

Do we need to know
Hebrew or Greek to truly
have the Word
of God?

Berend de Boer, chairman

We can speculate...

What is wise?

But it's much better to let God's Word answer this question.

Psalm 119:105: *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*

We'll look at this question from various angles

1. Should we translate?
2. What should we translate?
3. Can we trust the translation?

1. Is translation permitted?

Jewish Rabbis said no. The reaction to the Septuagint, the translation into Greek, became:

*The **the** day on which it was made was as calamitous to Israel as the day on which the golden calf was substituted for the true God, because the Torah cannot adequately be reproduced in a translation.*

(C.D. Ginsburg, **Introduction to the Masoretico-critical edition of the Hebrew Bible**)

2. Is translation permitted?

Jeremiah has a single sentence in a different language than Hebrew (Aramaic), where God denounces idolatry, chapter 10:11:

Thus shall ye say unto them, The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens.

(there are even entire chapters in Aramaic in the book of Daniel).

When speaking to other nations, God speaks their language.

3. Is translation permitted?

NT Testament quotes translated Hebrew as the Word of God.

Matthew 1:22-23:

Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

The prophet spoke this in Hebrew, but that is completely irrelevant in the Greek New Testament. Examples like this can be multiplied.

4. Is translation permitted?

At Pentecost the apostles were able to speak different languages:

Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. ... we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

Note that the miracle didn't happen to the hearers, but in the speakers: they were able to speak different language. They heard the words of God in their own tongue.

5. Is translation permitted?

In the New Testament translation is a non-issue. It's never even brought up as a potential issue.

Do we need to know Greek because **else**
we won't know what manuscripts to use?

Wisdom 1: in the multitude of counsellors is safety

Proverbs 11:14: *Where no counsel is, the people fall:*

but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.

Multitude of counsellors:

1. Manuscripts: only way to get copies.
2. Ancient translations.
3. Lectionaries
4. Direct quotations found in writings from Church fathers.
5. Expositions from Church fathers.

Witnesses 1: Manuscripts

Greek manuscripts are divided into two classes according to their style of writing: uncials and minuscules.

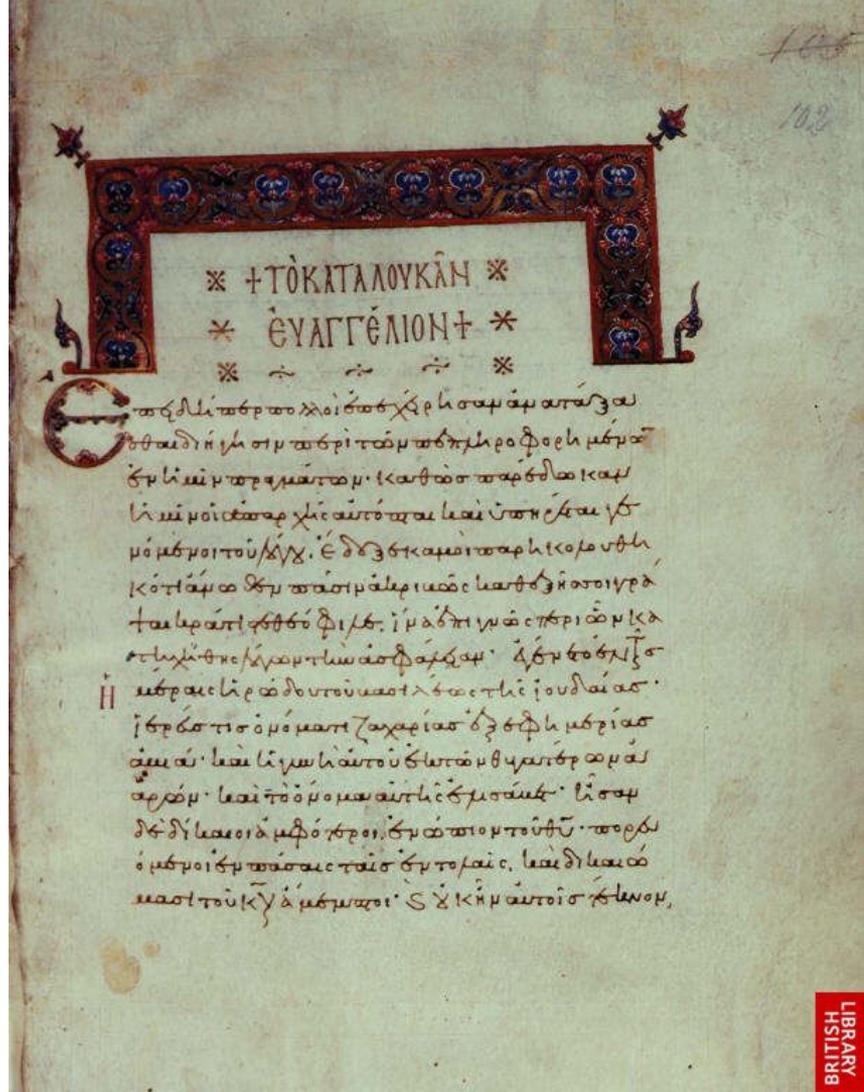
- Uncials (majuscule): large and disconnected letters (not capitals).
- Minuscules: small, connected, and written with a running hand.

