

Confidence in The Bible

The Authentic Word of God

David Gooding

A Myrtlefield House Transcript



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[Design Versus Evolution in the Universe](#)

My topic tonight is to be 'Design versus Evolution in the Universe', and you have a right to know by what kind of qualification I stand before you to talk on such a topic. In the first place, let me honestly confess to you, I am a Christian—not a very good one, as my friends will tell you, but a Christian nonetheless. As a Christian who believes the Bible, both Old Testament and New, you may rightly conclude that when I come to talk upon a topic like this, I am biased. That I freely admit, and I declare my bias right from the beginning. I do believe in God, creator and designer of the universe. Having said that, part of my thesis tonight will be simply this: that they who espouse the theory of evolution are likewise biased. Shocking as it may sound, I shall advance the thesis that those scientists who believe in evolution do not believe in it because the evidence compels them to believe in it. They believe it, if they do, on *a priori* grounds of materialistic philosophy.

Science or philosophy?

That may sound a rather arrogant claim made by a Christian. So let me quote to you the recent confessions of Professor Ruse of the United States. Professor Ruse is a leading evolutionary scientist and you may recall that some years ago there came up a trial before the Supreme Court in America. It was about the state of Louisiana, which had passed a law in their state that schools who taught evolution to the children as science must also teach what they called *creation science*, and thus be fair to the children in the schools. But the anti-creationists got together and pursued the state of Louisiana right up to the Supreme Court to decide this issue. The judge gave it as his verdict that evolution must be taught in the state schools because it is science. What Christians had called creation science, that is the doctrine that there is a Creator God who has designed the universe, must not be taught in the state schools of America because creation science isn't genuine science. It is a philosophy. It is a faith.

The judge wasn't saying that people shouldn't have that faith. He was simply remarking that a faith is open to your choice. You can choose to believe it or not believe it. It should not therefore be taught in the schools as if it were science, whereas evolution, said the judge, was science and therefore must be taught in the school. Faith deals with value judgments. Science deals with facts and, therefore, if evolution is a science and is a fact, it must be taught as a fact and received as a fact.

At that trial, Professor Ruse was the leading witness for the evolutionists and put before the judge that the case was precisely that: that evolution is a science, founded on science, whereas belief in a creator is not science. Much through the personal friendship and the argumentation of Philip Johnson of the United States, who some five or six years ago wrote

the book *Darwin on Trial*¹, Professor Ruse publicly acknowledged, in a keynote address to a meeting of scientists drawn from the whole United States, that he had come to the opinion that evolution is not a science; it is a philosophy. He hastened to add that he still believed evolution, but he had now to admit that evolution, strictly speaking, is not a science. It certainly isn't a fact put down by science. It is a theory based upon philosophy and, of course, that philosophy would be what we call materialistic philosophy.

There is an increasing number of folks in this world, even in the scientific community, who are beginning to see that evolution, Darwinian evolution that is, is as much built on philosophy as is the Christian doctrine of a creator. So I admit my bias. I am a Christian. I believe the Bible, I believe in God. I would want to remind all evolutionists present that they too are based on a philosophy, not strictly speaking on science. Our topic then is 'Design versus Evolution in the Universe', and I ought perhaps to spend our first few moments pointing out what I mean tonight in this title by *evolution*.

What do we mean by 'evolution'?

Evolution has become a very slippery term, difficult to hold it in the fingers of your mind when you are discussing these things with other people of a different view. For instance, 'evolution' is commonly used today in a sense that is not really evolution at all. Just let me remind you of instances of that.

Peppered moths

Generations of school children have been taught in their schools—I hasten to add, by honest school teachers—the evidence for evolution which they say is provided by the story of the peppered moth. So if you haven't seen a peppered moth recently, let me tell you about them. At one stage in the last century, before the Industrial Revolution, these peppered moths were mostly whitish in colour but with dark streaks here and there, hence the name, 'peppered moths'. In those days, even in the Black Country², the barks of the trees were often whitish or speckled, and so were many a lichen on a rock. And these peppered moths, being largely white, but just with flecks in them, would alight on such trees where the moth was very difficult for the birds to see. And the birds therefore only managed to gobble up just a few. Those peppered moths, however, which had more dark in their wings than light, stood out against the whitish grey background, and the birds got them.

So by natural selection—which does take place in the world—there came to be more whitish peppered moths than there were blackish peppered moths. But then came the Industrial Revolution, belching out its smoke and fumes until even the silver poplar barks were all blackened and sooty, and the lichens had turned sooty. In that period there was no longer advantage in being a whitish peppered moth because you stood out if you latched upon the tree trunk and the birds could see you. Contrary to what it used to be, there was every advantage in being a blackish peppered moth because you didn't stand out. Natural selection got to work, and the whitish peppered moths were gobbled up by ravenous birds,

¹ Philip E. Johnson, IVP Books, 1991 (3rd edition 2010).

² A term commonly used to refer to part of the West Midlands in England which, during the Industrial Revolution, was noted for its high levels of air pollution caused by soot from factory chimneys, etc.

but the blackish peppered moths were overlooked and, therefore, there came to be more blackish peppered moths.

Now we've got clean air laws and, even in the Black Country, the smoke is much less than it used to be, and the silver birches and things are turning back to being predominantly whitish or greyish or silverish. And the moths have adapted as well—natural selection once more. Now, the black moths show up and the birds eat them, and they can't see the white moths so much, so they don't get eaten. Nobody wants to dispute that natural selection goes on in nature. But when school children are taught that here is a marvellous example of evolution, it is quite plain to see that this isn't evolution at all. This is simply a moth's population in whose genes there is a certain range and in those different circumstances, natural selection will operate. In some circumstances, the moths that come out more white than black will survive better than the others, and vice versa. That's not evolution.

Ethnic diversity

Take, for instance, the human race itself—'red and yellow, black and white', as we used to sing in our Sunday school days. How did all these differently coloured humans come to be? The Bible will tell you that God didn't create one lot of black and one lot white, and so forth. The Bible says that all human beings, whatever their colours, come from one. That is the biblical doctrine, and all the massive variation of colours and physiognomy that has since arisen is truly called, not evolution, but development within the limits of natural physiological and biochemical development. The different colours have arisen by development, but if you ask how the human race started, that's another story. The moths change according to the possibility of change in their genes. That tells us nothing about how moths came to be in the first place. So although generations of school children have been taught that peppered moths are an example of evolution, that is not true, and it doesn't begin to support the Darwinian theory of evolution. You can call it evolution if you like. You must call it then, perhaps, micro evolution, and very carefully distinguish it from macro evolution. For that's a very different thing.

What do evolutionists mean by evolution?

The Bible itself talks about variation within species but that's not what we mean and it's not what I shall mean tonight by 'evolution'. Let me quote a thorough-going evolutionist and let him tell you what Darwinists mean by evolution. This is Professor Futuyma, leading evolutionist in the United States, and he says,

Anyone who believes in Genesis as a literal description of history must hold a world view that is entirely incompatible with the idea of evolution, not to speak of science itself . . . Where science insists on material mechanistic causes that can be understood by physics and chemistry, the literal believer in Genesis invokes unknowable supernatural forces.³

Now that is the sense in which I shall be talking about evolution tonight, and this isn't my Christian viewpoint putting up something so I can knock it down. Here is a leading expert in

³ Douglas J. Futuyma, *Science on Trial: The Case for Evolution*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1983, pp. 12–13.

evolutionary theory, telling you what, at heart, evolutionists of the Neo-Darwinian kind actually believe.

There are Christian people and others, who would call themselves evolutionists and tell you that they believe in Darwinian evolution, except that they hold that evolution is the method which God has used for the development of the universe and the human race. And I respect them. I think they are wrong, but I respect them. I shall not be discussing that view tonight—the view that God himself has used evolution as a technique for developing the universe. But those who say they believe in Darwinian evolution and think God has used it, should listen to the thorough-going evolutionist. Not only does he not believe in God but he points out that there is an utter, complete, absolute irreconcilable difference between Darwinian evolution—Neo-Darwinian evolution as currently taught—and a belief in a creator. The two are ‘entirely incompatible’. The evolutionist insists on material mechanistic causes that can be understood by physics and chemistry so that the world came to be, not by the creation of God, nor by any intelligence; it came simply by mindless, mechanistic, materialistic forces: no supernatural forces involved at all—not in the initial coming to be nor at any stage in the development. That is Neo-Darwinism, and Futuyama points out that there is this direct irreconcilable opposition between the two views. Let nobody persuade you otherwise.

The problem of meaninglessness

You will see the practical implications of this materialistic philosophy which we call evolution. Professor Futuyama continues,

Perhaps, more importantly, if the world and its creatures developed purely by material, physical forces, it could not have been designed. The fundamentalist, in contrast, believes that everything in the world, every species and every characteristic of every species, was designed by an intelligent, purposeful artificer and that it was made for a purpose. Nowhere does this contrast apply with more force than to the human species. Some shrink from the conclusion that the human species was not designed, has no purpose, and is the product of mere mechanical mechanisms—but this seems to be the message of evolution.⁴

He says that people shrink from that. I suspect you do too. I certainly do. According to him, a pot of jam has more purpose in it than a human being, because behind every pot of jam stands a jam maker, and it’s made for a purpose. But if the evolutionists are right, there’s no purpose behind you. You’re worse than a pot of jam, sir—the gentleman at the front here objects!—but I’m just pointing out the implications of the theory. This seems to be the message of evolution. It is a good thing if we wake up and listen to the evolutionists themselves and what exactly they are saying. You will see that this is, so to speak, a fight to the death.

Why should we bother about these things? Some of us who are older will say, ‘But we’ve always believed in God. We’ve believed in the Bible so why should we bother to listen to you?’ But on the other hand, if we are to keep our minds awake and afresh to the thinking of the world, then we ought to know something about what the world is thinking. We could start

⁴ Ibid.

with our children in the schools, where many of them are taught evolution as a fact, not merely as a theory. And so they listen to you in Sunday school, and then they go to school and hear the very opposite, and there develops a schizoid mentality. In school they believe their Darwinian evolution, which has as its preconception that there is no God. In church you talk to them about God and, as they get older, it sounds like a fairy story to comfort people when they go to bed in the dark: nothing more than a yarn. And there are multitudes of grown-ups nowadays who think science has proved there is no God, and when they listen to you preaching your gospel, they think you must be cranky if you don't know that science has proved there is no God.

Look at Julian Huxley. I had the honour for many years of working in a Greek department with a great-nephew of his. He was talking in 1959 at the famous meeting in Chicago in honour of Darwin. This was one of the first public occasions on which it was frankly faced that all aspects of reality are subject to evolution, from atoms and stars to fish and flowers, from fish and flowers to human societies and values. Indeed, that all reality is a single process of evolution. Said Huxley,

In the evolutionary pattern of thought, there is no longer either need or room for the supernatural. The earth was not created. It evolved, so did all the animals and plants that inhabit it, including our human selves, mind and soul as well as brain and body. So did religion. Finally, the evolutionary vision is enabling us to discern, however incompletely, the lineaments of the new religion that we can be sure will arise to serve the needs of the coming era.⁵

A new religion?

When this world has been soaked from end to end in generations of people brought up on the notion that evolution is a fact established by science, and science has thus proved that there is no God, it is easy to imagine the kind of religion that will dominate the West before our Lord comes in power and great glory. It will be a religion which says that there's no God out there: Man is God. Millions will flock to the propaganda put out by his chief of propaganda, and they will say 'Who is like the Beast?' (see Rev 13:4)—claiming divine honours for man. Julian Huxley himself said that as a human race, having understood there is no God, we've now evolved far enough that we ourselves could take control of evolution. He said the trouble was that there are so many silly people about who are liable to get angry if you step on their toes, and set off atomic bombs; and that would be unfortunate because then we wouldn't have the possibility of controlling evolution and developing into a beautiful, marvellous, peaceful society.

How can we persuade these idiots not to set off atomic bombs? 'We need to get hold of their hearts,' says he. Well, how do you get hold of their hearts? You can't get hold of people's hearts by a scientific test tube. People are not given to falling down on their knees and saying, 'Thy kingdom come, oh test tube.' So how do you get at their hearts to stop them playing the fool and setting off atomic bombs and eliminating planet Earth? He says that we need a new religion, but if there's no God, you haven't a religion. What will you worship now? You

⁵ Julian Huxley, *Essays of a Humanist*, pp. 82–83.

wouldn't go to worshipping centipedes, would you? What is the highest thing you know in the whole of the universe? That would be mankind. And people will worship man; that is the forecast of the Bible.

We should be concerned about these things because it is given out by people commonly, and to be heard to this day, that evolution is fact. Let's take two examples here, just to remind you. Julian Huxley said at that same conference that the first point to make about Darwin's theory is that it is no longer a theory, but a fact. Darwinism has come of age, so to speak, and we no longer have to bother about establishing the fact of evolution. If only he had known what science has brought forth in this last forty years! His claim has been repeated at all kinds of levels and, alas, in many a school text book it is taught like that.

Here is his modern equivalent, Professor Dawkins. Some media people recently endowed him a Chair at Oxford. He is an exceedingly clever man. His books are a delight to read for their sheer ingenuity and their sparkle. He is, in fact, an evangelist more than a scientist. He preaches Darwinism as though it were a gospel. I wish I had half his ability to preach the truth of the gospel as he preaches Darwinism. He is much to be heard on BBC. Says Dawkins in his book, 'The theory of evolution is about as much in doubt as the earth goes round the sun.'⁶ Michael Denton quotes this in his book, and adds,

Now, of course, such claims are simply nonsense. For Darwin's model of evolution is still very much a theory and still very much in doubt when it comes to macro evolutionary phenomena. Furthermore, being basically a theory of historical reconstruction, it is impossible to verify evolution by experiment or direct observation as is normal in science. It is a confusion of categories, therefore. Evolution is strictly speaking not a science, it is a theory; and it is certainly not a fact.⁷

What some evolutionists have said about the 'evidence' for evolution

So tonight I want to put before you ideas drawn from different areas of science to show that the evidence for evolution is substantially lacking. For this purpose, I'm going to quote people who are not, as far as I know, Christians, but are themselves evolutionists. We'll start with the fossil record.

Palaeontology

Many a book has been written and beautifully coloured, particularly for schools again and for the young, showing all sorts of wonderful things from the supposed fossil record. They have built up marvellous chains and family trees of evolutionary development, and people are taught that that's where we come from. You're on that branch here, and that branch joins a bigger branch, and another branch joins another branch, and this come downs to the central trunk, and it goes down to the bit of slime or whatever it was, where it all started. All sorts of marvellous things are pictured, things that were meant to be not quite human, imaginary things.

⁶ Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford University Press, 1976.

⁷ Michael J. Denton, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*, Burnett Books, 1985.

So let's listen to David Raup, who is an evolutionist. He is the expert, perhaps the world's most respected of palaeontologists—the people that deal with the fossil record. This is what Raup says:

A large number of well-trained scientists outside of evolutionary biology and palaeontology have unfortunately gotten the idea that the fossil record is far more Darwinian than it is. This probably comes from the oversimplification inevitable in secondary sources: low-level textbooks, semi-popular articles, and so on. Also there is probably some wishful thinking involved. In the years after Darwin, his advocates hoped to find predictable progressions. In general these have not been found yet the optimism has died hard, and some pure fantasy has crept into textbooks.⁸

So don't believe me, believe him because he's an evolutionist! He's an expert palaeontologist, and he is saying in effect that it's a pity that people who are not experts as he is expert—scientists indeed who don't work in palaeontology but in other disciplines—have got the idea that the fossil record is much more full than it actually is. And he describes some of what has been written as wishful thinking or even pure fantasy! Now this evolutionist is being honest! All you young folk at school that might be listening tonight, do listen to this chap. If your textbooks say the kind of thing he's complaining about, don't tell your teacher that the preacher in the Gospel Hall said it was nonsense; tell them that Raup said it was nonsense!

One of the ironies of the evolution/creation debate is that some creationists have accepted the mistaken notion that the fossil record shows a detailed and orderly progression and have gone to great lengths to accommodate this in their flood geology, whereas if only they knew the facts, they wouldn't bother to try. Here's Raup again:

Darwin predicted that the fossil record should show a reasonably smooth continuation of ancestor-descendant pairs, primitive and developed, and then primitive and more developed, and so on, with a satisfactory number of intermediates between the major groups.

After all, if things evolved little by little by little, there ought to be many fossils in the record, showing those little bits of development. Darwin predicted there would be such, and he even went so far as to say that, if this were not found in the fossil record, his general theory of evolution would be in serious jeopardy. That's Darwin himself saying it. Such smooth transitions were not found in Darwin's time, and he explained this in part on the basis of an incomplete geological record, and in part on the lack of study of that record. So what is the current position? This is what David Raup says:

We are now about 120 years after Darwin and the knowledge of the fossil record has been greatly expanded. We now have a quarter of a million fossil species but the situation hasn't changed much. The record of evolution is still surprisingly jerky and, ironically, we have even fewer examples of evolutionary transitions than we had in Darwin's time. By this I mean that

⁸ David Raup, as quoted in *Science*, July 17, 1981, p. 289.

some of the classic cases of Darwinian change in the fossil record . . . have had to be discarded or modified as a result of more detailed information.⁹

You young folks in your schools, you don't have to believe what so many charts in so many museums put across as though it were fact. It is not founded on fact but on what Raup calls a lot of wishful thinking. But let's take another angle from the palaeontological record.

Inherent improbability

Let's think of how all you enchantingly beautiful and complicated and sophisticated ladies and gentlemen came to be. How did life start on our planet? We shall limit ourselves for the moment to human life. How did it start? Was it, as the Bible says, by the creative act of God, or did it happen by chance, without any design, without any plan, just by chance: blind forces gradually producing life which then became more and more complicated and sophisticated? Here is the combined opinion of two eminent professors—Professor Frederick Hoyle, retired professor of astronomy from Cambridge, and Professor Chandra Wickramasinghe who is still a practising mathematician in the University of Cardiff. Neither of these gentlemen believe in the God of the Bible. Neither of them believe in Christ. Hoyle accepts a kind of evolution: 'evolution from space', he says. But now look at what they say about the possibility of life developing here on earth by evolution.

A simple calculation then shows that the chance of obtaining the necessary total of 2000 enzymes by randomly assembling amino acid chains is exceedingly minute. The random chance is not a million to one against, or a billion to one or even a trillion to one against, but p to 1 against, with p minimally an enormous, super astronomical number equal to $10^{40,000}$.¹⁰

Let's pause there because there are some big words, difficult for me to take in! If you're going to have life, you'll have to have things called enzymes, and to get enzymes, you have to start with another stuff called amino acids. There are plenty of amino acids, but to get these aforesaid enzymes, you've got to have a whole array of these amino acids, which generally come in groups of four, and they've got to be in exactly the right order. And the order changes with each different enzyme, and you've got to get about 2,000 enzymes. So he says, 'What is then the chance of getting these 2,000 enzymes by accident?' Well, he points it out to you—not a million to one or a billion to one, or even a trillion to one, but one in $10^{40,000}$! Then he says,

The odds we have thus computed are only for the enzymes and, of course, correct arrangement with many other important macro molecules of life besides enzymes, must also be considered. The molecules histone-4 and cytochrome-c are two such examples, each with exceedingly small probability of being obtained by chance. If all these other relevant molecules for life are taken account of in our calculation, the situation for conventional biology becomes doubly worse. The odds of one in $10^{40,000}$ are horrendous enough but that would have to be increased to a major degree. Such a number exceeds the total number of fundamental particles throughout the observed universe by very, very many orders of magnitude. So great are the odds against life

⁹ David Raup, *Conflicts between Darwin and Paleontology*, Field Museum of Natural History Bulletin, Jan 1979.

¹⁰ Hoyle and Wickramasinghe, *Cosmic Life Force*, London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1988, p. 134.

being produced in a purely mechanistic way that the difficulties for an earth-bound mechanistic biology are, in our view, intrinsically insuperable.

That, before he retired, was one of the leading astronomers in the world. He doesn't believe in the God of the Bible, nor in our gospel, but he is pointing out the odds against life having started by chance. He's the author of that famous phrase, 'You say that life happened by chance? You might as well talk of a hurricane blowing through a scrapyard, producing a Boeing 747.' You young chaps and girls, don't let your teachers tell you that evolution has been proved and is a scientific fact. Or if they start to tell you that, tell them about what Hoyle says: the odds against it are more than the number of particles in the whole universe!

Irreducible complexity

But now let's take another approach, and that is what is called these days 'irreducible complexity'. I was present at a conference recently in the United States, and profited much by listening to Professor Michael Behe who has recently produced the book, *Darwin's Black Box*.¹¹ He takes Darwinism to pieces in a very gentlemanly but very firm fashion. He points out its sheer impossibility. To help us understand what the biochemists nowadays mean by 'irreducible complexity', Michael Behe uses the very potent and simple illustration of a mousetrap. You'll know what a traditional mousetrap is. It consists of the basic board, as a little platform, and then it has to have a hammer affair that comes over and smites the mouse. But that would be no good unless you also had a spring to make it come down; and then you have to have a bar that holds the hammer back, and a catch that releases the bar when it is triggered. The cheese is put on the end of the catch so that when the unfortunate mouse, not being a scientist, touches the catch, it doesn't foresee that it will spring the trap, and the hammer will come down and kill it.

Now that is a very simple mechanism, made up of five simple pieces. But Michael Behe points out that it is what you might call irreducibly complex—meaning that the whole five bits have got to be there all at once or the thing doesn't work. No single part on its own would catch any mice; and it wouldn't be enough to have just four of the five pieces because until they're all there, you wouldn't catch any mice. It is irreducibly complex. Now you say, 'What's that got to do with evolution?' Well, Mike Behe is a biochemist and studies the chemistry that goes on inside the cells in the body. He points out that in Darwin's day, folks didn't know what was inside the cell so they thought it quite reasonable that a little bit inside it could change, and you'd get a bit of advantage; and then a few million years later, another little bit inside would change and you'd get another advantage. That was, I suppose, a reasonable supposition in those days. But the astonishing advance of technology nowadays, applied to biochemistry, has shown us that inside the cell there is an extremely complicated and sophisticated mechanism, and that it has all got to be there or else the thing doesn't work at all.

¹¹ Michael J. Behe, *Darwin's Black Box—The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*, Free Press, 1996.

The blood-clotting mechanism

Mike Behe gives us many examples in that book. I recommend it to you. Don't believe everything he says, but believe those parts when he talks as a biochemist! Take, for instance, that process which happens if you cut a finger. Suppose you cut a finger very badly, and it starts to bleed. If it kept on bleeding, you would die, but we know what happens. First of all the blood comes, and that's very good because it helps to wash away any germs that are there, but then presently the blood coagulates and seals the wound. It's got to do that or else you'll bleed to death. What is it then that happens inside the cell? What is the mechanism that causes the blood to clot and seal the wound? Actually, what happens is an exceedingly complicated thing.

Let me begin to remind you. When you cut your finger, there is a substance in your body that eventually will cause the blood to clot precisely at that point. Where do you get the stuff from? It's no good going down to the chemist if you're in the jungles of Peru! You'd be dead anyway before you got there. So the stuff has got to be somewhere in the cells in the blood. But it can't be in a form that's active otherwise it would make the blood clot everywhere and you wouldn't be alive two minutes. It's got to be in the bloodstream, in the cells, and when your finger is cut, somehow something has got to be transformed and changed so that now it becomes active and causes blood to clot. And it can't be clotting while it's still going round and hasn't reached your finger because if it clotted in your brain, you'd be less thinking than you are even at the moment! And if it clotted at your heart, you could be dead! So how has it worked: by what kind of mechanism?

In his book Mike Behe includes a diagram showing what happens to molecules in the cells when you cut your finger, from the time that the wound is made to the time when the scab has done its job, the wound has been healed, the flesh has been restored, and the scab falls off. There are sixteen stages involving a complex interaction of an array of enzymes and amino acids. This is the kind of cascade effect that has to happen within the cell and, what is more, if any of these elements were lacking, you would bleed to death. This is what Professor Behe means by irreducible complexity: they've all got to be there or else it doesn't work. How could a little bit of that have happened millions of years ago, and then (say) an animal nearly survived, but he didn't manage quite to survive? An animal missing even one of the sixteen steps would not survive and therefore could not contribute its genes to the gene pool for 'evolution' to happen. It is sheer nonsense. This is not conservative Christians putting their conservative Christian heads in the sand and trying to ignore science. This is the kind of thing that modern science and technology is bringing to light in the workings of the human cell.

That doesn't mean that all biochemists are now converted and no longer believe in evolution. Far from it, but some of them will honestly admit that evolution doesn't have an answer. There are many, many honest scientists and we're not despising them nor I hope talking rudely about them. On the back cover of Professor Behe's book, there is a review by Professor Robert Shapiro, author of *Origins: A Skeptic's Guide to the Creation of Life on Earth*.¹² He's an evolutionist and remains an evolutionist, but this is what he says:

¹² Robert Shapiro, Bantam New Age, 1987.

Michael Behe has done a top notch job of explaining and illuminating one of the most vexing problems in biology, the origin of the complexity that permeates all of life on this planet. Professor Behe selects an answer that falls outside of science, namely, the original creation of life by an intelligent designer.

That is true, that is Mike Behe's position. He does believe in God—he's a Catholic, actually—and he believes this points to a designer who designed the whole system, and installed it complete, not that it evolved bit by bit. Professor Shapiro says that Michael Behe has chosen an answer outside of science—the original creation of life by an intelligent designer—but now listen to what he says next:

Many scientists, myself included, will prefer to continue the search for an answer within science.

You see the implication. Shapiro is admitting they have no answer to this problem. Dawkins of Oxford gets rather angry with Mike Behe and tells him he should go on with his science and find an answer within science instead of calling on a designer outside! Why does Dawkins continue with his atheism, I wonder? It was Dawkins who said on one occasion, 'Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist'¹³—because he wants to be an atheist and he's looking round for intellectual justification for being an atheist.

Bacterial propulsion

One other interesting little diagram you'll find in Behe's book shows how a certain bacterium works. I don't know if you've ever seen a bacterium—they're mighty difficult to see! They're very lowly creatures in the process of life but some of these bacteria need to transport themselves about the place, and to them a cell is an enormous vast stadium. So some of these bacteria have got means of propelling themselves around. They don't all have the same means. Some of them have what is called a flagellum which rotates rather like a propeller at the end of the bacterium. It is a remarkably complicated mechanism that can best be described in the language of mechanical engineering, as the diagram shows.

We're talking about a bacterium, not a motorcar, but he's using the terms from motor mechanical engineering, and that comes down here to an engine. The engine is driven by electricity, produced in the cells. Behe asks the question, 'How could that have happened in stages, little by little by little?' Because nothing would have worked until all the components are present. You can believe, if you like, that it all happened over millions of years, tiny little bit by tiny little bit—and all entirely by chance not by design!

Information theory

One more line of enquiry and we shall be finished. We have talked about the record of palaeontology, the fossils. We have talked about the unlikelihood of life beginning by accident: in biochemistry, the amino acids and all the other things that have to go to produce life in a cell. We have now talked about some of the cascade processes that go on, irreducibly

¹³ Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker*, Norton & Company, Inc., 1986.

complex because if one bit were missing, they wouldn't work. Now we come to another important issue: what is called *information theory*.

To illustrate what information theory is, just let me take some of you who were experts in engineering in the 1950s back to those days. Do you remember, ladies, when you had the last word in washing machines? Where nowadays there would be a knob and a few buttons, back then there was a slot into which fitted a little square of plastic. If you happened to look at it closely, there were notches down each side of the plastic, and these controlled how the machine behaved depending on whether you were washing linens or woollens or whatever. So if it was the linens, you got the right side of this square, under directions from the handbook, and you put that side into the slot in the machine. And those notches on the plastic controlled the mechanism inside and, so to speak, told the machine, 'Linens, please,' and the machine went round at the right speed and the right temperature until the linens were done. And after the linens, if you wanted to put the woollens in, you took the bit of plastic out and you turned it round to a different set of notches. Of course, the younger generation don't know how sophisticated we were in those far-off days! And most of the ladies here are too young to have remembered it, but I remember it!

Now, if you'd got that piece of plastic and you'd said to somebody, 'Tell me, what is this I'm holding in my hand?' And they said, 'Plastic' you'd say, 'Yes, ten marks out of ten. Anything else?' 'Well, as far as I can see it's only plastic: there's nothing else on it.' That would be absolutely true, but was it only plastic? Well, of course, it wasn't. Those notches on the side were information, so to speak—instructions from the designer to the engine inside, so that when the plastic was put in a certain way with the right notches that side up, it made the machine do what the designer wanted it to do. Of course, the plastic couldn't speak and the engine couldn't hear, but engineers nowadays talk in terms of 'information theory'. The information was put on the plastic in the form of a design, so that it would make the machine do what the designer wanted it to do. It wasn't just plastic: it was plastic plus information.

The word of God

Now that's interesting when we think about how the Bible talks about creation. You'll remember Genesis 1, 'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth . . . *And God said, "Let there be light", and there was light . . . And God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters" . . . And God said . . .*' eight times over—creation by the word of God. Hebrews 11:3 says, 'By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God'. Material around us, and particularly living material, is not just stuff. It is stuff plus information from the designer. Take the easiest example. A child is conceived—a cell from mother, a cell from father, forming a *zygote*, which contains enough information to control the development of the foetus in the womb and the very timing of the different parts. It's no good developing an eye unless you've got an eye socket to put it in. It's no good developing a brain if you haven't got a skull. (I nearly said it's no good having a skull if you haven't got a brain, but some people manage it!) And it's no good having legs if you haven't got a body to put the legs on.

