

The Transmission and Translation of the New Testament

David Gooding

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[The Documentary Evidence for the New Testament](#)

It is a delight to be here again, after some long years of absence. I remember your fervour in those days and your strength of posture that you could endure such long sessions without murmuring like the Israelites in the wilderness. And that encourages me to proceed in my normal style!

And now since today we are to consider together some of the basic facts about the inspired Scripture, let's begin by reminding ourselves of some words that our Lord Jesus spoke: 'Sanctify them in the truth: thy word is truth' (John 17:17 RV).

I have been asked to speak about the documentary evidence that lies behind Scripture. Now, in that regard, the Old Testament is a great deal different from the New Testament; the facts and figures and the evidence I shall quote for the documentary reliability of the New Testament are necessarily somewhat different from those I should use if I were talking about the Old Testament. The New Testament was written within the space of about fifty years, more or less; the Old Testament was being written over a thousand years. So, while my own work on manuscripts and texts has been concerned with the Old Testament, if I were now to try to explain the details of the Old Testament documents, I fear I should transgress the time given to me. I don't say these things because I wish to cast doubt upon the reliability of the Old Testament—far from it.

Recommended reading

Old Testament: K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

New Testament: F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are they Reliable?* 6th edn; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2003.

In this session we shall raise and seek to answer three major questions:

1. Are the New Testament manuscripts authentic and reliable copies of what the original writers wrote?
2. Are the historical and geographical references in these manuscripts accurate?
3. Is the central figure in the New Testament an invention by the original writers?

If we are thinking of documentary evidence for the New Testament, I submit to you that we need to ask not just one question but at least these three.

Question 1. Are the New Testament manuscripts authentic and reliable copies of what the original writers wrote?

We shall all be aware that, for many hundreds of years, copies of the New Testament had to be written out by hand. We ought to be very grateful for the multitude of ordinary believers and later professional scribes that they did take the trouble to write out the New Testament as best they could by hand in these manuscripts. I don't know if you have ever tried it. Sometimes I wonder how many of us would have a New Testament if it depended on our writing the text out for ourselves. We owe them a great debt. That process of writing went on for 1400 years. Our question therefore is, Are these handwritten manuscripts that have survived authentic and reliable copies?

A. A false idea

Let me first mention a false idea that is widespread, put around in modern times by the authors of things like *The Da Vinci Code* and other such absurdities, namely, that the New Testament was not written down until around AD 300. Therefore the implication would be that—seeing it is nearly 300 years between the date of our Lord and the apostles and the writing down of the New Testament—the message of the New Testament has got largely altered and is misrepresented. Let me emphasise very strongly that that idea, that the New Testament was not written until AD 300 or more, is absolutely false.

B. Answer

1. It is true that the earliest surviving manuscript of the entire New Testament is the Codex Sinaiticus dated around AD 350. Again, let me make it clear what I am saying. I am not saying that this was the first time the whole New Testament was written down. Of course not! I am talking about the survival of a complete copy of the whole of the New Testament. And, as survivals go, the earliest surviving manuscript of the entire New Testament is the Codex Sinaiticus dated around AD 350. While that is so, let me point out to you—and as an Englishman I do it a little bit begrudgingly (you will find out why in a minute)—we have many earlier copies of parts, sometimes large parts, of the Old Testament.

2. Take, for instance, Papyrus 45, to quote its official numbering. Papyrus is made from a reed that grows in Egypt by the Nile, and people used to harvest it, slice thin bits off the stalk and lay them down on the front side by side one way, and on the back side by side the other way. They would glue them—generally with the water of the Nile, which is very sticky—and pumice stone them to make them a bit smoother to write on. Then they wrote on them with lamp black.¹ We call them papyri because that is what they are written on. Papyri is an ancient word—it is the word from which we get our modern word, paper. But the stuff of actual papyrus was rather different from our paper.

So Papyrus 45, which contains the four Gospels and Acts, dates from about AD 200. It is housed in the Chester Beattie Library in Dublin—you will agree with me that it ought to be in London, of course! But therein is Ireland's chief claim to fame and this spectacularly early

¹ Lamp black is a type of carbon black obtained from the soot of burned fat, oil, tar, or resin.

copy of the New Testament, the Gospels and Acts, written somewhere about AD 200, is now in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin. Because they believe that it contains and is the inspired word of God, all Irish believers have gone along to see it, haven't they? At least, we hope so!

3. And then, not to content ourselves with that, Papyrus 46 containing Paul's letters to the churches plus Hebrews—perhaps you think that was written by Paul as well? This is likewise dated about AD 200 and housed in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin. (That is, his letters to the churches, as distinct from the pastoral epistles that were written to individuals.) If you are going to see it and it is your first time, you will see a dark bit of papyrus with dark letters, and the lighting in the library is kept dark so as not to fade the original writing, so you may be a little bit disappointed. But try to visualise a group of believers in Egypt about 1800 years ago maybe; they wanted a copy, so they put their pennies together and probably hired a scribe. Scribes were expensive and they paid the best one they had money for and he copied out the Scripture by hand. Wonderful, isn't it? Just imagine if we had to do the same thing to get a Bible.

4. But I haven't finished yet! There's the Bodmer Papyrus No. 75 containing parts of Luke and John, dated somewhere between AD 175 and 225, which is housed in the Bodmer Library in Cologny-Geneva.

5. Then there's Papyrus 52, containing very tiny fragments of the Gospel of John dated between AD 100 and 150, housed in the Rylands Library in Manchester.

Now, let's ponder the implications of it. It just isn't true what cheap novels and others say, that the New Testament was not written down for 300 years. That is historical nonsense. Here are these early surviving papyri of largish parts of the New Testament, and they carry this implication. If you stand there in the Chester Beatty Library looking at the papyri of, say Paul's letters, what you are looking at is around 1800 years old. It isn't the original thing that Paul wrote—of course not. But if it is itself 1800 years old, let me pose a question to you. How old was the copy from which it was copied? You say, 'We can't know, can we?' No we can't. The manuscript from which it was copied might have been copied the week before, it could have been written fifty years before and it wouldn't be impossible that it was written a hundred years before. The point is to remind ourselves how near to the days of the apostles this was.

6. And then we have another source of information for the documents of the New Testament—the numerous allusions and quotations in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers². You will notice the adjective, the 'Apostolic' Fathers, the name given to those that followed almost at once the apostles of our Lord, and not the later Church Fathers. So we are dealing with the Apostolic Fathers between about AD 90 and 160. And in them we have numerous quotations and allusions to the New Testament, providing a wealth of evidence both of the existence of the New Testament and what it contained.

7. In the light of that, I quote you the verdict by Sir Frederick Kenyon. First, a word or two about Sir Frederick. He was the head of the British Museum in London and in 1935 when Chester Beatty, who then lived in London, brought this lump of chocolaty-looking papyrus from Egypt without really knowing what it was, it was handed to the library and therefore to

² Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna, *Didache*, Shepherd of Hermas.

Sir Frederick. With consummate skill they managed delicately to prise each page apart and were astonished to find that it was a copy of Paul's letters, which Sir Frederick then transcribed and edited very quickly, and a good many other manuscripts—Greek translations of the ancient Hebrew for the Old Testament. Expert that he was in handling the manuscripts at first hand, Sir Frederick Kenyon gave as his verdict in 1940, 'The interval then between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence had become so small as to be negligible and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established.'³ Since those days many other papyri have come to light.

C. A comparison between books written by ancient classical authors and the New Testament books

Still dealing with the question of the reliability of the documents—i.e., the manuscripts, let me now do what classicists are very pleased to do. I am not a theologian, I am a classicist by profession. I taught the Classics at university but worked on the manuscript tradition of the Old Testament. Christians who are classicists make a comparison between the manuscripts of the New Testament and the books written by ancient classical authors. You will find a great deal of information on that regard in F. F. Bruce's book *The New Testament Documents: Are they Reliable*, because the late Prof. Bruce began life as a classicist, and to the end of his days he would say he was not a theologian but a historian and a classicist. I take two examples from the long list he gives—examples of classical authors. I ask you to notice, firstly, the date on which the book in question was composed; secondly, how many surviving copies there are; thirdly, the oldest copy.

Example 1. Caesar's Gallic War. In my far-off day in the 1900s, that would be the first Latin book you would have read. Caesar composed it somewhere between 58 and 50 BC. The number of surviving copies is nine or ten. That is rather different from the New Testament, where the copies run into about five thousand-plus. Notice too, the gap between Caesar's own day when he wrote the book and our oldest surviving copy of what Caesar wrote. The oldest surviving copy is nine hundred years later than when Caesar wrote the book. No classical scholar that I am aware of doubts that in the surviving manuscript we have a reliable copy of what Caesar intended.

Example 2. Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War. I take this as my second example (Prof. Bruce will give you many more). Thucydides was an ancient Greek historian, writing somewhere about 460–400 BC. The surviving manuscripts are eight. The oldest copy, except for a few first century fragments, now dates to about 900. The gap between Thucydides' time and the first surviving copy of the major part of his work is thirteen hundred years. No classicist that I am aware of doubts that we have in our surviving copies a reliable copy of what Thucydides intended.

We have, then, about five thousand-plus copies of the New Testament. We also have enough in the Church Fathers in general, if we read their books and their quotes, so that if we

³ *The Bible and Archaeology* (1940), pp.288–9.

lost all New Testament manuscripts we could write the whole of the New Testament almost by selecting from the Church Fathers (not just the Apostolic Fathers, but the others), what they have written in their books. And then of course we have the early translations of the New Testament. The early Christians were missionary minded and they went everywhere preaching the gospel, so in Egypt there are some very early translations of the New Testament into Coptic Sahidic. In North Africa the missionaries had to translate the New Testament into Latin because the cities in North Africa were Latin-speaking. So that, with all the translations of the New Testament added up, we have thousands of documents, evidences for the text of the New Testament, and among them some very early copies.

D. Reasons why so few New Testament manuscripts *have* survived from the early period

Why don't we find hundreds of manuscripts? The practical answers to that are:

1. If you take a papyrus out of Egypt, where they get no rain, it easily disintegrates, so we can't expect to find many of these remaining. A number of the ones we have found were buried for centuries in the sands of Egypt, and being utterly dry they have survived.
2. The early Christians did what we tend to do. Well, I mustn't suppose it's what you do, but I could ask you! — What do you do when your much loved Bible falls to pieces, with all your notes in it and some of the leaves have nearly come adrift? I think you discard it and get a new one, don't you? That's what the early believers did.
3. But there was another reason why not many copies from the very early period have survived, and that is because of the great persecutions under the Roman Emperor, Decius (250) and then Valerius (257), and the Great Persecution of Diocletian in the 300s. Believers were not only persecuted for being believers, but Diocletian was determined to stamp out Christianity lock, stock and barrel from the face of the earth.
4. Diocletian was not content to throw Christians to lions or otherwise dispose of them, he demanded that all their sacred books should be handed over to the authorities and then burned. That faced the Christians with a very big question. Should you hand over your Bible? What would you do? Would you risk your life and keep hold of your Bible, or would you say, 'I am a believer and God knows I am, but this is only a book and I must give it up?' What would you do? The Latin word for 'handing something over' is *tradere*, and the person who hands something over is called a *traditor*. That word *traditor*, used of believers that handed over their Bibles to the authorities to be burned, eventually came into English. Its modern English equivalent is *traitor*. Traitor is the Latin word *traditor* as it has come to be pronounced by the English. How blessed we are to have Bibles. We mustn't welcome persecution, but it is obvious in nations where Christianity has been and is still being persecuted that believers value God's word and do everything they can to study it and believe it.

