

The Text of the Old Testament

Versions and Variants

David Gooding

A Myrtlefield House Transcript



MYRTLEFIELD

HOUSE

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, 2020

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.

This text has been edited from the transcript of a talk given by David Gooding at the Bible College of Queensland, Toowong, Australia on 1 April 1992.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. You may not copy or download more than 500 consecutive verses of the ESV Bible or more than one half of any book of the ESV Bible. Quotations marked KJV are from The Authorized (King James) Version. Rights in the Authorized Version in the United Kingdom are vested in the Crown. Reproduced by permission of the Crown's patentee, Cambridge University Press. Other quotations are Dr Gooding's own translations or paraphrases

Published by The Myrtlefield Trust

PO Box 2216

Belfast, N Ireland

BT1 9YR

w: www.myrtlefieldhouse.com

e: info@myrtlefieldhouse.com

Myrtlefield catalogue no: bib.020/dw

The Text of the Old Testament

Versions and Variants

Let me begin with a few technical terms, just to make sure that amongst your many, many studies, you are familiar with the technical terms that are used when it comes to the text of the Old Testament.

Masoretic Text

If you can cast your minds back to the time before the Dead Sea Scrolls had been discovered, our knowledge of the Old Testament text depended on one tradition of manuscripts which is called the *Masoretic Text*, affectionately abbreviated to *MT*. That means that all the manuscripts we had, came through one tradition of copying out the manuscripts over many centuries. The earliest surviving copy we had of the Old Testament in Hebrew was dated about the ninth century AD. If you ponder that a moment, you will see that the gap between, say, the time of Moses when the Pentateuch was written, and the earliest surviving manuscript copy, was almost two thousand years. We knew, of course, that the Nazirites, as we call them—the Jewish scholars who gave themselves to the writing out of the Hebrew Old Testament manuscripts—were exceptionally careful. And as the years went by, they became ever more proficient and exacting in their standards, so that the Masoretic Text tradition was a tradition that had been copied out faithfully over many centuries. Still, as I say, the earliest surviving copy that we had was dated to the ninth century AD.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

Then came the *Dead Sea Scrolls*, and some of those manuscripts were almost one thousand years earlier than any copy we had hitherto had. The interest they created was, understandably, enormous. What would the text look like in a manuscript that had been copied eight hundred years earlier, and sometimes nearly one thousand years earlier? And as you know, the vast majority of Biblical manuscripts from the Dead Sea area agreed overwhelmingly with the Masoretic tradition that we already had. That was the number one surprise, and perhaps it oughtn't to have been such a big surprise. There were, of course, differences in these manuscripts from the ones we had had hitherto, but they were comparatively minor differences, so that we call the majority of those manuscripts *Proto-Masoretic*, meaning manuscripts that were written out before the Jewish Nazirites got working and forming their tradition. Manuscripts that obviously belonged to the same tradition, but are earlier, we call *proto*. The difference between the two is, on the whole, minimal.

Next, we noticed that the manuscripts that the Nazarites had chosen as the Biblical text that they were going to follow and copy out was, for the most part, a very good text. So that was discovery number one. But, in addition, some of the manuscripts—notably, some of the fragments from the Dead Sea Scrolls, and particularly from Cave 4 at Qumran—presented a Hebrew text that was different from both the Masoretic and the Proto-Masoretic Text. And that was a very interesting situation, because, for the first time, it gave us what we have had for many centuries in the New Testament—more than one text tradition, as we call it.

The Septuagint

The next thing I must explain is what is generally referred to as the *Septuagint*. The Masoretic Text, by definition, is in Hebrew, and a little bit in Aramaic. The Septuagint, however, was a translation of the Hebrew into Greek. It began to be made about 280–270 BC, in Alexandria in Egypt. There was a very large colony of Jews living in Alexandria at that time. Many of them had been taken there earlier by Alexander the Great. They had prospered, and the Greek rulers of Egypt had designated a whole part of the city for the Jews, and they had very large synagogues. But like Jews today in Australia, many of them no longer understood Hebrew with any ease, and therefore they needed a translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek, so that they could read it and understand it more easily. That translation was begun, as I say, about 280–270 BC. It dealt initially with the first five books of the Old Testament, called the *Pentateuch*. The rest of the Old Testament was subsequently translated by different people, at different times, and quite possibly in different countries.