This tiny little pair of cells have in them all the information necessary to control the development of the foetus in the womb, to control the time of its birth, to control its growth

right up through manhood or womanhood, to the time it dies. And what is more, if the child born eventually becomes a father or mother, the original information it got from its parents will be enough to control the development of the next generation. It's a thing to be pondered: those original cells may have long since died yet the information they carried continues on.

What is the information and where did it come from? Listen to Wilder-Smith talking about the way the DNA in the cells is arranged.

By means of a double helix system of four letters, entire books filled with information could be written by merely altering the sequences—just as we write books by varying sequences of the letters of our alphabet. In this manner, the double helix system within a human sperm and a human egg contains the total coded building instructions for synthesising the complete human being. On paper, using our alphabet system, this human genetic information on one human zygote would fill over 1,000 volumes, each of 500 pages—a total of 500,000 printed pages' worth of information and chemical instructions.¹⁴

That is, one human egg the size of a pinhead, holds 500,000 printed pages worth of information and instructions. Are you going to tell me that all that happened by accident: there was no mind? Well, believe it if you will. The Bible has something relevant to say there: it says that the invisible things of God are clearly to be seen from the creation around us, namely, his eternal power and divine nature (see Rom 1:19–20). The Bible doesn't claim that we see from creation around us that God is love. Creation around us doesn't tell us anything about redemption: that is God's special revelation. But the Bible insists that men and women looking at creation could see, if they will, the evidence that there is a God, that we are his creatures and are responsible to him. And the Bible adds that people who refuse to acknowledge it will be without excuse. Darwinism is not forced upon us because it is a science. You've seen enough to know it is not a science. It is a philosophy. In that strict sense, Christianity is a philosophy. But the Bible declares that creation holds the evidence that all could see, if they will, that there is a God, an almighty, powerful creator, behind this universe.

Human intelligence

To show you that this is not talking nonsense, I give you this last quotation from Paul Davies, who is a mathematical physicist. He is not a believer in the God of the Bible, nor in Jesus Christ, nor in his miracles, nor in his resurrection. I would hesitate to try to describe him: I imagine that he's some kind of a pantheist. But listen to what he says. He's talking about man made of stardust, made out of the elements, produced in the gigantic atomic furnaces of the stars, but calling attention to this tremendous thing, that man has an intelligence. So that man, not the animals, but man and only man, can turn around and understand, or begin to understand, the way the universe works. And he's asking himself how it is that man has that kind of intelligence. He says,

I cannot believe that our existence in this universe is a mere quirk of fate, an accident of history, an incidental blip in the great cosmic drama. Our involvement is too intimate. The physical

¹⁴ A. E. Wilder-Smith, *The Natural Sciences Know Nothing of Evolution*, Master Books, 1981, p. 82.

species of *Homo* may count for nothing, but the existence of mind in some organism on some planet in the universe, is surely a fact of fundamental significance. Through conscious beings, the universe has generated self-awareness. This can be no trivial detail, no minor product of mindless, purposeless forces. We are truly meant to be here.¹⁵

Don't you be ashamed of the gospel, you young folks. Don't be afraid to dig your heels in and, very politely, to make it known that you believe in a creator, you believe that there is an intelligence behind the universe. The statement from Futuyma with which we began, says that there is no purpose, no mind behind the universe. That's what evolution stands for. But this man Davies, though he would still be an evolutionist, like some other scientists now in the light of recent discoveries, would say there must be an intelligence behind the universe. He doesn't recognize it as the God of the Bible, but he has come to see that we are 'meant to be here'. We are not the product of mindless mechanical forces. There is an intelligence behind the universe.

This is God's creation doing what the Bible says it was meant to do, to be the book of nature from God, to make it clear that there is a creator, there is a designer. He made us. There is therefore a purpose behind our existence, and we are responsible to him. If more of our modern folks saw it and got it into their heads, then perhaps they would begin to ask what is the answer to the question that our consciences have told us — that we've sinned against our creator. But here perhaps is a place to start: the evidence of the universe around us, that it has been designed and that Darwinism, therefore, is not true.

Thank you for your great patience.

¹⁵ Paul Davies, *The Mind of God*, Simon & Schuster UK, 1992.

Why I Believe the Old Testament is the Word of God

Once more, thank you very much for your kind invitation to come and speak with you on these few occasions. Tonight I choose to use the time you have so liberally given me to tell you some substantial reasons why I personally believe the Old Testament is the word of God, our creator. The Old Testament, as you know, is the first half of the Bible, and nowadays it has become for many people an exceedingly obscure book. Few folks these days know much about the New Testament, and children are to be heard around our streets who say they do not know who Jesus Christ was. And if the New Testament nowadays is a closed book to many people, the Old Testament is something beyond their imagination. Listen to any quiz on the BBC and questions about the stars and the galaxies, and dinosaurs, will be answered with alacrity. Questions that come from the Old Testament, more often than not, draw a blank. It is largely an unknown book, and I want to tell you tonight why I believe that that book, so largely unknown today, is indeed the inspired word of God, our creator. Not only is it a record of things that happened in the past, but a means by which, if we allow him, our creator will talk directly to the hearts of us, his creatures.

Any people I know, if they know anything about the Old Testament, will complain that as far as they are aware, it's a book that talks about savage battles, with people destroying other tribes in the name of their religion. And people find the very idea offensive. It comes as a surprise to many such people that the lovely exhortation, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself,' comes from the Old Testament, and comes from one of its very earliest books, the book called Leviticus (19:18). As we ponder our modern world, now coming to the end of this second millennium, we will immediately see that such advice is by no means old fashioned or out of date. Our century, the most progressive for its sophistication and inventions, will go down as the bloodiest century in all these two thousand years since the year of our Lord Jesus Christ. It has been the most violent century without exception, and continues to be. The Old Testament word that God spoke to his people in that far-off day remains relevant in the extreme to our modern so-called civilization.

Our significance and purpose

So allow me then to give you some reasons—I count them substantial but they are only some among many—why I believe this Old Testament is the word of our creator. First of all, it tells us right from the very beginning just exactly who and what we are. On its first page it says 'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth', which he did in successive periods of divine creation, rising to its climax when, on the sixth day, God said, 'Let us make man'. And listen to the wonderful story, 'Let us make man', not as our slave, not as our drudge; 'Let us

make man in our image . . . and let them have dominion over . . . all the earth' (1:26). So now the Bible, this Old Testament, tells us what exactly we are. We find ourselves in this vast universe on this planet for a few fleeting years. What are we? What were we made for? Where are we going? Whether we like it or not, we're travelling with the passing of the years, and as we get older, the years pass with an ever-increasing rapidity. Who are we and what are we?

I heard of a student once, in the doldrums, as some students get, particularly if they've been on drugs and drummed up a lot of unhealthy excitement. He described himself as 'an eczema on the face of the earth'. Ask any drug addict what they are, what will they reply? The Bible says we are creatures of God, made in the image of God, made to have dominion over the earth, and more important than all of the galaxies that fly in space. You may think that's an exaggeration, but if you will ponder it, you will find how that is obviously true. Take, for instance, the nearest star to us which is the sun in the sky. It's vastly big compared with my brain which is so tiny. But then you'd not be wise to think that significance lies in size all the time. A cartload of hay isn't as valuable as an ounce of gold. Size isn't everything. And what's more, the sun, for all its tremendous size, is just a lot of gas with elementary particles creating their own fun in their glorious atomic furnace, doing us a good service by sending us heat and light, and so forth, and keeping us alive. But that's all it is, a lot of old gas.

And I unashamedly, without pride, tell you that my brain or your brain, tiny as it is, is more significant than the sun. You can see that is so, can't you? I know the sun is there. The sun doesn't know I'm here. (If it did, it would shine a bit more in my part of the world!) I know it's there. It doesn't know I'm here. What is more, by the help of our modern scientists, I know how the sun works. The sun doesn't know how I work. A baby's brain is more significant than the sun. And the vast galaxies that swirl in space, what are they except great collocations of suns? That's all they are—so much stuff, so much gas, so many elementary particles. The Bible says that you, as a human being, are more significant than any one of them, or all of them put together. Made in the image of God, made to have dominion, hence man's remarkable ability. We salute all the tremendous progress that mankind has made through science, using a God-given intelligence to understand and begin to control their physical environment. That's what God intended, anyway. Made in the image of God.

The value of human life

You will see the same thing if you read a little bit further into that first book of the Bible, where God strictly forbids any man to murder his fellow man. Why shouldn't you murder your fellow man? Have you never felt you'd like to? Well, perhaps not you, but if you had a computer which, in spite of your patient application to its keyboard, didn't suit you, there's nothing to stop you putting your foot through it and kicking it to pieces. Why shouldn't you? It's only an old computer. It may have learned to speak, but there's no reason why you shouldn't put your foot through it and destroy it. But if your neighbour doesn't happen to please you, you're not supposed to put your foot through him, and destroy him. Why not? The Bible forbids it because man is made in the image of God as God's representative, as God's viceroy; and to murder a man is to do insult to his maker.

What a magnificent doctrine it is, and what a sorry world ours has been, even this modern century, as the result of men forgetting this fact. We used to tell the Russians—we tell them

still though they are rather sensitive about it now — that if Stalin had believed what the Bible says, he would not have eliminated sixty million human beings just for the sake of his political theories; theories which, they had to admit, were wrong and didn't work. In the ancient world men lost hold of this fact that man is made in the image of God. The Bible explains to us that they didn't like to retain God in their knowledge. Any intimate knowledge of our present generation would show the accuracy of that remark: they prefer to forget God.

The result was, however, that when people forgot God, they didn't turn to worshipping nothing. Observe your fellow men, if you haven't observed them before: people have to worship something. They'll make a god of something, and when they lost touch with, and lost hold on, the reality of the living God, they started to make themselves substitute gods. They deified the sun and worshipped the sun god. They deified the moon and worshipped the moon god. They deified the god of the storm, and they called him Baal. They deified sex, and they called her Aphrodite among the Greeks or Ishtar amongst the Babylonians; and they worshipped her and reduced themselves to animals in the process. Then some people made a goddess out of chance, and they worshipped her as well. And others made a goddess out of fate, and they said, '*Que sera, sera*', 'What will be, will be', and they worshipped and believe in fate—mindless, purposeless dread fate—as the ultimate power that controlled their lives.

That was long ago. Are men any different nowadays? A generation that's lost its hold on the living God is sometimes led by its scientists. And as we were seeing in our first lecture, the scientists will tell them there is no God. So what are we—just the accidental product of mindless forces? Let's stop with that and think about its implication. Is that what we are? We don't control the universe. If there's a God who made us, and made us for a purpose, we have glorious hope. If there's no God, if we are the product of blind, mindless forces, then there's no purpose in life. In the ancient world there was one exquisite torture that people thought up to torture their enemies with. They would put them in a cell. It would be almost completely dark, but enough to see the walls. After the prisoner had been there some months maybe, he'd suddenly wake up to the impression that the place wasn't quite so big as it used to be. Noticing this day after day, he would begin to get alarmed, and start to measure it with his feet, and would find that two of the walls were gradually and slowly coming in. Then, of course, his intelligence got to work and saw that if this continued, one day those two walls would meet and crush the very life out of him. He had the intelligence and the arithmetic to measure it, and see what was going to happen. He had no power to stop it happening.

Ladies and gentlemen, if there is no God, you are a prisoner like that and the jail keepers are the mindless powers of the universe, the great forces. If there's no God and it's these mindless forces that produced you, let me remind you that those same mindless forces will one day destroy you. One of these days a little germ or virus will get inside you. It has no sense in its head. You will have the intelligence to see what it's going to do to you, but all your intelligence will not be enough to stop it doing it, and it will destroy you—your body, your brain, all your aesthetic sense—and make a pulp of you. And beyond that? No hope. It is obvious to me, ladies and gentlemen, that we have to choose. Are we going to believe those who, with considerable intelligence, spin these theories that we're the products of mindless forces which one day mindlessly will destroy us? That is to make a mockery even of our intelligence. That is to tell us that ultimately our intelligence counts for nothing. Our

intelligence will be destroyed and made a nothing of by mindless forces, and when they've destroyed us, they won't even know they've done it. Do you believe it? Does it sound true?

Hope for humanity

Listen to God's wonderful book called the Old Testament. It says that the truth is that the living God is our creator. He made us for himself. He designed a glorious eternity of friendship with him, made us to have friendship with our creator and enjoy his fellowship for ever. That's the truth. The other is the lie. When Jesus Christ was on earth, he traced that lie to its origin, to the very father of lies, Satan himself, for he was a liar from the very beginning (see John 8:44). He stood not in the truth and he is a murderer. Why can't our modern men and women see that, in getting rid of God in their thinking, they are consigning themselves to this fearful meaninglessness? But men and women do, and they go along worshipping, nowadays, the old goddess 'chance' who is very much in fashion now that we have the lottery! And people pray to chance. You don't, of course, but if you went to the Far East you would see the people queuing up in the Buddhist shrines, consulting the priest and paying to have their little prayers offered to the gods that they might be directed to choose the right number in the football pools. Their hope for a bright future rests upon that nonentity, chance.

That is sad, isn't it? I say to my atheist friends, 'Let's test our theories to see how they work out in practice. Come, here's a woman. She's 33 years old and a mother of three children. She's been diagnosed as having terminal cancer. Shall we both come and speak to her?' And what shall we say? I'll say, 'My dear, I'm exceedingly sorry to hear what the doctors have said. I want to tell you there's hope for you. For you are created by a loving God who loves you personally. You have sinned like the rest of us, but the God who made you, loves you, and came in the person of the Son of God to die for you, so that you might be forgiven. One day, if you trust him, he will raise that body of yours from the grave and give you a body like the glorious body of the Lord Jesus, so that you might enjoy an eternity of bliss with God your maker. And what is more, my dear, even the pain that you now suffer is not meaningless, for God says that our temporary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison (2 Cor 4:17). There's hope for you if you will accept God's Son as your Saviour.'

I say, 'Come on, atheist, you talk to the woman.' And what will the atheist say? What will the mere worldly man say? 'I hope you'll win the pools, my dear?' What can the atheist say? 'Sorry to hear about your troubles, but there you are, that's how it is. We're all going that way and, in the end, there's no hope. Your sufferings are absolutely meaningless, for when you're dead, you're done for.' They won't add it, but they might as well, 'You might as well shoot your brains out.' Oh, my dear friend, will you not listen to God? God your maker who made you and loves you, and longs to give you the honour he designed for you, made in the image of God, made to reign with Jesus Christ, God's Son, for all God's eternity, and enjoy with him all those ambitious projects that God will put afoot through the unending ages that are to come. Why will you believe the lie that says you are ultimately insignificant, without meaning or purpose, and that your very intelligence in the end will be overcome and reduced to nothingness?

Awareness of right and wrong

There's a second reason why I believe the Old Testament is the word of God; only one amongst others. But I believe it's the word of God because it tells us another very significant thing about ourselves, and that is the feeling of right and wrong which we have inside us. Everybody has it: even little children have it. As Tommy takes Johnnie's toy, and Johnnie is indignant, Mum comes in and Johnnie complains, but Mum reads it the wrong way and she says, 'Let him have it.' So Tommy gets Johnnie's toy; and Johnnie says, 'It isn't fair.' That is innate in us: that feeling of what's right and wrong. It doesn't leave us when we grow up. The next time you go to the supermarket listen to Mrs Smith talking to Mrs Brown, and she is saying, 'Have you heard about Mrs Green — she's run off with another woman's husband.' 'Oh,' says Mrs Brown, 'she oughtn't to have done that.' Why not? If you hear this woman saying she oughtn't to have done that, she's got some concept of what's right and wrong. She's accusing the other woman of having done something wrong. And if Mrs Smith replies, 'Yes, I know but her husband was a terror'; so now she's excusing Mrs Green.

It shows we have an innate sense of right and wrong. And when people do wrong, we accuse them, or sometimes when they do wrong, we excuse them. And certainly when we do wrong, we excuse ourselves. Why should we bother? What is this sense of right and wrong that we've got? Where does it come from? Is it just a matter of taste? Whether you like rhubarb or peaches is a matter of taste. There's no right or wrong in it. But if it were Farmer Brown saying to Farmer Giles, 'You've stolen my chicken!' and Farmer Giles replies, 'I know that, but I like stealing chickens.' And Farmer Brown says, 'But I don't like stealing chickens.' Says Giles, 'Never mind, if you don't like stealing chickens, don't steal them, but I like stealing chickens.' Well, you wouldn't stand for that for five minutes, would you? You can see that right and wrong is not a matter of taste. What is it then?

Conscience—the law of God written in our hearts

The Bible tells us, right from the very start, that that is a feeling God put in our hearts. It is the law of God written on our hearts, says the New Testament, and behind that feeling of right and wrong stands the moral authority of the creator. I believe that, and it's exceedingly important. The Prime Minister, John Major, had a little programme not so long ago which he called 'Getting Back to Basics'. But before he could implement it, his party colleagues were defying the law of God left, right and centre, and engaging in all kinds of doubtful and sometimes immoral practices. Our modern world, as it tries to decide what we should tell the children in school about how they should behave, can't make up its mind because a multitude of the teachers are atheists anyway and there's no code that they can agree to. How shall we have any code of behaviour except it is based on what the Bible declares, and that behind the sense of right and wrong stands the moral law of the creator himself.

The question of justice

To many people that sounds grim. They want to escape that. They want to be free to make up their own minds, to do their own thing. They're not going to be kept down by any law of God. But see what happens. I invite my atheist friends to come to Auschwitz, the extermination camp, and we'll talk to the victims. Tomorrow they're going to the gas chambers. What shall we say to them? As we come, they shout out, 'We want justice.'

Whatever shall we say? We'll have to be honest and say, 'You're not going to get justice. Tomorrow you're going to be gassed.'

They say, 'We have a right to justice.'

I shall say, 'Yes, you have indeed. You're not going to get it here on earth, but there is a God, and your sense of justice and your longing for justice is a God-given desire and longing, and is valid. And the God who gave it to you is a God who one day will see that you get justice done. There's coming a day when he will judge the world in righteousness and put right those wrongs.'

Now what will the atheists say? 'You're not going to get justice. What is more, there's no God, and there's no life to come. You're not going to get justice in this life. You're not going to get it in the life to come because there isn't one.'

And so the prisoner says, 'Are you telling me that all my life when I've been hoping for justice, justice was a nothing?'

Oh, friends, what terrible nightmares society gets itself into when it ignores the law of God written on the heart, with its concomitant promise that there is a God in heaven who cares for justice, and one day will bring every deed ever committed, and every person that ever lived, before his judgment bar. Therein is hope.

The cost of forgiveness

If we begin to talk like that, then there's another question that comes up, and not merely about nations but about ourselves. We can forget about Hitler and Stalin, and national troubles and so forth because if there's a God who has planted his law within our hearts, then we ourselves have a personal question. We have not kept that law. I haven't, have you? Does it matter? The reason I believe the Old Testament is the word of God is that, from the very earliest, God began to teach people, when they were smitten in their conscience with a sense of the guilt of sin, that there is a way of forgiveness through a substitutionary sacrifice. He taught them, for instance, that when they were guilty before God, they could bring a lamb, perhaps, to the altar that God had ordained, and they laid their hands upon the head of the lamb and confessed their sin. And the lamb was killed, its blood shed. It was sacrificed upon the altar, and God laid it down as a principle that, without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.

That can sound hard when you first hear it but it is the prescription, the command, of a God of love. You see, if I get drunk and I drive my car at eighty miles an hour through your residential road, and I knock down your daughter and kill her, does it matter? When terrorists shoot people in Northern Ireland, does it matter? Or do we say, 'It's happened now, so we can forget it, brush it under the carpet'? Well, if I kill your daughter through my irresponsible behaviour, the God of heaven will never say it doesn't matter, for he loves your daughter, and he loves your daughter with an eternal love. He will never say that it didn't matter. Therefore, with God, forgiveness is not just agreeing to forget it. God has to uphold the values of his law, the values of his own heart. God himself says there's a payment to be made before that irresponsible man can be forgiven. And that's just what God was saying when he told the ancient people, and Israel in particular, that for forgiveness of sin, they were to bring a sacrifice and it would die in the place of the sinner.

Many people misunderstood that. They came to think of it simply as a fine. You did something wrong, 'Oh,' you said, 'that's going to cost me a penny or two. I shall have to go to the temple and hand in a sacrifice and then that will be the fine paid, and I shall be free to carry on until the next time.' It's like some people when they go down town and they're in a hurry to get to the bank before it closes. The only parking space is on double yellow lines, and they know they oughtn't to park there but they must have the money before the weekend. So they say, 'Oh, well, if I get caught, I'll pay,' and they park on the double yellow lines. When they come out, they've got a ticket and they pay the ticket. But there's no repentance in it, and if they're in a hurry the next time, they'll park on the double lines again. The fine is just a fine. And some people came to think about God's sacrifices like that. But they are not just fines.

There was a man called Cain in the Bible. He brought God a sacrifice, but God didn't accept it. Why not? Because Cain was wicked. He had no intention of repenting. For when God found fault with Cain and his sacrifice too, Cain showed his true colours and murdered his brother. His idea of sacrifice was just a kind of a fine that you paid God that allowed you to carry on as before, unrepentantly. That's not what God taught his people. God taught his people to know that, if they were trying for forgiveness, there must first be repentance, and if they truly repented, then God would forgive them, but would forgive them by showing them first that the penalty must be paid and a substitutionary sacrifice be found.

I was talking to some atheist scientists in faraway Georgia and Tbilisi just last year at Easter time. As we sat around the table, the matter came up of these Old Testament habits—the sacrifices in Israel and how they were taught about a substitutionary sacrifice. They said to me, 'What use was that, an animal dying for somebody's sins?' I said that in the end, it didn't do anything. 'Why then did God have the whole arrangement if it's impossible for bulls and goats to put away sin by laying down their lives on behalf of a sinner? What was the whole point of it?' And I used an illustration from my far-off youth.

I said I remembered when I was a little boy our parents gave us a toy shop. There was a toy cash register thing, and there were bottles of toy sweets, and there were bits of toy money, dressed up to look like real money. The girls kept the shop, being the bright ones amongst us, and they dished us out some toy money. We knew it wasn't real stuff. You couldn't buy real sweets with it but we went along and we ordered the sweets from the counter, and got the sweets and the necessary change. Our parents gave us that toy money game to teach us the value of things; that sweets don't just drop out of the sky: they have to be paid for. And though this was only toy money, and toy sweets, it was beginning to teach us the price of things, the cost of it, so that when we would go out into the real world, we might face the fact that things cost real money.

I love that Old Testament, for God in this fatherly way was educating people to face the fact that forgiveness of sins costs. Somebody's got to pay the price of it. The sheep and oxen they brought were the toy money but they pointed to the coming of the one that the Old Testament called God's anointed Messiah, God's own Son, who one day would come and pay in real money, the real cost of sin. Marvellous story that, isn't it? As I was telling the scientists about these things, and pointing out that the great sacrifice of Christ is the real thing—he paid it in full and it never needs to be done again—one of them, a mathematician, said to me, 'That's all right for him, he was the Son of God, but what about me? What can I pay?' And what a

lovely thing it was to be able to tell the mathematician he didn't have to pay anything, for when Christ died, he paid the cost of sin, the price of forgiveness, not for himself—he had never sinned—but for all the rest of us who would genuinely repent and put our faith in him. When John the Baptist said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world', he was now introducing the reality that God had been talking of, in his picture language to children, all down the centuries until the true sacrifice came.

It's not old-fashioned, for that speaks to you and me directly. We have sinned. One day we must meet our creator. We have to repent, but it's not enough to repent. Who shall pay the penalty of a broken law? Who shall pay the cost of forgiveness? How can I be forgiven and maintain my own standards let alone God's standards, and know that the forgiveness has been just? Here is God's answer, told again and again right through the Old Testament, through all its pages, and finding its fulfilment in the New. Wonderful book, this Old Testament. It was written centuries ago but God not only spoke centuries ago, he speaks still, through that Old Testament. It is alive with the living word of the living God. Do read it!

A message of hope

My final reason for believing the Old Testament is the word of God is that it offers us hope for the world. Therein it is different, say, from Hinduism which teaches us that history is just going round in circles, getting nowhere, and the best thing to do is to try and escape this world. The world itself is meaningless. 'No,' says the Bible. This is God's world, and God has a future for our world. He's going to judge the world, that is, administer it in righteousness. One day, says the Bible, this groaning creation is going to be delivered from her bondage to corruption, into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Oh, marvellous hope.

What is more, the Old Testament laid down the programme so that we could see this is not imagination. It predicted the programme in advance. It told of God's coming Messiah. It told us where he would be born—the prophet Micah said he would be born in Bethlehem (Mic 5). It told us that there would be a forerunner to come, preparing the way of the Lord. He came and his name was John the Baptist. It told how the Messiah would die for our sins, according to the Scripture. It told how he would be buried and raised again the third day. It told us that he would be raised to the very throne of God in heaven. And it told us there would then be a period between the Messiah's ascension and his coming again to put down his enemies and to rule in power and great glory. The Psalm which predicted it, said it like this—God talking to the Messiah, 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool' (Ps 110:1). It foretold these things. There is hope for our world.

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Does its successive journeys run,¹⁶

Oh what a glory it will be, and then the world will be ruled in justice.

¹⁶ Isaac Watts (1674-1748), 'Jesus shall reign' (1719).

He will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead. (Acts 17:31)

That glorious hope was written in the Old Testament, and the New Testament comments thus, 'Look, the Old Testament was saying about this programme, two things. It talked about how the Messiah would come and he would suffer first, and then he would enter his glory' (see Luke 24:25–27). And the New Testament says, 'Do you see how the first bit has already been fulfilled? The Messiah has come and he has suffered.' And as surely as that first bit has been fulfilled, so will the second bit be fulfilled. So that through the Scripture, through that Old Testament, we may be sure that we are not following a legend or a fable. Here is God speaking and laying down his plan so that we might compare events with the plan, and see how far we are along in the programme. Be assured by what's been fulfilled already that the rest will be fulfilled. The Old Testament: marvellous word of God to this present day.

I was in Jordan at the beginning of last year with a friend of mine and his wife who have gone there to be missionaries. He is a fully qualified dermatologist who had determined from his student days to study medicine to become a consultant so that he might go abroad as a doctor to some Islamic country, and there witness to the Lord Jesus. And now they're there, and he introduced me to some of his medical friends. They were nominally Muslims. One was very nominal, he didn't really believe anything. Another, a great and famous architect, was a delightful gentleman and a very devout Muslim. After dinner we fell to talking about all sorts of things. I asked them how they defined life, because most of them are doctors. They said, 'Well, we don't try. We leave that to God. Our job is to cure patients.'

Kind and sensible men they were, not aggressive at all. And as the conversation progressed they said, 'You know, we all believe the same thing, don't we? We all worship the same God, so don't let's fight about anything.' But they said, 'Of course, you've changed the Bible, haven't you?'

'Really? How have we changed the Bible?'

'Well, you've made the New Testament say that Jesus Christ died on the cross.'

'Yes, that's what the New Testament says.'

'Well, that's what you've changed. He didn't actually die on the cross. He was a prophet of God and God would never have allowed a prophet of his to die on the cross, so your Jesus didn't die on the cross at all. It's you who have changed it: you've changed the original New Testament.'

'Is that so?' (and I drew my little Bible out of my pocket). 'I'd like to read you something. This was written at least seven centuries before Jesus Christ was born. We Christians certainly didn't write it, and we certainly haven't changed it either. It was written by Jews and was written, as I say, about seven centuries before Jesus was born.'

And I read them those lovely verses from Isaiah:

He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (53:5–6)

And there came a silence over the room. Then the architect said, 'You're going to say that's Jesus, aren't you?'

'Well,' I said, 'not just yet. I will do later on, but not just yet! I'm just going to point out to you that we Christians didn't write this. It was written seven centuries before Jesus Christ was born and we Christians haven't changed it. But here was God telling the world what his plans were for the world's redemption, that one day his Messiah would come and he would die to bear our sins in his body that we might be forgiven and justified.'

Conclusion

These are just four reasons of mine. There are hosts of others why I believe the Old Testament is the word of God. I commend it to you. God give you the wisdom and the grace, and the courage, and the strength to read it diligently, and hear the voice of your living creator talking to you in it.

And now, gracious God, we thank thee from our hearts, joyfully and gratefully, for this wonderful word that is the Old Testament Scripture. We thank thee for these holy men of God that spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. These are the words of eternal life, and we thank thee for them. Now, Lord, we come and we make, each one, his or her response to thee. Many of us long since came to the Saviour and believed. Now in these moments we affirm our faith, and coming to thee, blessed Lord Jesus, we confess thee again as the Son of God, the Lamb of God; the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us.

Now, Lord, we pray thy grace that, having believed, we may walk and behave and live to thy glory, ever progressing in thy word and in thy practical salvation, looking for thy coming and longing to be with thee. So speak to every heart here, and if some have no faith to affirm, grant that this night they may hear the living voice of the Son of God, and find the creative power of his word in their heart, as in true repentance and faith they might come to him, and pass from death to eternal life, and eternal friendship with thee. These things we ask as we commit ourselves to thee now, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Authenticity of the New Testament Records

The central message

Once more, a very good evening to you. Last night I spent the time of our lecture giving four, what I regard as substantial, reasons why I believe the Old Testament to be the word of God. Tonight I wish to turn to the New Testament itself and I begin by pointing out that it cannot possibly be regarded as an exaggeration to say that if the central message of the New Testament is true, then the New Testament is the most important book in all the world, in all the centuries of human history. For the central message of the New Testament is this, that about two thousand years ago, the creator of the universe—he who is called the Word of God, who in the beginning was with God and what God was, the Word was; that person in whom was life and through whom all things were made—that Word became human in the person of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Our Lord Jesus Christ was therefore verily human and yet, being verily human, he was verily God, both man and God, and absolutely both.

