

Chapter 1

Introducing Greek Scripture

This is a book about scripture. It is about those writings from the ancient world better known to some as ‘*The Bible*’, and how to understand them.

The book relies predominantly upon working with scripture in Greek. To proceed in this way is essential if we are to have any chance of penetrating the ancient ‘mystery’ which underpins the gospels.

What is known as Koine [*common*] Greek was the language employed by the various authors of scripture at the time when their skills were approaching a peak. That stage was reached almost two thousand years ago with the release of many new books. Of these, twenty seven were later assembled into what is known today as the canon [*rule*] of the *New Testament*, amongst them the four established gospels and the Pauline letters. These new books followed in the cultural tradition already established by what Christians recognise as the *Old Testament*, a collection of originally Hebrew texts. Here were the five books of the Pentateuch (known also as the *Torah* or *Law of Moses*), the books of Kings and Chronicles, the books of the Prophets, the Davidic Psalms, the wisdom books, and others besides: and even these had been rewritten into Greek several centuries before the gospels appeared.

One reason for working in Greek is to preclude ideological bias introduced by subsequent translators. In practice a particular problem down all the centuries has been adjustments to the divine names made by translators determined at any cost to assert a monotheist agenda.

Another reason is that key features of the message in Greek fail to pass through the barrier imposed by translation. As we shall see, the authors convey a part of their meaning by selecting certain words deliberately to invoke other words related by a similar spelling or sound. In effect,

the words they choose have other words concealed within them. Where an important component of meaning is conveyed in this way, it will of course be filtered out by attempts to rewrite in a different language. The only way to preserve meaning is to preserve the actual text in which that meaning was first expressed.

To illustrate what may be lost in translation, let us consider the Greek text at a familiar point in the narrative of *Genesis*, Chapter 22:

LXX Gn. 22:13	καὶ ἀναβλέψας ἀβραὰμ τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς αὐτοῦ εἶδεν καὶ ἰδοῦ <u>ΚΡΙΘΟΣ</u> εἷς κατεχόμενος ἐν φυτῷ σαβεκ τῶν κεράτων καὶ ἐπορεύθη ἀβραὰμ καὶ ἔλαβεν τὸν κριὸν καὶ ἀνήνεγκεν αὐτὸν εἰς ὀλοκάρπωσιν ἀντὶ ἰσαὰκ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ	And Abraham, looking up, with his eyes, saw ... and look! A single <u>ram</u> held down in a Sabek plant by the horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and brought it as a whole-fruit (offering) in exchange for Isaac, his son.
22:14	καὶ ἐκάλεσεν ἀβραὰμ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ τόπου ἐκείνου <u>ΚΥΡΙΟΣ</u> εἶδεν ἵνα εἴπωσιν σήμερον ἐν τῷ ὄρει <u>ΚΥΡΙΟΣ</u> ὤφθη	And Abraham called the name of that place "He saw <u>a lord</u> " - so that they should say: "Today in the mountain <u>a lord</u> was seen".

The reader in Greek learns that Abraham saw κριθός [*a ram*]: but the place name is to indicate that Abraham saw κύριος [*a lord*]. The difference in spelling between the two words is slight, as is the difference in their sound. Is it not plain that the authors intend an association of some sort, even perhaps equivalence? But in translation to any other language the innuendo is lost. Many similar examples may be given where comprehension is restricted to those who read in Greek,

whilst the reader in translation, deprived of pivotal clues to meaning, ultimately misses the point completely.

Scripture was written to be understood in the language in which it was written. There is a natural and legitimate rôle for translation. But the irrecoverable mistake - and the mistake so widely made down the centuries - has been to publish translations *with the source text removed*. Here is the origin of much doctrinal confusion. For the message of scripture is deeply challenging, packed with riddles and truly subtle in its expression. Even the most attentive reader, deprived of the original text, may soon be led far astray.

For this reason scriptural passages cited in this book will be drawn from the composite Greek sources available to modern translators. As an aid to those unfamiliar with Greek, a strictly literal translation to English will be set alongside. Surely this must be the correct approach for the study of scripture in any culture which does not have Greek as its language for everyday use?

As mentioned already, the majority of the *Old Testament* books were set down first in the Hebrew language but by the time the gospels appeared it was already two to three hundred years since these earlier books had been rewritten into Greek. This change in the language assigned for scripture came about following the conquests of Alexander the Great [356-323 BCE] whose successors imposed a Hellenist (Greek) culture from Egypt and Greece in the west through Palestine and Mesopotamia and beyond to the east.

Later, with the free movement of peoples which distinguished the Roman Empire, Hellenism spread its influence westwards across the Mediterranean so that Greek continued as the language of learning in the Roman world in the first two centuries CE. It was in this period that Greek versions of scripture were in widespread use. Few could still read in Hebrew. Even in Palestine itself dialects of Aramaic were established in everyday use.