By about the year 130 or 120 BC, there was in existence at least one translation into Greek of all the canonical books of the Old Testament. There were two translations of some books: the book of Daniel, for instance, was translated twice, and in some small parts of the Old Testament, there were three translations. I ought to add that the second translation of the book of Daniel may not have been so early: it may have been later than the others, but I mention it now because I have some explaining to do about the Septuagint.

Septuagint is the English form of the Latin word *septuaginta*, which means the number *seventy*. It is applied to these translations because of what most people think is a legend that the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament, were translated into Greek by seventy-two Jewish scholars. So why do they call it ‘seventy’ if it is supposed to have been translated by seventy-two? To make life easier for students to write it down in their notebooks perhaps! And because of that, the abbreviation that you’ll find in many books indicating the Septuagint is LXX—the Roman numerals for fifty (L) plus ten (X) plus ten(X).

Variable quality and subsequent revisions

But next, I have to tell you that these Greek translations, the so-called Septuagint, were a very mixed bag. I have already said that they were translated at different times, by different people. It is not like, say, the King James Version in English, which was translated by a committee all at once. With the Septuagint, even if the story that it was done by seventy people were true, that only applies to the first five books anyway. The translations of the other books were done subsequently by different people, according to different standards, and perhaps also in

different countries. Some of the books may even have been translated in Palestine itself and taken from there into Egypt.

Next, we have to notice that these various Greek translations which have come in the course of history to be called the Septuagint, were themselves eventually revised, or some of them were. So that in some manuscripts of the Greek Old Testament, you will find the original old Greek translation, and in other manuscripts you will find that translation as it was subsequently revised in Palestine, as we think, by Palestinian rabbis, in the period 50 BC to AD 50. That is what makes the use of the 'pocket' Septuagint perilous for serious study, because in some books you will have in front of you what was the old Greek translation, and in other books you'll have what never was the old Greek, but the old Greek revised. So we normally talk these days, not of the Septuagint, but of old Greek, which we abbreviate as *OGR*, or the oldest Greek translations we know about, of the various books of the Old Testament, to distinguish it from revised versions of that old Greek.

Similarities and differences

Now let's come back to the scrolls found in the caves at Qumran. We had, before Qumran, the Masoretic Text tradition, but now we've got a lot of ancient manuscripts which, on the whole, agree with that Masoretic tradition. Let me emphasize once more that this Masoretic tradition which is the majority text—still the majority of Hebrew manuscripts belong to that tradition—is, on the whole, a very good tradition. Then, we have the so-called Septuagint. We've had that a long while. And now we've got manuscripts from Qumran, which, for the moment, let me call *Q*. And the situation, over great areas of the Old Testament, is that all agree—Masoretic Text, Septuagint, and manuscripts from Qumran. In many places, that is the state of affairs.

But then I have to tell you that it is not so everywhere. Take the Masoretic Text, and the so-called Septuagint. In many books, they run side by side and agree. But there are other places where they don't agree, and the Masoretic Text is different from the Septuagint. That has caused scholars much interest all down the centuries. Why does the Greek translation, in parts, disagree with the Masoretic Texts? There are all kinds of reasons for that. In some books, the translators weren't much good, and they didn't understand their Hebrew too well, and they got it wrong, to be honest. And in some places, the translators have done what the NIV has done in places—they have paraphrased their Hebrew, so that they no longer fit exactly.

In other places, they have introduced rabbinic interpretation into their translation. For instance, in the book of Exodus, where it says, 'The elders went up the mountain, and they saw God' (see Exod 24:9–11) the Septuagint translators have instead said, 'They saw the place where the God of Israel stood.' They were worried about the expression 'they saw God', because other parts of Scripture say that no man can see God and live. And anyway, if this translation was going to be used in public reading, they thought it wiser to soften the expression to appear more reverential. So they have, 'They saw the place where the God of Israel stood'—a *rabbinic targumic translation*, as we call it. And then, in some books, like the book of Proverbs, the translation fits where it touches. It is so re-written and paraphrased that, in places, you'd scarce recognize it as a translation of the book of Proverbs at all. And, for

good measure, it adds in a few Greek proverbs, and stuff that looks to have been taken from the Greek philosopher Aristotle!