The message of the New Testament is then that he lived here on earth, a sinless life, for about thirty-three years. He died, crucified on a cross, put there by the malevolence of the world. But according to the New Testament, he was put there by God's own design and purpose so that he might offer an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world and become, as a later apostle puts it, the propitiation not only for our sins, that is the sins of Christians, but for the sins of the world (1 John 2:2). The New Testament's message is that, when he died, he died in accordance with the Old Testament Scriptures which had forecast and predicted that God would send a Saviour into the world—God's perfect servant and anointed Messiah who would be wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities and would pour out his soul unto death. Yet, in spite of that, and after it, he would prolong his days and would see the travail of his soul and be satisfied (see Isa 53). The New Testament therefore records as an historical fact that three days after Jesus died and was buried, he rose again bodily from the grave, and forty days thereafter, ascended into heaven. That same Jesus, according to the central message of the New Testament shall one day come again, and he shall judge both the living and the dead. If that be true, and I believe it is, there can be no exaggeration to say that the New Testament is the most important book that has ever been written in the whole history of mankind.

The writers

When we look at it more closely, we find that the New Testament is written by a number of authors. They each claim to be contemporaries of the same Lord Jesus Christ. Some of them,

like Matthew, John and Peter, claim to have been his disciples from the very beginning of his public ministry, and to have followed him around Palestine, faithfully and closely observing his behaviour, listening to his teaching, and witnessing his crucifixion. Not only were they his contemporaries, but many of them will say that they saw the Lord Jesus after he was raised from the dead. Two of them, Paul who came to be a Christian apostle, and Luke, the great historian of the New Testament, will not claim that they saw Jesus Christ before he was crucified. But Paul will tell us that, after Jesus Christ rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, he personally appeared to Paul and Paul stakes his reputation for truth on this claim that he personally saw the Lord Jesus after he rose from the dead.

Luke, the great historian of the early church, tells us that he was a travel companion of Paul, and had opportunity closely to investigate the early written records of the life of Christ and, more importantly, to interrogate those who had been eye witnesses of the Lord Jesus. Luke likewise claims that these events of which the New Testament talks, can be dated in history. Like a good Hellenistic historian, when he comes to write his Gospel, he gives us the synchronisms of the birth and life and death of Christ, with the contemporary history of the first century AD. In his first chapter, Luke tells us that Mary the mother of our Lord, and his reputed father, Joseph, were living up in the north of the country at the time when the birth of Christ drew near. But they were obliged, nonetheless, to go to Bethlehem by a census decreed by Augustus, the first emperor in the Roman Empire. He tells us then, in chapter 3, that in the fifteenth year of the reign of the next emperor, Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate was then governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother, Philip, tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias, tetrarch of Abilene. Those are the Gentile rulers, and then at the same time Annas was the high priest, and Caiaphas also, among the Jews. And it was at that time in history that the word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah in the wilderness, that John whom we call John the Baptist, who was the forerunner of Jesus the Messiah.

Luke likewise tells us that it was under the governorship of Pilate that our Lord was crucified. And all through his Acts of the Apostles, he will date the various stories that he relates by contemporary history. The point is then that the New Testament is making these prodigious claims for Jesus of Nazareth and, in recording them, these writers of the New Testament are claiming to be contemporary writers and to be writing history, not myth. What then shall we say? We obviously cannot treat these great documents simply as historical documents, because no other historical document makes such a tremendous claim. There have been many who, faced with the claims of the New Testament in this last one hundred and fifty years, have said that they frankly cannot believe that the account was written by men who were contemporary with Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

The dating and authenticity of the New Testament books

They have claimed that the books of the New Testament were written either late in the first century or in the second century; and some even claim that one or two of them were written in the third century. In other words, many nowadays will claim that the New Testament documents are not authentic. They claim to have been written by contemporaries of Christ: they were not. They claim to have been written in the first century AD: if they were, it was

very late in the 80s or 90s, perhaps, but more likely in the second century. And, therefore, what we have in these New Testament documents is not history but legend, or even worse, myths. Our answer to that may begin at the ground floor. Let us think, to start with, about the New Testament documents simply as documents. The first thing we have to remind ourselves about these documents is that we do not possess the originals. We do not possess the autographs, as they are technically called, written by Matthew or Mark or Luke or John or Paul. What we do have, from early times onwards, are copies of these originals and they were written out by hand. That is why we refer to them by the Latin term *manuscript* which means, as we know, 'written by hand'.

The dating of the early manuscripts

So we have copies of these manuscripts. Our first question will be, are they authentic copies? Do they give us what the original authors originally wrote? That we shall deal with in a subsequent evening. More pressing is the question, do these manuscripts give us reason to think that the originals were not written in the first century, but were only written later in the second or third centuries? So what about the dating of these manuscripts: how soon after the originals were they written? That is what we shall think about now in the first part of our lecture. But I want to begin by giving you some standard of comparison so that you may judge these things for yourselves. So, instead of talking about the manuscripts of the New Testament, I'm going to talk first about some of the classical authors and the manuscripts we possess of their work.

Let me then say quite honestly that I'm prejudiced. I cannot myself claim to be an expert in the manuscripts and the textual criticism of the New Testament. My particular field has been as a professional classicist. From the tender age of ten, I began to study the so-called classics in Latin, and at twelve, I began the study of Greek. Through my life, professionally, it has been my happy pleasure to teach the classical authors. I am not a theologian as you have already guessed. I am a classicist by profession, and I used to both read and teach these classical authors. At the same time, my special expertise lay in the manuscripts of the Old Testament, and the questions of the validity of the text and what the original text of the Old Testament would have been. Within that field, the special interest I had was in the tradition of the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament. That began to be made about the year 270 BC. That in turn led me on to think about the manuscripts found in the Judean desert at Qumran and in other places in the Judean hills—the so-called 'Dead Sea Scrolls'. That then was my expertise, first of all in classics, and then in the texts of the Old Testament.

Some classical authors

Of course, the question of texts of the Old Testament and dealing with manuscripts, brings one very near to the manuscripts of the Bible and of the classical authors. So let's spend a little time thinking about these classical authors, and take dear old Caesar. Pity school boys and girls nowadays who are not taught to read the exciting stories of Julius Caesar and his Gallic War, and how he came across the Channel and beat up us poor English! Mercifully, he didn't get to the Irish, but many a schoolboy found it exciting to read his accounts of battles and slaughterings of Britons and Welsh! Nobody ever doubted that there was a Julius Caesar. No one ever doubted, as he was reading the text of Julius Caesar's records whether in translation

or in Latin, that he was reading substantially what Julius Caesar originally wrote. No classical scholar that I was ever aware of questioned the fact.

But think now about the manuscripts. Caesar was writing somewhere about 58–50 BC and we're going to ask two questions about the manuscripts. First, how many have survived? When we try to construct Caesar's text, how many manuscripts have we got—so that we can compare one with another in order to come to what he originally wrote? Secondly, what is the oldest one of any use that we possess? And we shall be going to ask the same questions for some other classical authors.

Well, the first question: how many manuscripts of Caesar survive? You may be interested to know there are nine or ten manuscripts of Caesar. And the oldest copy surviving? It's about nine hundred years later than the time of Caesar. That's a big enough gap in anybody's calendar, isn't it? Nine hundred years between the oldest surviving copy of Caesar's Gallic War and the original that Caesar wrote. In spite of the fewness of the manuscripts that have survived, and in spite of that enormous gap between the earliest manuscripts and Caesar's original work, I do not know of any professional classical scholar who would doubt that we now have what Caesar originally wrote.

Take the great Roman historian, Livy. He lived from about 59 BC to AD 17. He wrote 142 books of history. The number of books surviving in manuscript form, not more than about twenty, and the oldest copy are fragments of books three to six, written in the fourth century AD, that's in the AD 300 period. So the gap between the originals and our oldest copy is about three hundred years. I repeat, for him too, I don't know of any classical scholar who would doubt the authenticity of the manuscripts—that they truly represent what Livy wrote. Or take the famous historian, Tacitus. He composed both 'Histories' and then what are called *the Annals*. He wrote about AD 100. Tacitus is interesting because although he was a pagan Roman and completely out of sympathy with Christians, he bears witness to the fact that Jesus Christ was put to death under Pontius Pilate—a very interesting external witness to the historicity of the story of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. He wrote fourteen books of Histories and sixteen books of Annals, only four and a half survive of the fourteen books, and only ten survive in full of the sixteen books. Now look at the gap. The text survives in only two manuscripts, one of them from the ninth century AD and one of the eleventh century AD. I repeat, I don't know of any classical historian who, on those grounds, would doubt the authenticity of the manuscripts of Tacitus.

Then look at Thucydides. With him, we're going back to the centuries before Christ. He composed about 460–400 BC. Regarded by classicists as a very important history, Thucydides is reckoned to be perhaps the first scientific historian. His surviving manuscripts are eight. There are a few first century fragments, little to talk about, but the earliest manuscript in full is about AD 900. The gap is 1,300 years. I repeat once more, I don't know of any classical historian who doubts the authenticity of these manuscripts or the fact that Thucydides, the historian, wrote the original 1,300 years before. If you can bear some of those figures in mind we can now use them as a kind of a yardstick when we consider the records, the manuscripts, of the New Testament, and compare them with the manuscripts of the ancient Greeks and Romans. (The figures are summarized in the table below and, for ease of comparison, the corresponding figures for the New Testament writers are included.)

Number and age of some 'classical' manuscripts

Classical Author	Originally Written	No. of Manuscripts	Date of Earliest Manuscript	Approximate 'Gap', in Years
Julius Caesar	58–50 BC	9–10	c AD 850	900
Livy	59 BC–AD 17	20	c AD 450	300
Tacitus	AD 100	2	9 th cent AD 11 th cent AD	800 1000
Thucydides	460–400 BC	8	c AD 900	1300
<i>New Testament</i>				
Gospels	AD 65–90	5366 manuscripts	AD 350 (Codex	c 300 (max)
Epistles	AD 48–65	but 20,000+ when other documents included	Vaticanus & Codex Sinaiticus)	

The number of New Testament manuscripts

According to Professor Bruce Metzger in his most helpful volume, *Manuscripts of the Greek Bible*¹⁷, the total number of manuscripts of the New Testament number 5,366. If you'll notice the number, our New Testament manuscripts are vastly bigger than the number of the manuscripts of the classical Roman and Greek writers. Not only do we have 5,366 manuscripts direct of the New Testament, but we have quotations in the early church fathers who lived in the second and third centuries, that's in the AD 100s and AD 200s. In their writings we have quotations of the New Testament which are so numerous and so widespread that they are sufficient to reconstruct the whole of the New Testament except eleven verses. So if we didn't have these 5,000+ manuscripts of the New Testament, we would still be able to reconstruct from the writings of the church fathers virtually the whole of the New Testament. And, of course, the number of manuscripts of the early church fathers are abundant.

Then we have early translations of the New Testament into other languages—Syriac, Latin, Bohairic, Sahidic, and so forth. And the number of those manuscripts is very large indeed. Putting them all together—the direct manuscripts of the New Testament and all these other manuscripts—it is reckoned that the total manuscript evidence of the New Testament will number over 20,000 manuscripts. As far as numbers go, the amount of evidence for the New Testament from the manuscripts is overwhelmingly greater than that for the classical authors. Classical scholars regard the manuscripts of the classical authors as numerous enough to give us confidence that they are authentic copies of what the original authors wrote, and that they are authentic in the sense that they point to these authors, their reality, their historicity; they were actual men who actually lived at the dates they claimed. If classical scholars find no ground for questioning that on the grounds of the fewness and the lateness

¹⁷ Bruce M. Metzger, Oxford University Press, Inc., 1981.

of the manuscripts of the classical authors, we Christians have no reason to doubt the authenticity of the New Testament manuscripts.

The age of the New Testament manuscripts

But it is not only the number of them. I ask you now to look at the age of some of them. Perhaps the earliest manuscript that has survived of the New Testament is *Papyrus 52*, so called. You can see a photograph of the pieces of the manuscript in Bruce Metzger's book. They are just a few small fragments, held in the John Rylands Library in Manchester. They are fragments of the Gospel of John and are the earliest known fragments of the New Testament. According to Bruce Metzger, these pieces were written between AD 100–150, and are actual manuscripts. Of course, if you went there, you'd have to ask to see them, and you wouldn't be allowed to touch them. These pieces of manuscript, therefore, are nearly 1,900 years old. So what do we conclude from that? Well, we conclude this at least, that those scholars—and there were many of them at the end of the last century who said that the Gospel of John wasn't written by the Apostle John and it wasn't even written in the first century AD but much later in the second century—have been proved completely wrong, for here is a copy of the Gospel of John. The latest time at which it was written would be about AD 150. It could have been written as early as AD 100.

Now, let me put a question to you. This is not the original: it was copied from another manuscript. Can you tell me how old that other manuscript was? Well, it could have been almost brand new, but you couldn't be surprised if that manuscript from which this was copied was 30 years old. If this one has survived for 1,900 years, it wouldn't be difficult to believe that the manuscript from which this was copied could have been 30 years old, or maybe even 50 or 80 years old. And if it was 50 or 80 years old, according to what you date it, the manuscript from which this was copied could have been written when the Apostle John was still alive. That isn't bad going—getting back to the Apostle John in two steps.

The next very interesting New Testament manuscript is what is called *Papyrus 46*, better known by its family name, the *Chester Beatty Papyrus*. This papyrus is housed in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin and is Dublin's chief claim to fame—nothing to do with horses or Guinness or anything like that! This famous manuscript is quite substantial—86 leaves of the Epistles of Paul, written about AD 200. So it's a bit younger than those first fragments in Metzger's book. There are scholars who believe it could have been written much earlier, but we'll keep to the more conservative view, written about AD 200. It is a very, very early collection of some of Paul's letters. They're not in the order that you'll find them in your modern Bibles. If you could see that manuscript at close quarters you would notice that right after the last verse of the Epistle to the Romans there comes the title of the next book in the manuscript, and it says *Pros Ebraious*, meaning 'To the Hebrews'. In this collection of manuscripts, Hebrews comes immediately after Romans, and if you were to read on, you'd find that Ephesians comes before Galatians.

Incidentally, all the theologians present who are biblical scholars will be interested to see that about the year AD 200 somebody collected many of Paul's letters together; and obviously thought that the Epistle to the Hebrews was written by Paul and put them together. I'm not quite sure what the theologians will say about that, but the writer has long since gone to

heaven! But there they are, this great batch of around 80 leaves of the epistles of Paul—not all of Paul's Epistles, but some of them. There are two other big batches belonging to that same Chester Beatty collection and between them they cover most of the New Testament. They were written a little bit later, perhaps by the AD 250s, as best they can be judged.

But once more I want you to think with me about the implications of these manuscripts. You won't be allowed to touch them but you can go and see them. (I know that every Christian who goes to Dublin, particularly those who believe in the inspiration of holy Scripture, doesn't go to the rugby matches but to the Chester Beatty Library, and of course all of you have been there, but I'm just reminding you!) That first manuscript collection, written about AD 200, is now therefore about 1,800 years old. It's not an original, it is a copy. If this manuscript has survived for 1,800 years, how old was the manuscript from which this was copied? It wouldn't be difficult to think that the manuscript from which this was copied could have been 150 years old. And if that were so, it would bring us right down to the time of Paul the apostle.

The New Testament codices

It is not then simply the number of manuscripts, though that is exceedingly impressive, it is also the age of some of the oldest fragments and considerably large portions of the New Testament. The first complete New Testament that has survived is the famous Codex Sinaiticus, found by Tischendorf in St Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai Peninsula. It is dated not much later than AD 360. That's a gap of about 300 years between the time of Paul, say, and this manuscript. You say, 'Isn't that a little bit difficult to be happy about?' Well, you will remember what you saw in the table of classical manuscripts, that the gap between Thucydides, the Greek historian, and the first surviving copy, apart from a few fragments, was 1,300 years. It's still regarded as absolutely reliable. And the same applies with the gap between Caesar and the first copy of his Gallic War, which was 900 years. That doesn't worry any classical scholar. There's no need to be worried by this either, and on a subsequent evening, when we turn to talk of these things, we shall see why we have no need to be worried that the first complete copy of the New Testament which has survived, is dated about AD 360.

To be fair to other scholars, I just remind you before we pass on, that a German scholar by the name of Professor Peter Thiede has claimed that three fragments of the Gospel of Matthew that are in Magdalen College, Oxford, were written not later than AD 50. Now, if that dating is true, of course, it is right to the time of Matthew. It would upset a good many theological theories, and, as you may expect, most theologians of the New Testament are against Professor Thiede and want to retain the traditional date of somewhere about AD 80. He has a powerful case. Professor Stanton of London has written a whole book to try and prove him wrong which, unfortunately, he published before Thiede had the chance to publish the final evidence and the photographic evidence. But the matter is still disputed. I only mention it in passing: if you're interested in these things, do get hold of a copy and read it.

The same Professor Thiede has joined forces with Professor O'Callaghan of Barcelona in Spain. Years ago, when the Dead Sea Scrolls were first discovered, Professor O'Callaghan claimed that there were certain fragments in one of the caves that were fragments of the Gospel of Mark. He was about the only scholar who believed they were. They are very tiny fragments. He also claimed that others could have been taken as fragments of New Testament

manuscripts. The implication of that would be that those manuscripts, if they were found in that area of Qumran, wouldn't have been written later than about AD 50. More recently, Professor Thiede has written a book¹⁸ in which he gives his support wholeheartedly to O'Callaghan, and adduces much more forensic evidence for the case. Just last year, I was talking to Professor Tov from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, who nowadays is Chairman of the publication committee of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Professor Tov mentioned the fact to me that there were these manuscripts and some scholars were claiming that they could be small fragments of very early New Testament manuscripts. And Professor Tov, as far as I could understand his drift, was quite prepared to think that they might well have been manuscripts of the New Testament. That is an interesting discussion which is going on. We shall doubtless hear more about it in the days to come.

The historical accuracy of the New Testament records

So, with that, we have made comment on the manuscripts of the New Testament as to their number and their age and we have considered the validity, the authenticity of the manuscripts. But that is only the first thing we have to consider. Suppose the New Testament was written by these men in the first century AD, and I believe it was, and they profess to be writing history. How can we check whether they were really accurate and reliable historians or whether they made a lot of the story up? Well, there is one way among many that we can check up on these men, and on Luke in particular. For Luke, throughout his history, mentions all kinds of Roman officials. For the emperors, he mentions Augustus and the next emperor, Tiberius; and he talks about Claudius; and he talks also about the Roman officials in various of the provinces. And we can check whether those people did exist, and certain other minute details about them, to know whether Luke has got it right or wrong.

Allow me to use an analogy. I want you to imagine the impossible: that you were living 5,000 years from now in the future! And suppose a book was discovered which claimed it was written in the year 1960 and the author said he was writing a history of the Second World War in Europe: he lived in the time of the Second World War and what he was writing to you was a genuinely historical account. But supposing as you read it, the historian said, 'I was living then so I'm telling you the truth. The leader of the German side in the Second World War was Kaiser Bill.' You say, 'Wait a minute, no, he's got it muddled up. Kaiser Bill was the leader on the German side in the First World War. The leader of the German side in the Second World War was Hitler.' And you read on, and the author says, 'The Germans nearly won, but there came the concluding victory, fought at Waterloo, and the chief general was Napoleon.' You say, 'This man says he was a contemporary but he's an obvious fraud. He could not possibly have been a contemporary with the ridiculous things he is writing.'

Luke claims to be writing contemporary history. He was a travel companion of the Apostle Paul, and in the course of Paul's travels, Paul came across various Roman officials in the different provinces. One of them, at Corinth, was an official by the name of Gallio. Now, for many years, historians had no record of Gallio's existence. They said Luke got it wrong: there

¹⁸ Peter Thiede, *The Jesus Papyrus*, 1994.

was no Roman official called Gallio in Corinth in Paul's time. And then archaeological evidence came to light, and there was a Gallio—and Luke had got it precisely right.

There's another very interesting matter with Roman officials. The Romans governed their empire by two systems. Some parts of the empire were governed by the Senate from Rome. Other parts of the empire were governed by the emperor directly. When the Senate governed, they appointed various people, generally called consuls, and then proconsuls, and so on. When the emperor ruled, he had a different set of titles for the men that represented him. In one province the man in charge could be called one thing, in the next province, he could be called a completely different thing. And if you strayed over the border and didn't realize where the border was, you could have got things horribly mixed up if you didn't know the facts. You could be calling one man a proconsul when he wasn't a proconsul. He wasn't a senatorial official, he was the emperor's official. He was a legate of the emperor, and so forth. In the different provinces, they had different names and, to make things complicated, sometimes a province would be ruled by the Senate and then the emperor would decide differently, and the emperor would take over—so the title of the man in charge was now different than what it had been a year ago.

How does Luke fare with all this kind of thing? Does he make the same mistake as our supposed historian thinking that the leader on the German side in the Second World War was Kaiser Bill, and get it all wrong? No, the very interesting fact is that, down to tiny details of the descriptions of the Roman officials, he gets it absolutely right every time. Only a contemporary who knew the thing because he lived in it would know exactly what the titles were at that particular time, and get it right. There are many other such possible tests of the historicity than of the New Testament historians.

Jesus Christ—fact or fiction?

But now we come to the much bigger and much more important thing. Suppose these men were then contemporary with Jesus Christ; suppose the manuscripts we have are authentic and they go back to copies of documents that were written in the first century. Suppose the manuscripts are authentic and they're copies of documents actually written by disciples of the Lord Jesus—Matthew and John and Peter, and his apostles like Paul and so forth. Suppose all that. How do we know that the central message of the New Testament is true? Those contemporaries could have got all the historical details right but then, when they start to talk about Jesus Christ, claim that he did miracles and claim that he rose from the dead—how do we know they weren't making it up? When they record his parables and his sayings, how do we know that, because they loved him, they didn't exaggerate and make it all up? It isn't enough, is it, just to say that the New Testament documents are authentic as documents; not enough to say that many of the writers were accurate historians? We have to ask, did they invent the story about Jesus and make it appear true by getting all the historical details right, but the character of Jesus, they made up? What would we say to that?

The Jesus 'character'

There are in world literature, characters who were invented by famous authors that almost live for you. For instance, Dickens' Scrooge so lives for us, doesn't he? We can almost hear the

chains of Marley's ghost rattling! And we call people Scrooges now, after Dickens' character Scrooge. But Dickens' character Scrooge wasn't an actual man: he was a description of a type of a man, that's all. You mustn't say, where exactly did Scrooge live; where would I have found him if I had been visiting the place? He's a made-up character. What about Jesus of Nazareth, is he a made-up character? Did Matthew invent him, or John, or Paul? That's the question we have to face. There's no brief answer, but just let me sketch in some of the main features of the answer.

First of all, if Peter, Matthew, Mark and John invented the character of Jesus, these men are world geniuses. Take it from a literary point of view. The parable of the Prodigal Son—what a marvellous parable that is. Whoever invented it was a genius. I'm talking now simply at the ground level of mere literary criticism. I've read a moderate amount of literature in my time, both ancient and modern. The man who invented the parable of the Prodigal Son was a sheer literary genius. Did Matthew invent that, an old civil servant? No disrespect to civil servants, but I mean to say that if Matthew invented it, he ranks as one of the leaders of world literature! Did Peter write it, a fisherman? You know the kind of Greek he wrote from his epistles. Did Paul invent the parable of the Prodigal Son? No, most unlikely.

And what about those famous replies? What a personality you find. That famous occasion in the court of the temple when the Sadducees and the Herodians thought they had Jesus cornered, and they said, 'Is it right to pay tax to Caesar or not?' They thought they had him cornered, whatever he said. If he said, 'Pay it to Caesar', all the right-wing zealots would rise up in protest, 'This is no Messiah.' And if he said, 'Don't pay it to Caesar', they would have reported him to the governor and got him executed for treason. They thought they'd got him cornered. Now, what a stroke of wisdom that was when he said, 'Show me a penny' (see Matt 22:17–22).

Or that other occasion when they thought they had him cornered, and they said, 'This woman was taken in adultery. Moses commanded she be stoned. What do you say?' And they thought if he said, 'Yes, stone her,' they'd report him again to the authorities. It was illegal for the Jews to stone anybody at that time. If he said, 'Don't stone her', they would have said, 'There you are, he's no true prophet. He doesn't stand up for Moses' law.' And the genius of his reply: as he stooped down and wrote on the ground, and lifting himself up, he said, 'He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone' (see John 8:3–11). If that's an invented character, then we'd better take John and Luke, and put them on the pedestal of the greatest inventors of a character that ever lived.

Jesus 'idealized'?

But it's not just the literary ability of Jesus of Nazareth or that sparkling personality: it is easy to show that he wasn't anybody's invention. People say that what the writers have done is to get an ideal figure and then represent Jesus as fulfilling that ideal figure—that Jesus was their ideal, or near enough, and as they wrote his history they attributed to him all the characteristics that they would have loved in their ideal figure. The actual Jesus would have been very different from the ideal figure that Matthew and Mark and Luke have depicted in their Gospels. What about that theory then?

Well, it's plain silly. For when you read the Gospels, Jesus is nobody's ideal figure. He claimed to be the Messiah. He came before Pilate and he came before Herod, and he was accused of being the king of the Jews. Herod had never heard anything so ridiculous and absurd in all his life, and he made a long joke of the whole thing. 'Ridiculous. Jesus of Nazareth—King of the Jews? Absurd.' He certainly wasn't the Romans' ideal figure. What about the Jews? Was he their ideal figure? Well, no. They weren't looking for a Messiah who got crucified. To them, he was an absolute scoundrel. Even his closest disciples were expecting that Jesus would raise an army and boot the Romans out, and sit himself on the throne of David, and lead the nation politically; and every one of them would have a wonderful Rolls-Royce chariot like the Romans did! They weren't thinking of a Messiah who got crucified, of course not. He was no ideal for the Jew, and remains not. They didn't invent the character, Jesus.

Was he the ideal of the Greeks, then? Far from it. Take, by way of contrast, all the philosophy of the Stoics—men that would face suffering without complaint and without flinching. Or take that great hero of Plato, Socrates, who went to his death calmly and drank the hemlock without any blood, sweat or tears. Compared that to a figure who sweat blood and shed tears in the garden of Gethsemane, and prayed, 'Oh, my God, let this cup pass from me.' And before he died, was heard to cry, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' Such a figure was no ideal either of Stoics or Epicureans or Platonists among the Greeks. He was not their idea of a hero.

Did the apostles invent this, then? Well, let the apostles tell you. Let Matthew tell you honestly, and Mark repeat it, and Luke say the same thing. The very apostles of Christ, as they stood in the garden, and the troops came to arrest the Lord Jesus, they would have defended him with the sword, and Peter tried it. Our Lord told Peter to put up his sword again into its sheath, and said, 'Don't you realize, Peter, I could call to my Father and he would give me twelve legions of angels, but then how should the Scripture be fulfilled?' (see Matt 26:47–56). And then, says Matthew, when they saw he was not prepared to fight; when they saw he was not prepared to call upon God's angels to come and work a miracle to deliver him; and when they saw he was going to give himself over to death, then all the disciples forsook him and fled. A Messiah that wouldn't save himself: how could he be the Messiah that could save Israel?

Jesus Christ was nobody's ideal. Let Paul tell you, the great missionary to Europe as he went around in the civilized cities of the Greek and Roman world. He did not preach Jesus the teacher of the Sermon on the Mount and its wonderfully high moral teaching, glorious as that was. He preached Christ and him crucified—to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks, absolute folly (1 Cor 1:23). Nobody's ideal. You may be utterly sure that the person of Jesus Christ that we encounter in the Gospels was not invented by the early Christians or even by the early church. That's a very important thing to observe.

Christ in resurrection

How then is he the Son of God? For the books tell us that he was not just human, but he was also divine, and we believe he's the Son of God. The evidence is that on the third day he rose again, which proclaimed him and demonstrated him to be the Son of God; and that forty days

thereafter he ascended into heaven. Of those things we must talk on another occasion, but it was when he rose from the dead that his apostles saw now clearly that he was indeed the Christ who had been prophesied in the Old Testament in such famous passages as Isaiah 53. God's anointed servant who would give his life a ransom for many. 'This is he who came by water and blood', says John (1 John 5:6). Not by water only, but by water and blood. He came that way. The only man who entered history, proclaimed as the one who came to die for the sins of the world. As John, his forerunner, heralded him, 'Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!' — the only one that ever claimed it (John 1:29).

I say to you tonight, you'll never be troubled by any other religious leader coming alongside you and saying, 'I'm your creator, and I was born, and I came into the world to die for you that you might be forgiven.' Only Jesus Christ will ever talk to you like that. You'll only have to decide the question once. If anybody else talked like that you would dismiss them as deranged. Was Jesus Christ deranged, do you suppose? How could you ever begin to think so, when it is through the teaching of Christ that millions have found peace, and mental and emotional stability, not to speak about the assurance of acceptance with God and eternal life. But strangely enough, and yet in the wisdom of God, this Messiah who was born to die for our sins, authenticates himself as the Son of God.