E. The use of notebooks by first century Christians

One other source of information interests us in this connection, and that is that some people have the notion that the first century Christians were, all of them, uneducated and illiterate. And some even hold that the whole population in the first century AD was virtually illiterate, but of course that is not true. I have here a book by Alan Millard, retired Professor of Semitic Languages and Akkadian in the University of Liverpool, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus*.⁴ It was very common, in particular for short notes and for recording day-to-day experience, to use notebooks. If you think of, say, Matthew, he was an Income Tax inspector when he got converted, so he would have been used to keeping day-to-day accounts in the notebooks. Would you think, perhaps, that he might now and again have copied down what our Lord said in his notebook? Or did he have to wait to be inspired before he wrote anything down? If you had gone to Matthew and said, 'What are you doing, Matthew – writing down what the Lord Jesus said? What right have you to do that? You are not inspired yet!' And he would have said, 'No, I am not; but he is!'

So, between the days of our Lord and the first writing down of the Gospels, there must have been much written down of what our Lord said and did. And Luke, when he begins his Gospel, tells us straight out that many had written an account of what our Lord said. That adds to the question of the reliability of the documents and eventually what the Gospel writers wrote down. They were not just inventing it out of their heads, there were records already.

Question 2. Are the historical and geographical references in the New Testament manuscripts accurate?

Now we come to our second question. The first one has asked about the manuscripts from the point of view of the number of them. There were thousands of them—more than five thousand, plus all the other documents and evidence in the Church Fathers and in the early translations. But now we have another question—*how shall we judge the reliability of what they wrote?*

A.

There is a pseudo thing called the *Gospel of Barnabas*—not to be confused with the *Epistle of Barnabas*. The *Gospel of Barnabas* is a spurious gospel. There are not very many early copies beyond the 1400s or 1500s. How do we know it is spurious? Well, among other incongruities, it rejoices in the marvellous remark that our Lord sailed to Nazareth, which is a mighty difficult thing to do. I don't know if you have ever attempted to sail to Nazareth? Whoever penned it in that volume just didn't know his geography of Palestine, and is thereby, amongst many other things, convicted of being spurious. It also says that Jesus did not die on the cross, and therefore it is a document that will be often quoted by our Muslim friends who refuse to believe that Jesus died on the cross. It also says that Mohammed was the Messiah, which is not what Muslims believe. Muslims believe that Jesus was and is the Messiah, not Mohammed. So this is a spurious Gospel and the things that I am quoting show us that it is not true to the geography and historical details of the time of our Lord.

⁴ Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000.

B. Answer

1. So now we must ask about our New Testament documents—not only how many they number, but if the historical and geographical references in the New Testament manuscripts are accurate, insofar as we can test them against the evidence of history and geography, and so forth. Time and physical exhaustion on your part, not mine, forbid me that I should cite you a whole list of remote historical facts. Again, F. F. Bruce's little volume is very useful for that because he will quote you historical instances from the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles to show that the New Testament documents are true to life in the time that they refer to.⁵

2. One such thing I will mention. In the Acts of the Apostles it is said that Paul was at Corinth and started by going to the synagogue; then he left the synagogue and started a Christian church and the Jews who were angry with him for that reason appealed to the Governor of Corinth, a Roman. Luke says his name was Gallio. For many years the learned scholars said that Luke had got it wrong—there was no Gallio, there is no reference to Gallio anywhere in the Roman records. So Luke had got it wrong! And then somebody tripped over a bit of stone, a monument, and it had Gallio's name on it. He turned out to be a brother of the famous Roman philosopher, Seneca. Luke knew what he was talking about; he was talking accurate history and he is remarkable for that. To you who like history, I commend a book by C. J. Hemer: *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*.⁶ It is a very detailed scholarly work.

But I leave that now because we must come to more important questions. We have talked about the number and the early date of the manuscripts, and whether they are reliable documents that tell us what the early writers wrote. We have also asked if they are true to the contemporary history—did the writers know what they were talking about when they refer to contemporary history?

Question 3. Is the central figure of the Gospels and Epistles an invention of the original writers?**A. Answer**

No! This matter is absolutely central to our Christian faith. There have been many to suggest that the early Christians, being enamoured with Christ and believing in him, made up all sorts of stories, some of them a bit exaggerated, and these rather exaggerated stories were eventually written down and became our Gospels. My question, therefore, is against that kind of background.

B. Evidence

It is not quite enough—it is important, but it is not quite enough—to point out that the documents are true to the geographical and historical details of the time. As you know,

⁵ Bruce, *New Testament Documents*, chs 7 and 8.

⁶ Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1989.

anybody writing a novel nowadays, particularly a historical novel, will do a tremendous amount of research to get the background stuff right, though the story they tell is not altogether historical. It comes from the imagination, amongst other things, of the novelist. So, to show that the New Testament details are true to the history and geography of the period is very good, but it doesn't simply by itself mean that the central figure is true to history and not the invention of the writers or the early church. What evidence have we? Which comes round to my asking why you believe in Jesus of Nazareth—Why would you stake your whole eternity on him?

I want to suggest three areas, among many, that we meet in our New Testament documents that answer this question.

1. *The apostles would never have invented the message of the cross, knowing it was folly to the world*

I want to say that with the apostles, the human authors of our Gospels and Epistles, there was one central message of Christ that they self-evidently did not invent, and that was the gospel message of the cross. How can we be sure that they didn't invent it? I am not merely talking about the historical fact that Jesus was crucified, the Roman historians will tell you that. I am talking about the gospel that the early Christians preached—that we may have forgiveness and reconciliation with God, justification and peace for now and for eternity through the atoning death of Christ on the cross.

What evidence is there that the apostles didn't invent it? Well, let's take Paul first, with his insistence on the centrality of the cross of Christ in his epistles. Paul, as he subsequently became, will tell you straight that, when he first heard the story of the crucifixion of Christ as the Saviour of the world that the Christians preached, he thought it was sheer folly. It was worse—it was positively blasphemous. Saul of Tarsus was an Orthodox Jew; he knew his Old Testament. When the Christians came to him and preached Jesus as Saviour through dying on a cross, he remembered what is written in the Old Testament, 'Cursed is he that hangs upon a tree' (Deut 21:22–23; see Gal 3:9–14). For in Israel, if someone had committed an offence so heinous that he had to be put to death, and simply putting him to death was not enough to show the enormity of his sin, he could be hung upon a tree to advertise to the world that he was cursed of God. Even so, he had to be taken down before nightfall. To come to Saul of Tarsus, and say that his very salvation, his forgiveness, his acceptance with God, his place in God's heaven, depended on somebody who was cursed of God hanging on a tree, was sheer blasphemy. When he wrote of his conversion, and after some years of preaching to the Christians in Corinth, he still admitted that the preaching of the cross is foolishness to them that perish. You may be utterly sure that Paul didn't invent it.

We are told in our Gospels that, when our Lord first indicated to his apostles that he must go to Jerusalem and would be rejected by the High Priest and be crucified, they objected outspokenly. And when at last he was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane they all ran off. The message of the cross of Christ as the great sin atoning sacrifice by which we are reconciled to God was not invented by the apostles or the first Christians.

And if you say, 'But where does it go back to?'—it goes back to Christ, of course. The New Testament tells us that, before he left them, our Lord instituted a ceremony by which his people should remember him. It is very significant what he chose to be the means of

remembrance. He could have said, 'When you meet together after I am gone, take the New Testament and read the Sermon on the Mount.' Valuable, of course, but it would have given the impression that the main purpose of Christ's coming was ethical and sociological. He didn't choose that. He could have said, 'When you come together after I'm gone, recite my many miracles.' They were very valuable, because the miracles were very often enacted parables as well as being miracles and very illuminating. But he didn't choose that either. If he had chosen that, we should have remembered him as a great miracle-worker. What, then, did he choose? He took bread and gave it to them and said, 'Eat it' (not, of course, 'offer it'). And he took wine and said, 'Drink of it (again, not 'offer it'), all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins' (Matt 26:27–28 ESV). The historical record stands that from the very earliest times Christians have done precisely that. It was not invented by those who wrote the Gospels; they merely recorded it.

It comes round to the whole question, how do you know that Jesus is the Son of God — that he is God incarnate? I want to use an analogy that may help us. There is the story of how Solomon when he came to the throne demonstrated his wisdom. There were two harlots sleeping in the same room in different beds and they both had a baby. In the middle of the night one harlot turned over on top of her baby and smothered it and killed it. When she realised what was done she crept out of bed, took the baby and went across the room to the other woman, took her live child and put the dead baby in with the other woman. When the second woman woke up in the morning and saw this dead child and then looked at it, she said, 'This is not my baby!' She went across the room to the other woman and said, 'You've got my baby!' There followed much tearing of hair and other such suitable gestures. Not being able to settle the dispute, it was brought before His Majesty the king, and when he had listened to the arguments he decided upon a way of settling it. He commanded one of his officers to come with a sword and he handed the living baby to the officer. He said, 'I am not going to favour one of you above the other; I shall ask my officer to cut the child in two and I shall give you a half each.' One woman said, 'Yes, you do that!' And the other woman said, 'No, no, give it to her, then!' (1 Kgs 3:16–26). Anything rather than the child would die.

How do I know that Jesus is God's Son, who came to die for us? We are God's creatures and he loves us with the Creator's love. I nearly said, 'He would do anything for us.' That might not be quite true, but what bigger thing could you think of him doing than to give his dear Son, God incarnate, to die for us? That's God! It is not something that the apostles invented.

2. Without the resurrection, the coming into existence of the church cannot be accounted for

And if the cross is not a message that they invented, then of course the resurrection that establishes the fact that this was God's Son and God has accepted his sacrifice, raises the question of what evidence there is for it.

Ask the apostles, 'What has come over you, gentlemen? You have suddenly taken to preaching in the streets; a day or two ago you were skulking behind locked doors, afraid that you would die like your teacher and master. What has brought you out here?' They will reply, according to Luke's book the Acts of the Apostles, that the thing that thrust them out to the streets was the resurrection of Christ. But then ask them, 'So you have come out now boldly — but what is the message that you feel impelled to preach?'