So these translations are a mixed bag. And just a little word of caution. If ever you should be using the Septuagint in serious study, you mustn't suppose that because nowadays the Septuagint is printed in one volume, or two volumes, that it is the same quality all the way through. The Septuagint, I repeat, is a collection of translations made by different people at different times, according to different standards. And some translations are good, and some translations are very bad, and some are scarce translations at all. So before you come to any serious decision about a matter, you must take the trouble to discover what is the general standard and value and validity of the translation in that book of the Septuagint that you happen to be studying at the moment. If you don't do that, you're liable to come to the wrong conclusion.

More significant differences

Now, to cut a long story short, there are some books of the Old Testament where the Septuagint goes very, very differently from the Masoretic Text. In the book of Job, for instance, the Septuagint is one-sixth shorter than the Masoretic Text, and, of course, we want to know why. In the prophecy of Jeremiah, the Septuagint translation is one-eighth shorter than the Masoretic Text. Now, you'd better observe who it is that's telling you this. I believe absolutely in the inspiration of the Old Testament. I've been working on these matters of the original text of the Old Testament for years, and I do believe in the inspiration and authenticity of the original texts.

But I am telling you the sheer fact that the Greek translation, the so-called Septuagint of Jeremiah is not only one-eighth shorter than the Masoretic Text, it has a very different order of chapters. In the Masoretic Hebrew of Jeremiah, the oracles against the nations—those severe pronouncements of judgment on the nations—come at the end of the book. In the Greek translation, that collection of oracles against the nations comes in the middle of the book, just like those oracles against the nations do in Ezekiel. Remember that Isaiah, Ezekiel and Jeremiah all have these collections of oracles against the Gentile nations. In Ezekiel, they come in the middle of the book. In the Masoretic Text of Jeremiah, they come at the end of the book, but in the Greek translation they come, even in Jeremiah, in the middle of the book. So the Greek is shorter, and then it has a different order from the Masoretic Text. And then, the individual oracles in the Greek translation come in a different order, and very often they are shorter. So there has been a problem all down the years, and scholars argued about it. Why was the Greek so different? Was it that the translators themselves introduced these changes, without any authority from the Hebrew? Or were they following a Hebrew text that was different from the Masoretic Text?

Then, in Cave 4 at Qumran—we call anything that comes out of Cave 4 of Qumran 4Q—there turned up some fragments of Jeremiah, and notably, the fragments that are called 4Q *Jeremiah B*. These fragments are in Hebrew. They cover a place where the Septuagint is very different from the Masoretic Text. Though they don't, themselves, agree with the Greek completely, they are much nearer to the Greek than they are to the Hebrew, which tends to suggest that the Greek differences may well have been founded on some Hebrew manuscript

that was like these fragments, and unlike the Masoretic Text. So how shall we evaluate that? The next thing that you must be careful to observe is that now we've got two forms of the Hebrew of this part of Jeremiah—the Masoretic Text and 4Q Jeremiah B fragments—but just because the fragments are in Hebrew and are very ancient, that doesn't necessarily mean they are a good and reliable manuscript.

This is an exceedingly complicated matter for analysis by the experts, of which I shall not attempt to bore you. Just because these fragments are old, and just because they have a text which is near the Septuagint, does not mean that this is automatically better than the Masoretic Text tradition. We have to study each case on its own, before we come to our decision. It is this kind of thing that you will find occasionally in your modern translations. You may see a footnote that says, 'Following the Septuagint,' where scholars have decided that the Septuagint is following a Hebrew text that is possibly now lost, but was better than the Masoretic Text. Therefore, they follow the Greek of the Septuagint, because they feel it is founded on a Hebrew manuscript—either that has been preserved at Qumran or is perhaps now lost.

Now that kind of thing repeats itself, not in such big proportions, in other places in the Old Testament. So much so that nowadays, it is a recognized problem to be discussed by Septuagint people and others—what we call the problem of the shorter and longer texts. The story I have chosen to talk to you about this morning is an instance of that phenomenon—the story of David and Goliath. You may care to turn to it in your Old Testament, at 1 Samuel 17.

The story of David and Goliath—Masoretic Text versus Septuagint

In the Septuagint, the Greek translation, the story is considerably shorter than it is in the Hebrew Masoretic Text. For instance, the Greek does not have 17:12–31. The Greek likewise does not have 17:55–18:6. In the verses in between, although the Greek has largely what the Masoretic Text has, there are many minor omissions in the Greek. The question is, how do you account for that? Nowadays, we have to presume that the fact that the Greek is shorter does not necessarily mean that the translators themselves decided to omit great wedges of the text. It may mean that they based their translation on a Hebrew text that was itself shorter than the Masoretic Text. But that simply poses another problem. Suppose we have two texts of this story—the Masoretic Text being a longer one, and some other Hebrew text, a shorter one—which is to be preferred as the original text? That is the question we face.