How is that? Well, forgive me telling you a long story. I was in Kiev about six years ago, just before Yeltsin came to power, and things were getting difficult in the Ukraine. I was invited to go to a state school in Kiev because the headmistress now felt she was free to ask people to come and talk about Christianity and indeed other religions. So she invited me along and she assembled the whole school and I was asked to talk to them about Christianity. 'Anything you like,' she said. 'The historicity of it, or anything at all.' So I talked to the school. I imagine they were shocked to hear somebody talk about religion in a Communist State school. After the lecture, the deputy headmistress, a very gracious, senior lady, came up to me and said, 'If I may ask a question, what do you think about UFOs—unidentified flying objects?'

I said, 'Madam, I don't think very much about them because we haven't had any our way. There are some reported sightings but the government said they were not the real thing, so I don't know what to think about them. But I believe you've had a lot down here, haven't you?'

'Yes,' she said, 'and the story is that the last one that came, the men got out of this spacecraft and they told the local people that Buddhism was the true religion, not Christianity. What do you say to that?'

In reply I told her that I had been in Japan recently and a Buddhist lady there had asked why we couldn't have both the Buddha and Jesus. So I explained to the deputy headmistress how I had answered that question. I said that, for me, I didn't much need religious leaders to tell me to be good. They can be helpful in defining what is good and what is bad, but on the whole I don't need to be told that I ought to be good. My trouble is not that I don't know I ought to be good. My trouble is that I haven't been good. The basic problem of all is that I have sinned against my own standards, let alone God's standards. How can I find forgiveness in such a way as to maintain my own standards and maintain God's standards? In Buddhism there is no such thing as forgiveness. Everybody has to bear their karma and its results. And you must go on bearing your karma. If you don't suffer enough in this life, you'll have to be

reincarnated and suffer again in the next life, until you've suffered enough to save yourself from being reincarnated again. I said, 'There's no forgiveness in Buddha so, for me, that doesn't enter into the equation. This is why I believe Jesus Christ because he meets my need. I am a sinner: I need forgiveness.'

Christ in personal experience

Here is the wonder about this figure we find in the New Testament. He claims to be God incarnate, our creator, become man, primarily that he might die for us that we might be forgiven.

There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin;
He only could unlock the gate
Of heav'n, and let us in.¹⁹

How do we know it's true? The great Bishop Handley Moule once said this: let me read you his words:

The gospel can never be proved except to a bad conscience. If 'bad' means 'awakened', the saying is profoundly true. But for a conscience sound asleep, we may discuss Christianity whether to condemn it or to applaud it; we may see in it an elevating programme for the race; we may affirm a thousand times from the Creed that God became flesh and there are thus, boundless possibilities for humanity. But the gospel, the power of God unto salvation, will hardly be seen in its own prevailing evidence until the student is first, and with all else, a penitent. The man must know for himself something of sin as a condemnable guilt, and something of self as a thing in helpless yet responsible bondage, before he can so see Christ given for us, and risen for us, and seated at the right-hand of God for us; as to be able to say 'there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus'.²⁰

How do you know a loaf of bread is authentic? When you get hungry, and the bread offers itself, you take it and you eat it, and you find it is all it claimed to be. Ladies and gentlemen, that in the end, is how you find Jesus Christ to be true.

Shall we pray.

Our Father, we thank thee for thy written word, and for every evidence of its authenticity and its credibility. We thank thee that it leads us to him who is thy spoken word to men, supremely so. And as we survey all the evidence for his truth, we bless thee for this above all, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. That God is love and thou hast shown thy love, not that we loved thee, but thou didst love us, and sent thy Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

¹⁹ Mrs C. F. Alexander (1818-1895), 'There is a green hill' (1848).

²⁰ Bishop Handley C. G. Moule (1841-1920).

So inform our minds by the facts that we have considered tonight, we beseech thee. In these closing hours of this day, draw near to our hearts and to our consciences, and make real to us Jesus Christ, man and God, and our Saviour—that we may embrace him and rejoice in his salvation. For his name's sake. Amen.

How Do We Know the Bible is God's Word?

Once more, a very good evening to you. If confession is good for the soul, let me begin by making confession to you honestly this evening. Tonight's lecture will be perhaps more detailed than any other hitherto and, therefore, somewhat more difficult to comprehend as it goes along. To make matters worse, through my own fault, I have no overhead projector slides tonight that could have diverted your attention occasionally. Therefore, I am prepared in the indulgence of my heart to make certain concessions to you. I often used to have to attend lectures at the dead of the afternoon period in my professional life. I found it very difficult to keep my eyes open. I hit upon a scheme, and that was to listen with my eyes shut; and the energy I saved by listening without trying to keep my eyes open, increased the energy I had to listen! I shall be quite happy if you adopt that technique this evening. If you are afraid to listen with your eyes shut, just in case you should inadvertently fall off to sleep, then I think I can help you there as well. If you give your name in to me now, when I see you going to sleep, I will call it out and you will be saved from being so desperately disappointed!

We do come to study a topic that is at the very basis of our Christian faith and the basis of our Christian witness for the Lord in this world. If it should strike you as overly technical, please remember that we are to love the Lord our God not only with all our heart and our strength, and our soul; but we are to love him with all our minds — with every centimetre of intellect and brain power that he has given us. So tonight we are to consider that basic belief that all Scripture, both Old and New Testament, is the inspired word of God in the sense that, to use a famous phrase, 'what Scripture says, God says'.

Last night we were thinking of the authenticity of the New Testament documents, that they were genuine copies of originals that were written in the first century AD. And then we went further and said these writers who wrote the original documents claim to be more or less contemporary with our Lord, and claimed to be writing history. And we considered one or two of the tests that we could apply to them to establish whether, in fact, they were accurate historians. Then we came to the very central message of the New Testament itself, relating to the question of who Jesus Christ of Nazareth is. We asked ourselves whether this Jesus Christ and the character that is represented in the New Testament was an invention of the New Testament writers. Was he some ideal figure? Did they build up their history of Jesus Christ, representing the carpenter from Nazareth in these glowing terms as though he were some ideal figure?

We found overwhelming evidence that that is not so. Jesus was no-one's ideal, not even the ideal of the Jews, not even the ideal of his disciples when they knew him here on earth. So much so that when he refused to resist arrest and allowed himself to be crucified, all his

disciples forsook him and fled. And when they went out to preach the gospel, then their central message was this, 'We preach Christ and him crucified.' They preached it in the face of the knowledge that the world around, both Jew and Gentile, would find that message offensive. They preached it nonetheless, and proved as they did so that the message of a crucified and risen Christ, though offensive and folly and a scandal to men, proves in actual practice to be the power of God unto salvation, to everyone who believes.

The inspiration of Scripture

Having got that far, I want now to think with you tonight on Scripture. Not only does it present the Lord Jesus to us as the Son of God—and we have evidence indeed that he is as he claimed to be—but we are to think tonight of the claim that every Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, is given by inspiration of God and is profitable. That has been the traditional belief of Christians and the Christian church all down the centuries. Unitedly, they stood on it for 1,600 years or more until the days of the *Enlightenment* came, and the temperature and atmosphere began to change. Instead of submitting the mind to holy Scripture, men began to argue that their proper approach was for men to be sceptical about Scripture, and believe nothing until, by the use of their critical faculty, they could prove Scripture true. So men began to sit in judgment on Scripture, not merely to study it rigorously and use the power of the mind to try to understand it with the help of God, as we are called upon to do. Belief in the inspiration of Scripture does not mean that we don't have to study. It is the very reverse. If we believe that Scripture is the word of God, then it implies that we ought to study it with every ounce of energy and intelligence that God may give to us, precisely because it is God's word.

But from the *Enlightenment* onward, a rationalistic attitude began to prevail, particularly in our universities. More recently that spread to many a Bible college, in which men come not in the attitude of faith but in the attitude of scepticism, prepared not to believe, unwilling to believe until their critical scepticism is satisfied. The result has been devastating in Christendom. To put it succinctly, Leslie Newbigin, himself a liberal but with a great estimate of the word of God, put it this way to his intellectual colleagues: 'In our private bedrooms or study, in our devotion, we approach Scripture in faith and on our knees. When we come to our academic study of Scripture, we approach it not in faith, but in doubt and in scepticism.' It's like looking at a thing through double perspective glasses, and it blurs the vision. So it does indeed.

I had a Romanian staying with me for parts of three university terms just two years ago. He was one of a number of younger men in Romania who are tired of listening to sermons just on one little verse of Scripture. They have come to love the exposition of the word of God as it is written—in whole books. In the many assemblies and churches where they follow this method, let me tell you what they do. The Sunday morning is a three-hour period when the whole church meets. The first hour is spent in the worship of the Lord. The second hour is spent in a controlled discussion, as the elders and teachers in the church have a discussion in full view of all the members of the assembly as they consider the meaning of a passage in the book. And the third hour is spent when some preacher or teacher expounds that passage of Scripture. They mean business in that Romanian church, and the Romanian churches like it.

Then, in case there are others who like to take it a bit further, on Monday night they have another three-hour period to expound and study the Scripture. They get as many as two thousand attending it, because the place is a university city and people want to know.

As they study holy Scripture, they tell me that unconverted people come in—hard-boiled atheists and Communists—and they get caught by Scripture. They have been brought up to believe that Scripture is a lot of old fables and legends, with nothing to say except silly stories for children. Unknown to them, what they're discovering is that this is the word of the living God, and it is the living God who is speaking to them in Scripture, and dealing with their problems, talking sense, and talking stuff that's relevant to their day and generation. They come, and they come again, and they get converted. Would God, here in the West, that we had a belief in the inspiration of holy Scripture like those Romanians do.

I can tell you where that young man and several others got their first taste of Scripture. It was because certain dear men of God, convinced of the value of the word of God, in the bad old days when it was dangerous in Romania, used to get themselves across the border by one means and another. They would go along to various assemblies and ask the elders, 'Have you anybody here that could profit from rigorous, systematic study of Scripture?' And quietly and secretly, men would be chosen out, and they would go off in secret, sometimes in the depths of the winter, up to the tops of the mountains, in the remote forests where no-one would know they were there, not even the forest rangers. And with deep snow upon the ground, they would live in tents. They wouldn't be allowed to know the names of the men who were visiting them from the West to teach them the word of God in case they got caught, and they could be tortured into confessing who the men's names were. There, in those conditions, they sought God and studied his word. It's no wonder that they've come to love it, and proved it to be the word of the living God; and now seek to study it with all their might and main, and lead the assemblies and churches into a similar study.

I think it is sometimes a pity, and it certainly shocks the Romanians when they come to our assemblies and find a mere twenty-five minutes apportioned to the preaching of the word; and people complaining if it goes on any longer. They open their eyes and mouth in astonishment. This good man of whom I speak was advised by some of his fellow Romanians that he ought to get a university degree in theology because it would help him in his relations with the government nowadays in Romania. Against his will, he came and took a degree through a certain Bible college. The degree was a degree from my own university from the department of theology, of which I am not a member. In his innocence, he thought coming to a Western Bible College would be marvellous. 'A whole year studying the Bible,' said he to himself. What disappointment he did discover. The course through the Bible College had little study of the Bible. It was the rigorous study of all the rationalistic theories that have been propounded since the middle of the last century. Granted, he was given the answers to all the rationalism in them, or some attempted answer, but he had to know it off by heart. He had to read so much of that stuff, he had very little time to read the Bible. He pleaded with the authorities of the Bible College, 'Why will you not change your syllabus? Instead of studying all this rationalist nonsense as the basis of your programme, why can't you start with teaching the Bible, and then deal with the criticisms of the critics as they come along?'

It's high time in the churches that we got back to a belief that Scripture is the word of God. The famous text which is our leading text this evening comes from Paul's second letter to Timothy.

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. (2 Tim 3:16)

All believers believe the first bit of the verse — that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, as the King James Version expresses it. They would go to the stake for that belief; but I'm not sure that we believe the next bit quite so much — that all Scripture is profitable for teaching. When did you last hear Chronicles expounded? May God give us not only a firmer grasp on the fact that all Scripture is inspired of God, but a very deep conviction that all Scripture is profitable for teaching.

Where then do we come to this belief, on what does it rest, that all Scripture is the word of God, such that, if God opened heaven this very night and talked to us, he would speak nothing else than what he has written in his word? I find the belief that this is the word of God a tremendous incentive to study. I don't know about you but I find it hard to try and think through particularly some of the less common books of holy Scripture. I read them and find myself knocking my head against the wall and getting nowhere fast. So I tell the Lord about it, and I say, 'Lord, I see what you've written, but I just don't get the point of it. Please show me the point of it.' I talk to the Lord because I do believe that if God opened heaven and spoke to me, here and now, he would speak what he has spoken in his book. We need to get hold of the fact that this is God's love letter to his people. It's the way he courts us. Don't be disappointed, you young folks.

I've often wondered what it would be like if the Lord Jesus came to dinner, like he came to Martha and Mary's house. What would you talk about if the Lord came to dinner? There he would be seated and, of course, the dinner would be the most marvellous dinner you'd ever put on! But what would you talk about?

'Lord, it's been a beautiful day today. The weather has been good.'

'Yes, it has, my child. I made it.'

'It's better than yesterday's weather. It rained a lot yesterday, Lord.'

'Yes, I know, I'm omniscient.'

'Have you read any good books recently?'

'Well, I wrote a lot. And what did you think of Leviticus, chapter 16?'

What would you say? For you know our Lord had the most embarrassing of habits when he was here on earth. In the midst of a conversation or an argument, he'd suddenly say, 'Have you not read what David did?' It would be embarrassing to say, 'No, Lord, I haven't read that bit. Where does that come?'

'That comes in Samuel, my child.'

'Oh, yes, well, I don't find that interesting. I find that a little bit boring.'

'You do? But I wrote it.'

What on earth are you going to talk to the Lord about, in heaven?!

This is not merely a book of instructions. This isn't just like our car manuals. I've got a car manual. I never read the thing except when the car goes wrong, and then I find it mighty

difficult to find any place that would tell me how to put it right. But anyway, I read it when things go wrong, to know the instructions how to put it right. But I tell you now, I don't take it to bed with me, to read this beautiful thing, and feel a song in my heart when I've read it! It sometimes is possible to treat the Bible like a car manual. These are the instructions. You need to read them now and again to keep you on the right lines, but not other than that. But it's more than that. I repeat, it's God's love letter. It forms a conversation with us as it did for the two disciples as the Lord walked with them on the road to Emmaus, and beginning from Genesis round to Malachi, he expounded in all the Scripture the things concerning himself.

The basis of our belief that the Bible is the word of God

So then what is the basis for this belief that this is the word of God—the word of the living God to us? I suggest to you that as far as we Gentiles are concerned, we have two major witnesses for this belief that the Bible is God's word. The first of them is Jesus Christ our Lord himself. And, secondly, it is what the Bible says about itself, for the Bible not only tells us what God says about sin, about salvation and about the Saviour, but the Bible also from time to time speaks about itself. It describes itself as the written word of God, and says things about its inspiration, and its revelation and its authority. But being a Gentile, I personally put our blessed Lord himself as our first witness to the inspiration of Scripture.

Now, there is a practical problem. Let me put it this way if I can. You're trying to witness to your unconverted friend. You want him to read about the Lord Jesus, and you take to him the Bible and you say, 'The Bible says this, that and the other,' and he says, 'But I don't believe the Bible.' So what do you say then? Do you say, 'Oh, well, there's no use going any further, because unless you first read the Bible, you can never come to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. You've first got to believe the Bible.' Is it that way round? You first have to believe the Bible before you believe that Jesus is the Son of God?

No, that isn't the way round, actually, and you can see that if you watch the apostles going about their preaching and evangelization in the Roman and the Greek world. It was a different thing when they came to the synagogues of the Jews where, of course, the Jews already believed the Bible was the word of God, so they preached them the Bible. But when they went, say, to Athens, and stood on Mars Hill, they didn't even mention the Bible. You say, they were a bad, ungodly lot! If we'd had the chance to get on Mars Hill, we would have started by saying our first hymn is number so-and-so, and then we'd have a prayer, and then the announcements, and then a second hymn!! And the dear Areopagites would have been a little bit perplexed, wouldn't they? 'Now, let us turn to the book of Proverbs.' They wouldn't know what on earth you were talking about.

But the apostles didn't say, 'First you have to believe the Bible.' They said, 'We're here as the inspired and authoritative witnesses of the Messiah, and we want to tell you about Jesus. The God who made the world has sent his Son, and he was crucified, and he's now risen from the dead, and God has given witness in raising him from the dead that one day there will come a day of judgment, and this Jesus Christ is going to be the judge.' That's how they began. And through the power of the Holy Spirit, preaching through them and witnessing to the Lord Jesus, his death and his resurrection, people got converted. And because they thus came to believe Jesus is the Son of God, now risen from the dead, then they believed what the Lord

Jesus said about the status of holy Scripture. That's the way round it was. And if you were to ask me, 'Why do you believe Jesus is the Son of God?', I believe it because my mum and dad told me so. But, of course, since then, I've come to my own personal faith. And the first reason I believe that the Bible is the word of God is because Jesus said it is. I believe him.

There are a lot of people who profess to believe in Jesus Christ but they don't accept that the Bible is inspired. That is a major problem within Christendom, but it is utterly illogical to profess to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and then to refuse to believe what he himself said about holy Scripture. Then when we look at Scripture itself, both Old and New Testaments, it constantly professes to be the word of God, spoken and written. To help us understand the principles involved, I want us to get hold of three words, and then briefly to try and see why they are distinct, but all of them are related to this question of faith that the Bible is the word of God.

The first word is *revelation*. I mean, not the book of the Revelation, but the act of revealing. The Bible is God's revelation to men. God has revealed himself. And then the second term is *inspiration*. We believe the Bible is inspired by God, and the men who wrote it were inspired by God. The third term is *authority*. What authority has the Bible? The authority of the Bible, we shall find, rests on the first two things—the fact that it is the revelation made by God himself to us; and the fact that it is inspired of God.

You could put it this way round, if you like, to see the difference. When God revealed himself to men—his prophets and apostles—God was communicating to them something they could not have known unless God himself revealed it to them. That's what God revealed to his holy apostles and prophets. But then came the second step. Those holy apostles and prophets were meant to speak what they had learned by revelation. They were meant to write down what they had heard from God by his revelation. How could God secure that what those men had been shown would now be spoken exactly as God wanted it to be spoken or that it would be written down exactly as God wanted it to be written down? God had revealed these truths to them: now it was a question of their taking that truth and passing it on by word of mouth, or by writing. To ensure that that should be done exactly as God wanted it, God inspired them. And that led to the authority of God's word spoken and God's word written.

Revelation

So let's get hold first of this idea of revelation. We need to get hold of it because it will answer for us the taunt of many a sceptic. It's many centuries now since a sceptic once laughed at believers in God and said, 'Just look at them. They think they've discovered God. All they've done is to invent something out of their own minds and you can see that their God is something that they have invented because they picture God like a super-duper human being, sitting up there in the sky.' And they said, 'If elephants thought about these things and claimed to have found God, they would represent God as a mighty, great, super-duper elephant, and that would show that the elephants thought it up themselves. That men think of God as a super-duper human being up in the sky, shows that men invented the idea.' What's the answer to that? Well, the answer to that is to admit, first and foremost, indeed to point it out to your sceptical friend, that men could not by their searching find out God. The

Bible itself says it. We could know nothing at all about God by thinking, however hard we might try, unless God first revealed himself. Listen to how the Lord Jesus spoke on that issue.

No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. (Matt 11:27)

That is Christ saying to all and sundry, 'You'll not know the Father. You'll know nothing about him worth knowing unless I personally am prepared to reveal God to you.' What we have in the Bible is not a record of man's attempt to work out what God might be like, in spite of what the critics say. For the Bible itself tells you that such a process would end nowhere. The Bible is saying we could not know anything about God unless God reveals it, and the Bible is the record and the substance of what God has revealed to us. It's important to get hold of that. That is how the apostles talk about it, so Paul writing to the Ephesian church says,

When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. (Eph 3:4-5)

It was not something that Paul thought up. It was God stepping in now to communicate to Paul a purpose that God had had from all eternity, and God had deliberately kept it concealed, and nobody knew about it until the time came for its revelation, and God revealed it to the Apostle Paul. It's what makes the Bible such exciting stuff as we see what the living God has revealed! And our Lord Jesus is on record as thanking his Father for it.

I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children. (Matt 11:25)

That is the Biblical position, that whereas God is willing to reveal himself, and the Lord Jesus is willing to reveal the Father, there are people from whom God hides himself. Why is that? For this simple reason: that God is not a thing, nor is he a subject like physics or cookery. He is a person.

I happen to be a person too, a very limited sort, but I'm a person. I'm not just a thing nor a subject. Now, an atom is a thing, a very small thing as you know. And if you decided you wanted to know about an atom, it's very simple. You get a cyclotron, a few miles long, costing multi-billions of pounds, and you get some very egghead scientists, and you get hold of an atom, and you put it inside. And you get hold of some particles and you rev them up to colossal speeds, as near the speed of light as you can get them, and you cause the aforesaid particles to bump into the atom. And the poor old atom is helpless and has to come apart and reveal what's inside. It's very simple to get to know an atom—it will cost you a few billion, and you need considerable intelligence, but otherwise it's straightforward! And the atom can't do much about it. Well, I'm not an atom, I'm a person. You could get hold of me and put me in your cyclotron and bombard me with particles forever, and you'd never know me. You may have measured my bones and measured the electrical impulses in my brain—even then you wouldn't know what I was thinking. Why's that? Because I'm not a thing, I'm a person.

And there are things about me that you would only know if I, as a person, am prepared to communicate them to you.

God is a person, and he longs to make himself known to his creatures, but he demands that his creatures take the right attitude towards him. If they're arrogant, and they think they are the judges and God has got to come up to what they think, because they're not prepared to believe him, God doesn't bother to reveal himself to them. But to little children—those who are prepared before almighty God to take the place of infants and humble themselves before him—the mighty God of heaven is prepared to reveal himself. And he is a genius at revealing himself and conveying it to the simplest of people.

We see it also, if we're prepared to take the analogy, in creation around us. We are to seek God, the Bible says, even though we will not find him unless God reveals himself. We are to seek him. So take the scientist who is studying the universe around us. The universe, the Bible says, is God's self-revelation, created by the word of God and, as you look upon creation, there are certain things about God that you could deduce from the creation. You could see it intuitively, namely, his almighty power and the fact he is no mere human or created being, he is God. The Bible doesn't claim you can see the love of God in creation, but it says you can see his power and his divinity.

The scientist takes his telescope and his microscope and studies it. What is he doing? Well, he's not creating the evidence. The universe had to be there before he could study it. And when it comes to revealing God's power and his Godhead, he reveals it in creation: God supplies the evidence. That is God revealing himself. The scientist doesn't create the evidence, he studies it. And his opinions and deductions have always to be tested by bringing them back to the evidence. Do they properly interpret the evidence?

So it is with God's revelation in his holy word. First of all, God had to reveal it. It's not we who create the evidence. It is God who gives it, and there God reveals himself. We are to seek him in his word, and he will give us understanding of it. What a marvellous revelation it is through Scripture, and finally through his Son. The Bible is one long story—God who has revealed himself by speaking. As I've said, he spoke at creation. Listen to Genesis, 'And God said'; 'and God said'; 'and God said'. And listen to Hebrews, 'By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God' (Heb 11:3). It is God speaking. Psalm 19 says how wonderful is God's creation. It speaks the glory of God and, likewise, his word speaks his glory: God speaking in creation.

God speaking in redemption. Moses at the burning bush, and God calling to him and revealing himself to Moses, speaking to Moses. It's a God who speaks. And when Moses said, 'Tell me your name. You say you are the God of my fathers. When I come to the people and they ask, "But who is this God of our fathers?" what name shall I give you?' And God says, 'I am that I am. I will be whom I will be'—the declaration of the name of God, the God who speaks, and speaks to reveal himself (see Exod 3:13–14). The God who spoke on Mount Sinai; they heard a voice. The God who spoke to Moses standing in the cleft of the rock, and talked of his righteousness, yet of his mercy. The God who speaks all through the Old Testament, through the prophets, in a different type of language—sometimes in poetry, sometimes in prose, sometimes in wisdom literature, sometimes in laws, sometimes in history—but whatever form he uses, it is God who is speaking.

When God revealed himself in the Old Testament, sometimes he revealed the future. You remember the story in Daniel 2, for instance. Nebuchadnezzar went to bed with a troubled head one night, and he had a dream. It startled him in the middle of the night and he felt it perhaps came from the gods. When he woke up in the morning he thought, 'What does this dream mean?' He was about to call his wise men when he had second thoughts. He said to himself, 'If I call these wise men and ask them what my dream means, they could tell me any old nonsense, and make up a yarn. How shall I know what is the right answer?' So Nebuchadnezzar thought of a way of deciding that. He called his wise men and he said, 'Gentlemen, I had a dream last night, and I'm asking you now to interpret it to me. And if you do, I'll give you great reward, and if you don't, I shall hang you and put you on the dung hill.' They said, 'Yes, your majesty, very reasonable of you. Just tell us what the dream was and we'll tell you the interpretation.' 'No,' he said, 'that's precisely what I'm not going to do. You tell me what I dreamed.'

And you see his art, can't you? 'You claim, gentlemen, to have revelations from gods or something or other. Well, if you have revelations from gods about the future, and what my dream meant, you can get revelation from your gods about what I dreamed last night.' They said, 'This was never a thing asked by any monarch or anybody at all.' That was diplomatic language for, 'You're the biggest, arrogant old fool that ever lived,' only they didn't dare put it that way! And the king said, 'If you don't do it, I shall have you executed,' so they thought there was no hope, for they couldn't reveal the past. But Daniel sought the mercy of God, and in that hour, the secret was revealed, not merely about the future, but about the past — what Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed last night.

That's a very important thing. Revelation is not merely about the future or about the present. It can be about the past. What do you think Genesis chapter 1 is? Moses wasn't there when the creation was made. This is God revealing the past. And when you read the great historical books of Scripture, they are about things that have already happened, and this is God's view of them, and God's prophetic interpretation of them: God revealing the significance of the past. Of course, he talks about the future too.

But if God has spoken in the past through the prophets, says Hebrews, 'In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son' (Heb 1:2). What a wonderful title it is of our blessed Lord Jesus: he is the Word of God. He didn't become the Word of God when he was born in Bethlehem. 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' (John 1:1). He is, as the theologians would call him, the second person of the Trinity, a part of the Godhead whose very function and nature is to reveal God and to speak him forth. It's one of the very functions of deity. I take comfort in my heart that as I pour over Scripture, it's not just a question of me trying to understand it by my own unaided ability. There is a person in the Godhead whose very function and title and nature is to be the one who reveals God to the likes of me. Fancy having a divine person there at your side, to be the revealer of God to you. Yes, 'In the beginning was the Word'.

And not only our blessed Lord, but his apostles too. I have already quoted you Ephesians 3—the great mystery revealed to the holy apostles and prophets in the New Testament. And the final vision of the risen Lord, meeting John on the Isle of Patmos and in form of vision, making himself and his glories known, and speaking to John—the God who reveals himself

in speaking. The God who not only speaks, but the God then who reveals himself to his holy apostles and prophets, and then inspires them to speak in turn, and to write what has been revealed to them. And so that what they say and what they write shall be God's message transmitted accurately as God intended it, he inspires them.

Inspiration

Now here comes our second big term, and it's important to see the difference in function and meaning when we talk about inspiration as from when we were talking about revelation. Revelation is concerned with a content revealed by God. Inspiration is the mechanism by which the chosen apostles and prophets speak or write, and God secures that what they speak and write is God's message correctly transmitted. Second Peter 1:19–21 are important verses in this connection of what inspiration means. Let me read it to you.

And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Now, that's a verse that has often been used and commented upon, and we must take care to understand it rightly. I've no time to discuss with you all the different views. One of the prominent views has been no prophecy is of private interpretation (as it says in the KJV), and people have said that means that you can't just read one Scripture and see what it means. You have to compare it with other Scriptures, so no prophecy is of its private interpretation. You have to compare it with other Scriptures. Well, that's always very good advice, of course, to check one Scripture by another. But if all you understand is John 3:16, and you don't even know what John 3:15 says, nor what John 3:17 says, but you do know what John 3:16 says, go out and preach it. It's jolly good and means what it says! Preach it, it is the word of God, and true. Yes, it's good to compare Scripture with Scripture.

And other people have said, 'Well, no Scripture is of someone's own interpretation so it's no good you making up your mind as to what it means. Before you decide what it means, you must ask him or her or somebody else. You have to take the church's interpretation.' It doesn't mean that either. It's always good to compare with your fellow believer. That's why God has put us in families together as the Lord's people that we might help each other, and save each other from becoming cranks and having silly interpretations.

But the passage isn't talking about our interpretation. It's talking about how a prophecy *came* to the prophet. It's not talking about how did the prophecy go out, or how the prophecy is to be understood or interpreted. It's telling us how the prophecy *came*. No prophecy came from a man's own analysis, the Greek word can mean. So what do we mean by that? Well, when Jeremiah announced that God was going to destroy Jerusalem, it wasn't because Jeremiah had sat down, scratched his prophetic head, thought about the situation, and came to a shrewd conclusion that it's likely that Jerusalem will probably be destroyed. It wasn't that. It didn't come by Jeremiah's own analysis of the situation, and shrewd prediction. How

did it come then? Well, that's the point. Says Peter, 'It didn't come by the will of man.' It wasn't Jeremiah saying, 'I must say something here. What shall I do? I think I'll startle these Jerusalemites by making a prediction.' No, it didn't come that way. How did it come, then? Well, men spoke from God, that's how it came.