I am sure you have found it interesting that in the Acts of the Apostles you will find very little, remarkably little, of the Sermon on the Mount and being good to other people. The New Testament believed in it, of course, but there is remarkably little of it in the Acts of the Apostles. The apostles have been thrust out to witness—and what they witnessed to is the resurrection of Christ!

C. F. D. Moule, who died in 2007 at the age of ninety-eight, was Professor of Theology at Cambridge. He used to point out that, whatever you think, the rise of the Christian church is a fact of history. Whether you agree with the church or you don't agree with the church, it is a fact of history that cannot be denied and therefore you have to ask, 'What caused it?' If you ask the apostles what caused it, they will say, 'The resurrection of Christ caused it.' If you don't believe in the resurrection, or you don't like the notion of the resurrection, well then, what caused the church? Again I want to submit to you that this isn't a myth, made up by the writers of the New Testament, it is a great explosive power that started the church going on the day of Pentecost.

3. The character of Christ

So we have been considering evidence for the reliability of the documents of our Christian faith—that it is not made up. Finally, I want to submit to you a big piece of evidence, and that is the character of Christ. C. S. Lewis, the famous Irish writer, used to make the point repeatedly. If the apostles invented the character of Christ, then perhaps we ought to start worshipping them because they were literary geniuses if they invented him. The character of Christ has won the hearts of millions and if you ask any of them they will tell you that they love Christ. Some of them may be embarrassed to tell you before they get to know you, but I have never met anybody that talks about loving Socrates or Plato, or loving Einstein. Admiring him, maybe, but I don't know about loving him. Loving Christ, that real person, not the literary invention of a few fishermen; they were but recording what they saw in front of them.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us. (1 John 1:1–2 ESV)

Are our New Testament documents reliable? I want to say they are overwhelmingly reliable!

[The Role of Textual Criticism](#)

In these days there are many different translations of the Bible; scarcely a week goes by but some new translation is offered to us. Many of them of course are helpful, but sometimes I think we could do with rather less than we have at present.

When people read these various new translations, if they are used to an old one, like the Authorised Version, they find two difficulties. One of the difficulties is that the new translations have a completely different wordage from the old one that they are used to, and those of my generation find it upsetting. The reason for the different wordage can be one of two things. 1. The new translation is based upon the same Greek as the old one, but it has put the translation into up to date modern English. So that, while it sounds very different, if you analyse it the meaning that is being conveyed remains the same. 2. The other reason for the differences is that the translators may not be using the same Greek because, as we shall now see, there are many differences between the manuscripts of the New Testament. Therefore, a modern translation may be based on somewhat different Greek from what the old translation was based on.

Now, as far as differences in the *same* Greek manuscripts, but by a different translation, are concerned, we shall be considering that in our third session. This afternoon we must think of the differences that occur because the translators are using *different* Greek manuscripts. In other words, in this session we are to talk about the role of *textual criticism*.

This is the second difficulty that I mentioned and it sounds a barbarous word to many people's ears! Why should you need to criticise the text of the Bible? Isn't that what wicked atheists do, they criticise the text of the Bible? Why would you even contemplate a textual criticism of the New Testament? If that is how it appeals to you, let me assure you that the term, textual criticism, is not criticising the message of the Bible. I myself practised textual criticism. It means studying the different manuscripts of Scripture and, where they differ, deciding which manuscript best represents the original author's meaning in each place.

Recommended reading

Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 1964; 3rd enlarged edn, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: a companion volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (fourth revised edition)*, 2nd edn, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994.

D. A. Carson, *The King James Version Debate: A Plea for Realism*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979.

1. A personal statement

I personally believe with all my mind and heart in the divine verbal inspiration and authority of the New Testament. Then I would add —*as originally given*.

2. The facts

1. But what we have are copies of what was originally written. We have no *autographs*, as they are called — meaning by that term we don't have the actual papyri that Paul or Luke wrote on.

2. We don't have that, but what we do have are thousands of copies, written by hand at various times and in different places by different scribes.

3. The result is that no two copies are exactly the same in all respects down to the last detail.

4. There are therefore thousands of differences.

If that upsets you, then let me tell you that there is no reason why it should upset you. As I said earlier, I have not worked professionally on the textual criticism of the New Testament; I have worked on the textual criticism of the Old Testament. That, if anything, is more complicated than the similar discipline in the New. But the aim of textual criticism, when faced with the differences in the manuscripts, is of course to work back, to get back to the original text.

Now, if all this sounds bordering on apostasy or something like it to you, I suggest you conduct a little experiment. In your spare time for the next week take a Gospel from the New Testament. A good place to start would be Matthew chapter 1. You yourself copy it out by hand, then get somebody whose eyes are like the eagle's to look at what you have copied and see if in any place you have made a mistake. If you try to do the whole of the Gospel of Matthew I guarantee you will make a mistake, if you are simply writing out by hand. If you doubt it, have a go and show me the result.

3. The aim of textual criticism

So there are differences in the manuscripts, and there is no need for us to hide ourselves from that fact.

1. Our task as textual critics is to get back to the original text.

2. In the vast majority of cases this can be done.

Let me now repeat, no basic doctrine of the faith remains in doubt as a result of the differences in the manuscripts. That is for one very good reason: *no basic doctrine of the New Testament depends on one single verse*. Basic doctrines are taught all over the place and, while there are differences in the manuscripts, no two manuscripts have exactly the same differences. Most of them, of course, are accidental differences, so in the vast majority of cases we can work back to the original with very good certainty.

3. I have to add that in some cases at present complete certainty is unachievable, and we must be content with probability.

4. I repeat, no basic doctrine is in doubt because no basic doctrine is dependent on one verse.

4. The methods of textual criticism

A. *To understand the causes of the differences and to distinguish between them*

1. Unintentional mistakes in copy, spelling mistakes for instances, or accidentally omitting a line. You are going along the manuscript you are copying; coming across a word while you are turning round you write it down; but when you look back, instead of looking at that word, you look at the same word that occurs five or six inches down the page and start copying from there, with the result that you have missed out a whole paragraph. Ordinary, unintentional mistakes which are moderately easy to spot.

2. Then we have to face the fact that there are some deliberate, or at least semi-deliberate alterations and we have to distinguish between those two types of differences.

B. *To trace the relationships between the manuscripts and to distinguish 'text types'*

Let's say you are a teacher in Year 9 and you have given the children some little problem to write the answer to. When you get the papers in, if you saw one had an absurd mistake and then you noticed that another one had the very same absurd mistake, you would begin to think, where do these two boys sit in class? Next to each other? Thought so! One has copied the other, of course. That is a small matter, but we can detect manuscripts that make similar mistakes like that and begin to group them. It is much more detailed and much more complicated, but as we group the manuscripts we can then try to trace where the manuscripts were written because in different places different text types arose.

1. In Alexandria, for instance, we call them 'Western-type' manuscripts, or in Caesarea in Palestine, or Byzantium in what used to be Asia Minor, we try to trace the major text types and consider what has brought them about.

2. This helps us to consider the approximate dating when these text types arose, but I don't propose to go further into that now.

5. An attractive but fallible theory

However, I will mention a theory that has been formulated in the last twenty to thirty years, which sounds very attractive when you first hear it, but it is in fact a fallible theory. It runs like this: you needn't really bother too much about hunting up the text types into which the manuscripts fall because the original reading will have survived in the majority of the manuscripts. So learned scholars have laboured to produce a Greek New Testament according to the majority text.

1. It is a statistical theory that if you start with so many manuscripts and there are very many mistakes in some of them, then over the centuries the *individual reading*, as we call it, which has the earliest beginning, is the one most likely to survive in a majority of documents. It is a statistical theory and of course if it were true, it would very much simplify determining what is the original text of the New Testament.

2. It depends on the following condition having been fulfilled. Let me read to you what the authors of *The Greek New Testament according to the Majority Text* say about their own method: 'In any tradition where there are not major disruptions in the *transmissional history* (i.e., in the history of transmission) then the individual reading that has the earliest beginning is the one most likely to survive in the majority of documents.'⁷ Would you notice that condition, 'In any tradition where there are not major disruptions in the transmissional history.'

3. But there were major disruptions. For statistical purposes that is absolutely vital, but the ugly fact is that there were major disruptions in the history of the transmission of the manuscripts. I mentioned them this morning, and let me repeat it this afternoon.

(a) Under several of the Roman Emperors, and particularly under Diocletian, there came a very major disruption in the transmission, because believers had to surrender their manuscripts to the authorities and had them burned. On pain of death they had to surrender; so it wasn't just a smooth copying-out, mistakes or no mistakes — there was a big disruption in the transmission history. (b) The destruction of the library at Caesarea by Moslems in AD 638.

4. The Roman emperor, Constantine, professed conversion to Christianity. Some conversion, I'm afraid! But never mind, he professed conversion and made Byzantium his capital city, as distinct from Rome in the West. Byzantium became Constantinople (now Istanbul), the capital city of Turkey. So when Constantine came to authority the Christians were encouraged to continue writing out their manuscripts, preach the gospel and so forth and so on. It was no longer a peril or danger to do so and the result is that nowadays when we look at the manuscripts the majority of them are of the Byzantine type. They were copied from that tradition of Byzantium, which isn't to be wondered at, of course, because it was safe to do it. There are far more manuscripts of that type than there are of the earlier papyri, so that now it is not a safe guide to rely on statistics and to say the original reading will have survived in the majority of the manuscripts.

6. The importance of the early papyri

I only wish now to add to that the importance of some of the very early papyri, which are not Byzantine. Papyrus 75 is from the early third century, the early 200s AD. It was of course a copy of a text and there are two interesting facts about it. Firstly, it was written before Origen. You will find some people that are knowledgeable in history who say that we can't trust manuscripts that come from Alexandria, because their theology was corrupted by certain liberal thinkers, like Origen, who existed originally in that place. But this early manuscript, Papyrus 75, and certainly the manuscript from which it was copied, came *before* Origen. The second interesting thing about it is that it shows mistakes, like many manuscripts do, and there is no evidence in that manuscript for any deliberate revision of the Greek. So it is from before Origen and anybody else who could have theoretically revised the Greek in Alexandria

⁷ Zane C. Hodges, Arthur L. Farstad, *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982, xi–xii.

(this is very early), and it shows no evidence of deliberate revision of the Greek. That is a matter of some importance.

Rather than talk theory any more, let's take some actual examples of differences in the manuscripts and for a while let us all practise at being textual critics. Some people take up gardening and some cookery, well why not put a little practice into textual criticism? You have to learn the rules of course, but have a go!

7. Some examples of large differences and their likely causes

We shall take some examples of differences, and see what we are looking for when we come across them and what were their likely causes.

A. Acts 9:5–6

In the Authorised Version at that point in Acts there are the statements, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks," and he trembling and astonished said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" And the Lord said unto him . . .'