Inspiration versus evolution

Now, of course, different opinions are held by different scholars, largely because of their presuppositions. I admit my presupposition forthwith. I do not believe in what is called the 'evolution' of the Old Testament. I believe there was an original text, given by inspiration of God. I do believe it is worthwhile looking back and trying to ascertain what the original text of the book of Samuel was, and I'm not denying that the historian may have used all kinds of written sources. However, I do believe that when the historian came to put it together, he was guided by inspiration of God in what he did, that he produced a whole book, and that was, in our technical sense, the original text of Samuel.

Many scholars do not hold that view. They hold the view that the Old Testament just grew and evolved. And not only evolved in itself, but evolved in different religious centres in Palestine. So they hold that the story of David and Goliath could have evolved in one place to the point where the Hebrew on which the Septuagint is based has it. But in some other place the Hebrew story of David and Goliath went on evolving, and other bits were added to it from time to time, until in that place it came to be what we now have in the Masoretic Text. And those scholars would say that it's no use arguing which of the two is original. In some sense, they were both original. They represent different stages of evolution of the text, so they argue.

Apparent inconsistencies

And secondly, they argue that the Hebrew on which the Septuagint was based represents an earlier and more primitive stage of evolution of the story of David and Goliath. Why do they say that? Well, they say, look at the Masoretic Text, and look at those pieces which the Masoretic Text has, and the Greek doesn't have. And when you look at them, those extra pieces seem to introduce contradictions into the story. Do mark that I said: they *seem* to—they don't actually, but they seem to. Let's look at one of them.

In chapter 16, to go back a little bit, David is taken into Saul's house to play the harp to him, and to quieten his bad spate of mental illness, or demon possession. And Saul obviously knows David. But now look at chapter 17, which says,

As soon as Saul saw David go out against the Philistine, he said to Abner, the commander of the army, 'Abner, whose son is this youth?' And Abner said, 'As your soul lives, O king, I do not know.' And the king said, 'Enquire whose son the boy is.' And as soon as David returned from the striking down of the Philistine, Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand. And Saul said to him, 'Whose son are you, young man?' And David answered, 'I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite.' (vv. 55–58)

And so these scholars will say, 'Now, look at that. Chapter 16 implies that Saul knew David very well before the battle, but when David went out to the fight, and then when he came back again, Saul didn't know who he was, and had to ask Abner, 'Who is this young man?' And they say that that's a strange contradiction. Now, of course, the Greek Septuagint doesn't have the verses 55–58, so it doesn't have this apparent contradiction. And these scholars say, therefore, that the Greek represents an earlier stage of the evolution. Later on, other pieces were added, and were added by people who apparently didn't mind, or didn't notice that the bits and pieces they were adding introduced contradictions into the story.

Similarly, they say, to quote just one more example, David is taken by Saul as his armour bearer (16:21). He is, therefore, a man of war. But according to these scholars, when David volunteered to go out to fight Goliath, Saul is supposed to have said to him, 'David, you can't go and fight because you are only a youth, and Goliath is a man of war' (17:33)—another supposed contradiction.

Answering the critics

So now what should we say about these supposed contradictions or discrepancies? The last mentioned isn't a contradiction at all. In spite of what many books say, in 17:33 Saul does not say, 'You are only a shepherd boy, and that's why you can't go and fight Goliath.' Saul says, 'You can't go and fight him because you are only a youth, and Goliath has been a man of war from his youth.' And that last sentence shows that you can be a man of war while you are a youth, doesn't it? So why can't David go and fight him? Not because David is a shepherd boy, but because David is still only a youth. He's a man of war, but only a beginning man of war, so to speak, an apprentice man of war, whereas Goliath has been a man of war from his youth, and is now middle-aged, and a very crafty and experienced fighter indeed. There is no contradiction.