And by what mechanism? And now the mechanism is told us, 'Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.' That's how it came, men speaking from God. And to ensure that what God said, they would say and say it accurately as God required it, they weren't left to their own devices as to how to go about it. They spoke from God as they were borne along by the Holy Spirit. So the men were inspired, but then when God's chosen prophets and apostles wrote the Scripture, what they wrote was inspired. We come back to that verse that we quoted at the beginning. Timothy is told to remember that every Scripture, all Scripture, is breathed out (inspired) of God, and is profitable for teaching. All Scripture is *theopneustos*, says Paul, 'God-breathed.' So what does it mean when it says that all Scripture is God-breathed?

Some people used to suggest—I think they've given up suggesting it now, at least I hope so—that it would be helpful to compare Scripture with the story of the creation of man. We read that when God breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life, he came alive (Gen 2:7). And people will say, 'That's what Paul means. All Scripture is like that. When you come to it, it's absolutely dead, lifeless kind of stuff, until God breathes into Scripture.' No, God's Scripture is the living word of the living God. It isn't like Adam before breath was put in his nostrils. It's the living word of the living God. How does it become that? Well, because God didn't breathe into Scripture. All Scripture is breathed *out* by God. That's what it means. It is the very breath of God. He created the whole universe by the breath of his mouth, and his word written to us is his word because, when he took the penman in hand, God breathed out his word. And the penman wrote it down, for all Scripture is inspired of God. That's the two sides: the men were inspired, the Scripture is inspired. That is the claim of Scripture, talking about itself.

I could, but I mustn't, quote you all kinds of Scriptures that talk about that. But let me cite, finally, just two things from the New Testament on this topic. Paul, writing to the difficult church at Corinth, says this:

If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. (1 Cor 14:37)

Scripture written by Paul are the commandments of the Lord—what Paul wrote, God wrote, so to speak. We will see it when our Lord himself appeared to John on the Isle of Patmos. As John lay almost dead at his feet, our Lord put his right hand upon his shoulder and bid him stand, and then he said,

Write therefore the things that you have seen . . . (Rev 1:19)

And then John had to listen as the Lord dictated seven letters in succession, and each letter begins, 'The words of him who . . .' and some description is given of the Lord Jesus. It's the Lord Jesus dictating the letter to John. But as the letter comes to its conclusion, the remark is

made, 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' What a succession. There stands the risen Lord, speaking, and as he speaks, it is the Holy Spirit speaking, and John is on the receiving end and he is told to write it down.

It's not merely then that these men did their best to understand what God had revealed to them—like a liberal would say—and, of course, only understood what God said rather imperfectly. And when they came to write it down they did their best, poor souls, but they weren't highly educated and so they made an even worse attempt at writing it down properly. So originally there may have been some revelation, but it was imperfectly understood by the apostles and prophets, and then still more imperfectly written down. No, it is not that. Scripture explicitly says it is not that. 'Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.'

So when, in everyday language, we talk of Scripture being 'inspired', you may have to tell your friends what we really mean—otherwise they may get the wrong end of the stick! They may tell you, 'Well, I think there are many inspiring passages in the New Testament. Look at that lovely poem on love that Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13. Isn't that very moving and inspiring?' They're thinking that 'inspiration' means a sort of a purple passage, a real rhapsody moving your heart, and so on. If you were to tell them that Leviticus' description of the entrails and innards and intestines of an old ox is also inspired of God (see 9:19), they'd be a little shocked! They can't believe that that is inspired. Why not? Well, it doesn't move them. I can understand it doesn't move them, but that isn't the question. Inspiration in Scripture doesn't mean something that inspires you, like an inspirational hour with some song leader. As we have seen, it has nothing to do with that at all. It is the fact that it is God-breathed, and whether it be exalted poetry, lyric poetry like the Psalms, or legal enactments as in Leviticus, they're equally inspired because they are holy Scripture.

Verbal inspiration

Some people argue about whether inspiration means verbal inspiration. And I reply to that, what else could you possibly have? Think about it a moment. If God spoke to men, did he speak without words or something? And people say, 'Well, it's not the words but the meaning that counts.' Well, of course, all you folks who have been taught to translate from English into any other language will have been taught by your teachers, 'Don't translate words, translate meaning,' and that's a very important thing.

But you will observe that, whether you're writing English or Swahili, you can't communicate anything without words. You've got to choose words to express the meaning. And when God speaks to us, and inspired men to write, it was God who inspired them in the choosing of words. You say, 'Isn't that a very narrow view? What does it matter?' You can call a thing a boat or you can call it a ship. In normal circumstances and in daily talk, it doesn't matter which you use. In technical language, it would, but in ordinary language a boat and a ship are one and the same thing. It doesn't matter which, but you've got to choose one: you can't write both in one sentence. And God chose words, of course he did. How do we know that? Well, in John 17, mark the reference. Our Lord is reporting on his mission, and he tells his Father, 'I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them' (v. 8). He spoke the very words of God, not simply the message. 'Follow the pattern of the sound

words that you have heard from me', says Paul to Timothy (2 Tim 1:13). Of course, it is verbal inspiration. What else could it be?

People say, 'We can't believe that. That would mean that God was treating a man like some human machine, overpowering a man's personality and just using him as a machine to speak God's own words. That wouldn't be a very nice thing for God to do.' Well, if God created us, he's got a right to do what he likes with us. However, when you read the New Testament and the Old Testament you find that God hasn't erased the personalities. You can tell Peter from Paul any day of the week. But as for erasing personalities, let me take an example. Here's a four-year-old. She understands some things, not everything in the world, and father is working in his study, minding his own business when mother tells four-year-old to go to Daddy and tell him the postman has just come with a letter saying that Aunt Emeline is coming on Friday. And four-year-old comes into the study with great excitement and tells Daddy with all the eloquence she can muster that Aunt Emeline is coming on Friday. And as far as four-year-old knows, that simply means that Aunt Emeline is coming on Friday. But to Dad it means an enormous amount more. He happens to know Emeline and you can imagine all the other things that Dad begins to think about, and they've not entered four-year-old's head. Has mother abused the child's personality? Of course she hasn't.

First Peter 1 tells us that, when the spirit of Christ was in the prophets, and they prophesied of the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow, they weren't stupid. They realized it was about the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. They didn't understand the whole thing, though. For they didn't understand what time or what manner of time it referred to, and they had to search diligently to try and find out. And then it was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but us (see 1 Peter 1:10–12). Prophets very often, though they understood a great deal of what they said, said things that, because of God's foreknowledge, went far beyond what they themselves would have understood.

Authority

Inspiration, therefore, and many things else ought to be said but, finally, we come to authority. Scripture is God's revelation of himself and all the other information that he wants us to have. Because that is so, God has also inspired the prophets to speak and the prophets and apostles and historians to write, and the poets as well, and the wisdom writers, to secure that that revelation and its content should be securely and accurately conveyed in his words. Hence Scripture has authority because it is God's word, spoken and written. You see that authority magnificently displayed in the life of our Lord. In his temptation, his reply to his satanic majesty, four times over, was, 'It is written' (see Matt 4:4, 7, 10). And in the garden of Gethsemane, to his disciples, 'How then should the Scriptures be fulfilled . . .?' (Matt 26:54). Son of God and Word of God that he was, yet becoming man, he bowed to the authority of the word of God, and obeyed because it was God's word, God's word written.

And so are we expected to obey because it is God's word. Yes, understanding it, interpreting it, making sure that we're applying it rightly to our own day and age. These are extra questions and, if we get the time, we shall discuss them on another occasion. But let's start and finish tonight with the foundational thing. The Bible is the word of God. What the

Bible says, God says. And even the things that were written in former days were written for our instruction (Rom 15:4). Just let me remind you of two things.

It's possible to misuse the Bible and the study of Scripture. To the Jews of his own day, our blessed Lord said, 'You search the Scriptures . . .'; very good, but he said, 'it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life' (John 5:39–40). You think that in them you have life, but in that sense, that's not true. The Scripture, God-breathed as it is, the word of the living God, is pointing to Christ, and you can't get life without coming to Christ. You can study the Bible as an academic discipline without ever coming to Christ. That is always a challenge as we come to holy Scripture. It is the word of God—the breathed-out word of God. But let us always be conscious of its purpose, which is to lead us to Christ. The Pharisees studied Scripture but they weren't prepared to come to Christ, and their study in the end was in vain.

Then let us remember that we shall not rightly understand holy Scripture, given by revelation and inspiration of God as it is, without the work of God's Holy Spirit within. Says holy Scripture,

For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. (1 Cor 2:11)

Show your dog a bone and he understands what it is; and a bit of beef, and he understands what that is and comes around your table, wanting a piece because he's got a stomach like you've got a stomach. And he understands all those lovely feelings that you're enjoying as he watches you eating a beef steak. But take him into your library and show him your copy of Rembrandt on the wall, and say, 'There, Fido, have a look at that', he can't make head nor tail of it. He licks it, he smells it, he may chew it or something, but he can't see what you see in it. Why? Because he's not human. The only way he'll ever come to an art appreciation course is if he could have a human spirit put in him. Likewise, unconverted men make very little of Scripture. That is to be expected, for who knows the things of God except the spirit of God? The glorious thing is that God has given us his Spirit that we might know the things that he has so richly given us.

So may God use our little study to encourage us and strengthen our faith in his word, and may it have that result that it will draw us ever more constantly to his word. With conviction that it is the word of God, that God here speaks to us, so that we shall persist in our reading of it, and our talking to the Lord about it until, in that subjective sense, he reveals himself to us as he did to those who walked on the road to Emmaus, as he expounded the Scriptures and opened their minds that they might understand his word.

Shall we pray.

Our Father, now we thank thee together for this wonderful gift that is the gift of thine inspired word. We thank thee for the wonderful revelation of thyself that is given us therein. And we bless thee for life's experience that the more we have read and the more we have sought thee in thy word, the more thou hast gone on

to show us wonderful things so that we can readily believe by experience as well as by the authority of thy word that in thy Son are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Now, Lord Jesus, as we go from our study, we say as they did on the road to Emmaus, Lord, it is late in the day, and the day declines. Come in with us and abide with us, we pray, that our hearts too and our eyes may be opened to see thee. Beyond the sacred page we seek thee, Lord. Today make thyself known to our hearts, we beseech thee. For we ask it for thy glory and for our blessing, and for thy name's sake. Amen.

Addendum

Just before you run off, the question of the authority and inspiration, and revelation of Scripture bring with them questions. What about all the contradictions in the Bible? And these can be difficulties if unconverted people point them out to us, especially when we have no answer to them. In these talks I cannot begin to deal with them because every one has to be dealt with separately. Proof that one isn't a contradiction does not prove that the next one is not a contradiction, so you've got to go on to the next one. One book among many written on these things is this worthy tome, *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook of Bible Difficulties*²¹. It goes through the Scripture book by book, picking out certain things that are difficult, and suggesting answers to them. A useful book if you wish to qualify yourself for witness for the Lord to thorough-going sceptics.

Similarly, but a slightly different style, dealing with supposed historical difficulties in the four gospels is, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*.²² It is a serious academic study, but done by a believer and done to support our faith and give us confidence in our witness for the Lord.

And, finally, if you didn't know it before, in this little book by J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken*²³, there is, at the end, in addition to the helpful things he says, what has come to be called the 'Chicago Statement' about Scripture and its inerrancy. What we mean exactly by the terms 'revelation', 'inspiration', and the 'inerrancy' of Scripture, and what we don't mean. It is a very balanced statement about it. It comes as a result of much prayer, much study by godly academics and others. If you haven't seen it and read it, it is certainly worth reading. It is called the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*, with exposition.²⁴

Thank you very much for you long patience.

²¹ Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, Baker Publishing Group, 1992.

²² Craig L. Blomberg, IVP, 1987.

²³ Baker Academic, 1994.

²⁴ Also available online, for example at www.bible-researcher.com/chicago1.html.

The Canon of Scripture: Old Testament

This evening we come to consider the collections of books that we now call the Old Testament and the New Testament. When were those collections completed and 'closed', as people describe it, so that no books thereafter could be added to those collections? And when was this done, both for the Old Testament and the New? And the final question that we shall be asking is whether all people agree on how many books there should be in the Bible: which books should be included and which books should be excluded.

First, we shall have to ask the question about the Jews themselves because, long before there were Christians, the Jews had their Bible. We call it the Old Testament. Incidentally, if you are talking to Jews, don't call it the Old Testament because they find that offensive. There's a famous story about a Jewess who got converted to Christianity, and had great suspicions that the New Testament didn't quote the Old Testament rightly. So being a Jewess, she went to a Jewish book seller and asked him for an Old Testament. And his reply was, 'How old?' They don't call it the Old Testament, of course. They're liable to call it the *Tanakh*, and why they call it that, we shall find later on.

The meaning of the 'canon' of Scripture

The term that is used when we consider these collections of books that are regarded as Bible and authoritative is the word *canon*. That word has many slight differences in its meaning according to the context in which it is used. Tonight I shall not trouble you with the technical discussion of its meaning. I'm going to use it in the popular sense, the canon of holy Scripture: that is the list of books that have come to be regarded as inspired and authoritative—those books that are distinct from all other books, however good those other books are, however spiritual, however religious. The canon of the Bible are the books that are regarded as altogether distinct and different from all others because they are inspired. These are authoritative, these are the books that settle our belief and our doctrine. These are the books that form the rule, if you like, the canon, by which our beliefs are to be judged. And when our beliefs are not according to these books, then it is our beliefs and traditions that must be changed.

The Old Testament canon

We must come now to the Old Testament and deal with it first. We shall then deal with the New Testament, but we have to divide it like that for historical reasons. We take then first the canon of the Old Testament. Here I have to tell you two very important things. Among the Jews traditionally, all down the centuries until more recently, there has been no dispute

whatsoever as to which books should be in the canon of their Bible. The second fact I have to remind you of is that in the centuries of Christendom, beginning in the second century and onwards, there has been a long dispute as to how many books there should be in the canon of the Old Testament. It has come to be known as the question whether the apocryphal books, as they are called, should be regarded as part of the Old Testament or not.

The Hebrew Bible

To understand the question, let's first remind ourselves of what books there are in the Hebrew canon and then what are in the so-called Christian canon. Here (see [Appendix 1](#)) is a list of the groupings of Old Testament books. In the Hebrew canon, the books of what we call the Old Testament are divided into three groups. The left-hand column shows a group that is called 'the Law'—*Torah* in Hebrew—containing Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

Then there is a second group called 'the Prophets', *Nevi'im*, containing what we would have called historical books—Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. Among later Jews, they came to be known as the former Prophets, but notice that in the Jewish Bible, they belong to the second division that is entitled the Prophets. Then come the classical Prophets, the later Prophets, as they're called—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, (not Daniel, which was placed in the third division), Hosea, Job, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. They form the second division in the Hebrew Scriptures.

The third division the Jews referred to as 'the Writings', *Ketuvim*. They are also sometimes referred to as the Psalms, for the simple reason that the Psalms stand as the first member of the group, being mightily important and a very large book. This group, the *Ketuvim*, contains the Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles. When referring to their Bible, the Jews use the initial letters of those three divisions—*Torah, Nevi'im, Ketuvim*—which gives the word Tanakh. So much then for the Hebrew Bible.

The Christian Bible (Old Testament)

You will notice when you take your Bible nowadays that the list of the books in the Old Testament is different from what they would be in a Hebrew Bible, even to this day. The books of the Torah—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy—are the same. But our Bibles don't divide the books of the Old Testament into three groups so, after the first five, the list is in a different order. We have Joshua, Judges, Ruth, first and second Samuel, first and second Kings, and then you notice that first and second Chronicles is put there, among those other history books instead of being at the end of the Old Testament as it is among the Hebrew. Similarly, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther are here, and not in the third division; as are Job, the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. Then come the Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations—you will notice that Lamentations is put immediately after Jeremiah whereas, in the Hebrew Bible, it is not along with Jeremiah—then Ezekiel, followed by Daniel which has been put here among the Prophets. Then follow what we call the minor Prophets, not because they are less important, but their books are less in volume—Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

So we notice the different order, the different groupings of books in the Christian Bible as distinct from the Hebrew Bible. But notice that the list is the same books. As to the number and identity of the books, both the Hebrew Bible and Christian Bible agree thus far. The reason the Christian Bible has a different ordering of books is that it was very heavily influenced by an ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament called the *Septuagint*, which had this order, or an order very much like it. So far then, Jews and Christians agree over the number of books and the identify of them, and the Christian Bibles certainly have all the books which are in the Jewish canon.

The apocryphal books

What we must now face historically is that from the second and third centuries, in Greek-speaking countries, particularly also in Western countries, in Greece and Rome and in South Africa, other books were added to the Old Testament in Bibles written out by Christian people. These books are called *Apocrypha* nowadays; in more recent times they have begun to be called *deuterocanonical* which simply means 'books of the canon of the second order'—meaning they're not so good as the others, and that's pretty true! If you're not in the habit of reading the Apocrypha, here is a list of these books (see [Appendix 2](#)). They are the first book of Esdras, the second book of Esdras, Tobit, Judith, the Additions to the book of Esther, the Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, or as it is alternatively known, the Wisdom of Jesus, the son of Sirach—Ben Sira, as we know him. Then there's Baruch, the Letter of Jeremiah, the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young men, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, the Prayer of Manasseh, the first book of the Maccabees and the second book of the Maccabees. These are the books that are normally regarded as the Apocrypha.

Let me comment just for a moment on the nature of these books, not just what they contain. What are they? Well, they are a very mixed group indeed. Some of them are quite serious history books, particularly the first and second book of Maccabees. They are attempts at serious history, written as a result of the great persecutions inflicted upon the Jews by the Greek emperor, Antiochus Epiphanes. That was a time of desperate trouble, 167–164 BC, when the great Gentile emperor desecrated the temple of God at Jerusalem, and set up the *abomination of desolation* in the Holy Place. That tremendous term which you will find again in the New Testament has its origin in these times, when Antiochus Epiphanes the Seleucid emperor set up his pagan worship in the temple of God at Jerusalem. The high priest joined with Antiochus Epiphanes, colluded with him, and consented to these things. It was then forbidden to the Jews that they should circumcise their baby boys. Any mother caught having circumcised her baby boy was taken to the ramparts of the city and thrown over the wall, to dash her head to pieces on the rocks below.

Possession of the scrolls of Scripture was forbidden. On the altar in the temple, there was a statue, an old Greek god or Seleucid god, possibly Baal Shamen, and in the temple also they offered pigs upon the altar, which is an abomination to the Lord and to the Jew; and there is some talk of temple prostitutes being added to the temple. The Maccabees rose in revolt, both against the emperor and against the Jewish high priest that had colluded with him. After valiant struggles they gained their independence and were able to cleanse the temple. Eventually some of their successors achieved that the state became a completely independent

state once more, for a few brief decades. Now, at the end of that trouble, a historian wrote the first book of Maccabees, to tell of this epic contest between the Jews faithful to the law of God and to the name of God in their struggle against Epiphanes. And that is an attempt at serious history. Of course, it is partisan and written from the point of view of the Maccabees.

The second book of Maccabees is likewise a history of those times, and takes the history further than the first book of Maccabees. It is full of wonderful things and miracles that probably didn't happen anyway, and is itself a synopsis of another work that was written in Greek. The first book of Maccabees may have been written in Hebrew, but it exists with us in Greek: the second book of Maccabees was written in Greek straight off. These are interesting and important books: those who study prophecy ought to read the books of Maccabees to have the background to the whole question of the abomination of desolation. They are moreover practically the only historical sources we have for that period of history and they are therefore valuable.

On the other hand, books like Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon are no more than religious novels calculated to entertain the lowly. The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men, and the Prayer of Manasseh, are prayers that were made up by well-intentioned people. For instance, when Daniel tells you that the three young men were put in the flames of fire of Nebuchadnezzar's furnace, they prayed. And whoever was the composer of these, thought it would be a good and helpful thing if he wrote an account of the prayers they prayed. Where he got the account from, other than out of his own head, nobody knows! Similarly, when Manasseh, that old rogue and evil man beyond any Judean king, was taken away by the Assyrians into captivity and he prayed to God, and God heard his prayer and bought him back (see 2 Chr 33), someone later thought it would be a good thing to tell the world what exactly he prayed. Of course, he made up a suitable prayer for Manasseh.

What are the Additions to the book of Esther? Well, as you know, the book of Esther in the canonical Hebrew is remarkable. It doesn't contain the name of God anywhere, though the providence of God and his control of affairs is everywhere evident. But the book itself doesn't contain the name of God, and then when Jews of later centuries read this book, they had a few question marks in their head. 'I thought that Jewish women weren't supposed to marry Gentiles. How come this woman, Esther, was married to the old pagan emperor, Ahasuerus?' That seemed to them to require a little explanation. And how did she go to the banquet and eat Gentile food which was forbidden by the food laws? Somebody or other set about improving the book of Esther, and the way they did it was to add great chunks of stuff at the beginning, and then later on they put another chunk in. And later on, they put another chunk in, and bits at the end, and turned the book of Esther into a historical novel. They hyped it up and made it more excitable and suitable for the local television, but were careful to insert the name of God!

The book of Judith is another fictitious story of a Jewess heroine, and this was certainly written by the strict Jews. When the city was besieged by a pagan enemy, she volunteered to sally forth and go to the tent of the king and say that she now wanted to take refuge with the king. She had given up her people and had come over to the king, and was prepared to be the king's wife, if need be. But she kept him at a bit of a distance and tantalized the man. So she gained time and when, without becoming his wife, she had got his confidence, she lulled him

to sleep one night, and when he wasn't thinking about such things, she cut off his head, poor chap, and put it in a bag, and escaped back to the Jewish city! Now there's a Jewish heroine for you. She didn't marry any old Gentile; she didn't eat the Gentiles' food—she always asked the king, even when she was with him, if she could have her own food. She kept all the laws and she delivered Israel. So, it's a book written by the right-wing in Israel if ever there was one, and in contrast to the canonical story of Esther.

Ecclesiasticus or the Wisdom of Jesus, the Son of Sirach, again is a serious book of moral teaching. It is written in the same style as the book of Proverbs. Indeed, though I've no wish to insult you, if tonight I had said, 'Now, don't open your Bibles, I just want to read a little bit from the Bible,' and I had read some words from Ecclesiasticus, it would sound to you so like the book of Proverbs that I think you might have to scratch your head and think, and say to yourself at last, 'Hey, wait a minute, is this the book of Proverbs or isn't it?' It is so like the book of Proverbs in style, a very serious book by a senior Jew. Baruch, historically, was the scribe of Jeremiah, and this is a book that purports to be written by him. More could be said about these things but I cannot tarry longer. Suffice to say that the Apocrypha is a very mixed collection of books.

So we come to the question, what did the Jews do about these things? Well, they never admitted these books at all. Apocryphal books were never regarded as canonical by the Jews, not all down the centuries before Christ, not after Christ, except that nowadays liberal Jews like Professor Emanuel Tov, who was the chairman of the publication committee of the Dead Sea Scrolls, would be prepared to accept them, and much else besides, as Bible. But no orthodox Jew still would accept the apocryphal books, maintaining the almost unbroken tradition amongst the Jews that these were not canonical, not to be regarded in that sense as the word of God.

But Christendom, as I say, has been divided. In the early times, in the West particularly, many professing Christian scholars, and later on, councils like the Council of Trent, regarded these books as being part of inspired Scripture. The Council of Trent, in fact, pronounced its anathema on anybody who didn't accept these books as inspired Scripture. In Greece, the Orthodox church will tell you that no great ecumenical council ever decided the matter, but from the 1600s onwards, at least, at their synod, they proclaimed that these books were to be regarded as part of holy Scripture. Amongst the Protestants, Luther held an ambiguous view. He didn't throw them out. On the other hand, he regarded many of them as profitable reading. England, too, at the reformation, was ambiguous. In his helpful book, F. F. Bruce reminds us that, at the time of the Reformation and the Counter Reformation, the history of things in the English world was as follows:

In 1611 the translators of the Authorised Version translated the Apocrypha as part of their work, and in 1615 Archbishop Abbot forbade any stationer to issue the Bible without the Apocrypha on pain of one year's imprisonment. But an edition of the Geneva Bible, published at Amsterdam in 1640, omitted the Apocrypha deliberately . . . This omission was in line with the prevailing tendency in England at this time where, in 1644, Parliament ordered that the canonical books only should be publicly read in church. This tendency was reversed after the restoration of the Catholic monarchs, but the exclusion of the Apocrypha became increasingly

popular among the non-conformists . . . The first English Bible printed in America, 1782-83, lacked the Apocrypha. The fashion of printing Bibles without the Apocrypha received an impetus in the nineteenth century from the example of the British and Foreign Bible Society which in 1826 decided to print no more Bibles with the Apocrypha.²⁵

And to quote a very famous authority, going back just a while, the Westminster Confession of Faith, in 1647, stated,

The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are not part of the canon of Scripture and, therefore, are of no authority in the church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved or made use of than other human writings.

You will see, therefore, that opinion has been divided. From the Westminster Confession of the Church of England, under the influence of the Protestant puritans and, in more recent times, by the United Bible Society, the Apocrypha has been most definitely excluded from the list of canonical books.

Why should we bother about all that? Well, because nowadays there has come a very noticeable change, certainly in academic circles, and then with the United Bible Society. In academic circles, theology has long since taken a very liberal course. I myself was present when a professor of theology from London University, some thirty or more years ago, in my university, informed the public who had come to listen to his lecture, that the Bible was like an electric light, very bright at the centre. When you go a yard or to from it, it is still fairly bright. Get several yards from it, and it's beginning to get dim. And so it goes on until it becomes a little bit grey, and then it becomes altogether black, and that's like the Bible is. Somewhere at its centre, wherever the centre is, it is very bright, but it gets dim in certain parts until you couldn't distinguish black from white, and truth from error. That is a view commonly held in liberal theological circles now and, because they hold that, they don't see any difference between, say, the New Testament and the Apocrypha, or the Old Testament and the Apocrypha, and think they should all be bundled together. The United Bible Societies of more recent times, in order to persuade Catholic people who once were forbidden to read Scripture, and in order to publish Bibles that would be sanctioned by the Catholic church, have taken to printing two kinds of Bible, one set of Bibles without the Apocrypha, another set of Bibles with the Apocrypha included.

Doctrinal errors in the Apocrypha

Why should we bother about this, so long as people read the Bible? Why should we bother about which books are to be regarded as being in the canon of Scripture? Well, let me read you some of the issues at stake. In his very helpful book, *Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*²⁶, René Pache lists the unscriptural doctrines which are supported by the Apocrypha as including:

- prayers for the dead;

²⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments*, Pickering & Inglis, 1984, p. 164.

²⁶ René Pache, Sheffield Publishing Co., 1969.

- the expiatory sacrifice, eventually to become the mass;
- alms giving that has expiatory value, also leading to deliverance from death;
- the veneration and intercession of the saints;
- the worship of angels;
- purgatory;
- the redemption of souls after death.

That list of doctrines is to be found in the sundry books of the Apocrypha, and you will immediately perceive that there are very big questions of doctrine at stake. If these apocryphal books were indeed part of God's self-revelation to men, and if they were indeed written by inspiration of God, then their doctrines are to be received and submitted to. If they are not part of God's self-revelation and are not part of the canon, these doctrines are to be rejected as being not in conformity with the rest of the inspired Scripture.

There are other issues that are at stake. For example, if you go to your unconverted friends and get them to read the Bible, and you include the Apocrypha in the Bible, presently they're liable to come back at you and say, 'You don't believe all these silly miracles, do you, such as have been recorded in Bel and the Dragon, and such things like that? Are these really part of God's word?' The Roman Catholic church and the Orthodox churches will tell us that it is the church that decides what books shall be in the Bible. The church, they say, gave you the Bible, and it's for the church to tell you what books are in the Bible and what books are not in the Bible. The issue, therefore, is a very serious one, and not to be treated lightly

The evidence for the Old Testament canon

So let's go over the history of these things as briefly as we can. First, the evidence for the Old Testament canon. Here we come to solid ground indeed. First of all, the Jews. As I've earlier said, the Jews of the ancient world never accepted the Apocrypha as being part of their sacred book. You may read Josephus to that effect: the great Jewish historian tells us explicitly how many books he regarded, and the Jews regarded, as being in their sacred book, and Josephus makes it clear that the apocryphal books are not among them. The great Jewish philosopher, Philo, likewise regarded the apocryphal books as not being part of the Old Testament, and that is indeed remarkable because he read his Bible in Greek.

Secondly, we may take the witness of some of the apocryphal books themselves. Look at that first book of the Maccabees. It was written at the time when the Jews were now trying to cleanse their temple. It had been polluted by the emperor, Antiochus Epiphanes. It had to be cleansed. So they came to the altar. What should be done with it? How could they cleanse the altar? They didn't know what to do, and the Maccabees tells us why they didn't know what to do. The writer says, 'There is no prophet among us now.' Elsewhere, he described how it had been a long time since there was a prophet. 'If there were a prophet amongst us, we could go and ask him, and he would give us the direct word of God as to what we are to do.' He certainly isn't claiming inspiration by God's Holy Spirit! So they put the altar aside and made a new one until a prophet should come. He is prepared to think that one day there might come a prophet. There was no prophet then, nor has there been for a long time. Prophecy has ceased. Josephus says the same thing in his history. He says the prophets have long since ceased.

Then take the second book of Maccabees. The writer has a delightful phrase at the end of his book. He says, 'I hope you'll take my book kindly,' or words to that effect. 'I've done the best I can so where I have succeeded, take it kindly, and if I've done anything wrong in it, and it's done poorly, well, have mercy on me, for I've done my best.' He certainly isn't regarding his book as inspired! You never heard a classical prophet saying anything like that. Isaiah doesn't end his prophecies saying, 'Thus says the Lord. I put it down as best I could, but if I haven't done it very well, have mercy on me!' No inspired man of God ever spoke like that: Second Maccabees does. On their own testimony, therefore, the first and second Maccabees are not books inspired of God, quite the opposite.