This is the story of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus and I have read you what occurs in the Authorised Version of those two verses.

1. Now I have to point out that the Greek equivalent of those words that I have quoted for you is not found in any known Greek New Testament manuscript in this place. It doesn't have any manuscript authority in that place whatsoever, but I can tell you where the information comes from.

2. In the Acts of the Apostles there are two more accounts of Saul's conversion; he gives them himself, and they have this extra information in that correct place where he gives them later on (Acts 26:14 and 22:10). But here in 9:5–6 what you have in the Authorised Version is not in any Greek manuscript whatsoever.

3. You say, 'Well, how on earth did it get into Acts then? Who put it in?' And the answer is, a gentleman by the name of Erasmus, a great scholar around about the time of the Reformation. He wanted to be the first scholar to produce a printed Greek text of the New Testament and where he didn't have a manuscript he took the Vulgate and retranslated it back into Greek and put that in. Here, apparently, he found these words at this place in a manuscript of the Vulgate (not all manuscripts of the Vulgate are exactly the same), he retranslated it into Greek, added it into his *Textus Receptus*, Elzevir printed it and hence it is in the Authorised Version. This is a case where we can see and know for certain how these words came in, and that they should not be there because there is no authority for them in any Greek manuscript. So, if you agree, you've got 100% and I shall write it on your report!

B. Colossians 1:14

This is not just so simple as it may seem.

1. In the Revised Version and in many more modern translations we have the words, 'In whom (that is, in Christ) we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins.'

2. Now we have a similar phrase in Ephesians 1:7 where some manuscripts have, 'We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.' In the passage in Colossians at the similar phrase, 'We have redemption, the forgiveness of sins', the early Greek manuscripts do not have the words, 'through his blood'.

How did they come to be in other manuscripts of Colossians 1:14? Well, they came there because the similar phrase in Ephesians has it, 'We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins,' and therefore when some dear scribe came across it in the Colossians passage he knew his Bible very well and therefore if it said, 'We have the redemption, the forgiveness of sins,' he remembered the Ephesians passage and added the words, 'in his blood', into the passage in Colossians.

That kind of thing is very, very frequently done by scribes, both of the Old Testament and the New. I cannot prove that to you now, I would have to cite many places in the Old Testament and in the New. I ask you simply to take it from me, because I have wrestled with these things in many places. It is the fact that scribes who were writing out the New Testament, and therefore knowing their New Testament well, would add to one passage words that were in a similar passage in a different book. When a scribe did that, then the textual critic would not include his addition in the Greek text. Why? Because it was copied from somewhere else in the actual manuscripts that were originally written without authority.

But allow me to exhort you, if you will. When some people read a modern translation of Colossians 1:14 that says simply, 'In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins,' and they notice that the words 'through his blood' are lacking here and they are in Ephesians 1:7, they presume that the authors of the new, modern translation are wickedly perverting the gospel and they exclaim, 'They don't believe in the blood!'

There is a printed card, published by a Christian firm—with the very best motives of upholding the integrity of the Word of God—and it lists translations from the Authorised Version (KJV), the Good News Version, and the New International Version. It points out that the NIV in Colossians 1:14 has simply, 'In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins,' and does not include the words, 'through his blood,' and they accuse the translators of denying the value of the blood of Christ.

Well let me speak quite strongly, if I may. That amounts to a slander because in multitudinous places elsewhere in that same translation (and I hold no brief for it—it is good in some places and bad in others) they make it quite clear that they believe in the blood of Christ. It is not because they don't believe in the blood of Christ that they leave out those words there; they are being honest to the textual tradition and that is why they leave it out. To accuse good men and godly, who are doing their best to study textual criticism for the sake of the Lord's glory and the benefit of his people, of refusing to believe in the blood of Christ is actually slander. If the men who translated it were ungodly, worldly men they would have sued them in the courts. So we must be careful. We must oppose all false doctrine of course, but when it comes to things like this in the New Testament that depend on textual criticism we must moderate our criticisms. At least, if we criticise, it must be in full view of the detailed study of the actual manuscripts and what they have to say.

I am sure you have often had your attention called to this verse.

1. 'There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus'—so my Revised Version and many of the more modern translations read.

2. The Authorised Version at that point reads, 'There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.'

Where do those extra words come from? It has long been seen that the scribes in that particular instance copied those words from v. 4, 'That the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.' Some scribes took it from there and put into v. 1. Now, how shall we decide that they shouldn't be in v. 1?

Firstly, there is the original manuscript evidence. Secondly, there is the matter of gospel doctrine. If it were true that those words, 'who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit,' really belonged in v. 1, you would have to translate it in this fashion: 'There is therefore now no condemnation to those who in Christ Jesus walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.'

Do you see what that would mean, my dear brothers and sisters. It would mean that if you are in Christ, then your being right with God and clear of final condemnation would depend on whether you are walking by the Spirit or according to the flesh. Those that are in Christ Jesus would then be divided into two groups—those who are walking according to the flesh (for them there is condemnation, and Paul is talking about final condemnation); and those that are walking according to the Spirit (for them there is no final condemnation).

Tell me, you who preach the gospel, what is the truth of the gospel? Does the question of whether or not I should suffer eternal condemnation depend on whether this day I have been walking according to the flesh or according to the Spirit? If so, could I ever be sure of there being no condemnation? How do I know what the terms are for being sure there is no condemnation? Well, it is not a bad idea in that context to consult the judge. Do you happen to know who the judge is going to be? Our blessed Lord himself said when he was here on earth, 'The Father judges no man, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father' (John 5:22–23). The final judge is our blessed Lord. Wouldn't it be a thing, then, if you could know from the one who is going to be the judge what his verdict is going to be? 'Is that possible?' you say. Well, let me read his own words, 'He who hears my word and believeth on him that sent me, has everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation, but has already passed over from death to life' (v. 24). (I'm glad that some of you have got over your inhibitions and said, 'Hallelujah'!)

It is a matter for personal rejoicing, is it not? The words, 'who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit,' are inappropriate in v. 1, which is talking about the grounds of there being no condemnation; whereas you will see that those same words are highly appropriate in v. 4. We start off in v. 1 with the assurance by Christ the judge, that there is no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus; but now in v. 4 there is a programme of living. The glorious thing about Christian living is that it is not a matter of being forgiven and assured there is no condemnation, but now please go and do the best you can!

The law says, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and soul and strength,' and the moment you come short the law says, 'I curse you!' My good folks, if I were under the law you could just imagine me, waking up one Monday morning and there stands the embodied law by my beside. 'Gooding, get up! "Love the Lord your God with all your

heart, mind, soul and strength today, and your neighbour as yourself!” What do you think I would do? You would probably get up and have a go, but I don’t think I would. I have known too often that I am weak through the flesh, coming short, so I think I would stay in bed. And then the law would curse me for staying in bed! ‘What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh . . .’ (Rom 8:3)—yes, we have all experienced it.

How different the gospel is; it is a glorious salvation, as Paul now explains. ‘There is no condemnation,’ to start with—we are assured by the statement of the judge himself. And now a wonderful provision; whereas we are indeed weak through the flesh to keep God’s law there is divine help at hand—‘who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit’. The living Spirit of God is within us. It doesn’t mean that we are perfect overnight, but there is a new power working, striving, encouraging, chiding us if need be—but little by little enabling us to attain and achieve what is here called, ‘the righteousness of the law.’

D. 1 John 5:7–8

To quote the KJV: ‘For there are three that bear record *in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.*’

1. Those words that I have highlighted are absent from every known Greek manuscript except four, and in one of those manuscripts the words are pencilled in the margin. They contain the passage in what appears to be a translation from a late revision of the *Latin Vulgate*.⁸ Actually, they don’t make a lot of sense. On earth we desperately need the witness of the Holy Spirit to the deity of Christ. In heaven they don’t need any witness to the deity of Christ, do they?—it is self-evident.

2. Where did the extra words come from? Probably added at a certain time in history to boost the controversies that arose in connection with the doctrine of the Trinity.

E. Revelation 22:14

Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have the right to come to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city.

1. The seriousness of the issue at stake.

Now we are talking once more about something very serious and solemn. On what basis and on what condition does anybody have the right to the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God, and to enter in by the gates into the eternal city? On what grounds?

Some manuscripts read, ‘Blessed are they who wash their robes that they may have the right to the tree of life and enter in by the gates into the city,’ but the *Textus Receptus* and therefore the Authorised Version, has instead of ‘Blessed are they who wash their robes,’ ‘Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life.’

⁸ See Metzger’s *Commentary*.

If you were a textual critic—and I am trying to persuade you to be one just for the sake of this lecture—which would you choose? You would say, ‘Well, we would need to know the weight of the manuscript evidence. How many manuscripts are there for the first and how many for the second?’ Yes, that is one way to do it; but it is very rarely a question of simply counting the manuscripts.

2. John’s normal phrase elsewhere is not ‘do his commandments’ but ‘keep his commandments’.

Other things are concerned with it, for instance the question of a writer’s style. It’s not one hundred per cent certain, but John’s normal phrase elsewhere when he talks about such things is not, ‘that do his commandments.’ John uses a different verb and says, ‘that keep his commandments.’ Check it out when you get home with a decent concordance. On stylistic grounds therefore, the reading that doesn’t have, ‘that do his commandments,’ would seem to be better. If that had been John he would have said, ‘who keep his commandments.’ The phrase, ‘that do his commandments,’ is not in John’s style.

3. The cause of the change—the scribe’s doctrinal propensity?

But then of course there is at stake the consistency of New Testament doctrine. Those who wish to retain the Textus Receptus and say, ‘Blessed are they that do his commandments that they might have right to the tree of life,’ argue this way.

‘Look, true believers get salvation free, do they not?’

Of course they do! Not by doing or keeping commandments; they get eternal life through faith in Christ.

‘But,’ they say, ‘if they are genuine believers they will show that they are genuine believers by doing his commandments—“He who says he loves him and doesn’t do his commandments is a liar” (1 John 2:4).

In this question therefore, they say that John, instead of putting the basic condition for salvation, ‘who washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb,’ he has put the results of salvation! Well, you have to make the choice—you are textual critics—but you can’t have both. Stylistically, ‘do his commandments,’ is not Johannine.

What about doctrine? Would you be happy to make your entry to the eternal city dependant on your display of the results of your salvation? Or would you do what the Revelation does everywhere, make it dependant on washing your robes in the blood of the Lamb? As the old hymn has it, ‘Are your garments spotless, are they white as snow, are you (your garments) washed in the blood of the Lamb?’⁹ If I were a textual critic, responsible for the New Testament, I would choose the manuscripts that have, ‘Blessed are they who washed their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and enter in by the gates of the city.’