And secondly, to look at the other supposed contradiction, Saul doesn't ask Abner, nor yet David, 'Who is David?' If we read carefully what the text actually says, what Saul asks is who is David's father—'whose son is this?' And eventually he gets the answer from David, 'I am the son of Jesse the Bethlehemite.' Saul was anxious to know who David's father was because he had promised that anybody who went out and fought Goliath, he would make his father's house free in Israel (v. 25). And when Saul saw David go out, there was a flickering chance, he thought, that David might possibly be victorious; and if he were victorious, he'd have to make David's father's house a free house—that is, exempt from taxes. And secondly, Saul had promised that if any man went and slew Goliath, he would give him his daughter for a wife. And the hero, the conquering hero, being married to the king's daughter, would then have a claim to the throne when Saul died. It was no small matter, allying the royal house of Saul with the house of whoever the father of David was. It was to mean that that house of David, now, would have a potential claim to the throne, and you see that in the subsequent history.

When Abner eventually came to David and offered David to bring over the ten tribes of Israel under David's power, David said, 'Thank you very much Abner, but first, I'll have my wife back, if you don't mind; you know, Saul's daughter' (see 2 Sam 3:13–15). And why did he insist on that? Why, because having the king's daughter as a wife was a claim to the throne, and David was politely telling Abner, 'You can bring back the ten tribes if you like, but you're not making me king. I don't depend on you for being king. I have a right to that throne. I am married to the king's daughter.' This matter, therefore, of David's father, and his father's house, was supremely important in the politics of the day. And I repeat, Saul was not asking who David was, but who his father was. It always pays to attend to what the text actually says. It's a good rule, in any discipline of biblical studies.

Corroboration of secular history

But there is another approach that we may take to these matters. I have to tell you here that all we have of the David and Goliath story is the Masoretic Text on the one side, and the Septuagint on the other, which may be based on a Hebrew text, but we don't possess any such text. We have fragments from Cave 4 of Qumran that cover other parts of Samuel, and sometimes those Hebrew manuscripts are better than the Masoretic Text, and we would

normally follow them nowadays. But we don't have any Hebrew manuscript from Qumran that covers those actual chapters of the story of David and Goliath. So it's a straight choice between Masoretic Text on the one side, and Septuagint, and whatever it's based on, on the other.

So, how shall we decide? Well here, literary and historical considerations, and finally, theological considerations, come to the fore and influence our thinking. I haven't time to outline to you the considerable literary considerations. They alone would lead me to say that the Masoretic Text is original, and the Septuagint, and whatever it's based on, is not. But now historically, the story of David and Goliath is a very interesting story in Israel, because it comes from the time when they still had the custom of what we call single hero combat. That was a custom, indeed a convention, in the ancient world in different countries. You will meet it in Greece, at a very early stage, and it fills much of the space in the great epics of Homer. Many times, in Homer, you'll read how the Greeks or the Trojans would suddenly, in the middle of the fighting, propose a hero—single hero combat. And when the Trojans stated that, all the Trojan army had to stop fighting and sit down, and all the Greek army had to stop fighting and sit down. And then the Trojan hero would be challenged by a Greek hero. The Greeks would choose one man to come out and fight, and the two boys would have a ding dong battle. It was supposed to be that whoever won, then his side had the victory. Of course, it never actually ended like that because whoever won, the other didn't agree, so they kept on fighting!

But the practice was widely known amongst the Greeks of that far off period—the heroic period, as we call it. It is known in far distant islands, where it is chronicled in their great epic stories. Here in the Old Testament, you have a case of that very thing. The two armies sit down, the Philistines put out a hero to challenge the Israelites, and eventually, the Israelites find a hero to come and fight Goliath. Now we know that that kind of warfare proceeded according to very set convention. When one side put forth a hero, then both armies had to sit down, and there was a truce, and nobody was allowed to break that truce. If they broke the truce, that had a very serious implication. During the truce, either of the heroes was free to walk absolutely where he liked. He could go up to the very ramparts of the other people's camp, and nobody dared shoot him, because there was a truce. Hector, the Greek hero, at one stage, went right up to the walls of the Trojans, and they didn't shoot him, because they were under truce. Except, subsequently, one silly duffer went and shot him from the Trojan walls, and that created a vast international difficulty!

Now, you will find in the story of David and Goliath, that Goliath comes up to the Israelite camp every day for forty days. Some scholars have queried that: how could this Philistine come right up to the Israelite camp? But the scholars didn't quite know their stuff, because that's quite normal in single hero combat. Under a truce, the other chap can come up to the enemy's lines, and nobody will shoot at him. Then the critics have a difficulty with the long delay—forty days and forty nights. That may just be a Hebrew idiom for 'a long while', but even that is paralleled in Greek literature. At one stage, when the Trojans put forth their hero, Hector, the Greeks had butterflies in the stomach and nobody dared come out from the other side. They were a long while debating who they could send out to meet the great Trojan hero Hector, since their leading hero, Achilles, was sulking in his tent, and wouldn't fight.