Minuscule

Replaced uncial script, began in 9th century.

Also known as cursive manuscripts.

Used for all kinds of manuscripts, not just Bible manuscripts.

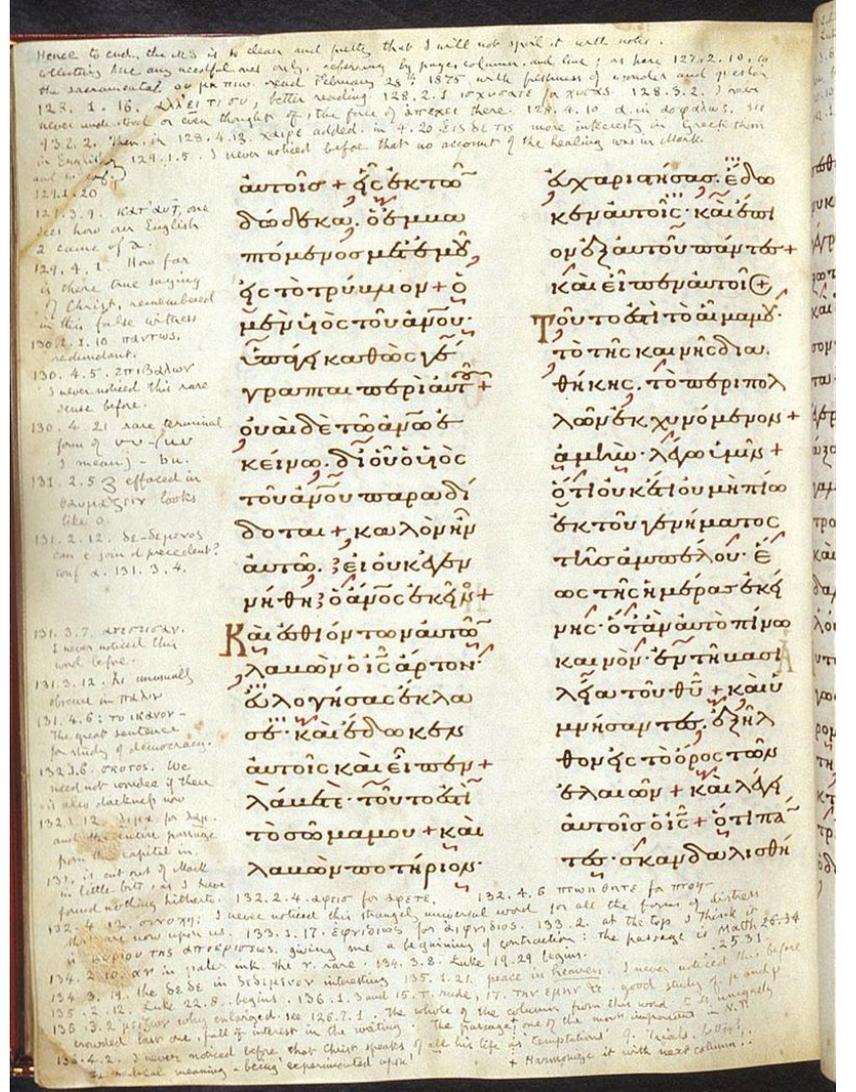


Witnesses 2: Lectionaries

A lectionary is a book or listing that contains a collection of **scripture** readings appointed for a given day or occasion.

Written in uncial or minuscule Greek letters.

Not complete, but highly accurate as read in church. Oldest are from 6th century.



Summary so far

These manuscripts have:

- No distinction between uppercase and lowercase.
- No spaces.
- No punctuation: no dots, commas or speech marks.
- No chapter indications.