In chapter 7 of this very same book John sees a great multitude standing before the throne of God. One of the elders asks John, ‘Who are these?’ and John says, ‘I don’t know, you tell me.’ ‘These are they,’ he says, ‘which come out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne

⁹ Elisha Albright Hoffman (1839–1929), ‘Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power?’

of God.' (Rev 7:9–15). That is, as I understand it, the condition for anyone to stand before the throne of God—they have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb.

F. *The hitherto insoluble problem of the ending of Mark's Gospel.*

But time forbids me indulging myself, so I shall not comment on it. Some of the questions that you might have to ask about that passage at the end of Mark's Gospel would be as I have put them on your handout.

1. Did the woman eventually do what they were told to do?
2. Did the disciples go to Galilee and see the Lord?

Let that be enough for textual criticism. Let us thank God for every honest, true believer who has toiled in the arduous, detailed, back-breaking (and sometimes heart-breaking) job of investigating the manuscripts and deciding amidst thousands of reasons which should be the right one. They are unsung heroes of the church. You had them here in Ireland—men who toiled in draughty old cells copying out the Scriptures as best they knew how in the days before the printing press was invented.

The Process and Philosophy of Translation

At the beginning of the previous session I observed that when people read some of the modern translations and find differences between what the new translation has and what they are used to, then sometimes they are puzzled why there have to be these differences. The differences can come from the fact that the modern translation is following different manuscripts from the older one. But there is a second reason for the difference, and that is that both the old and new translations are translating the same Greek, but the manner of translation is different. So in this third and last session we are briefly to look at some differences in translation and why they need to occur.

Of course, some folks nowadays have never used the Authorised Version; they know nothing but the more modern translations. But I have to be impartial in my talk and where I see the noble crown of grey hairs upon some of your heads then I imagine I must in part talk about the differences between the old Authorised Version, glorious and magnificent as it was and still is, and the more modern translations.

Principles in Translation

1. The translation must be correct—it must translate the Greek correctly

Example: Luke 23:15.

Pilate is talking to the crowd and he has been trying to wangle out of having to make a decision about the Lord Jesus by sending him to Herod, because our Lord lived normally up in Galilee, in Capernaum, and therefore belonged to Herod's jurisdiction rather than Pilate's. Herod happened to be in Jerusalem at that Easter time so Pilate sent Christ to Herod, and Herod having mocked him sent him back to Pilate.

1. The Authorised Version, translating the words that Pilate spoke, says at that stage, 'Lo, nothing worthy of death is done *unto* him.'

2. Whereas, the correct translation would be, 'Look, nothing deserving death has been done *by* him' (ESV).

The Greek is a little bit tricky, as schoolboys used to discover. It is a certain construction that could easily (but mistakenly) be translated, 'nothing worthy of death is done to him,' when it actually means, 'nothing deserving death has been done by him.'

If you will recall the circumstances that Pilate is talking about, you will see the important difference. He sent our Lord to Herod and when he comes back he has been very severely mocked by Herod's soldiers. It wasn't a question of nothing worthy of death is done *to* him

by Herod's soldiers and by Herod. Their treatment of the Lord Jesus, being the Son of the Father, was certainly worthy of death; it was scandalous thus to treat an innocent man. The correct translation is, 'Look, nothing deserving of death has been done *by* him.' That is, *by Christ*. For, had Christ been guilty of some legal offence against the law that deserved death, Herod would have condemned him and made it evident that he had done something worthy of death. But, apart from mocking him, Herod sent him back without any charge laid against him. Herod had found in Christ that nothing deserving of death had been done by him and Pilate is now trying to point this out to the crowd. Pilate himself has constantly said that he has done nothing deserving of death; and now Herod, having examined him, has come up with the same verdict—nothing deserving of death has been done by him.

2. The translation must be intelligible to its readers

Example: Matthew 9:15

Our Lord says to his people, 'Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them?' Now you who have long-since read the Authorised Version know exactly what is meant by the term, 'children of the bridechamber.' But if you came across a young person who had never read the Authorised Version and you said, 'I was at a wedding today and three hundred children of the bridechamber were there,' I wonder what your friend would take out of that! 'Children of the bridechamber' is a Hebraism that has come into the Greek of the New Testament, it simply means guests of the bridegroom, or wedding guests, and therefore, to stop modern people getting the wrong idea, that idiom has to be translated into modern English. The NIV has 'guests of the bridegroom,' and the ESV, 'wedding guests.'

Because you love to go to Paris and practise your French, you know that the French for potatoes is *pommes de terre*—apples of the earth. What do you say when you go down to your local greengrocer—'Please will you give me a kilo of apples of the earth'? Your greengrocer would ask you if you were feeling well! 'Apples of the earth, what do you mean?' The translation of the French *pommes de terre* is not to be taken literally in English, it would be gibberish. It must be translated idiomatically and what the French call *pommes de terre* we simply call *potatoes*. So, in our modern translations, if we are going to reach the modern generation, we must put it in terms of modern English that they can understand, though if you try it I hope you will be delivered from using slang!

3. When the older English misleads modern readers it must be changed into modern English

Example 1: Romans 6:6

'Our old man is crucified with him' (KJV). For those who don't know old English that is potentially misleading. It sounds as if it is a present tense—our old man *is* crucified, is constantly crucified, is day by day being crucified. Nowadays we don't use that idiom in modern English, but the French do. In English we say I *have* come, using the auxiliary verb, but the French say *je suis venu*, I *am* come. And so, according to the Authorised, when Martha went to Mary she said, 'the teacher is come,' in modern English, 'the teacher has come'.

It matters in a passage like Romans 6:6. What is the apostle talking about when he says, 'our old man is crucified'? Every day, is crucified? No, he is talking about the past; our old man *was* crucified with him. Or, to quote a translation that has gone out of favour except in some circles, 'our old man *has been* crucified with him' (JND). When Christ was crucified we were crucified, when Christ died we died. I think that is what you said when you got baptized. Why did they baptise you? Baptism is a burial, you know—did they baptise you to make you die? I hope not, or else they would be in trouble with the police! They only bury people when they are already dead. You were baptised, so you were already dead. When did you die, then? Yes, you died when you received the Saviour—legally in God's sight when he died you died.

Example 2: 1 Thessalonians 4:15

'We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord comes shall not *prevent* them which are asleep.' The old Latin *priveneri* means 'to go before,' and that is what is meant when the Authorised used it to translate the Greek at this point—'. . . shall not go before them.' As the old Collect in the Anglican Church has it, 'O Lord, *prevent* us this day in all our doings.' Not meaning, 'stop us in anything we intend to do,' but 'go before us in all our doings.' So the modern translations of 1 Thessalonians 4:15 will have 'shall not *precede* them.'

Similarly in 2 Thessalonians 2:7, 'He who now *letteth* will let, until he be taken out of the way.' 'Let'—meaning what? 'He that *restrains* shall restrain.' And here it is very necessary to have a modern translation because nowadays the word 'let' in English can mean two things. To 'let out' a house for money, but otherwise to 'allow' people—the very opposite of what it once meant, which was to prevent, restrain people. So it is not used in modern English, except in that very old-fashioned term in the game of tennis. When the ball strikes the net and yet goes over, the umpire will call out, 'let'—meaning, the ball was restrained so you can have another go. That is all very simple, when the old English misleads modern readers it must be changed into modern English.

4. The English should try to convey not only the meaning of a Greek word but also its emotional force and that often means using a dynamic rather than a literal translation

It is possible to use dynamic translations far too frequently and when they are not necessary, but sometimes you have to use a dynamic translation and not translate literally. The Authorised in places uses a dynamic translation.

Example Romans 6:2 and 15 and elsewhere.

The phrase in Greek are the two words, *mē genoito*. A literal translation would be, 'may it not be.' I don't know how that appeals to you, 'Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?—*may it not be.*' That's a bit weak! The Greek *mē genoito*, said in the right voice of course, is much stronger emotionally and therefore even the Authorised Version has at this point used a dynamic translation—'Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?—*God forbid!*', yet in the Greek there is no word for 'God', or for 'forbid' either. It is a dynamic translation, aimed at getting across the emotional force of the Greek. You could have used other translations in English. 'Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? (ESV), 'by no means'; 'never, or far be the thought, or perish the very idea!'—you have your choice. Sometimes a dynamic translation is necessary, rather than a literal one. The English, then, should try to convey not only the meaning of a Greek word but also its emotional force.

5. The English should try to convey the meaning that the Greek conveys by its word order

This matter is more complicated and a little bit difficult to explain. Greek doesn't necessarily have the same order of words as we do in English. English speakers have a way that mystifies the Chinese, and particularly the Japanese, because we get meaning by emphasis. The Japanese don't know what on earth is happening because they don't use emphasis to get across meaning.

So let me put a question to you. 'Did you go down town yesterday to buy a pair of shoes?' Did you notice my intonation, 'Did you go down town yesterday to buy a pair of *shoes*?' as distinct from, 'Did you go *down town* yesterday to buy a pair of shoes?' What is the difference in meaning? In the first question I am not asking did you go down town or not, I know you went down town. My question is, 'Why did you go down town to buy a pair of shoes (when you could have got them in Marks & Spencer round the corner!).' The very same words with a different intonation mean something different. 'Did you go *down town* yesterday to buy a pair of shoes?' I know you went to buy a pair of shoes yesterday, the question is, where did you go to buy those shoes?

So when the very same words in the sentence are pronounced with a different intonation, the intonation is part of the meaning. The Greek normally gets that kind of thing across by the order of its words within the sentence in a way that we don't in quite the same way in English.

Example 1: Acts 1:6

The apostles asked our Lord a question when he was risen from the dead, just before he went to glory. According to the Authorised they said, 'Wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' What is their question? Is it, 'Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom *to Israel*?'

Some commentators at this point break off their exegesis and lambast the apostles. They say, 'What narrow minded men they were! Here is the Lord, risen from the dead, about to commission them to go into all the world and preach the gospel, and all these apostles can think of is restoring the kingdom to little Israel! What desperate men they were, but the day of Pentecost soon came and it delivered them from that narrow mindedness into a wider vision.' That's nonsense!

They did not ask the Lord, 'Are you going to restore the kingdom *or not*?' The apostles believed the Old Testament and therefore they believed that the kingdom would be restored to Israel. The question is not, 'Are you going to restore the kingdom?' but, 'Is it *at this time* that you are going to restore the kingdom?' You will see that that was what their question was by the way our Lord replied. He didn't say, 'Of course not, I'm never going to restore the kingdom.' He said, 'It is not for you to know *the times* or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.' So the question was, 'Is it *at this time* that you are going to restore the kingdom to Israel?' 'It is not given to you to know *the time*,' said Christ—'you get on for the moment with evangelising the world!' Of course he was not denying that he would one day restore the kingdom to Israel.

