it. You don't say, "Now, I'm about to pick up *The Irish Times*. I believe every word, every comma, because it is *The Irish Times*." Of course you don't. But you also don't say, "Well I can't be sure that everything in this is true, so I shan't read it." You don't say that, do you? You read it and then make up your mind.'

### *Was Jesus Christ a work of literary fiction?*

Why do I believe that Jesus is the Son of God? Well, not because the Bible says so; it is the other way round. It is because I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God that I believe the Bible. Let me tell you some reasons why. When I read the Bible like I would read *The Irish Times* or *The Belfast Telegraph*, I meet this figure of Jesus Christ in it and, according to the Bible's description, I can see very quickly that this is a figure that is utterly unique, if it's true. He towers above everybody, to say the least. He is one of the outstanding people in history, isn't he? You can say that Muhammad has had influence on millions and Christ on multimillions more. Then I look around me, and I find that not only do you read about this Jesus Christ in the Bible, but the character that is depicted therein is a character that has won the faith and the love of millions. That is a historical fact, whether I agree with these people or not. And he has so won their love and faith that millions have died for him already and, if

you'd like to do a little research, you'll find a good many more millions that would in this present day be prepared to die for this Jesus Christ.

Then I have to do some hard thinking. Who invented this Jesus Christ? Let's suppose he is a made-up character and that whoever wrote the Gospels made him up. Well, now you're in the presence of a miracle of some proportion, aren't you? There have been occasionally in the course of history brilliant writers who have invented characters that never did exist. You see Scrooge, for instance, from Dickens. To invent a character who, in that sense, is alive to people, you will require an enormously gifted artist. Do you know of anybody that's ever invented a character in literature that has become so real to some people they've been prepared to die for him, and all the while he has been an invention? Well, if Jesus Christ was invented, then we ought to bend our powers to discover who were the inventors, because they were the biggest miracle makers in all the history of literature.

#### *No one's idea of a hero*

Is he invented? Well you'd have to ask, who would have invented him? It is plain on the surface that, if you compare him with the world in which he lived, Jesus Christ was nobody's hero. What do I mean by that? Well, he claimed to be Messiah, but when the Greeks learned about Jesus Christ they thought this was the biggest load of tomfoolery and folly they ever did hear. Read the Greek philosophers; the ideal of the Greek wise man would be a man like Socrates. Have you read the story of that tremendous event of the death of Socrates? Yes, of course you have, and if you haven't, you must (it won't cost you much in English translation). When he was condemned to die because of what he taught, the jailer came in with the cup of poison. He had to drink the poison, and with perfect equanimity and calm, while all his disciples were breaking down and sobbing their hearts out, he rebuked them and peacefully drank the poison and died. This is the Greek ideal. What about the story that you find in the Gospels of Jesus Christ—how does he die? Why, in Gethsemane, he is sweating blood and tears and then crying on the cross: 'My God, why have you forsaken me?' I tell you, no Greek invented that story. The Bible itself will tell you that story is folly to a Greek (1 Cor 1:23).

When the Romans came across Jesus Christ, and Herod the Idumean and his troops likewise, and somebody told them that this Jesus Christ claimed to be king, they'd never heard of anything so screamingly funny for a long while! 'Oh,' they said, 'a king?' And they dressed him up and put a crown of thorns on him and a purple robe and put an old reed in his hand and had a real soldier's fun and games. They thought it the most ridiculous notion on earth that one who claimed to be king wasn't even prepared to let his disciples fight to protect him.

And what did the Jews think of him? They were looking for a liberator to liberate them from the oppressing Romans. It wasn't only that his nation crucified him; the apostles themselves (who wrote the story) tell us that, when it came to the crunch in the garden of Gethsemane, they were going to try and defend him with their swords, and Jesus said, 'No, you don't. Put up that sword' (see Matt 26:52). Then all the disciples forsook him and fled. It wasn't simply that they lost their nerve. They thought what he was saying was so absolutely absurd—a Messiah who wouldn't even defend himself, nor let his disciples fight to defend him—it was barmy.

I'm not asking you to begin by believing the New Testament is inspired, I'm telling you straight: the character of Jesus Christ in the New Testament was not invented by anybody.