- No verse indications.

Witnesses 3: church fathers

Church fathers often quote Scripture. That is a clear indication of the Scriptures they had in their possession.

Witnesses 4: expositions from Church Fathers

Mark 15:39: *And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.*

John Chrysostom, 4th century, explains:

What chiefly moved him to make that confession of his faith was that our Saviour evidently died with power.

So that helps us to understand that he read the words “so cried out” in Mark 15:39.

Wisdom 2:

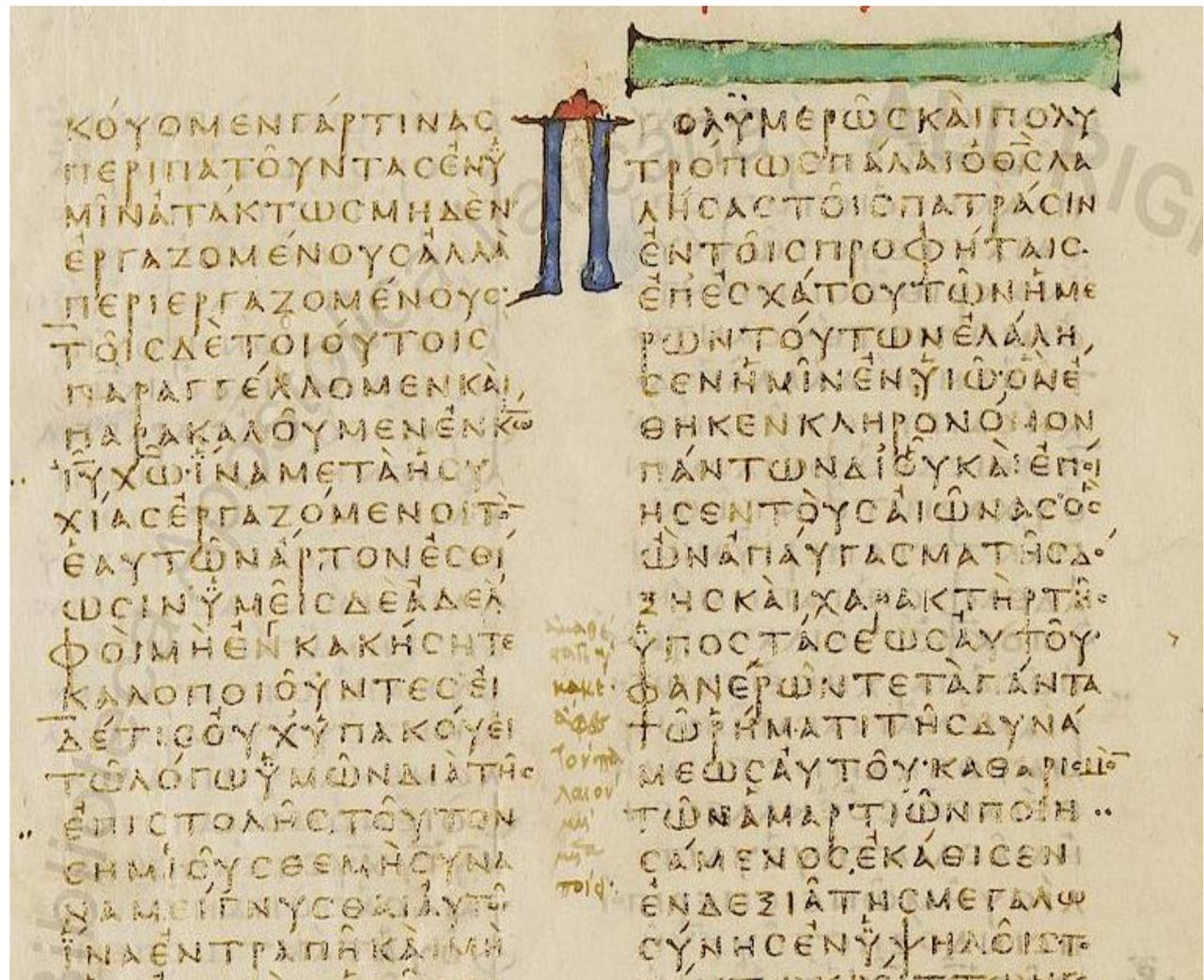
Luke 16:10: *He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.*