In this book we shall use the most abundant and well known Greek version of the *Old Testament*, the *Septuagint*. In Greek it was known as **οι ε**, meaning 'the seventy', from the popular story (attributed to Aristeas) that it had been produced by seventy translators. In the Roman world this version was identified with the tag **LXX** - the symbol in Latin for the number 70.

This important textual source was produced at Alexandria (Egypt) around 250 BCE. Copies circulated widely: indeed plenty of the later manuscripts exist to this day. Then it is widely held, and with good evidence, that this was the version of the *Old Testament* [OT] familiar to the *New Testament* [NT] authors.

For example Jobs and Silva¹ assert:

An additional consideration, however, brings the LXX and the NT even closer together; namely the indisputable fact that the NT writers knew and used the OT in its Greek form.

Theirs is an opinion consistent with the following recent statement²:

Today we know that the Greek translation of the Old Testament produced at Alexandria - the Septuagint - is more than a simple (and in that sense really less than satisfactory) translation of the Hebrew text: it is an independent textual witness and a distinct and important step in the history of revelation, one which brought about this encounter in a way that was decisive for the birth and spread of Christianity.

By the time the gospels appeared, essentially all scripture was known and studied - and also written - in Greek, although it did retain certain traits of style inherited from Hebrew syntax and a small number of Hebrew or Aramaic phrases were incorporated into the Greek text by transliteration (for example at Mt.27:46 and Mk.15:34).

For the gospel authors it was the *Septuagint* which provided the reference (or base text) against which they now wrote, and from which they took quotations. They could easily have written all the gospels without being able to read Hebrew at all. Interestingly, some scholars hold that one or more of the gospels may have been written at Alexandria, the home of the LXX.

But let us return to the aim of this book. More precisely, it is about the *nature* of Greek scripture, about the *methods* employed in its composition, and about *how* to extract the message such scripture conveys. Ultimately then, *it is about how scripture may be soundly understood* - something which may not be possible for those relying upon any subsequent translation, whether to Latin, Coptic or Armenian, or to one of our modern languages.

The need for such a book is surely pressing, for there is certainly far more to the **λόγος** [*message*] of scripture than has been widely understood ever since the fourth century CE. In that century the Catholic church was newly established and already the request was issued by Pope Damasus ~382 CE for some early translations of scripture into Latin to be ‘corrected’ by the scholar Jerome (his full name in Greek was **Ευσέβιος Σωφρόνιος Ιερώνυμος**).

To this day we know Jerome’s Latin edition as the *Vulgate* Bible. But how strange - and how unfortunate - that after revising the four gospels against sources in Greek³, Jerome followed up by translating much of the *Old Testament*, including the five books attributed to Moses, from a recently established Hebrew source, a precursor to the Masoretic text which we still have today. For with this choice it became almost certain that the original coupling would be lost between the Greek text of the gospels and the Greek version of *Genesis*. And this in its turn might put at risk the transmission of scripture’s deeper meaning.

Alongside translations to Latin, the fourth century saw some other trends develop. One was to assign to scripture a historicity it did not deserve, as Constantine’s biographer Eusebius of Caesarea sought to do

with his inventive **Εκκλησιαστικη Ιστορια** [*Church History*]. Another was to interpret scripture at the most literal level possible, as Jerome's friend Eusebius of Cremona sought to do. Rome in the fourth century was steadily losing its political and military grip on the world: its struggling empire would shortly collapse. Yet the Roman Catholic church was fast establishing its hold ... with Constantine's Nicene creed, with a god who had entered the Roman world in the person of Jesus, with extraordinary tales supposed to have been recorded by those who had known him. The stage was set for the later development of the Holy Roman Empire which would underpin medieval Europe, would survive for more than eight hundred years, and was finally brought to an end only with the Napoleonic Wars.

How many now would be led astray. The growing dominance of the Roman Catholic church was not the result *per se* of translating scripture to Latin, rather it was sustained by the successful assertion of a false historicity for the gospels and by the loss of ability in the western world to read the original texts in Greek. It was typical that Augustine of Hippo, foundational theologian of the western church, should struggle to learn Greek (as he himself notes in his *Confessionum, Liber I, XIII-XIV*). And Jerome's achievement as *vir trilinguis* (knowing Hebrew, Greek and Latin) was rare indeed in that age.

Such considerations go a long way towards explaining why there is, to this day, more to the message of scripture than the Christian tradition will readily admit: for much was misconstrued in that age. And as for the developments of subsequent centuries, it was never likely that any person would explain correctly a matter he had yet to grasp for himself.