Where did he come from then? He wasn't invented; he was real, wasn't he?

*The evidence of his own words*

Why do I believe he is the Son of God? Well, because he said so.

You say, 'You're arguing in circles, old boy.'

No, I'm not, and I'll tell you why. If I were to stand here today and say to you, 'I'm the Son of God you know,' you might say, 'Is that so, really?' And quietly you'd bring a psychiatrist or something, and warn my friends in Belfast: 'Gooding's gone even more nuts than he used to be.' Jesus Christ says he is God incarnate. Does that strike you as the words of a lunatic? You say, 'No, this is the Jesus Christ who has brought peace to millions.'

Yes, not only peace, but he has brought his concept of holiness.

If I wanted to go and find out about music, I would go right to the top, and if it were possible to get at Beethoven or Chopin, I should go to them. I shouldn't go to the next-door neighbour's cat because, while it does have a go at singing, the results are disastrous. No, I'd go right to the top. When it comes to morality, who would you go to if you could? The answer is to be found in the teachings of Jesus Christ, that tower above the rest of us like Mount Everest and the eternal snows. He who taught us *that* kind of holiness claimed to be God's Son. If he isn't, he is a liar. If he is a liar, it contradicts everything he taught in the way of ethics, and then he is the biggest humbug you ever met on the face of the earth.

Is that your reading of him? If he says he is the Son of God, then I believe it because he says so. Then we come back to the evidence that that Jesus Christ, who said he was the Son of God, was vindicated: he rose again the third day.

*The reason he came shows who he is*

Is there any other kind of reasoning? Yes, because Jesus Christ is unique in this. John the apostle says in his first epistle, 'This is he that came by water and by blood' (5:6). For time's sake, skip the water for a moment and consider what John means by saying that Jesus Christ came 'by blood'. That is, he not only went by blood, he came by it; for when he began his public ministry, his forerunner, John the Baptist, proclaimed to the world that this Jesus Christ had come as the Lamb of God to die for the sins of the world (John 1:29). It is one of the reasons why I believe he is the Son of God, because though he taught ethics and taught us that we ought to be good, the Bible tells us that when he came, he didn't come to teach us to be good; he came to die for us.

You see, my trouble is not that I don't know that I ought to be good. I don't know about you. Do you feel that your trouble is that you didn't know you ought to be good, and you need somebody to tell you?

'No, of course not,' you say. 'I know I ought to be good.'

Well, I thought so. My trouble is not that I don't know I ought to be good. My trouble is that I have not been good; and that puts me in a terrible fix. What am I to think about moral law? Does it matter or doesn't it? If it doesn't matter, then there's an end of all values. If it matters, I'm in trouble, because I've broken it. That's where Jesus Christ comes alongside me

and says, 'Yes, and I've come to deal with your problem. I've not just come to tell you to be good; I've come to die for your sins.'

I can tell you this, you'll only have to decide the question once, because there's nobody in the whole of history that will ever come alongside you and say, 'Look here, I am your Creator incarnate, and I came to die for your sins.' Nobody else will ever say that to you. He stands unique.

How do I know he's true? Well, at that level, I know he's true because he meets my need. If I'm hungry and you put a brick before me, well I'll do my best to taste it, but it's no good. Put a chunk of wood there? No use. But if you put a loaf of bread in front of me — yes! It meets the need. Jesus Christ, who died at Calvary, and came to die for my sins, is the only one in all history that has ever said anything like it to me. He meets my need. And I say, 'Yes, he's true!' And coming to believe he is the Son of God incarnate and my Saviour, then I say, 'Well, if he says the Old Testament is inspired, I accept it, and if I've reason to think that his authority lies behind the New Testament then, on his say-so, I accept that as well.'

And now I cease.

## About the Author

**DAVID W. GOODING** is Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University, Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. He has taught the Bible internationally and lectured on both its authenticity and its relevance to philosophy, world religions and daily life. He has published scholarly articles on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John, Acts, Hebrews, the New Testament's use of the Old Testament, and several books addressing arguments against the Bible and the Christian faith. His analysis of the Bible and our world continues to shape the thinking of scholars, teachers and students alike.