Example 2: Acts 15:11

Peter is giving his verdict at a meeting in Jerusalem. The Authorised has, 'But we believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.' I am glad he believed that much, he would scarcely have been an apostle if he hadn't believed it. 'We

believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus *we shall be saved!* No! According to the Greek word order, he was saying, ‘We believe it is *through the grace of our Lord Jesus* that we are saved, just as they are’ (NIV). It is not a question of whether we shall be saved or not, but a question of on what condition we (Jews) are saved. Is it through circumcision—is it necessary or does it help—or, on what ground are we Jews saved? Peter says, ‘We believe (or in modern English, it is our conviction) that it is *through the grace of the Lord Jesus* that we are to be saved, even *in the very same way* as they, the Gentiles.’ Peter is declaring that the condition of salvation is the same for Jews as it is for Gentiles.

So it is important (but it is not always done) that the English should try to convey the meaning that the Greek conveys by its word order.

6. English ought to make clear what the flow of logic in a Greek sentence is

Example: Luke 7:47

‘Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much’ (KJV). This breaks into the story of the woman in Simon’s house. You will remember that Simon had asked our Lord to dinner and as he sat down to eat the meal there came a woman behind him. They reclined at table in the Eastern fashion, not as we do, sitting at it. So the woman came behind him and began to wash his feet with her tears. His feet would be dangling over the edge of the reclining couch and she began to wash his feet with her tears and wipe them with the hair of her head, kiss his feet and anoint them with ointment. Simon said to himself, ‘Well that settles it! This man is no prophet, for if he had been a prophet he would have known what kind of a woman this is that touches him and he wouldn’t have permitted her. The woman is immoral.’

So our Lord spoke a parable. ‘Simon, I have something to say.’ ‘Say on,’ he said. ‘There was this creditor and he had two debtors and one owed a vast sum and the other owed a smaller sum. They were both stony broke and couldn’t pay anything, and when they couldn’t pay anything the creditor forgave both of them, free and for nothing. Tell me, Simon,’ said our Lord, ‘which will love him more?’ And Simon said, ‘Obviously the one who is forgiven more will love him more.’ Now, do get hold of that with both hands, because if you don’t you will misread what follows. What was Simon saying? He was saying that the more you have been forgiven the more you will love. That is, love follows being forgiven.

It wasn’t that these two debtors, when they couldn’t pay anything, took every occasion when they saw the creditor coming down the street to say how they loved to see him, hoping that he would forgive them. ‘It makes us feel very encouraged to see you and anything we can do for you we will do. We want to show how much we love you, Sir.’ Of course not! When they saw him coming down the street they did their best to avoid him. It was when he forgave them, and as a result of being forgiven, that they loved him.

And when Simon saw that, and it was clear enough and true, then our Lord pronounced (according to the Authorised Version), ‘Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much.’ Well, that is what the Greek says, but what does the Greek mean?

It’s another example of the idiomatic use of the conjunction ‘for’. But this translation has misled thousands of people. The old *Douay Bible* had it, of course, and therefore they used to

teach and believe that if you want God to forgive your sins you must love God. The more you love God the more you will be forgiven. Alas, it is the very opposite of the truth, as you will see from the parable. What did our Lord mean therefore, when he said, 'I say unto thee, her sins which are many are forgiven, for she loved much'? If we follow the argument we shall see that the love follows the forgiveness, so our Lord was saying, 'Therefore I tell you that her many sins have been forgiven—on what ground do I say it?' It's no good our Lord sitting there, saying, 'You must accept it because I say so, Simon.' Simon didn't believe he was a prophet; on what ground, therefore, can our Lord tell Simon that her many sins have been forgiven? How will Simon ever come to believe it? Well, he's just given him the reason for believing it. When these debtors had been forgiven they loved—Simon has just said so. Our Lord is saying the same thing, 'I am telling you that her sins have been forgiven. On what ground do I say it? Look how she loved, Simon! And you yourself have just said that love like that is the result of forgiveness, not the condition for receiving it. Wherefore I say unto thee her many sins have been forgiven.'

The NIV is slightly better than the Authorised here, 'Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—as her great love has shown.' Better still for getting the meaning is the paraphrase in the *Jerusalem Bible*. 'For this reason I tell you that her sins, her many sins, must have been forgiven, or she would not have shown such great love' — the love coming out of the forgiveness. That is the true explanation of that little participle *gar* in Greek. And of course the Jerusalem Bible, being from the source that it is from, sought to warn its readers in a footnote: 'Not, as is usually translated, "her many sins have been forgiven *because* she has shown such great love". The context demands the reverse: she shows so much affection because she has had so many sins forgiven.'

7. The problem of how to express, in modern English, metaphors in the New Testament that are drawn from practices that have largely died out in our modern western world

I used to teach Latin to students—very compassionate I was! I would set them a piece of English and then work the translation together with them. I sometimes set them the impossible sentence, 'Mr Smith loved the limelight.' Why is that so difficult to translate into Latin? The students didn't know what limelight was, to start with. In times gone by in the theatre there was a very brilliant light on the stage, somehow produced by lime or something, and it was normally focused on the chief actor. So the limelight fell upon the chief actor and hence gave the metaphor that some people (in this case Mr Smith) loved the limelight, meaning, not that they were going on the stage as actors but a metaphor that they loved to be the prominent person in every situation, with everybody's attention on them. We have all known types like that, I suppose!

So how do you go about translating it? It's no good trying to think up what is the Latin for limelight—there is no Latin for limelight. So what do you have to do? Well, you decode the metaphor into language that can be translated into Latin. 'Mr Smith loved to be the centre of attention', or something that you can put into Latin.

There is a problem in modern translations. What should a translator of the Bible do when there are metaphors drawn from practices that are no longer in use, or very largely not in use?

Example: 1 Peter 1:13

‘Wherefore, gird up the loins of your mind . . .’ How many people would admit to having loins in their minds? Presumably the word of God means something. I’d better not ask you if you have any loins at all, it is not a term we use in modern English. It refers to the old custom in the East, when people were going on a journey or to run or do some hard work, they gathered up their long flowing robes that they normally wore and tucked them under their belt.

Years ago when I worked on a farm, and it was a question of carrying heavy weights—perhaps lifting 120 kilograms of wheat—the men would wear a big thick belt round their loins to stop them getting ruptures in their inward parts. But nowadays we don’t gird up the loins of our minds, so what would you say if you were a translator? I can tell you what the NIV says—‘Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober,’ or the Jerusalem Bible—‘Free your minds then of encumbrances.’ Very good, that makes sense. But there ought to be a note to explain where the metaphor comes from.

Peter in that chapter talks about the Passover. We are redeemed, not with the blood of a lamb but with the precious blood of Christ. Therefore we have to pass the time of our sojourning here in fear because God has begotten us again to a living hope by the resurrection of Christ from the dead. So we have been redeemed, we have got a great promised land ahead, an inheritance incorruptible in the heavens and meantime we have to journey—not a literal journey but a journey of moral and spiritual progress.

On the night when Israel ate the Passover, we are told that they couldn’t eat it just any old way. They had to eat it with staffs in their hands and shoes on their feet. (I’ve often wondered how they did it. You go to these parties and you are presented with a cup of tea here, a piece of cream cake there, and how do you manage both of them?) That’s how it was with the Passover, you had a staff in one hand, the eats in the other, and your loins girded. If you weren’t prepared to gird your loins, you weren’t allowed to eat the Passover. Why not? The whole significance of the Passover was that God was coming down to deliver Israel out of Egypt and start the journey to their promised land. If you weren’t prepared to start the journey it made a nonsense of the Passover.

It has a voice to us nowadays. All who say that they are redeemed by the blood of Christ are expected to journey and to take the journey seriously, ‘girding up the loins of our minds’—to start *thinking* of what the journey is liable to imply.

If you had been in Egypt at the time and, thirty years after the Israelites had left, you were going round the pyramids and bumped into old Eleazar, what would you say to him?

‘My dear friend, I am surprised to see you here. Weren’t you one of those Moses people who left Egypt a long time ago for the promised land or something?’

‘Yes, I am one of those,’ says Eleazar.

‘What are you doing here, then?’

‘Well, they were very keen believers and they journeyed, but I don’t see the need of journeying like that. Egypt is a very nice place really, with the pyramids, and dates, and things!’

‘But Eleazar, how do you propose to get to this promised land?’

‘I don’t think about those things!’ he says.

‘You don’t! Do you think you’ll wake up one morning and say, “I feel a bit different. I know what that is, I am in the promised land”?’

‘You had better start some strenuous thinking,’ says Peter—‘gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope in the truer fashion for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ our Lord.’

May God bless these remarks for our guidance, particularly that we might again give thanks to God for men and women who have toiled with foreign languages to give us the Bible in our own language that we can understand. And if God should so guide, shall we not remember the many who have no Bible in their language as yet and bear our responsibility of helping those that are devoted to translating God’s word so that all around the world people may hear it in the language of their hearts.

Q&A Session

Q 1. Isn't it true that different translations and different Bibles make it difficult to convert a non-believer? (In that instance what version do we use?)

A. A very sensible and practical question! My own habit would be, if I am talking to an Orthodox Jew I would use a Jewish translation. They can be very useful. I said to one Jew of my acquaintance, 'Otto, do you pray for the dead? (I knew he did—it's in his Prayer Book.)

He said, 'Yes we do.'

'What do you pray for?'

'Well, it's a nice way of remembering people,' he said.

I said, 'Come off it, Otto, you do more than that!'

'Yes, we do. We pray that God will let them out of the bad place into the better place.'

I said, 'You are a mystery to me, Otto. I am an old Gentile and I have come to believe in God—not just any old god, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And I like that Psalm of yours, 'I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever'! I know what that means, Otto. I am absolutely certain I shall be in heaven at last. Why don't you believe it?'

All I am trying to say is, I try to use the translation that people know. If the person has always used the Authorised Version, use the Authorised Version. If the person doesn't know English very well and your only hope is using a very modern translation, I would use that; but within reason, because I believe God's word properly expounded can help all kinds of people. But don't confuse people by insisting on, say, NIV only, or KJV only. Judge who it is that you are talking to.

Q 2. Do any manuscripts in the Greek actually read, 'who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit'? (Rom 8:1).

A. Some do, yes.

Q 3. If there is none of the autographs, can it be assumed that the Holy Spirit had a purpose in allowing them to be lost to us?

A. I wouldn't like myself to question the providence of God; if the Holy Spirit allowed the autographs to perish then I bow to his providence. You can think up all sorts of reasons. If the manuscript that Paul himself wrote, stained with his tears, had survived, I tell you what would happen. People would worship it and put a shrine around it. In the 1990s when we began to give away Christian literature in Russian, we didn't frequently in the first days offer Bibles, we offered New Testaments. In those days if you had given a Russian a Bible he would weep over it sometimes and kiss it, and go home and put it on the shelf along with his icons and pray to it and not read it.

Q 4. 1 John 5:7–8—is there not a reference in one of the Church Fathers containing similar words? This, presumably, was long before the words occurred in the late manuscripts. May this be the source of some of the words?