But when we have considered the fact that the Jews never regarded these books as part of holy Scripture, we come to the evidence that must be, for us Christians, supreme. And that is this: our blessed Lord Jesus Christ accepted the Jewish canon, not the Apocrypha. He not only accepted books of the Old Testament and attributed them to God, but he referred to the three divisions of the Old Testament. Let me remind you of what he said to his disciples in Luke.

Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' (Luke 24:44)

Remember what we saw at the beginning, that the Jewish Old Testament, as we call it, is in three divisions. It is the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings, alternatively called the Psalms because that third division is headed by the Psalms. Now listen to the Lord Jesus talking to the eleven disciples in the Upper Room and pointing out to them how that everything written about him in the Old Testament must be fulfilled, and he refers explicitly to the three divisions of the Scripture as it was in his day. For those of us who are Christians, that will, I am sure, suffice in one sense.

When was the Old Testament canon 'closed'?

I have to say one or two more things before I let you go home. You say to yourself, 'Well, if the Lord didn't accept the Apocrypha, I have no need to accept it, and why should I bother my head thinking about it anymore?' But the question arises that, if the Jewish Old Testament was in these three divisions, when was each of those divisions closed, so to speak? These books were written in the course of many centuries, so when was the first division closed and no more books added? And when was the second division closed, and no more books added? And likewise for the third division. Everybody agrees that the first division was closed very early on in history because the authority of Scripture—whether a book was to be received as a holy book and an inspired book—was settled very early. When the people stood at the bottom of Mount Sinai and heard the thunders and saw the lightning, with great terror they besought Moses to go and speak to God, and not themselves to draw near any further. Moses went up and they heard the voice, though they saw no form. Soon thereafter they accepted the Ten Commandments, for instance, as the words of God. And Exodus 24 tells how Moses rehearsed in their ears all the words of the covenant that God made with them and, very significantly, it is said, 'And Moses wrote it in a book' (see v. 4). He didn't just preach it, he wrote it in a book, says Exodus 24. Notice that emphasis on writing.

And in Deuteronomy, when Moses rehearses the law at the end of the wilderness journey, and sings his song and teaches the song, then he wrote these things in a book—the written Law in the sense of the Torah. These books were obviously very early on regarded by all Jews as the inspired word of God. And they most frequently disobeyed it, forgot it, and spurned it, and had to be brought back, but they regarded it nonetheless as the word of God. However, when was that decided? It used to be thought that the Prophets' division was closed after the time, say, of Malachi, but the rest remained open right until the time of Christ and beyond the time of Christ, to AD 90, for instance. And it wasn't settled until the Jews, they say, held a council at a place called Jamnia in about the year AD 90. So when you point out to folks that our Lord authenticated the three divisions, people are liable to come back at you and say, 'But wait a minute, when the Lord Jesus was alive, this third division wasn't yet closed.'

So what shall we say to that? I cannot rehearse in your ears all the detailed discussion of this. It is still hotly debated. If you are serious in your study, I would commend to you this excellent tome, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church*²⁷ by Roger Beckwith. Why would anybody ever write a tome like that about these matters? Well, because this man actually believes in the inspiration of Scripture, and he believes the issue is so important. We're talking about what is and what isn't the inspired word of God. He's a man that so believes it. The volume he has written has masses of historical detail, tracing the historical facts as far as he can trace them. Thank God for such men who are prepared to give their time and energy to researching the sources, to be able to help the likes of us in these matters. I commend it to you, therefore. Of course, his findings are disputed, but his argument is that sections two and three were decided and closed at the same time, and he would suggest to you they were closed in the time of the Maccabees. For during the persecutions that we talked about earlier, under Antiochus Epiphanes, many of the books of Scripture were destroyed, and people daren't keep them because to keep them was to risk death at the hands of the government.

When the enemy were thrown out, there was a tremendous attempt to collect again the books that were regarded as sacred Scripture, and a letter went out to Jewry in all parts, to come because, 'We've a collection of the books. If you want them, come and get your copies.' Beckwith argues, to my mind very strongly, that it was then that, not only the second division, but the third division also was closed. And we come back to the point that if that is so, then when our Lord was speaking to his apostles, all three sections were already closed and formed the books that the Jews regarded as the inspired word of God, and not the others. As we said, that is the view Josephus took. Philo, the Jew who lived in Alexandria in Egypt, likewise took this view. Our Lord authenticated those books as the word of God. We follow his example.

Whence, then, the Apocrypha?

How then did some Christian people and some Christian churches come to accept the apocryphal books? Let me give you a little bit of history. When you try to answer that question, you'll have to divide the ancient world of Christendom into two major parts, the Eastern part and the Western part. In the Eastern part, some there were who accepted the apocryphal books, but in the main those apocryphal books in the East were never accepted.

²⁷ Roger T. Beckwith, SPCK & Eerdmans, 1985.

Just let me read their names. You won't remember them, but just let me read them to you. In AD 170, the Bishop of Sardis was a certain Melito. He did not accept the apocryphal books. That's AD 170, that's second century. Then there's the great and famous Origen, the scholar of Alexandria, much traduced by certain modern evangelicals. Origen originated in Alexandria, then he went to live in Caesarea and he got to know the Jews, and he learned a bit of Hebrew, and understood what the Jewish canon was. And he accepted as canonical only the Jewish canon that our Lord had accepted as canonical. Origen lived in AD 185–254. I'm sure you've heard also of Athanasius. He was Bishop of Alexandria. He's the famous Athanasius connected with the great creed, the Athanasian Creed, defining the deity and person of Christ. In a letter written AD 325, he firmly accepts the Jewish canon and points out that all other books may be read as profitable reading, but they are not to be regarded as the word of God.

So not all Christians in those early centuries accepted the apocryphal books. But in the West, they had general acceptance. In places like Italy and North Africa where there were multitudes of Christians, the apocryphal books came to be accepted. How did that ever come about? I'll do my best to make the explanation simple. The Old Testament among the Jews was not written in book form with covers and pages like we have—in the trade, we call this a codex. However, the Jewish scribes always wrote their Scriptures in scroll form, long bits of parchment all sewn together, very expensive. At each end there was a thing like a rolling pin, and each end was stuck to this rolling pin, and then they rolled it up from each end toward the centre. A scroll of Isaiah, with his sixty-six chapters, would be an enormous great length, and normally one big book like Isaiah would take up the whole of a scroll. Each major book would be on its own scroll, whereas the minor Prophets, say, the eleven short ones, would be together on another scroll; but they were individual scrolls and would be kept individually as scrolls. So it was in the time of the Lord Jesus. You'll recall that our Lord was handed the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue of Nazareth (see Luke 4:17–20). He unrolled it until he got to the appropriate chapter and read it, and he rolled it up. 'Closed the book,' says the King James Version, which is a little bit misleading: it wasn't a book, but a scroll. He rolled it up, and gave it back to the attendant there.

But towards the end of the first century and on into the second, the Christians hit upon a new idea. They left off writing the Scripture on individual scrolls. On a scroll, Matthew would be on one scroll and Luke would have to be on another scroll, and John would be on another scroll, and so on. They gave up that idea, and they started to write in our book form, which had a tremendous advantage because you could get now a much larger amount of stuff in book form than you could on a scroll. So you could put the contents of a number of scrolls into a book, and that is what Christians proceeded to do. They did it with the New Testament, and they started to do it with the Old Testament as well. It had another advantage because they were able to write it on papyrus, and papyrus was much cheaper than vellum, and Christians generally were poor.

So when they came to write out these books, and particularly in the West, there was this other feature to it. Very few of the Christians in the late second and early third centuries knew Hebrew anymore so they took over the early Greek translation of the Old Testament, made by Jews in Alexandria from about AD 270 onwards. This early Greek translation was on scrolls, one book on a scroll, so to speak. All the books of the Old Testament were on different scrolls,

but in addition to those Greek translations of Scripture, there were also other Greek books, religious books, containing all sorts of things. Those apocryphal books were also on scrolls, so when they started copying the books of the Old Testament now from scrolls into book form, in the course of doing it, they picked up a lot of these other books and included them as well. They hadn't the ability to read the Hebrew to check whether these other books were in the original Hebrew Scriptures or not. That's how it came to be. Then, of course, when the missionaries went to North Africa and they took the copies of the Scripture, they themselves couldn't read Hebrew, so they took the Greek translation. The people in North Africa couldn't read Greek so they translated it into Latin, and the Latin Bibles, therefore, came to contain all these other books too. So, for some centuries, people in the West read their Old Testament thinking that it should contain these books of the Apocrypha.

You say, 'Those Christians must have been stupid, or unlearned, or something or other. Whatever happened to them?' Well, let me tell you what happened to some of the New Testament manuscripts. When we look at the famous New Testament manuscript, *Alexandrinus A*, the very famous and beautiful manuscript written in the 400s, you will find that at the close of the New Testament are appended two letters of Clement, and there originally appeared also, the so-called Psalms of Solomon. Likewise, at the end of its Old Testament, it doesn't just have the apocryphal books that I told you about, but it has two more books of Maccabees, three and four Maccabees; it's got a 151st Psalm and after the Psalter it has fourteen liturgical canticles, used in the liturgy, and such like things. You say, 'Why on earth did they add all this in the Bible manuscript? Surely that wasn't right: they should have had a lot more respect for the inspiration of Scripture than to do that.'

Well, what about your Bible? Has your Bible got anything in it that is additional to the inspired Scripture? Have you got some Schofield notes or some Newberry notes? Have you got a concordance at the back? Christians do that kind of thing for some reason or other! You say, 'but we know the difference. We know which bits in our Bibles are Bible and which bits aren't Bible.' Good for you. I hope you keep that distinction very clearly in your head, that even the expository notes are not necessarily true to what the Bible teaches: they have to be used with caution. But you can distinguish because you know scholars who can go back to the Hebrew and Greek originals, and tell you which of this stuff in my Bible is the word of God and which other things have been added by editors and expositors and so forth.

Jerome and Augustine

These dear early Christians, not being able to read their Hebrew, added all this stuff, but it alas came to be regarded as though it were the word of God. That was particularly so in the West. To finish that story, I must tell you something tremendous that happened. There was a man called Jerome, St Jerome of that name, born in Dalmatia about AD 346. He then went to Rome and, in the years 381–384, he was asked by the then pope to revise the Latin Bible. The Old Testament had been translated from Hebrew into Greek, and then from Greek into Latin, and the New Testament translated from Greek into Latin. The Latin Bible had been copied out many times, and altered and edited until it was a jumble of a thing. And the pope asked Jerome to revise this Latin Bible and bring it into good order. Jerome had a go and produced a revision, or part of it. Then circumstances changing, he went to live in Bethlehem, and there

he met rabbis and learned Hebrew. Comparing his Latin translations with the Hebrew, he saw that the Latin translations didn't agree with the Hebrew. Jerome's reaction was to say, 'Let's throw the extra bits out. They're not according to the Hebrew. They are not part of holy Scripture.' And that's what he wanted to do.

But there was another scholar called Augustine, the famous Saint Augustine. He lived in North Africa. He read Latin because that's what they spoke in North Africa. His knowledge of Greek was a bit thin and his knowledge of Hebrew was non-existent. When he found out what Jerome was doing—Jerome was translating direct from the Hebrew, and when he found all these extra bits, he was for throwing them out—Augustine lifted up his hands in holy horror. If you read the letters that flowed between them, they got rather hot! Augustine said, 'You can't take books and material that's been regarded by the church as part of the Bible and now say it isn't the Bible.'

Jerome said, 'But these books don't agree with the Hebrew canon.'

'Never mind,' said Augustine, 'I believe that they're equally as inspired as the Hebrew.'

And so there raged this disagreement between them. Another reason Augustine gave was, 'It's alright for you, Jerome, you know Hebrew. We don't know Hebrew and when our parishioners come to us and say, "Should this be in the Bible or not, and what does the Hebrew say?" we can't tell them, and that embarrasses us very much because we can't tell the people what the truth is. So, Jerome, you mustn't make these changes.' But Jerome persisted and made them.

So there was the great argument down the centuries for the Roman Catholic church. It lasted until the Council of Trent decided the matter. It said the apocryphal books were to be regarded as divinely inspired, and pronounced an anathema on anybody who rejected them. At the same time, it made concessions to Jerome. The additions to the book of Esther that had been put into Esther at the beginning and then, later on, another batch, to make it run as a long story, were taken out of Esther, and they stand at the end of the Old Testament where they no longer make any sense. Pick up any copy of the *Vulgate* and you will find the Additions to Esther at the end. They don't make any sense. They'd only make sense if they were put back in their particular positions in the book of Esther but the Council of Trent had them taken out, and they were put at the end of the *Vulgate*.

That is how it came to be that Europe, reading its Bible first in the Medieval times in Latin, came to accept these apocryphal books as the inspired word of God. It has been the task of scholars from Jerome onward to show that that idea was grossly mistaken and, in my view, remains mistaken to this present day.

Now, it's been a long and detailed session, and doubtless many of the details you will forget. My purpose is to try and point out to you, first, that there is this disagreement as to what the canon of the Old Testament should contain. Secondly, to give you some broad principles of guidance as to how to settle the matter. Pre-eminent in that is that the Jews have never accepted the Apocrypha as the word of God and, supremely, our Lord accepted the Jewish canon, and not the Apocrypha. Thirdly, I have suggested to you why it should concern you. Not only because of the old disputes, but for the present mood when, in many countries, the word of God is being circulated now plus the Apocrypha, and the people encouraged to read it who were forbidden to read it for centuries. So that if you want to witness to a Catholic,

and you tell him that, like the dying thief, if he puts his trust in Christ, then the moment he departs this life he will be with Christ in glory, the Catholic may say, 'But the Bible teaches purgatory', and he'll quote you second Maccabees as being part of the Bible. If he should say, 'Why have you taken it out? And what right have you to say it isn't in the Bible?', what will you say to him?

So it is of practical importance, and if tonight I've wearied you with hard work and much detail, it is simply to impress upon us that in our witness and stand for the Lord, and in our concern for his inspired word and our concern for the salvation of multitudes of men and women who have been taught that the Apocrypha and its doctrines are part of God's word, we'd do well to inform ourselves of the facts, hard as that might be—to study them and get them under our control, to the end that we might be the more effective witnesses for our blessed Lord.

Our Father, now we thank thee for thy holy word, and above all tonight, as we have considered these complicated things, we thank thee for the testimony of our Lord, the Word made flesh. We thank thee, Lord, for the preservation of the books of holy Scripture. We thank thee for all those scholars, ancient and modern, that have given themselves to care for these things, and we thank thee, Lord, for the inner witness of thy Holy Spirit as to which books are and which books are not the inspired word of God. In our gratitude for thy great salvation and the treasure of thy word, help those of us whom thou didst call to be diligent in understanding the major facts in these matters, that our doctrine may remain uncorrupted, and that our witness to those who need to hear the gospel in its purity, may be uncompromised. Bless then our study, we pray, for we ask it through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

APPENDIX 1

The Old Testament Canon: Groupings of Books

	Hebrew Bible	Christian Bible
1. THE LAW (Pentateuch)	Genesis	Genesis
	Exodus	Exodus
	Leviticus	Leviticus
	Numbers	Numbers
	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy
2. THE PROPHETS	Joshua	Joshua
	Judges	Judges
	Samuel	Ruth
	Kings	1 & 2 Samuel
	Isaiah	1 & 2 Kings
	Jeremiah	1 & 2 Chronicles
	Ezekiel	Ezra
	Hosea	Nehemiah
	Joel	Esther
	Amos	Job
	Obadiah	Psalms
	Jonah	Proverbs
	Micah	Ecclesiastes
	Nahum	Song of Solomon
	Habakkuk	Isaiah
	Zephaniah	Jeremiah
	Haggai	Lamentations
Zechariah	Ezekiel	
Malachi	Daniel	
3. THE WRITINGS (Hagiographa)	Psalms	Hosea
	Proverbs	Joel
	Job	Amos
	Song of Solomon	Obadiah
	Ruth	Jonah
	Lamentations	Micah
	Ecclesiastes	Nahum
	Esther	Habakkuk
	Daniel	Zephaniah
	Ezra	Haggai
	Nehemiah	Zechariah
	Chronicles	Malachi

APPENDIX 2

The Books of the Apocrypha

1 Esdras

2 Esdras

Tobit

Judith

The Additions to the book of Esther

Wisdom of Solomon

Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus, Son of Sirach

Baruch

The Letter of Jeremiah

The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men

Susanna

Bel and the Dragon

The Prayer of Manasseh

1 Maccabees

2 Maccabees

The Canon of Scripture: New Testament

And so, once more, a very good evening to you. Our lecture last night concerned itself with the canon of the Old Testament. God willing, we shall tomorrow night move on to the question of the manuscripts of the Bible and what is called textual criticism, and then the whole question of the translation of the Bible, and which translations are better than other translations. Before we do that, we must spend one more evening, this time on the canon of the New Testament.

The question that we shall pose right at the beginning for the New Testament is the same as the question we posed last night for the Old Testament – who decided which books should be included in the New Testament and which books should not be included? Though it is not so well known perhaps as it is known for the Old Testament, there are a very large number of apocryphal New Testament books—many books written by very often unknown people, sometimes under the assumed name of Paul or Peter, or Nicodemus, and so on. Then there are the works written by the so-called apostolic fathers—Christian leaders who immediately followed the apostles in different parts of the Empire—and then there are the works of the church fathers, as they are called. So who was it that decided which books should be put in the New Testament and be regarded as uniquely authoritative, to form what is called the canon of the New Testament? Who collected them and put them together, when was that done, and on what ground was it done?

The test of intrinsic authority

The short answer to the first question is that they decided which books to choose on the basis of their intrinsic authority, because men saw in those books the words of the Lord Jesus—the words that he spoke when he was here on earth, and the words that he spoke when he rose again from the dead and spoke to his apostles before he ascended. What is more, he continued to speak from his throne in glory by the power of his Holy Spirit. Secondly, they recognized the authority of Christ and of the Holy Spirit in the apostles whom Christ had appointed and charged. The power of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit within them filled both their oral ministry and their written ministry. That is why the books were received.

There were, of course, books that are now included in the New Testament that were not written by apostles, such as the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, written by Luke, and those that were brothers of the Lord Jesus when he was here on earth but were not then believers. These too were accepted on the ground of their inherent authority being self-evidently the inspired word of God. Then, of course, in those that received them—and in those who still receive them—there was the work, the witness and the authentications in the hearts

of men and women, produced by the Holy Spirit. It is by his ministry that people are enabled to perceive the truth and authority of the books of the New Testament.

Acceptance of the New Testament canon

Last night we noticed that the Jews accepted the canon of the Old Testament. They were responsible for its formation and they never did accept the Apocrypha, and to this very present day, Orthodox Judaism does not accept the so-called Old Testament apocryphal books as being the word of God. That, of course, is important because it was to the Jews, according to Romans 11, that the oracles of God were committed. They were not committed to the Christian church, which was not then in existence. The Old Testament oracles of God were committed to the Jews. It is right that we give them the respect due to them, but the supreme reason why we accept the canon of the Old Testament, the Jewish canon, without the Apocrypha, is because that canon was authenticated by our Lord Jesus Christ when he was here on earth.

We did observe last night that, in the second and third centuries onward, many Christians came to accept the Apocrypha as though it were part of the Old Testament. So we reminded ourselves that some very important and significant Christian scholars, who were great authorities in the early centuries, never did accept the Apocrypha. Others did, however, and that has remained a dispute in Christendom until this present day. Tonight we shall see a very different picture. When it comes to the canon of the Old Testament, once it was settled, there has been remarkable unity in all sections of Christendom, both Orthodox Christians, and heretical Christians even, on what books constitute the Old Testament canon.

Christ's authority

Now we begin our study of how and why the books of the New Testament were received as canonical, and placed in the canon. We start, as I've said, with our Lord's own authority. The authority of his words, spoken orally in his own earthly ministry. It is important that we begin there if we're going to be true to history. We don't start with the written New Testament. Do you notice that? We start with our Lord's oral ministry. That's where the first authority of the New Testament lies. We shall all easily recall his words when he was here on earth, some of them in his earthly ministry. He said to the astonished onlookers as he spoke to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven' (Mark 2:5). And when the onlookers questioned that, he said, 'But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . .' (v. 10).

When he came down from the mount from delivering what is called the Sermon on the Mount, multitudes followed him, we are told, because he spoke with authority and not as the scribes. By that time, of course, there were no prophets in Israel except John the Baptist. The prophets had been silent for centuries, and when the rabbis studied holy Scripture in their *bethe-midrashim*, as they called them, when they said anything, they said it not on their own authority but in the name and in the authority of some previous rabbi. You'll find it all over the place if you care to read the Jewish Talmud which is a record of these things. When our Lord spoke, he didn't speak in the name of any other rabbi, and that is what got the crowd. The crowds and multitudes followed him, and he spoke to them as one having authority and not as a scribe. You remember in that sermon how he impressed himself on the multitudes:

‘You have heard that it was said to those of old . . . But I say to you . . .’ (Matt 5:21–22); putting himself not only on or above the level of other rabbis, but putting himself in the same role as holy Scripture. He concluded that sermon with the solemn words,

He who hears my words and does them is like a man who built his house upon a rock, and when the storm comes, the house still stands. He who hears my words and doesn’t do them is like a man who built his house upon the sand, and when the floods come, they will destroy the house. (see Matt 7:24–26)

He is making his words, and whether or not men obey his words, the criterion of the final judgment. That is the living Lord Jesus speaking in the days of his flesh. I needn’t remind you of the many times he said, ‘Truly, truly [verily, verily, KJV] I say to you . . .’. Listen to the rest of what is perhaps the most famous verse in which those words were spoken:

Truly, Truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life. (John 5:24)

Notice he does not say ‘whoever hears God’s word’ but ‘whoever hears my word’, and in that famous chapter he also says that when it comes to the final judgment, it will not be the Father who sits upon the great white throne.

The Father judges no one, but has given all judgement to the Son, that all may honour the Son, just as they honour the Father. (John 5:22–23)

It will be our blessed Lord who delivers the verdict in the final day. He has the authority to execute judgment because he is the Son of Man. That is a marvellous thing, and we may pause for the moment to let our souls be refreshed by the memory of that wonderful statement. He is to be judge in the final day, and says he, ‘Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. I shall not accuse you. The word that I have spoken will judge you’ (see vv. 45–47). Man’s attitude to the words of the Son of God will be the thing that will be the criterion of their judgment in the coming day. He is to be the judge at the final assizes and, even as he stood on earth, what a wonderful thing it was he said to his contemporaries:

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life. (John 5:24)

Eternal life is the life of eternity, and you will remember how our Lord uses the words, describing that time when the nations are brought before him, and he judges them; and those who are found righteous will go away ‘into eternal life’ (Matt 25:46). Yes, eternal life is the life of the ages, and yet this verse is saying to us, ‘You can have it now.’ How can you have it now and how can you know you have eternal life now? Because it is the Judge himself who stands in front of you and he says, ‘I who am to be the judge in the final day, I’m saying to you now, he who hears my word and believes him that sent me, has eternal life—*already has* the life of the ages—and will not come into judgment but *has already passed* from death to life.’ How can he say that? Because he’s going to be the judge and he should know. There are people who

say that you shouldn't try to anticipate the final judgment. That is precisely what you should do, what you need to do. You can anticipate the final judgment now because to meet Jesus Christ is final. And when the Lord gives his verdict, 'Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not come into judgment,' that isn't a tentative statement to be revised next year or at the great white throne. It is the final word of the final judge. Marvellous, isn't it, when you have met the living Christ, even now.

And many other such sayings there are by our Lord Jesus. Let's remind ourselves of the one we had the other night when we were talking about what inspiration means, and it involves verbal inspiration. In John 17 we have the record of our Lord's prayer to his Father as he gave a report of his earthly ministry. And he's talking of the men that have come to believe, and he rehearses the process by which they came to believe. 'I have given them your words.' So the words that Christ gave were the very words of God. The New Testament books are seen to have intrinsic authority as they carried the words of our Lord's earthly ministry.

Yes, but it's not only the words of his ministry before he died. After he rose from the dead, he came to his apostles. He appeared to them in the Upper Room, and to some of them on the road to Emmaus. He appeared to above five hundred brethren at once. He appeared to the disciples, to the eleven, at last, and led them out to Mount Olivet, and charged them for their worldwide mission. Those words, too, came with authority. Listen to the words that he spoke on the mountain in Galilee, according to Matthew's last verses. He came and said to them,

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. (Matt 28:18-20)

Note this awareness of his divine authority, both in heaven and on earth. When he was about to leave his apostles, he charged them to wait for the Holy Spirit who should continue to speak to them the words that our Lord had yet to speak.

The authority of the apostles

So let's now just go back a little step. We now have in the New Testament the words of our Lord when he was here on earth, but his words, when he was here on earth, included his choice of his apostles and his delegation to them of authority. So we read in Matthew 10:40-41,

Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward.

In the same chapter Matthew tells us that he called his disciples to him and 'gave them authority' (v. 1), and because he gave them authority, then it followed that those who received them were receiving Christ. In other places, he put it the other way round, 'the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me' (Luke 10:16). The authority of the apostles, then, and the early church from those times onward received the books that the apostles wrote because they recognized the authority given them by the risen Lord.

Let's go back over some well-known Scriptures, then, and think quite carefully again about the authority given to the apostles. Let's go back to John 20, where we have a very interesting account of something our Lord said and did when he appeared to his apostles on the first day of the week after his resurrection.

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.' And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.' (John 20:19–23)

They are exceedingly important words, emphasized by this very eloquent gesture—the Lord Jesus breathed on his apostles and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' Now, I'm aware that those verses have troubled the expositors, and various views are held about them. One of the early problems that some people feel is, how did the apostles then receive the Holy Spirit in the Upper Room? According to Acts 1, when the apostles were speaking to the Lord Jesus, he indicated that they hadn't yet received the Holy Spirit, and told them to wait in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high, when the Father should send them the Holy Spirit of promise. You see the problem: how could they have received the Holy Spirit in John 20 when, according to Acts, they didn't receive him until the day of Pentecost? I want to suggest how we should understand them best, by pointing out that verse 21 puts the whole thing in its context. On that first Lord's day, Jesus said to them, 'As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.' It is our Lord's commissioning of his apostles to go forth and preach. As the Father sent him into the world, and endued him with the Holy Spirit—he was ever full of the Holy Spirit and he was led of the Holy Spirit, and he was anointed of the Holy Spirit, and when he stood up to preach in the synagogue at Nazareth, he said, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.' So now he repeats it, 'As the Father sent me, even so I am sending you.'

What was to be their task as he sent them forth into the world? Verse 23 tells you. 'If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.' And, again, arguments have raged as to what our Lord meant by those words. Some have said, 'This is an example of discipline in the church.' And they will quote to you what happened to the unfortunate, or the sinful, Ananias and Sapphira, as recorded in Acts 5, who lied to the Holy Spirit, and dropped down dead. They say, 'There's an example of an apostle exercising his authority to forgive some and consign others to their death, unforgiven.' But it seems to me that if we would understand these words of our Lord to his apostles in the Upper Room, we must let the apostles themselves show by their behaviour how they took them. Yes, you will read the account of Ananias and Sapphira in the Acts of the Apostles which is the story, right from the start, of how the apostles went forth from the Upper Room, and began their ministry. But whereas you will read one story like that, and another story of Paul who smote the false prophet blind in Paphos, the rest of the Acts of the Apostles is full of the forgiveness of sins, and the warning why sins won't be forgiven. That is the way the apostles understood what the Lord had said to them.

You'll notice, for instance, what happened on the day of Pentecost. Peter had preached and the crowds were pricked in their hearts. They had become aware of the enormity of their sin. They had crucified their very Messiah, and God had intervened and raised him from the dead, and they saw themselves to be in a grievous plight indeed, murderers of the Messiah whom God now had raised from the dead. So they came clamouring around the Apostle Peter and asked, 'What shall we do?' They meant, 'What shall we do to get forgiveness.' He told them what they were to do. He said, 'You'll repent, that's what you'll do. And then you'll be baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, that's what you'll do. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' (see Acts 2:37–38). And I want to ask you, what authority had Peter to say that?

I'd like you, if you will, in your minds to contrast yourself with Peter for a moment. If you were confronted with somebody asking you, 'Look, I've sinned grievously: how can I get forgiveness of sins', what would you say? I fancy many of you would say, 'Well, it's not for me to tell you but this is what the Bible says. This epistle here says that we receive forgiveness through the Lord Jesus. We're redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins. Don't listen to me. Look what Scripture says.' That's what you would say, isn't it? I hope so, anyway! On the day of Pentecost, what did Peter say? 'Well, it's not for me to tell you'? Of course, he didn't. There wasn't any New Testament to refer to. You say, 'How difficult for Peter. Wouldn't it have been better if he'd had the Epistles?' My dear friend, he wrote them! He and Paul and James, it was they who wrote the Epistles, of course. We wouldn't dare to write epistles of that sort, or claim for them inspiration if we wrote them.

When we're pointing a soul to Christ, we quote those epistles but we shouldn't forget that what we're quoting is Peter and Paul, and James, and John. And long before they wrote the Epistles, with apostolic authority and by word of mouth, they laid down the conditions upon which people could be forgiven, and warned the populous, wherever they went, of those things which, if they did, they would never be forgiven, namely, if they rejected the Lord Jesus as Lord and Saviour. What authority did Peter have on the day of Pentecost to lay down the conditions on which people could be forgiven? You have it here in the Upper Room as our Lord now indicates to them, by what I believe personally, was a symbolic action. He was going to give them authority to forgive sins. That is to say, to lay down the condition on which people could be forgiven, and what the things were that, if people were guilty of them, they would not be forgiven.