“Oldest, and best manuscripts”, or “most mutilated, rewritten, and corrected?”:

- Codex Bezae (D): As many as eleven people have corrected the manuscript between the sixth and twelfth centuries.
- Codex Sinaiticus (Aleph): 23,000 corrections.
- Codex Vaticanus (B): “Thou knafe, leave the old reading alone.” in the margin.

Vaticanus (B)

Fool and
knave, leave
the old
reading and
do not
correct it!



Wisdom 3: do these witnesses agree?

Mark 14:56: *For many bare false witness against him,
but their witness agreed not together.*

One would expect the Lord's prayer, Luke 11:2-4, to read the same in the best manuscripts.

Let's compare if the false witnesses agree.

(From "The Revision Revised")

The Lord's prayer 1

AV	Vaticanus (B)	Sinaiticus (κ)	Bezae (D)
Our Father which art in heaven	Father	Father	Our Father which art in heaven
Hallowed be thy name	Hallowed be thy name	Hallowed be thy name	Hallowed be thy name upon us.
Thy kingdom come.	Thy kingdom come.	Thy kingdom come.	Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.		Thy will be done, so also as in heaven, so in earth.	Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.

The Lord's prayer 2

AV	Vaticanus (B)	Sinaiticus (κ)	Bezae (D)
Give us day by day our daily bread.	Give us day by day our daily bread.	Give us day by day our daily bread.	Give us day by day this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins: for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us	And forgive us our sins: for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us	And forgive us our sins: for as we also we ourselves forgive every one that is indebted to us	And forgive us our sins debts : for we also as also we forgive every one that is indebted to us our debtors
And lead us not into temptation	And lead us not into temptation	And lead us not into temptation	And lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.	but deliver us from evil.	but deliver us from evil.	but deliver us from evil.

Can we trust the translation?

If you cannot read the original languages, you will have to trust the translators. But can you? They need to have been:

1. Spiritual men.
2. Capable in both the original language, and their own.
3. Trustworthy.

Spiritual

Exodus 28:3: *And thou shalt speak unto all **that are** wise hearted,
whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom,
that they may make Aaron's garments to consecrate him...*