A. It may well be, for there were at one stage great questions in Christendom about the Trinity and its implications, the heavenly aspect of the Trinity and so forth. We know those discussions went on and that could well have been the source of those words in 1 John 5.

Q 5. Variations between manuscripts are sometimes counted in many thousands. Are not many of these details of no material significance?

A. Exactly so! You are perfectly right in your observation. As textual critics we have to regard all variations; but some variations (to put it no more strongly) are neither here nor there, and are without significance. Textual critics are liable to copy the Apostle Paul in a wrong manner—they are liable to 'magnify their office,' as Paul put it (see Rom 11:13). This is a pity. They make out that many differences are vastly important and some *are* very important, but many are neither here nor there.

Q 6. Two questions written by different people but only requiring one answer!—In light of textual differences, do you recommend a particular version of the Bible?

A. I would be loath to recommend a particular version of the Bible. What I would say is that if you are doing serious Bible study then use two Bibles, one a literal translation and one a freer translation. The freer one will help you to get the emotional force of what is being said and that is a very important thing to get hold of. On the other hand, it is not always wise to found your doctrine on a dynamic translation, particularly if the dynamic translation is very wide. So, if it is a question of forming your doctrine, choose a more literal translation for that purpose. There are various translations of both.

Q 7. Rom 11:26 KJV: 'And so all Israel shall be saved.' Is this another example of wording that can be misconstrued? You used to use the Revised Version of 1881. Is there a modern translation that you consider to be suitable to the modern generation and to immigrants who want to improve their English, and yet retain accuracy?

A. Romans 11:26, 'all Israel', means, as it means in many places in the Old Testament, not every man, woman and child in Israel, but Israel as a whole. 'All Israel will come to make Jeroboam or Rehoboam king,' means all the tribes, not just the two down in the south of the country. So that when it says, 'all Israel shall be saved,' it means Israel as a whole and not just a remnant of Israel at the time when Paul was writing.

I am using that Revised Version today. I am very old fashioned so you must make allowances for me! You are modern people. It is difficult, standing here, to come out with advice, because modern immigrants can have very different languages, from Polish to African languages. I think you must consider who the person is, and sometimes for a beginner you need a very simplified English. I don't think you parents would be against giving children very simple English and you wouldn't think you were being disloyal to the Bible. So with some immigrants you might have to use a very simplified form of English to get it across to them. But if you are going to talk about adult translations, you need to think what their country of origin is and what their language style is.

Q 8. Some translators hold false doctrine (for example, JND in relation to baptism). Should this influence our view and use of their translation?

A. Not necessarily. We have to test all things and hold fast that which is good (1 Thess 5:21). The dear Authorised Version, for instance—I love it and respect it—but if you compare our AV with Tyndale's version you will notice that the AV made various changes. In Tyndale's version when he came across the word *ekklēsia* he translated it 'congregation': 'Christ loved the congregation and gave himself for her.' Tyndale wanted to stress that when the Greek talked about the *ekklēsia*, the church, it doesn't mean the building it means the people. So he put 'Christ loved the congregation'. King James had it translated back to 'Christ loved the church', and appointed the Authorised Version to be read in churches! Not elsewhere, in your little conventicles. So you will scarcely find a translation that isn't motivated in some area or another. We have to learn to respect people and allow for their particular emphases and so forth. To say, 'I am not going to use the Authorised because of the views of some of the translators,' would seem to me to be highly unwise.

Q 9. What do you think of the anti-biblical emphasis propagated through the media, for example the programmes/documentaries shown on National Geographic, History Channel, etc.?

A. The National Geographic to me is a magazine that has beautiful photography in it! But they recently had an edition that put forward the so-called Gospel of Judas in glowing terms and talked a lot of nonsense about it. Nowadays it has become a custom, with the Da Vinci Code and others, that the so-called Gnostic Gospels were genuine Gospels and the church didn't like them so they hid and suppressed them.

They are not genuine Gospels. They teach Gnosticism, which runs counter to the whole thrust of both Old Testament and New. Its modern equivalent would be Christian Science, for instance (Mary Baker Eddy)—who will tell you that when Jesus Christ said, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life,' he meant not that he himself was personally the way, the truth and the life, but the 'I' in every person is the way. That is sheer nonsense and it is not Christianity. And so the Gnostic Gospels circulated, but they weren't Christian. Though they sometimes go under the heading of being Christian, they go solidly against the basic doctrines of the Christian faith.

Q 10. What are the terms of salvation in Rom 10:9–10? Do I have to make Christ Lord of my life to be saved; or is it simply based on my faith in Christ as my Saviour?

*A. I think that came from America too, because there was a great division of thought amongst evangelicals in America some years ago over this question. I personally believe that the terms of conversion are to receive Jesus Christ as Lord. I don't think you can come to Christ and say, 'Look I want my sins forgiven, but I am not prepared to do what you say in everything!' Really? Some people say that if we confess Jesus as Lord, the word *Lord* there is the Greek for *Jehovah*. And that could possibly be so, of course, for Greek does use the term *kyrios* to translate *Jehovah*. But to say to Jesus Christ, 'I know you are *Jehovah*; I don't propose to receive you as such but I am glad that you died for me,' is theological nonsense.*

We receive him as Lord, but that doesn't mean that our salvation depends on our being perfectly obedient all the way home to glory. 'In many things we all offend,' (Jas 3:2). 'And if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. But the blood of Jesus Christ, [God's] Son, cleanses us from all sin, and God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins' (see 1 John 1:7–9). But I don't think you can come to Christ and say, 'I'm not going to receive you as Lord; I want to go my own way, but I want you to save me.'

Q 11. Does not Lordship come after salvation, with greater light as in Rom 12:1–2?

A. It certainly comes after, when we gather more and more what his lordship means, but he is Lord to start with.

Q 12. What happens to the unsaved after death? Do they go to Hades, a holding place? Furthermore, is Hades a place with two compartments? Upper for the Old Testament believing saints, and Lower for the damned, who await the Great White Throne? Is this a legitimate interpretation of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16)?

A. The Greek word *hadēs* means, simply, ‘the unseen, not visible’ and therefore is used of what lies beyond the grave, beyond life in the unseen world. Therefore it is used in the Psalm quoted in Acts 2, ‘Thou wilt not leave my soul in hades.’

And as to the two compartments, people find that in the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus, because of the ‘great gulf fixed.’ For my own part, I am just a little bit wary of being too certain about the geography (forgive the term) of the world to come. I think when God talks to us of the world to come, he makes it clear enough that we take it as real. But even in our own universe, when you come to the outer reaches of space and quantum physics and such things, it goes past our visualization even, and what that other world is like visually. All that is in the Bible is true, so long as we take it for the purpose for which it was given. We can trust God’s metaphors and we should always remember that the things that are said about the geography of the world to come are, indeed, metaphors.

Q 13. How are the manuscripts dated?

A. Sometimes people have used carbon-14 methods, but carbon-14 has such a wide area of doubt that it is frequently so that you can’t get the same accuracy of dating by that method as you can by what is called *palaeography*. Palaeography is a study of the style of writing—the way people shape their letters—and the style of writing differs all down the centuries. If you are used to looking at manuscripts you can tell what sort of manuscript it is—‘I can tell that one is mediaeval,’ you would say. That is how the experts in these matters tend to date manuscripts.

Q 14. How old are the manuscripts of the Apostolic Fathers that quote the New Testament?

A. I am not sure about the manuscripts. When I talked about the Apostolic Fathers I was talking about when they actually lived and wrote. Like all else, their books were copied out many times and the copies are moderately reliable, all other things being equal.

Q 15. Will you explain the difference between textual criticism and higher criticism please?

A. Textual criticism used to be referred to as the lower criticism, as distinct from the higher criticism.

The higher criticism was the attempt to date when the documents in the Old Testament and sometimes in the New were written. When it was practised by Wellhausen and Ewald, the presumption was that the order of the Bible that we have at the moment is not original. For instance, Genesis 1:1, 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,' is applying strict monotheism—just one God. People like Wellhausen in the 1800s said that this is impossible because monotheism didn't exist at such an early time, and therefore this is much later, perhaps even after the exile and the return from the exile. So they divided up the Old Testament, according to their sundry principles, into the different sources and the dating of those sources. That was the higher criticism.

Textual criticism doesn't attempt to do any such thing. It is a question of taking the manuscripts and working as best we can from those manuscripts back to the originals.

Q 16. Why did you spend so much time in apparent flaws in the King James Version and no time in showing the flaws in modern translations? Are you not showing a clear bias?

A. Thank you for that question. Even as I spoke I was thinking that people will run away with the idea that I am against the AV and haven't pointed to the mistakes and flaws in modern translations. It allows me now to put the matter right.

I respect the Authorised Version with all my heart and soul. It is a glorious and wonderful translation and its English is superb. I simply use it as a basis for comparison because I thought to myself (rightly or wrongly) that there would be some people here today who have used the Authorised Version all their lives. So I thought I would use a translation that they knew to point out why changes have to be made.

In my experience it is people who have used the Authorised all their lives who get a little bit upset sometimes by the modern translations. If you would like me to come and point out the weakness in modern translations, and dissatisfactions I have with some modern translations that aren't translations at all, you would need to organise two Saturdays to give me enough time, and even then I shouldn't be able to complete it. Some are virtually re-writings of the New Testament.

So I am far from saying that the Authorised Version is bad and I hope I am not biased. It was merely a practical thing; if I wanted to speak to the over sixty-fives I had to ask what version would they have been brought up on. I wasn't quite sure, so that is why I chose the Authorised as a basis for comparison.

Q 17. Would you like to comment on John 9:35?

A. This is our Lord and the blind man who has received his sight. Our Lord asks him, 'Do you believe on—some manuscripts have—the Son of God?' and some manuscripts have 'the Son of Man?'

This goes back to manuscript differences and is a good example of one of the principles that textual critics use. They will tell you that the reading which is liable to be original is the one that can best explain why somebody changed it to something else. And if you take that principle on this verse—some manuscripts reading ‘Son of God,’ some ‘Son of Man’—it would be highly unlikely that any scribe in the early centuries would find the term Son of God in front of him and change it to Son of Man. Whereas it is quite possible that a scribe, finding Son of Man in front of him, would change it to Son of God.

Therefore, I would hold that the original reading is Son of Man. We have to observe, however, that when Scripture uses the term Son of Man it is not just saying that Jesus was a man born of a human mother. It goes back to the vision of Daniel 7 when Daniel was given to see the great vision of the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven to the Supreme God, and receiving the kingdom from him. And when our Lord said, ‘you shall see the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven’ (see Matt 26:64), ‘coming with the clouds’ is a sign of deity. Son of Man is not some weak term merely saying, ‘the ideal human person,’ it is saying far more than that. The Jews would have been more used to the term Son of Man in contexts like this than Son of God, but Christian scribes, finding Son of Man might well change it to Son of God.