And the authority? 'Receive the Holy Spirit,' he said. I take it that this was a deliberate gesture—he breathed on them. How reminiscent that is of the word 'inspiration'. The word of God is inspired, we heard the other night—that is to say, it is God-breathed: God breathing out to inspire his servants who would be his witnesses, orally and in writing. It is what our risen Lord did. He breathed out on them. Here was inspiration in the technical sense: that was the authority behind the mission which they were then to fulfil. So when we come to read the Acts and Epistles and there the apostles offer us forgiveness, we trust them. On what authority do they do it? They do it because they were inspired by the Holy Spirit—inspired, if I may say, in the truly technical sense, by Christ as he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'

The apostles' authority and the work of the Holy Spirit

So then, our Lord also did some other things that we must briefly look at. You have doubtless seen them many times, but for completeness sake, let's look at them once again. Let's read John 14:25.

These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

Now, these words are very often taken by us today as a tremendous comfort—the Helper, the Comforter, the Encourager, the Exhorter, the Advocate, the Holy Spirit sent, not only to the apostles, but to all God's people. Very often in times of need or in times when we would go astray or in times when we need to be encouraged, he will bring to our memories things that we have heard in Scripture, heard from the Lord through his preachers and all through Scripture. I'm not denying that, but I want to point out that, strictly speaking, this promise in all its fullness was made to the apostles, and for them it has a special meaning. He says that when the Holy Spirit has come, 'he will bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.'

When did he say these things to them? Well, from the time of John's baptism when they began to accompany him, right up to the time when he was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven—all those many things that he said to them. How would they remember them, and how could you be sure they got them right? Now tonight I know you will remember every word I've said so that when you get home, if somebody asks you, you'll start at the beginning and go through it all! But that's only a short sermon. If you think of all those three years, the multitudes of words that the apostles heard the Lord Jesus say, how would they remember them all? That's an important question, because how are we sure that what we have in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and John are the words of the Lord Jesus correctly remembered? The messages he gave, reported if not verbatim, if not word for word, yet reported truly, and the sense of them given, and the drift of the sermons rightly understood, remembered and written down; how can we be sure of that?

I ask the question because nowadays liberal theology denies that they are necessarily the words of the Lord Jesus, and says that they are very often the inventions of the church in later ages, or that the apostles misheard what the Lord said, or twisted it a little bit, perhaps unintentionally. But here, John is telling us what the Lord Jesus actually said, and here is the Lord's own provision so that the apostles would remember what he said. That is the authority that lies behind our Gospels, so it is important. That's point number one.

Then let's look further to John 16:12:

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

This likewise is an exceedingly important statement. For the Lord Jesus, about to go to Calvary, says, 'I've still many things to tell you. You cannot bear them now.' The Lord explains the things that he is going to tell them after he has gone away. It will be the same Lord Jesus

speaking as the one who spoke on earth. 'I have many things to tell you. You cannot bear them now, but I'm going to tell you.' How and by what means? Well, he now explains, 'When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.' You say, 'So the Lord Jesus spoke to them when he was on earth, and when the Lord Jesus went to heaven, it was the Holy Spirit who took over and spoke to them.' No, you haven't got it quite right, for the Lord goes on to explain. 'The Holy Spirit will guide you into all truth, that is true, but he will not speak on his own authority when he guides you into all truth. He will not take the initiative. He will be the voice that conveys the message.' Who will the speaker be? 'Whatever he hears, he will speak.' Hears from whom? Well, hears from the blessed Lord himself, of course, the risen Lord Jesus Christ. For he spoke to his apostles when he was on earth, and then when he went to glory, he continued to speak those many things that he had to say that he couldn't say when he was with them.

He spoke to them through the Holy Spirit whom he sent, but it was the Lord speaking. And if you say to me, 'Mr Preacher, prove that if you can', that's a tall order, but I'll give you an example of it. Our Lord appeared to John the apostle on the Isle of Patmos, and gave John to see him in all his splendour. When eventually he laid his right hand on John, he told him to write what he saw in a book and send it to the seven churches that are in Asia. Each of the letters that John was told to write, began with the Lord Jesus. He is described in different terms—'he that walks among the lampstands' or 'he that has the seven stars in his hand', and so forth, but it is the Lord speaking, dictating to John the letter that John now writes. But when each letter comes to its end, it ends like this, 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says.'

It's a wonderful example of what the Lord Jesus is promising in John 16. It's the risen Lord now saying the things that they couldn't bear while he was on earth—they wouldn't have understood them—but continuing to speak to them through the Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit, not speaking from himself, but listening to the Lord Jesus, and what he hears the Lord Jesus say, he channels to the apostles. The marvellous thing is that as we read the words the apostles wrote, we are hearing the living voice of the living Christ in glory, speaking to us. For what he spoke through his Spirit to the apostles and they wrote in his word, he speaks still. What he said then he still says. It is the word of the living Lord Jesus Christ. Isn't it glorious?

And as he, the Lord of glory, spoke to them through the Holy Spirit, this is what the result would be: 'He will guide you into all the truth.' There is the promise of a completed canon: one day the message would be complete. And then it says,

He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:14–15)

Oh, glorious words. The Holy Spirit coming from the risen Christ as the risen Lord speaks to his people through the apostles by the power of the Holy Spirit. This was the first supreme mission of the Holy Spirit: he glorified Christ. That happened on the day of Pentecost. When Peter began his tremendous sermon, he said, 'What is happening now is what was promised: God has poured out his Holy Spirit upon us as the Prophet Joel said he would' (see Acts 2:16–21). It happened, not simply after Jesus rose from the dead, not simply after Jesus ascended,

but says Peter, 'It is the Lord Jesus who has poured out the Holy Spirit. Having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.'

And then he made the logical deduction. Who then is Jesus? If Jesus of Nazareth has the power to pour out the Holy Spirit, who must Jesus be? The Holy Spirit isn't so much 'stuff' — I say it reverently — he is the third person of the Trinity. If Jesus of Nazareth, now exalted to glory, pours out the Holy Spirit, who is he? 'I tell you,' says Peter, drawing the deduction from this, 'that God has made him both Lord and Christ' (see v. 36) — the dispenser of God the Holy Spirit.

And all those lovely epistles — bringing home to his believers as the risen Lord spoke to the apostles and the Holy Spirit conveyed the message — that Christ is firstborn of all creation, for whom, in whom, through whom all things were made, and now the firstborn of the dead, that he might be first in everything, Son of the owner of the universe. Not a leaf or a flower that blossoms, not an angel that flies, not an animal that breathes, not a galaxy that whirls in space, not a human that ever lived was made for any other reason than for Christ. Glorious, isn't it?

And it is the authority of the Lord Jesus, before he died, in his earthly ministry, after he rose from the dead here on earth, and as he is ascended into heaven, that gives the books of the New Testament their authority. And, finally, the Lord said to them, 'He will declare to you the things that are to come.' There is the Lord telling them that they would be told things prophetic. You see it happening in the Epistles. You see it happening supremely in the book of the Revelation.

The completion of the canon

We come now to the practical question. How and when, and by whom were the books of the New Testament recognized as Scripture? And how was agreement reached, and how did they come to stand in one book that we now call the New Testament? Here I think we would be wise to remember the course of things that actually happened in history. First of all came the oral stage by the apostles. So, for instance, Paul points out to the Thessalonians what happened when he came to Thessalonica. He had been entrusted with the gospel, he says, and 'so we speak'; and then he adds, 'And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers' (1 Thess 2:4, 13).

The first stage in recognizing the authority was at the oral level — just as when our Lord preached the Sermon on the Mount, they recognized he spoke with authority. Likewise these pagan Thessalonians heard Paul preach as a man entrusted with the gospel and, as they listened to him preach, they accepted what he said. Not as the word of men merely: it was a word coming out of a man's mouth, but they accepted it as the word of God, as indeed it is, says Paul. So it was that many accepted the authority of the apostles' spoken message long before they had any written Bible. That oral message was inspired just as the apostolic writing was inspired.

That was the first stage but then there came the continuing stage, as we see for instance in Acts 2:41–42, when the crowd in Jerusalem got converted on the day of Pentecost. You say,

‘Well, the first thing they did was to start a Bible reading.’ Yes, they had the Old Testament to read, but it says in Acts they continued ‘in the apostles’ teaching’. They hadn’t got any New Testament, but they had the apostles, and the apostles were able to tell them what subsequently they would write in the Epistles. They continued in the apostles’ doctrine even before they had a written New Testament.

That stage lasted quite a long while, as Paul went round the different parts of the Empire, right up to AD 62 or AD 64 when he was eventually beheaded. There were many places that had no New Testament. The first they’d ever heard of the gospel was as Paul preached to them. It was the word of God, and they received it, and they believed it, and assemblies were formed. Even though they didn’t have the New Testament written, the message was nonetheless authoritative.

But then there did come the written stage, and Paul says to the same Thessalonians in his second epistle, ‘So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, whether by our spoken word or by our letter’ (2 Thess 2:15). So they had his word, his spoken word, then subsequently they began to have the written word. Likewise, writing to the Corinthians he says, ‘The things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord’ (1 Cor 14:37). And our Lord commanded John as we earlier saw, ‘What you see, write in a book.’ So there came the second stage, the writing of the New Testament.

The progressive writing of the Scriptures

We ought to see at once what that implies. The New Testament wasn’t written all at once. It was written little by little: a bit here, a bit there, a bit somewhere else. Paul wrote a letter to the Galatians. He wrote two, at different times, to the Thessalonians. They got those letters. When they got the letter to the Galatians, who knows? For there were some decades when what you had of the written New Testament were certain books written at different times and some sent here, and some sent there, and some sent somewhere else— before they were collected into a book. It is the fact that at the time the Second Epistle of Peter was written, Peter could make mention of all Paul’s Epistles: ‘This is what he says in all his epistles’ (see 2 Pet 3:16). It doesn’t mean Paul had finished writing: he is referring to all the epistles Paul had written up to that point. And by the time you come to Jude, Jude talks about ‘the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints’ (Jude v. 3). The time came when they realized that there were no more things coming from the inspired apostles. That time was at an end.

So let’s think about that again. Were the things that were written down at once put in a book called the New Testament? No. If you can remember Acts 15, when Paul and Barnabas went up to Jerusalem and the church assembled, at least the teachers and the elders and the apostles assembled, and gave their unanimous verdict on this foundation question: do people have to be circumcised to be saved? And the apostles and the church came to the conclusion, no, that is not so. It is by the grace of the Lord Jesus, not by works and circumcision that we shall be saved, even as the Gentiles are saved that way. ‘That is our belief,’ says Peter. It seemed good to the apostles and the Holy Spirit to write a letter, so they wrote a letter and sent it to Antioch. What was that? It wasn’t even a whole book, it was just a letter. It came from the apostles and elders at Jerusalem, and Paul and Barnabas and Silas took it to Antioch. Then wherever Paul went on his missionary journey, he took this letter with him to show to

all the other believers around about the place. As yet, it was only a bit of a book. It was eventually taken by Luke, the historian, and put in the Acts of the Apostles. So we can see that there were different stages in the writing of the New Testament.

When our Lord was here on earth, he called Matthew to be his apostle. Matthew had worked in the income tax department but when he got converted, he gave that up because those early income tax inspectors weren't respectable people (not like all income tax inspectors are now!) But he was trained in keeping records, as we can see when we look at the beautiful way he has recorded the gospel messages of the Lord Jesus in his Gospel—in order, putting them in groups of similar things. Some scholars think it is almost certain that he would have known shorthand because shorthand was in very widespread use in those days. Any competent secretary could do shorthand, and it is highly probable that Matthew, as he listened to the Lord Jesus, took notes, shorthand notes maybe, probably in Aramaic. Later they had to be translated into Greek, and it was in Greek that he wrote his Gospel. So there were stages in the writing, even of the books of the New Testament.

Inspiration doesn't mean that they just sat there and some voices spoke inside their head. Luke tells us that, when he set about writing his Gospel, he consulted the sources. By his time, and that was before AD 62, he knew of several who had taken it in hand to write accounts of our Lord's ministry on earth. He was able to study what they wrote, and then he was able to interview those that had been eyewitnesses of the Lord Jesus. He used sources. That doesn't contradict the fact he was inspired, but he diligently looked up the sources and investigated eyewitnesses. Maybe, because he was a medical doctor and could do it in true professional fashion, he even consulted our Lord's mother—because who lies behind the stories of the nativity and Mary's conception, and birth, and the timing of it that you have in Luke's Gospel? Well, it must be Mary, and who did she tell? Maybe he consulted Mary before the Lord called Mary home. But he used sources and he consulted documents that were already written. What they were, we're not told, whether complete Gospels or partial records of what the Lord Jesus said, but Luke consulted them and was guided by the Holy Spirit in writing his own Gospel.

It is an interesting fact that some sayings of the Lord Jesus—there must have been multitudes of them—were not recorded. There's one, for instance, that is not recorded in the Gospels, but comes out when Paul was talking to the elders at Ephesus, and he told them they ought to remember the word of the Lord Jesus that, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' (Acts 20:35). That is not in the Gospels. It was spoken by the Lord, so Paul tells us, but God didn't guide the apostles to put it in the Gospels. We have, then, what the risen Lord, supervising his apostles and his prophets and his history writers, decided that we should have. And that is enough.

Collecting the writings

There were different stages, then, of the thing coming together. When did the Epistles and the Gospels begin to be put into a collection, so to speak? Well, you will recall that I told you the other night about the Chester Beatty papyrus—a very early papyrus, written about the year 200. It contains about ten of Paul's Epistles in this one big folio. It has Romans, followed by Hebrews and then Galatians and Corinthians. It's a different order from what you have in your Bibles because this is a copy of one of the very early collections of Paul's Epistles. As they

came to hand, somebody collected them—we don't know who—but scholars think that, by the years AD 80–90, there was a collection of Paul's Epistles made from the various parts where they had been sent all round the Empire. There are subsequent papyrus groups, also in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, which contain other parts of the New Testament. These copies were written in about the year 250, but they go back to things from which they were copied. They were beginning collections of both the Gospels and the Epistles. Later, as things went on, you got complete copies of the New Testament, such as the famous Codex Sinaiticus which is a fourth century vellum manuscript containing most of the books of the New Testament. You have to come to the Codex Alexandrinus to get a complete New Testament.

Eventually, of course, all the books of the New Testament were agreed upon by the churches at large. Professor Birdsall²⁸ charted some of the main stages in the coming together of the books of the New Testament, recognized as being inspired and authoritative books. He indicates that, by the time AD 130–200, Irenaeus of Lyons accepted virtually all the New Testament books. Similarly, the Muratorian Canon accepted even more. In Eusebius' time, some were still disputed, whereas when you come to Athanasius's letter, he had accepted the lot. Why were some disputed? There were various reasons for it. Certainly books that were written by apostles, that were recognized to be apostles, were accepted by everybody—or almost everybody. When Paul's letter to the Galatians went to Galatia to rebuke the Judaizers, we hope most of the Galatians accepted it. I suspect some Judaizers didn't like it very much, and may have had qualms about accepting it!

Then in other places, there were books that were used by heretics. Take the Gospel of John, for instance. That was disputed in some circles, apparently for the reason that certain heretics who were troubling the church claimed that John's Gospel supported their views. It doesn't, of course. It does the very opposite, but that is what the heretics put around, and that caused trouble in certain circles. Similarly, the book of the Revelation was not much liked by many people when it first came out, and for some time after that, because there arose Christians who didn't like its teaching on the millennium and it was therefore longer than some books in getting general recognition throughout the churches of Christ. But by the time you come to Athanasius, for instance, then the disputes have largely ceased.

More than that, if you read Professor Bruce Metzger, one of the world authorities on these matters, in his work *The Canon of the New Testament*²⁹, he will tell you that the main structure of the canon, as to which books it should contain, was fixed by the end of the second century AD. Now that is extraordinary, given the ancient world and how you started with epistles going here and there and elsewhere. You will say to me, 'But was there no central authority in charge of collecting them all?' Well, you'll have to tell me the answer to that. I mean, Paul wrote a letter to Galatia. I'm sure it went round, and people took it round and showed it to their neighbours and friends, and what have you. But Galatia was a long way from Rome, for instance. He wrote a letter to the Romans. How long was it before a copy of that letter got down, say, to North Africa in those far-off days? And how long would it have been before these began to come together like we've seen in the Chester Beatty papyri, and then later other

²⁸ J. N. Birdsall, *Textual Transmission and Versions of the New Testament*, The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies.

²⁹ Bruce M. Metzger, 1987 (paperback edition: Clarendon Press, 1997).

books being added, and finally the whole lot, and finally everybody everywhere accepted those books? That was a long while, you may say, but if you consider the historical circumstances, the fact that the canon, this main structure, was in place by the end of the second century, is a most wonderful thing.

*Authority inherent—**not** conferred by the church*

Finally, I want to make one very big point. Please get hold of it. We've talked about how long it took for the church at large to recognize all the books that we now have in the New Testament canon. Please note that, when we talk about the church at large recognizing the books, that should not be understood as meaning that it was the church that gave them their authority. The church didn't give any book its authority. That is an exceedingly important point to get hold of. The church didn't give the New Testament its authority. Secondly, would you notice, please, the books of the New Testament didn't get their authority by being put in the canon. That's not the way it was. The book had the authority in and of itself. Then its authority was recognized, and because it was recognized as having authority in itself, it was put in the list of books. That is exceedingly important. It was not the church that gave authority to the books of the New Testament. It was not being in the canon that gave the books their authority. It was completely the other way around. It was because they possessed the authority of being inspired by God, being inspired by the risen Lord, because they already had that authority, that the authority became recognized. And then when it was recognized, it was advertised by being put into the list of the books that the church receives.

That will have all sorts of important, practical implications. We need to know it, and get hold of it in our witness for the Lord, because in many countries and in some circles in this country, you will be told that it's the church that gave you the Bible, and because it was the church that gave you the Bible, the church is the one that must be allowed to interpret it and tell you what it means. That is not true. The church did not give us the Bible. The church was given the Bible, and the Bible carried its own authority, and the authority being acknowledged, the books were regarded as canonical.

But we've covered a lot of ground tonight so let's now terminate our study. Let's do so with thankfulness to God for the wonderful treasure of his word, spoken to us by the Lord on earth after he rose from the dead, and spoken to us from the glory of his Father's throne.

Blessed Lord Jesus, our hearts rise to thee in gratitude and thanksgiving for this wonderful word of the Lord that thou has given us. We treasure it, blessed Lord Jesus, the words that thou did speak here on earth, the words that thou has spoken in glory, and we bless thee thou art the same yesterday, today, and for ever. Thou did speak them still to our hearts by thy Holy Spirit. We thank thee, Lord, for sending thy Holy Spirit that we might freely grasp and know, and enjoy the things that are given us thus from thy throne. Help us to treasure thy word. Help us, Lord, diligently to try to understand its historical dimension, and how it came to be, so that we might help those who labour under false ideas that they cannot read the Bible or that they must rely upon the church to interpret it, or whatever it is. We pray like Tyndale of old that thy word may so be circulated that all, even the

boy behind the plough, might come to see that this is the word of God, read it, learn it, receive it, and be saved. So part us with your own blessing, we pray, for thy own name's sake. Amen.

Why do Bible Translations Differ?

Tonight we have to deal with very detailed, and some rather difficult technicalities. But anything that confirms the word of our blessed Lord is surely dear to our heart, and we count it no trouble to be interested in his word, and to be among those who understand how it came down to us, and how it has been preserved. In former evenings we have been reminding ourselves that, in the Bible, we have God's revelation to mankind, and the content of that revelation has been secured throughout because all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. God inspired both the men whom he chose to preach his revelations, and those men again when he required them to write it down. We have also asserted that God's inspiration of his servants, the apostles and prophets, to write his words, resulted in that he gave us verbally inspired holy Scripture.

A question therefore arises in the minds of many believers. If the Bible is God's verbally inspired words, why are there so many different translations, and why do they differ, and why can't they all say exactly the same things? Tonight, I want to make my little contribution towards answering that question. Answering the question will involve me in explaining some major areas of biblical studies. The first one is called textual criticism.

Textual criticism

I am aware that those words, particularly the second of them, 'criticism,' sounds very bad in the ears of many believers. It sounds as if we are talking about criticizing the Bible, which no reverent believer would dream of doing. That, however, would be a misunderstanding of the term. What textual criticism is concerned with is the study of the manuscripts of the Bible. As we saw on an earlier occasion, there are very many manuscripts of, say, the New Testament. The total number of manuscripts of the New Testament, in part or whole, is somewhere about 5,366. There are also quotations in the early church fathers in the second and third centuries AD, so many in fact that they would be sufficient to reconstruct the whole of the New Testament except eleven verses. Then there are early translations into other languages which—when they are retranslated into Greek—can show us what was on the manuscripts that the translators used when they translated those early copies. In all, there are about 20,000 manuscripts of one kind and another of the New Testament, and textual critics are people that give themselves to the study of these manuscripts.

As I told you the other night, I am not an expert in the textual criticism of the New Testament, though of course I know one or two little things about it. I am however an Old Testament textual critic, concerned primarily with the manuscripts of the Old Testament. It is the same kind of work—to study those manuscripts and to discover, as best we can, what

exactly was in the originals when they were written down. Why do we need to study them like that? The simple answer is that we do not possess the original manuscripts. That is, we do not possess the actual pieces of papyrus on which Paul wrote his epistles. We no longer possess the original pieces of papyrus that Matthew used when he wrote his Gospel; and likewise for all the other books of the New Testament. The originals, the autographs as we call them, have long since perished. There are reasons for that, of course.

The originals were written on papyrus, and that is a very fragile material. It was originally grown mostly in Egypt, and then when it was turned into a kind of paper for writing on, it tended to last longer in Egypt than elsewhere because they do not have much rainfall. When old manuscripts were discovered that were buried in the sand, they were preserved because there was very little moisture in the sand, but in European countries papyrus much more easily disintegrates. A secondary reason is that when Paul wrote his letter, say, to Colossae, and gave instructions that this letter was to be read also in the church of the Laodiceans, you will imagine the many eager hands that were stretched out to take hold of this papyrus. 'Please can I take it home and read it for myself,' or 'My grandmother couldn't come to the meeting and she wants to read it,' and, 'Uncle George would like a copy', and then of course it had to be taken across the street and it had to be read to them, and they all wanted to handle it and read it. You can imagine how those busy, eager hands, handling the papyrus would eventually pull it to pieces, it being fragile material.

Doubtless it was copied out many times because when the early believers got a letter like that—and many of them could read—they would each want to make their own copy. Some of them would copy it well, and some of them not so well. I don't know whether you've ever tried to copy out a whole epistle by hand from your printed version. If you want something to do on a wet Monday afternoon, have a go at it. Then leave it a day or two and come back and see whether you have copied it absolutely exactly word-for-word, letter-for-letter, or whether you may have made a mistake or two. I would almost guarantee that, unless you are a genius, you would find that there was a mistake or two here and there.

Then there's another reason why manuscripts, in the early days, perished. In the persecutions under the Emperors Vespasian and Domitian, the Emperor sought to exterminate Christianity. No Roman emperors had been so bitter before in their persecutions. But these later persecutions took the form that Christians were commanded to hand in their religious books, and the Roman authorities systematically destroyed them. The penalty for failing to hand in their religious books was death. That caused great searching of heart amongst the leaders as to which books were the real holy books of Scripture that they must not surrender for the sake of the Lord Jesus, and which religious books weren't holy Scripture and could be handed over to the authorities. Other persecutions were bitter and severe, and many, many copies of holy Scripture were destroyed. Thankfully, again, copies had been made, and copies survived.

Comparing manuscripts

When, in later times, the believers begin to compare the manuscript copies they have, they discover that there are differences between the copies and they want to know which is the correct original reading. They couldn't refer to the original autographs written by the biblical

authors to settle the matter, because all they had were copies. Now you'll recall that there are over 5,000 straight copies of the books of the New Testament, let alone the quotations in the church fathers and early translations. And we have to face the fact that, when you look at these thousands of manuscripts there are literally thousands of differences. I have professed openly to you in previous evenings that I believe absolutely in the inspiration of Scripture, and I believe in its verbal inspiration. Let me then tell you that most of these thousands of differences are caused by mistakes in the copying out of the manuscripts.

I mentioned to you the other night the Codex Sinaiticus. It is a beautiful manuscript written in the fourth century, and written not on papyrus but on vellum, that is animal skin, and that itself would have been very expensive. It is written, doubtless, by a professional scribe because the lettering looks so regular and beautiful. But if you were in a position to view it at close quarters, you would see an example of how mistakes could come in to the manuscripts. At the top of one page there are four lines that have been written in; and lower down there is a little arrow in the text and a little Greek word that says, 'Above,' and the arrow points to these lines above. Clearly, when the scribe first wrote it out, he missed out those four lines accidentally. Someone checking what he had written, found he'd left them out and so added them at the top, and indicated in the text here where they should be placed.

Even in very expensive manuscripts, sometimes mistakes like that were made. Accidental omissions occurred, and nobody noticed. You'll find they've got gaps every now and again, of words or lines that accidentally fell out. There were other reasons why differences occurred. Some of them, not so very many proportionately, were deliberate alterations for all sorts and kinds of reasons. So then, there are thousands of differences. We have to face the facts.

To these facts there are two reactions that I find amongst believers and people in general. There is the one extreme, and this comes from believers who say, 'We don't care what you supposed experts say, we believe God would have preserved his words in the copies of his Scripture absolutely without mistake.' And the answer you can give to such people is, 'Well, read the manuscripts for yourself.' It is all right to believe that God could have preserved all the manuscripts of the Bible without any mistakes in, but when you come to the manuscripts, the actual fact is that you will find thousands of differences between them.

The other extreme comes from unbelievers, who say, 'There you are, the New Testament has been copied out so many times, and there are so many differences that you can no longer trust these manuscripts. You can no longer trust that we have in our Bibles what God intended us to have.' That likewise is false and is, in fact, nonsense. Let me tell you why that is nonsense. I remind you, first, that for 1,400 years, the copies had to be copied out by hand. You may praise God that they were copied out by hand and not printed, and I'll tell you why. When you have to write out a manuscript by hand, every one has to be separately written out. And, of course, they were written out by many different scribes at different times, from different copies, all over the Roman and the Byzantine world. Consider what would happen to you, for instance, if tomorrow you had a copy of your local newspaper, —that's printed of course— and as you peruse it you discover a paragraph that doesn't really make sense. It looks as if something has been left out—you come to the end of a line and there's no full stop and you start half way through another sentence. There would be no point taking your paper next door to compare it with theirs, because they both came off the same printing press. The only way

you could possibly find out what the real original was, would be to take the thing up to the head offices and see what the editor originally wrote. Every copy coming off the printing press would be exactly the same, so you would have no means of checking if you couldn't get hold of the editor.

In contrast, every single manuscript was written out by different people at different times on different copies. Even though they made mistakes, they didn't all make the same mistake, mercifully, so now you can compare all 5,000-plus of them! You'll find some share the same mistakes—like naughty school boys who've been copying off their next-door neighbour! But overall you'll find they don't all make the same mistake and therefore you can compare them, and that provides the basis for tracing back to what exactly the originals were.

I shall not worry you tonight with a great deal of the technical detail about the methods that textual critics use for working back from these manuscripts to determine, as exactly as they can, what originally stood in the books that the apostles and evangelists wrote. That would be far too long, far too technical. Let us content ourselves tonight by listening to some of the greatest experts in these fields that ever have been. The great and famous Westcott and Hort, much maligned nowadays by people who don't know better, gave their strength and expertise to a study of the ancient manuscripts. They concluded that, in their experience, when they have used them all and worked back as best they could to what stood in the originals, the amount of uncertainty—that is the places where you can't be exactly certain what was in the original— amounts to less than two percent of the whole; and of that two percent, most is concerned with little words and different kinds of words for 'and' and 'but' and so on, that make almost no difference to the material sense of the passage.

Sir Frederic Kenyon, Director of the British Museum, who edited the Chester Beatty Papyri, concludes his book on this subject by saying:

It is reassuring at the end to find that the general result of all these discoveries and all this study is to strengthen the proof of the authenticity of the Scriptures, and our conviction that we have in our hands, in substantial integrity, the veritable Word of God.³⁰

Moreover, we can say with absolute confidence that no fundamental doctrine of Scripture is in any doubt whatsoever as a result of differences in the biblical manuscripts. That comes about because no basic doctrine of Scripture depends simply on one verse, or even one paragraph for that matter. The great doctrines of the faith are taught all over the New Testament, and therefore when you study the doctrines, for instance all the passages that talk about justification by faith, or redemption by blood, or the second coming of Christ, or whatever it is, you can very soon see if a certain manuscript has a difference. You can see whether its doctrine conforms to the rest of the New Testament, or whether it goes against it.

So no fundamental doctrine of the faith is in doubt anywhere, because of the differences in the manuscripts. Let me give you a practical example of what I'm talking about, and turn you into textual critics! Here is a very famous verse from the end of the New Testament, Revelation 22:14.

³⁰ F. G. Kenyon, *The Story of the Bible*, 1936.

Version A. 'Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city' (KJV).

Version B. 'Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates' (ESV).