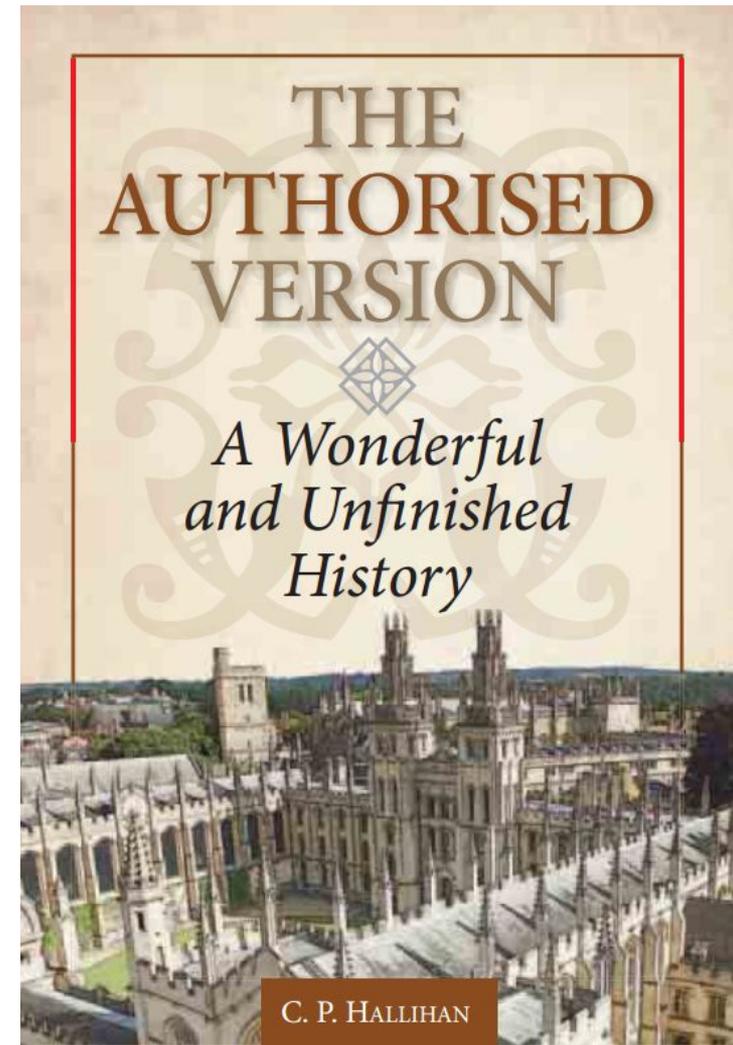
If when making Aaron's garments you needed to be filled with the **spirit** of God, how much more do you need it when translating God's Word!

They have to lie about their witnesses: "many ancient documents," "best and oldest manuscripts."

Capable

The TBS has produced a very useful booklet that contains a lot of material about the translators.

They probably were capable beyond anyone or any group seen since.



Trustworthy

Marki 15:39 (NIV): *And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"*

They have a little footnote there: *some manuscripts have cried out*

Some: 10%, 20%?

The Revision Revised: only 3 do not have it. Every other manuscript contains it.

(Currently the number stands at 5?)

JW today

Watchtower Bible Luke 23:43:

Truly I tell you today, you will be with me in Paradise

Or should it be:

Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise

(Truly I tell you: “today you will be with me in Paradise”)

We have noticed that manuscripts do not have spaces or punctuation. Punctuation changes over time, for example the Authorised Version does not use quotation marks in speech.

Watchtower: are they right?

So what is correct?

1. When you are telling someone something, it is obviously today. So nonsensical reading.
2. Jesus was speaking: he was not ambiguous.
3. How do they translate other verses?

What about similar verses in the gospel?

Luke 23:43: Truly I tell you today, you will be with me in Paradise.

Luke 23:47: Truly, this man was righteous

Luke 4:24: Truly I tell you that no prophet is accepted in his home territory

Luke 12:37: Truly I say to you, he will dress himself for service

In seventy passages in the four **gospel** the comma follows truly in their translation, except one: “Truly, I tell you that,”

Watchtower Bible Hebrews 3:7

And in a very similar verse they too put the comma the right way:

Hebrews 3:7: *Therefore, just as the holy spirit says,
“Today if you listen to his voice, ...”*

Conclusion

Luke 5:39: What makes more sense?

ESV: The old is good.

(and the new one too?)

Or given the context, is this the much better translation?

AV: The old is better.