Other critics have said that the Hebrew story doesn't make sense. Until this moment, the Hebrews haven't been afraid of the Philistines; apparently they've been fighting them, and now they are afraid, so that's a nonsense. But it's stupid to say that. The same was true of the Greeks and the Trojans. The Greeks were happily fighting the Trojans, but when the Trojans put forth their hero, Hector, then the Greeks got the jitters because they hadn't got one single hero to match him. Finally, poor old Ajax was sent out to meet Hector. The Hebrew account, thus far, has been very true to life. The Israelites were panic-stricken: who could they send out as a single hero to meet Goliath?

And then you will see another thing. There was a convention in single hero combat that the warriors would come out of their camps, and they would come so far and stop. And one would harangue the other, and curse, and swear, and threaten him with every polite and impolite thing under the sun, and generally threaten to feed his flesh to the birds, and whatnot. And when he'd had his fill of denouncing the other chap, the other chap had his turn, and denounced him in similar gory terms. Sometimes they had a double session of that. And then, when they had finished haranguing each other, they rose up and joined in combat. That is exactly, according to the Hebrew Masoretic Text, what David and Goliath did. They came out of the camp until they got within earshot, and then Goliath denounced David uphill and down dale. When he'd finished, David had his turn and denounced Goliath. It's all very true to life.

Then there's the question of the choice of weapons. This was a very big convention in the ancient world, in single hero fight, as to what weapons you would use. You will notice in the Hebrew story, a tremendous fuss is made about the choice of weapons. First Saul tells David to take his weapons, which would have been a nonsense. For David to have taken Saul's sword, he wouldn't have got within feet of Goliath. Goliath had a spear like a telegraph pole: he would have skewered David on the end of it, long before David got anywhere near him. Saul was a little bit silly in the head for proposing it!

But then there's the great fuss about the weapons that David did choose. He took some stones and a sling, and put them in his shepherd's pouch, and came with a staff in his hand. And when Goliath saw the weapons that David had chosen, he nearly had an apoplectic fit. Here he was, armed to the teeth in the manner of the supreme single hero man in the Philistine army. And when he saw David was a youngster, ruddy faced, and coming with a stick, it was such an insult to Goliath that he nearly exploded. 'How dare he come to me with a little old stick, like somebody would chase a dog out of his backyard with' (see 17:43). It was a tremendous insult. And of course, David replied. That is all true to life. It would be like putting me in the boxing ring with Muhammed Ali, or somebody. He wouldn't even bother to fight me, it would be such an insult to his professional status.

And I have to tell you, ladies and gentlemen, that that is the story in the Hebrew of the Masoretic Text. It is beautiful and absolutely true to the conventions of ancient history. The story in the Septuagint ruins the whole lot. I cannot go into the detail now. I've written a book on it, if you care to read it one day.¹ The story in the Septuagint ruins the whole story from that point of view. It cannot possibly be original.

¹*Current Problems and Methods in the Textual Criticism of the Old Testament*, 1979 (Queen's University Belfast).

And one final thing, if I may, there is a spiritual point. When Goliath objected to David's weapon, David, in his turn replied, 'I come to you with these apparently weak weapons because of the issue that's at stake. The issue between us is not who is the biggest fighter, who is the best fighter, who has the best weapons and the best skill; the issue at stake is this: you have defied the living God. I am coming to you with these apparently weak and foolish weapons so that everybody may see, when you are killed, it is not I who have done it, nor my clever weapons. It is God himself who has defeated you, that Israel may learn no longer to trust in man, but in the living God' (see 17:45–47). So now history is joining with theology, and is a very powerful spiritual lesson, as well as a historical one.

Conclusion

It's that kind of thing that people like me, who are textual critics, have given our thought to over the years. These are some of the devices by which we attempt to judge between the manuscripts, and to decide which better represent the original Old Testament text.

About the Author

DAVID W. GOODING (1925-2019) was Professor of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University Belfast and a Member of the Royal Irish Academy. He taught the Bible internationally and lectured on both its authenticity and its relevance to philosophy, world religions and daily life. He 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.