Concluding Exhortation

I am told that I have to give a five-minute exhortation. It won't last that long, I have kept you long enough already; but here is an exhortation that comes from our blessed Lord himself, it is our Lord's word to the crowd.

Work not for the meat which perishes, but for the meat which endures unto eternal life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him the Father, even God, has sealed. (John 6:27)

This is a typical Hebrew expression, 'work not for the meat that perishes', but we would say in English, 'work, but not so much for the meat that perishes, but for the meat that endures.' The Hebrew puts it as a stark contrast.

Another example:

For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Rom 14:17)

But wait a minute, has the kingdom of God nothing to say at all about meat and drink? It has a lot to say! If we submit to the rule of God in our lives we shall not get drunk, to start with, and we mustn't be gluttons. But when it says, 'the kingdom of God is not about meat and drink, but about righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit', it is pointing out proportions. The kingdom of God is more concerned with righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, and not simply about what foods are good to eat, and what not.

The epistles will tell us that if you don't provide (by working) for your family you are worse than an unbeliever. It is about getting life's proportions right. Work not for the meat that perishes—but lie in bed and the meat that endures to eternal life will come floating down? Not quite! Don't work for the meat that perishes—but work! Work for the meat that endures.

I am not fit to exhort my fellow believers who are older than I am, so I will do what preachers do; I'll talk to the young! And anybody else who likes to listen, it's your fault if you do! Did you hear what our Lord said? If we really believe that this is God's word and he is the food sent down from heaven, we shall put our utmost that we can, according each to his or her own gift and circumstance, into working for the meat that endures. It can be hard work. God help us to get our proportions right, each according to his or her own capacities, gifts and circumstances, but it will require effort and deliberate intention. 'Work not for the meat that perishes, but for the meat that endures unto eternal life.'

APPENDIXES

1

The Documentary Evidence for the New Testament

Recommended reading

Old Testament: K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

New Testament: F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are they Reliable?* 6th edn; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2003.

In this session we shall raise and seek to answer three major questions:

1. Are the New Testament manuscripts authentic and reliable copies of what the original writers wrote?
2. Are the historical and geographical references in these manuscripts accurate?
3. Is the central figure an invention by the original writers?

Question 1: Are the New Testament manuscripts authentic and reliable copies of what the original writers wrote?

A. A widespread false idea: the New Testament was not written down until AD 300.

B. Answer:

1. It is true that the earliest surviving manuscript of the entire New Testament is the Codex Sinaiticus, dated round about AD 350; but
2. Papyrus 45, containing the four Gospels and Acts, dates *c.* AD 200, housed in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin.
3. Papyrus 46, containing Paul's letters to the churches plus Hebrews, dated about AD 200, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin.
4. Bodmer Papyrus 75, containing (parts of) Luke and John, dated between AD 175 and 225, housed in Bodmer Library Coligny-Geneva.

5. Papyrus 52, containing fragments of Gospel of John, dated between AD 100 and 150, housed in The Rylands Library, Manchester.
6. Numerous allusions and quotations in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers¹⁰ (between AD 90 and 160).
7. Verdict by Sir Frederic Kenyon: *The Bible and Archaeology* (1940), 288–9:

The interval then between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established.

- C. A comparison between books written by ancient classical authors and the New Testament books.

Example 1: Caesar, *Gallic War*

Composed: 58–50 BC

Surviving copies: 9 or 10

Oldest copy: 900 years later than Caesar's day

Example 2: Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*

Composed: 460–400 BC

Surviving manuscripts: 8

Oldest copy: (except for a few first century fragments) about AD 900, i.e. a gap of about 1300 years

- D. Reasons why so few New Testament manuscripts have survived from the early period:
1. The material, papyrus, easily disintegrates.
 2. The practice of early (and many modern) believers: to discard worn out New Testaments.
 3. Persecution: under Decius (250), Valerius (257), and the 'Great Persecution' of Diocletian (303 onwards).
 4. Scriptures had to be handed over and burnt.

¹⁰ Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna, *Didache*, Shepherd of Hermas.

E. The use of notebooks by first century Christians:

See Alan Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus*, New York: New York University Press, 2000.

Question 2: Are the historical and geographical references in the New Testament manuscripts accurate?

A. Contrast the *Gospel of Barnabas*, (not the *Epistle of Barnabas*) a spurious Gospel, which among many other incongruities says that Jesus sailed to Nazareth!

B. Answer: Yes! For detail see:

1. Bruce: *New Testament Documents*, chs. 7 and 8;
2. C. J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1989.

Question 3: Is the central figure of the Gospels and Epistles an invention of the original writers?

A. Answer: No!

B. Evidence:

1. The apostles would never have invented the message of the cross, knowing it was folly to the world.
2. Without the resurrection, the coming into existence of the church cannot be accounted for.
3. The character of Christ.

The Role of Textual Criticism

Recommended reading:

Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 1964; 3rd enlarged edn, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: a companion volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (fourth revised edition)*, 2nd edn, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994.

D. A. Carson, *The King James Version Debate: A Plea for Realism*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979.

1. A personal statement

I believe with all my mind and heart in the divine, verbal inspiration and authority of the New Testament as originally given.

2. The facts

1. We have no autographs, i.e. the actual texts written by the New Testament writers.
2. What we have are thousands of copies, written by hand at various times, in different places, by different scribes.
3. No two copies are exactly the same in all respects down to the last detail.
4. There are therefore thousands of differences.

3. The aim of textual criticism

1. To get back to the original text.
2. In the vast majority of cases this can be done.
3. In some cases complete certainty is (at present) unachievable, and we must be content with probability.
4. BUT NO BASIC DOCTRINE IS IN DOUBT, because no basic doctrine is dependent on one verse.

4. The methods of textual criticism

- A. To understand the causes of the differences and to distinguish between:

1. unintentional mistakes in copying;
 2. deliberate or semi-deliberate alterations.
- B. To trace relationships between the manuscripts and to distinguish 'text-types'.
And
1. to try to trace the geographical origin of these text-type (e.g. Alexandrian, Western, Caesarea, Byzantium);
 2. to consider the approximate dating when these text-types arose.

5. An attractive but fallible theory

That in any one case the reading supported by the majority of the surviving manuscripts will be the original reading.

1. This is a statistical theory.
2. It depends on the following condition having been fulfilled: 'In any tradition where there are not major disruptions in the transmissional history, the individual reading which has the earliest beginning is the one most likely to survive in a majority of documents.' — Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982, xi–xii.
3. But there were major disruptions:
 - a. The persecutions under the Roman Emperors, especially Diocletian.
 - b. The destruction of the library at Caesarea by Muslims in AD 638.
4. When Constantine professed conversion and set up his capital in Byzantium, it was safe to copy and possess the New Testament. It is no wonder that the majority of surviving manuscripts are of the Byzantine text-type.

6. The importance of the early papyri

e.g. Papyrus 75 (early third century AD) the text of which antedates Origen. It shows no sign of deliberate recension.

7. Some examples of large differences and their likely causes

A. Acts 9:5–6

AV—'It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, "Lord, What wilt thou have me to do?" And the Lord said unto him . . .'

1. The Greek equivalent of these words is not found in any known Greek New Testament manuscript in this place.
2. They are taken from the other accounts of Saul's conversion in Acts 26:14 and 22:10.
3. Who added them to Acts 9:5–6? Erasmus!

B. Colossians 1:14

'In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.'

1. Some manuscripts add after 'redemption' the words 'through his blood', taken from Ephesians 1:7.

C. Romans 8:1

'There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.'

1. Some manuscripts add inappropriately the words 'who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit' taken from v. 4.

D. 1 John 5:7–8

'There are three who bear witness *in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit and these three are one. And there are three who bear witness in earth, and these three agree in one.*'

1. The words in italics are absent from every known Greek manuscript except four, and these contain the passage in what appears to be a translation from a late recension of the Latin Vulgate (see Metzger, *Commentary*).
2. Probably added to boost a certain theory in the controversies re the Trinity.

E. Revelation 22:14

'Blessed are they who wash their robes that they may have the right to the tree of life and enter in by the gates into the city.'

Textus Receptus: 'Blessed are they who do His commandments . . .'

1. The seriousness of the issue at stake.
2. John's normal phrase elsewhere is not 'do his commandments', but 'keep his commandments'.
3. The cause of the change—the scribe's doctrinal propensity?

F. The hitherto insoluble problem of the ending of Mark's Gospel

1. Did the women eventually do what they were told to do?

2. Did the disciples go to Galilee and see the Lord?

The Process and Philosophy of Translation

1. The translation must be correct

Example: Luke 23:15

1. Wrong translation: AV—'Lo, nothing worthy of death is done UNTO him.'
2. Correct translation: ESV—'Look nothing deserving death has been done BY him.'

2. The translation must be intelligible to its readers

Example: Matthew 9:15

AV— 'children of the bridechamber'

NIV—'guests of the bridegroom'

ESV—'wedding guests'

3. When Old English misleads modern readers it must be changed to modern English

Example 1: Romans 6:6

AV—'our old man *is* crucified with him'

ESV—'our old self *was* crucified with him'

JND—'our old man *has been* crucified with him'

Example 2: 1 Thessalonians 4:15

AV—'shall not *prevent* them . . .'

ESV—'shall not *precede* those . . .'

4. English should try to convey not only the meaning of a Greek word but also its emotional force and that often means using a dynamic, rather than a literal, translation.

Example: Romans 6:2, 15 and elsewhere

The Greek phrase is *mē genoito*. A literal translation would be, 'may it not be'. But this would not convey the emotional force of the Greek. So consider the following dynamic translations:

AV—'God forbid'

ESV—‘By no means’

Other possibilities—‘Never!’ ‘Far be the thought!’ ‘Perish the very idea!’

5. English should try to convey the meaning that Greek conveys by its word order

Example 1: Acts 1:6

AV—‘wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?’

Better, JND—‘is it at this time that thou restorest the kingdom to Israel?’

Example 2: Acts 15:11

AV—‘But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved, even as they.’

Better, NIV—‘We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.’

6. English ought to make clear what the flow of logic in a Greek sentence is

Example: Luke 7:47

AV—‘Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much.’

Slightly better, NIV —‘Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—as her great love has shown.’

Better still the Jerusalem Bible’s paraphrase—‘For this reason I tell you that her sins, her many sins, must have been forgiven her, or she would not have shown such great love.’

cf. also, the Jerusalem Bible’s footnote on this verse—‘Not, as is usually translated, “her many sins have been forgiven *because* she has shown such great love”. The context demands the reverse: she shows so much affection because she has had so many sins forgiven.’

7. The problem of how to express, in modern English, metaphors in the New Testament that are drawn from practices that have largely died out in our modern western world

Example: 1 Peter 1:13

AV—‘Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind . . .’

NIV—‘Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober’

JB—‘Free your minds, then, of encumbrances . . .’

About the Author

DAVID W. GOODING (1925-2019) was Professor Emeritus 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.