You will see that the beginning and end of the verse is substantially the same, but the manuscripts divide into two groups as between those which say 'do his commandments' and those which have 'wash their robes' (that is, in the blood of Christ). A majority of the manuscripts have the first version. So now if you're our translator, here's a place where you must decide which manuscripts you are going to follow. Suppose you were a missionary to a remote tribe in the rainforests of Peru and you were translating the New Testament for the first time into the tribal language, which manuscripts would you follow? You can't follow both, so how would you decide which to follow?

Choosing between differing manuscripts

When people ask me why differences occur in translations, this is one of the reasons. Faced with differences in the manuscripts, translators have got to decide which manuscript they're going to follow, before they start even translating it into their particular language. I'll tell you at once which one I would follow, and that is the second one. One of my reasons for doing it is that, when it comes to our right to enter the eternal city and come to the tree of life, the New Testament consistently says everywhere that it is *through the blood of Christ* that we are qualified to enter the eternal city. Nowhere is it put that the condition for entry into that eternal city is to do his commandments. Therefore, judging the matter by all those other verses that talk about how and by what right we enter God's heaven, I shall say that the consistent opinion of the New Testament agrees with Version B and not Version A. There are other reasons why we would think that. When John talks about the commandments of the Lord in his book, and urges us to keep them, he doesn't normally say, '*do his commandments,*' but he talks about '*keeping his commandments*'—so this doesn't look like a phrase John would have used.

Predominantly in my mind, however, is the question of the fundamental doctrine—on what ground do you enter heaven? I imagine if I asked you that, with one accord you would choose the one which says that entry into heaven is conditional upon washing your robes in the blood of the Lamb. That indeed is what Chapter 7 says of the great multitude of the redeemed who stand before the throne, and the elder tells John,

These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God. (Rev 7:14–15)

This is Scripture saying quite clearly that the ground of standing before God's throne is nothing other than the blood and sacrifice of our blessed Lord, Jesus Christ. To show you that I am not being eccentric in my judgment, let me read you the translation by J. N. Darby—no one could accuse him of being a modernist! Darby's translation of Revelation 22:14 is 'Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have right to the tree of life, and that they should go in by the gates into the city.' In his larger editions, he points out in his notes what the

various manuscripts say and gives it as his judgment that the original reading was 'Blessed are they that wash their robes.'

It's that kind of thing which translators have constantly to deal with as they translate the New Testament into other languages. They can't begin to translate unless they have first decided which manuscripts, in any one case, they are going to follow. After all that, let me remind you which of them our King James Version follows, and it is version A. Why should that be so? Because their text is based on later manuscripts, as I would understand it, and as Darby would have understood it—manuscripts which, at this point, had been wrongly changed. But I come back to the fact that, when all is said and done, the basic doctrines of the New Testament are not in any doubt—as you see surely in this case—because you can compare the doctrines throughout the whole of the New Testament, and judge in any one case whether this version or that, agrees with the general doctrine of the New Testament.

Translating the Old Testament

The Masoretic Texts

I'm not going to say any more about the New Testament. I must, for a few moments, talk to you about the similar problem in the Old Testament. The Old Testament is, as you know, different from the New Testament in that its original languages were Hebrew and Aramaic, not Greek. When we come to the Old Testament we begin first of all with the surviving manuscripts written in Hebrew. The majority of the Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament are what we call the *Masoretic Texts*, so called because the text was developed and guarded, and copied out, and corrected by Jewish scholars called Masoretes. They became ever more expert at writing out their Hebrew Bible with tremendous accuracy, as far as they could. The majority of the Hebrew manuscripts are Masoretic Texts. Then there is a minority of Hebrew manuscripts, the non-Masoretic Texts, and I must stop there to tell you a little bit about them.

Until the year 1947, the earliest Masoretic Text manuscripts we had were written in the ninth century AD. So, the earliest manuscript we had of the Hebrew Bible, before the year 1947, was in AD 800s. Now, ponder that a moment. When did Moses write Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy? What would you say? About 1200 BC? And the first copy in Hebrew that we had of it, until 1947, was written in about AD 800. If you can work out that arithmetic, I think that comes to somewhere about 2,000 years—a 2,000-year gap between the earliest manuscript of the Hebrew Bible and the originals written by Moses. Of course, we had all sorts of other evidence, earlier than those Hebrew manuscripts. For example, we have quotations in the New Testament that were much earlier: we have them in the Greek translation. But, strictly speaking, for the actual manuscripts of the Old Testament, as I say, there was a 2,000-year gap between Moses and the earliest copy we have.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

Then, in 1947, and from then onwards, manuscripts came to light, the so-called *Dead Sea Scrolls*—found in a series of caves over a distance of about 30km in the Judean desert. Those were exciting days, when these manuscripts were discovered, because some of them were 800 to 900, or even 1,000 years earlier than anything we had before. I said a moment ago that the

gap between Moses and the earlier ones we first had was nearly 2,000 years. These were 1,000 years earlier than anything we had had before.

You can see photographs of a scroll of Leviticus which was written about 100 BC³¹. It is in the old Hebrew script. I couldn't read the stuff: it is an older script than I've ever studied. It is not the script you would find in a Hebrew Bible to the present day. It's part of a scroll, with a long rolling pin at each end that they rolled up. It is a very precious manuscript because it cuts the gap between the earliest manuscript we had previously and the time of Moses by 1,000 years at least.

There were many others that were discovered. Some large and complete scrolls, and some books like the famous scrolls of Isaiah, and others just tiny fragments. The major lesson that those discoveries taught us was simply this. To everybody's surprise, the vast majority of the manuscripts agreed—not necessarily one hundred percent, but agreed ninety-five percent or more—with the Hebrew manuscripts we already had. That confirmed the tremendously high value of the manuscripts we already had—the Masoretic manuscripts. The majority of those from the Dead Sea caves were so close to the Masoretic Text that we call them Proto-Masoretic Texts.

That is a very important thing to say, but there was, and still is, a minority of manuscripts, mostly fragments, that disagree with the Masoretic Texts. In some places the differences are small, in others the differences are quite large. And it is a very interesting thing. And I'll tell you why in a moment.

The Septuagint

But, I come back to add another fact, and this is what makes it complicated. The evidence for the Old Testament was first the Hebrew Masoretic Text manuscripts and, secondly, the manuscripts that were non-Masoretic Texts. But in addition to that we have another source of evidence, and that is the so-called Septuagint. That is the name given to a series of translations of the Old Testament into Greek. And the importance of these Greek translations is that they were made from 270 BC onwards. So they were very early translations of the Hebrew into Greek, and we have scores and scores of manuscripts of that Greek translation. Some of the big New Testament manuscripts also have the Old Testament in Greek in those same manuscripts. They were very important.

In Greek-speaking parts of the Roman Empire, when the earliest Christians read their Old Testament, if they were Greek speakers, they read it in this, rather than in Hebrew. When the writers of the New Testament quote the Old Testament, because they are writing in Greek, they often use this Greek translation in the New Testament. It gets complicated, but that is the fact. They don't always use those Greek translations, sometimes they make up their own. So now we have three kinds of manuscripts to concern ourselves with when we come to study the text of Old Testament. We have the majority (Masoretic) manuscripts, we have the minority Hebrew manuscripts, and we have the manuscripts of those very early Greek translations, the Septuagint. This is something to praise God for, because you will remember

³¹ You can view some of these photos at www.deadseascrolls.org.il

that when we were talking about the New Testament, we had thousands of manuscripts, and we praise God for that because we can compare the manuscripts one with another.

Suppose this was the situation. You had the original manuscript, and then somebody made a copy. And then somebody made a copy from that one, and made a mistake. And then, some people copied that mistaken manuscript out and they repeated the mistake. They copied it out a hundred times, but every time with the mistake in it. Now, if you had one of these hundred, how would you see there was a mistake? Well, what you have in fact, in both Old and New Testament, is not just that. You have copies made here, and perhaps they came down and made a mistake, but you have other copies here that didn't make that mistake. And when they get copied out you can compare the two, and discover the mistakes by comparison. It is very important, therefore, that even in the Hebrew, we have these different manuscripts, two lots in Hebrew and then those in Greek, that we can compare one with another, and so the more easily detect where mistakes and alteration have come in. It is to that work that I have given myself for many years, technically and professionally.

I will have to tell you that, while the vast majority of the manuscripts of the Old Testament confirm us in our belief that we have solidly, in our Bibles, what God intended us to have, there are places where problems have arisen, and work still needs to be done. For instance, if you read the Prophet Jeremiah, you will find that, at the end of the Prophet Jeremiah in your Bibles, there are a whole series of denunciations of the Gentile nations for their sins. They come at the end of your translation of the Hebrew of Jeremiah. But, when we looked at the Septuagint manuscript—we have known for centuries that the Greek translation of Jeremiah would have existed in the time of the apostles—the Greek translations of Jeremiah had those same oracles but in the middle of Jeremiah, not at the end. And they have them in a different order from what the Hebrew has them. And some of them are not so long, some are a shorter version of those oracles than you find in the main Hebrew.

So now we want to know why the difference. And then we look again, and we see that some of these manuscripts from the Dead Sea, Hebrew though they are, tend to agree, not with the majority of Hebrew manuscripts, but with the Septuagint, on this kind of thing. And, therefore, scholars give themselves to considering why those differences are there. There are all sorts of things you could think of. For instance, when Jeremiah spoke his prophecies they were not at first written down, but he had a scribe called Baruch, and he wrote them down. Then one day Jeremiah was taken before the king and he had to read what he had written, and the king didn't like it so he got out his knife and cut it to bits and chucked it into the fire. Baruch not being daunted, wrote it out again, and he added much thereto. Now if you look at your book of Jeremiah in your English translations, and you look at the prophecies he gave, you will notice from the dates at which he gave them, that they're not in chronological order. So who was it that put them in their present order in the majority Hebrew manuscript? Who do you think did that? You'll say, 'That's a big difference, isn't it?'

But you'll remember that I told you last night that in the early copy of the New Testament which we know as the Chester Beatty Papyrus, written about AD 200, the early collection of Paul's Epistles has the epistles in a different order from what you've got in your English Bible. He has Romans, and then it's followed by Hebrews, and Ephesians comes before Corinthians, and all sorts of things like that. So we know that kind of phenomenon—that the manuscripts

of the New Testament don't all have the writings of Paul in the same order. So it is evident to us now that the ancient manuscripts of Jeremiah's prophecies were not all collected in the same order in all the manuscripts.

And then as you look at the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, you know they have a record of our Lord's sayings and of his miracles. Have you not noticed, sometimes, that Matthew would tell you a story and it's quite short; and you find that Mark has it but in a slightly different place, and he's got a much longer story of this miracle that the Lord Jesus did. That doesn't make you doubt the inspiration of Scripture. You'll say, 'That's okay by me. Matthew took the original story and the Holy Spirit guided him to tell it, but in a few words. Mark took that story and the Holy Spirit guided him to tell it in longer detail.' That doesn't worry you at all: you say both are inspired. The same applies to Jeremiah, so there's nothing to get really too upset about if some Hebrew manuscripts have Jeremiah's prophecy in one order, and some Hebrew manuscripts and the Greek translation has those prophecies in a different order; and some are different lengths from what you would find them in the majority of Hebrew manuscripts.

I trust I have not worried you with my remarks. It is not my intention to cause you to doubt the inspiration of God's holy word. Rather, I would leave with you the impression that, in the multitude of manuscripts, we have the resources to discover the original text in a very great degree.

The need for evangelical scholars

There are still uncertainties in parts of the Old Testament and people like myself have worked on them. Here is a book by the present chairman of the publication committee of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and in it you will find him putting forth his views. In it also, you will find the views of other scholars and, in amongst those other scholars, is one whose initials are DWG! You will find that the Emanuel Tov constantly disagrees with him, and DWG constantly disagrees with Emanuel Tov. He doesn't always fill in all the reasons for the disagreements, but there you are. The work goes on. Now as a very old aged pensioner, what I would like to do is to exhort my younger brothers and sisters. Someone ought to look after these manuscripts, surely. It is a very curious thing that evangelicals who believe in the verbal inspiration of holy Scripture, and would go to the stake for that belief, have provided very few men or women to give themselves to the study and the care of the original manuscripts that are basic to everything else. Just let me blow off a little steam, and then to sow a thought in the minds of our younger brothers and sisters. There is a service still to be done for men and women whom God would raise up to look after these things on behalf of all of the people of God; because the manuscripts are in the big libraries of this world and are not always among friends. There is a job, like Moses' mother took on, to care for Moses when he was in the hands of the Egyptians.

Keeping translations accurate and up-to-date

So now, enough said about that. I have one or two other things that have to be said, on another line, so let me leave it there. At the beginning of our lecture we raised the question of why translations of the Bible differ so much. The first reason we've given is because there are

differences in the manuscripts, and some translators will prefer to go with one reading, one variant, and some will prefer to go with others. That's why you have seen that Darby and all modern translations that I know of, in that verse in Revelation, would agree with the manuscripts that say, 'Blessed are they who wash their robes'. The Authorized Version, along with many others of the older kind, chose to go with the manuscripts that said, 'Blessed are those that do his commandment'. You have to make up your mind, and that's one reason why translations differ.

But there's another reason—a much more simple one, but an important one. All translations need to be revised from time to time. That is an important point to remember, because translations get old. The title page of the Authorized Version³² (King James Version, KJV), opens with these words:

The HOLY BIBLE
Containing the Old and New Testaments
Translated out of the original tongues:
And with the former translations diligently compared and revised.

You will notice the reference to 'the former translations'. The Authorized Version was not the first English translation. There were many translations into English before the Authorized Version and it was, as the title page says, a 'revised version'. It is a revision, made by diligently comparing and revising the former translations, and correcting what they thought to be mistakes in the former translation. So, older translations need to be revised from time to time, or brand-new ones made. Why is that so?

Correcting errors

In the first place, no translation is perfect and therefore you will find that there are mistakes. For example, look at Luke 23:15. Pilate has sent our blessed Lord to Herod and Herod has sent him back to Pilate. Pilate then says to the crowd, 'Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him' (namely, by the Lord Jesus). That's what it should be. Pilate is saying, 'I sent Jesus to Herod, and Herod has found no fault in him. I've examined him before you. I find no fault in him. It is clear nothing deserving death has been done by him.' That is what the Greek says, and it is absolutely true. Both Herod and Pilate agreed the Lord Jesus had done nothing wrong whatsoever.

Alas, the Authorized Version—that marvellous translation which we all love!—got this bit wrong, plainly mistranslating the Greek. It says, 'Nothing worthy of death is done unto him.' What? Nothing worthy of death was done *to* Christ? Really? When Herod's soldiers mocked him, and beat him, and scourged him, and Pilate's soldiers beat him, and mocked him and scourged him, nothing worthy of death was done to him? Well, not even Pilate said that. That has come in because the Authorized Version made a mistake in their translation of the Greek. When you look at other translations, you will see that they will agree with what I have just said. For instance, J. N. Darby on that same verse has, 'And behold, nothing worthy of death

³² This title page was a standard feature of all printed copies of the KJV but is not always included in more recent copies.

is done by him'. And the New International Version agrees there with Darby: 'as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death'.

Changes in the meaning of words

A second reason why translations need to be revised and changed is that, over the years, language becomes antiquated, and then possibly misleading. You've often heard it said that, in 2 Thessalonians 2:7, where the Authorized Version says, 'he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way', it actually means, 'He who now restrains will restrain'. The old English, 'let' has now, in modern English come to mean, not restrain, but the very opposite: to *allow* somebody to do something. It is therefore potentially saying the opposite to a modern English person than what the intended meaning is.

I remember in my childhood—and that's a terrific memory because it goes back a long way!—I met a dear lady, elderly by that time and a little eccentric, who told me that she read in the Bible in Matthew, our Lord's directive that when you pray, you are to 'enter into your closet, and shut the door' (see Matt 6:6 KJV). She took it, not in the sense which it originally had in English, but in the sense which that word had in her girlhood. So, thinking to obey the Lord, whenever she prayed she went into the lavatory and locked the door. And there, I hope, got down on her knees! Well, of course in the days when the Authorized Version was translated, *closet* had meant a cupboard, not a lavatory. In modern America, they have retained that Elizabethan English and the closet in American language, to this very present day, means a cupboard. But it sounds odd in modern English to have a translation that says, 'When you pray enter your closet.' What it means is to go into your room, your private room, and close the door. A closed room, that's all it means. And, if we're going to evangelize our modern world, why should we make it difficult for them by using a translation which, if they are modern, they are liable to misunderstand.

There are many more such things you could instance from that old translation. It's marvellous if you still understand the old English. I love the Authorized Version for its beautiful English and am aware, of course, as you would be, of some of the possible mistakes in understanding if you think it's modern English when all the while it's old English. Similarly, Luke 5:3 in the Authorized Version says, 'He entered into one of the ships', and the New International Version says, 'He got into one of the boats'. You say, 'What difference does that make?' Well, nothing at all actually. He entered into one of the ships; he got into one of the boats. So there's no need to revise it if you don't want to. But now let me ask you what you say in your normal words. If you went down to the ferry to go over to France, would you tell your friend that when you got to Dover, or wherever it was, you entered into one of the ships? Or would you say you got on the boat? Or you got on the ship? Would you say 'I *entered into* one of the ships'? Well, perhaps you did, and everybody would know what you meant even if you said it. You would use the term in some contexts in modern English, as in 'he *entered into* an agreement.' But nowadays we don't normally say, 'he entered into a ship,' we say, 'he got on a ship,' or something.

And secondly, we know from the context that they were fishing vessels, as they belonged to the fishermen. If you went to Lowestoft and saw these vessels in the port, would you say they were fishing ships? Or would you call them fishing boats? Well, I'll leave you to judge!

It all comes down to the same thing in the end, but in a translation, if you constantly use phrases that are out of date, you will eventually make it sound a bit odd.

The 'emotional' level

You have to be careful because in English, as in other languages, you can take a whole lot of words that basically mean the same thing, but there is a difference in the emotional level. Look at this list:

- He died
- He deceased
- He passed away
- He went home
- He expired
- He gave up the ghost
- He departed

They all mean the same thing—basically the same thing. But you say, 'No, they don't all mean quite the same thing,' and what you're thinking about is that they have a different emotional level. 'He died,' is a stark fact. 'He is deceased,' that's a sort of a legal term, 'the deceased'. 'He passed away,' softens the expression somewhat. And look at the next one: it does mean he died, but this is a Christian way of talking about it. Similarly, 'He went home' is a lovely way of talking about it. 'He expired,' we don't normally say that now, nor would we say, 'He gave up the ghost,' which sounds a little bit odd.

If you were a translator translating into English which would you use? You could think of others. 'He fell asleep' says the Bible. 'He slept.' That's a lovely Christian way of talking about it. It's true that they all mean basically the same thing, but you have to watch the emotional level. That's why some of our modern translations grate on the ears of the older people. The translation is correct, but the emotional level is wrong. Some people will find the new translations offensive for that reason, because they get the emotional level wrong; and here we've got to ask for patience with one another, because the emotional level changes over the years. I was reading a little bit of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* the other day, and he was talking about putting a key in the lock, and it was very difficult to turn, and Bunyan actually wrote, 'The lock was damnable hard to turn.' Now if I had dared say that in this hall, I would've been censored, (so I haven't said it, but that's what Bunyan wrote!) In those days, that word had no bad meaning with it: nowadays it would sound like a swear word. So this emotional level of words changes over the centuries, that's why we will need new translations, and yet the new translation has got to be aware of the emotional level, and be sensitive to it.

Word-for-word translations

Some people say therefore, 'Well, the simplest thing is to translate word-for-word, that's what you want to do.' And they say, 'That's the trouble with this bad New International Version: it doesn't translate word-for-word. Why can't we have word-for-word? We believe in verbal inspiration, so why can't we have translations that are word-for-word?' Okay, what about *pommes de terre*, then? Imagine going down to your greengrocer tomorrow and saying, 'I've got some French people coming to me, and they told me the vegetables they'd like for lunch,

so please give me 3 kilos of apples of the earth.’ Your greengrocer would likely say, ‘We don’t keep them, sir!’ It’s no good translating it literally. It doesn’t make sense in English, so what you have to do is say what the English equivalent is, and that’s potatoes. Ask the greengrocer for 3 kilos of potatoes, and he’ll know what you mean. You cannot translate it literally.

So look now at this phrase from one of our Lord’s parables. ‘Can the children of the bridechamber mourn . . .?’ (Matt 9:15 KJV). What would your friends think if you came back from a wedding and when they asked how the wedding was, you said, ‘Marvellous. There were 105 children of the bridechamber there.’ It would be open to misunderstanding, I think! But I’m translating it literally, and so did the Authorized Version. But look how unfortunate it is in English if you translate it literally. What on earth are children of the bridechamber? It is simply the Hebrew for wedding guests, that’s all.

The use of ‘dynamic’ translations

You can’t always translate literally and that’s why modern translations have sometimes departed from a literal translation, and gone over to a more ‘dynamic’ translation, as it is called, in order to get the meaning across better. Look for example at Romans 6:1–2, where there is a phrase in Greek, *mē genoito*. Literally it means, ‘May it not be so’. It’s a phrase that Paul would use in this kind of context: ‘Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? *mē genoito*.’ How would you translate that? ‘Shall we continue in sin? May it not be so.’ Well, even the Authorized Version couldn’t stick that, because it sounds so weak in English. In Greek, *mē genoito* is a very strong term emotionally, and to translate it ‘may it not be so,’ is weak and misses the emotional strength of it. So even the Authorized Version didn’t translate literally. It said, ‘God forbid’. In the Greek, there is no word for God and there is no word for forbid, but even the Authorized Version recognizes that you can’t always translate a thing literally, and they don’t. J. N. Darby says, ‘Far be the thought’. The English Standard Version and New International Version say, ‘By no means!’. They all mean the same: it’s just different ways of getting across that particular Greek phrase. If you were given the choice, ‘God forbid’; ‘Never’; ‘Far be the thought’; ‘Perish the idea’ – which one is better? Well, you’ll have your choice. It doesn’t matter. None of them translates the New Testament literally. They are what we call ‘dynamic’ translations.

Translation versus interpretation

It is true that modern translations like the New International Version (NIV) have used dynamic translations much more than the old Authorized Version (KJV) but, in principle, the King James Version is prepared to accept dynamic translations. There are more difficult things in Scripture occasionally – when a translator is obliged not just to translate but to give us an interpretation of what he thinks a phrase means. When Joshua and the Israelites were ordered to fight the Amalekites, God commanded Moses that it should be written in a book that God would have war forever against the Amalekites (see Exod 17:14–16).

The Authorized Version has, ‘Because the LORD hath sworn that the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.’ The Hebrew literally says, ‘For a hand on,’ or you could translate it, ‘For a hand against the throne of the Lord.’ You could translate it literally if you liked, ‘For a hand against the throne of the Lord, the Lord will have war . . .’. What does it mean? The Jewish Bible has, ‘The hand upon the throne of the Lord.’ The New

International Version has, 'Because hands were lifted up against the throne of the LORD'—meaning, I suppose, that the Israelites lifted up their hands to God in prayer, to appeal to him, and the Lord answered by saying, 'I'll have war against Amalek from generation to generation.' The great Hebrew and Greek scholar, Dominique Barthélemy says it has nothing to do with prayer. 'For a hand has been raised against the throne of the Lord,' and because the Amalekites have dared to raise their hands against God's throne, God will have war with them forever. The Authorized Version has interpreted it in a different way. The translators took it that the hand raised on the throne of the Lord is the hand of God, and he has lifted up his hand in order to swear a divine oath; and so they've translated it, 'Because the LORD hath sworn that the LORD will have war with Amalek'. Who's right? Well, I'll ask you afterwards!

But there you see that translators are obliged to interpret what they find in front of them. If you read the notes they supply with their translation, they will all admit that this is what they think it means, but the thing could be interpreted other ways. How can we know what it should be? Well, you are not altogether dependent on the experts. There are good commentaries by godly authors who, when they come to passages like that, will discuss it with you, how they think it ought to be translated, and then let you make up your mind. If you take the big Bible editions, the library editions, they will tell you what the original language literally says, and why they opt for this interpretation but another interpretation is possible; and they'll let you make up your mind. That is very important.

When a translator goes in for too much interpretation, sometimes his readers violently disagree. The Authorized Version of Romans 8:9 says, 'You are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit.' The New International Version has not been content just to translate it literally: 'You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit'. Other translations have gone even further. For example: 'But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit' (NLT). By any estimate that is going in for interpretation in a very big way, instead of being content to translate what is there. In my humble estimation, and I say it with due respect, here I think they would have been wiser not to go so far into interpretation but to have contented themselves with the plainer version, such as the Authorized Version gives, 'You are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit'. But again, in the bigger editions they will discuss these matters with you in the text itself.

Some translations have connotations that are perhaps undesirable—at least to some. When good old Tyndale translated Ephesians 5:25, he translated it as, 'Christ loved the congregation'. He used that term to make it clear that what Christ loved was not a building called *the church* in English, but the people—the congregation of the redeemed. The Authorized Version, perhaps unfortunately, went and changed it, and they have it, 'Christ also loved the church.' Which would you prefer? J. N. Darby of course put, 'Christ also loved the assembly.' They're all translating the same word. Their reasons for doing it are theological, but they carry implications and connotations, so we need to be careful. As serious students, it is important that we study the context carefully to find out what a term like, say, 'the church,' actually means in a particular verse. If you read the New Testament well enough and thoroughly enough, you'll soon find out that the word 'church', even in the Authorized Version, doesn't mean the building: it means the redeemed people.

A final exhortation. I have quoted these instances, not to confuse you, but to remind you that translating God's holy word is a very, very big task. There is a sense in which it is never done. Each generation needs, perhaps, almost to do it again for itself. It isn't a job to be taken on hand by people who are not experts. Let us thank God for that large army of men and women, all down the long centuries, who copied out the Bible by hand. How many of us would have ever done it? We have Bibles in our hands because those multitude of men and monkish souls, under persecution some of them, copied out the Bible laboriously, day after day, copied it out by hand. God be praised for them. What a debt we owe them. What a debt we owe to men and women who gave themselves to learn the original languages when learning them was difficult, so that they might understand as exactly as possible what God was originally saying. God be thanked for all those men and women who have given themselves to translating God's word as accurately as they can, in terms that each generation could understand. And thank God for those who have given themselves to study it in depth, that they might help the rest of us to understand and interpret aright what has been written.

Unjust criticisms of some modern versions

There are very bad translations, done by heretics, like the Jehovah Witnesses. They deserve to be denounced. But, my dear brothers and sisters, if I may say it with all kindness of heart, beware of people who denounce versions that are made by honourable God-loving and God-fearing people. For example, it is common these days to come across tracts denouncing the New International Version (NIV). That version is not a perfect version, and its chief editor has told me personally that he doesn't regard it as a perfect version. If you read their study Bible and you look at the notes, they explicitly say that they believe in the total inerrancy of the word of God as originally given. They believe in the deity of Christ absolutely. They say it explicitly in their study version. It is a sad thing when you find other believers writing things like this,

Despite claiming to believe in the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible, the NIV translators used the dynamic equivalent translation method which, by its very nature, denies both inerrancy and the need for inerrancy.

Now, just you listen to it. That is either written in ignorance or because the version they favour is the Authorized Version. We have just seen that the Authorized Version uses dynamic equivalence. But they take it upon themselves to say that because the New International Version has used dynamic equivalence, it is denying inerrancy and the need for inerrancy. My dear brothers and sisters, that is a downright slander. If the New International Version translators were ungodly men, they would sue them in the courts for libel and defamation of character. It is not the kind of thing that one believer should say of another believer.

Let me mention one final thing. One of the specific criticisms some have levelled against the New International Version is that its translation in places fails to attribute deity to the Lord Jesus Christ where some other translations do. The fact is that there are a number of places in the New Testament where you could translate the Greek in one of two ways; and there are strong arguments for both ways. For example, in Romans 9:5, you could translate the end of the verse as:

of whom came Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever more.

Another translation could say, and argue for it,

of whom came the Christ. God who is over all be blessed forever more.

The first would attribute deity to Christ, while the second would not. Professor Don Carson in his book on this issue³³ has tabulated these various parts of the verses in the New Testament and compared how they have been translated in a number of the translations in common use. If you look at the chart in his book, you will see that, on his analysis, the New International Version translation attributes deity to the Lord Jesus in seven out of the eight occasions in question. This compares with four out of the eight occasions in the case of the Authorized Version. It is not that one translator is saying that another is wrong, simply that that is their preferred translation. They allow that you could translate it differently. It is open to you to agree with the Authorized Version, but don't misunderstand the situation. When the Authorized Version in a particular instance declined to use a translation that attributes deity to the Lord Jesus, it was not denying the deity of the Lord Jesus: it would never dream of doing such a thing. It is a question of choosing between equally valid alternatives.

The point is simply that, given the decision, the New International Version has attributed deity to the Lord Jesus significantly more times than the Authorized Version. It is not Christian behaviour to write pamphlets that denounce the New International Version as though it were absolutely heretical, and to praise the Authorized Version as though it were, in these respects, much more loyal to the Lord Jesus.

The Bible stands like a rock undaunted
 'Mid the raging storms of time;
 Its pages burn with the truth eternal,
 And they glow with a light sublime.

The Bible stands like a mountain tow'ring
 Far above the works of man;
 Its truth by none ever was refuted,
 And destroy it they never can.

The Bible stands tho' the hills may tumble,
 It will firmly stand when the earth shall crumble;
 I will plant my feet on its firm foundation,
 For the Bible stands.³⁴

³³ D. A. Carson, *The King James Version Debate: A plea for realism*, Baker Academic, 1978.

³⁴ Haldor Lillenas (1885-1959), 'The Bible stands like a rock undaunted' (1917).

About the Author

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