So often religious leaders consider it as strange, as disturbing, even as heretical or offensive, if someone should assert that there is more to the meaning of scripture than they themselves have ever taught, or indeed have ever known. The very suggestion may be regarded as an unwelcome challenge to authority, an authority which does not find it easy to examine for flaws a teaching and tradition which, however defective, has survived for seventeen centuries.

A common response may be to say “*There is no new revelation*”. Yet such a remark lacks weight when made by those who cannot even read in Greek. For where scripture of the *New Testament* is concerned, a reader without Greek is no better placed than one who is blind.

Notwithstanding every protest, this book will demonstrate that there *is* more to scripture than many have ever known. As you read further you may come to this appreciation for yourself. The themes of scripture are tightly self-consistent and the task of penetrating them not entirely free from effort. But who will say that it cannot be done? And who lays claim to knowing all the answers when as yet he (or she) has never read in Greek?

What could it Mean to be Blind?

Notice how the concept of *the blind guide of the blind* is found in the gospels themselves (*qv.* Mt.15:14, 23:16; Lk.6:39). In the narrative we find Jesus addressing the scribes and Pharisees as ‘*hypocrites and blind guides*’.

Indeed he goes further to accuse them of being:

Mt.	ὁδηγοὶ τυφλοὶ, οἱ διυλίζοντες	Blind guides, those straining
23:24	τὸν κώνωπα τὴν δὲ κάμηλον καταπίνοντες.	out the gnat but gulping down a camel.

The gospels are packed with sayings which cannot be taken literally but must be recognised and understood as allegory or as riddles.

Perhaps you are familiar with London’s Cockney slang. In this form of rhyming slang a selected word is replaced by another word borrowed from an unconnected phrase chosen to rhyme with the word replaced. The association of the original word and the slang word is rarely obvious to the uninitiated.

Suppose that an acquaintance says to you :

Let's go 'n take a butchers

As many Londoners will know, it means :

Let us go and take a look

The paired rhyming rule neatly transforms 'a butcher's *hook*' into '*look*'. But think how hard it would be to understand what was meant if you didn't know the rhyming rule.

Now put yourself for a moment in the place of a person living in a future age, say in the year 4000 CE. After much effort, you have learned to read in ancient English, a tongue long since lost from everyday use. And then you come across the phrase '*take a butchers*'. What could it mean? Two thousand years after it was written, the challenge posed to us by scripture is no less severe than this.

In the passage above from *Matthew*, the behaviour attributed to blind guides is typical of the riddles embedded in the gospels. If it seems to make but little sense, then we may guess it has been generated by using some kind of private convention, and may be understood correctly only by those who *know* that convention. The verb in Greek which holds this sense of knowledge acquired is **γινώσκω** [*I know or I learn to know*]. From it is derived the noun **γνώσις** [*knowledge*], and from this we obtain in English the adjective *gnostic*. As we shall discover, the texts of Greek scripture, including all the gospels, are in this sense gnostic. They are gnostic through and through.

But what do we have to know before we can solve the riddle about the gnat and the camel? It may help to recall here the Jewish tradition about the wily 'serpent' who in the book of *Genesis* (the first book of the *Torah*) enters the narrative at Chapter 3. It is here that the serpent deceives the woman Eve, with his promise that:

By death you shall not die ...
and you shall be like gods, knowing good and evil.

As we shall see, the narrative of all scripture echoes to this deceitful theme. The same bland assertion then provides the foundation for Christian doctrine as first set forth by the Catholic church (and by the time you reach the end of this book you should appreciate the reason for this correspondence).

In the story the serpent is cursed for his successful deceit ... cursed to go upon his belly and eat earth all the days of his life (like a worm). Yet Jewish tradition⁴ claims of the serpent that prior to this punishment:

Like a man, he stood upright upon two feet, and in height he was equal to the camel

Suzetta Tucker presents further evidence for equivalence between serpent and camel at:

<http://ww2.netnitco.net/~legend01/camel.htm>

The implication in the riddle about *blind guides* is that such a person gulps down a camel without even recognising he has done so: for who would try to swallow a camel on purpose? It is implicit too that those who 'gulp down camels' do so *only, or mainly, on account of their blindness*.

Blindness results in a failure to 'see' what is placed before you. The visitor to London, upon seeing a notice which instructs him to "*Pick up the dog*", may not appreciate that he must go to the *telephone* (dog and *bone* = *telephone*). His actions may not match those intended by the author of the notice, who might easily think of the hapless visitor as suffering from word blindness because his responses show beyond doubt that he doesn't know the meaning intended for the word 'dog'.

Now let us suppose that the word for 'camel' has been used in scripture to replace the word 'serpent'. Then it would not be surprising if many readers didn't 'see' the serpent. On this basis they too would be classed as blind ... for they have failed to 'see' what was placed before them. But their real problem is that they don't understand the gnostic

convention employed by the writer, for whom the word *camel* is simply an alternate name for a serpent.

In *Genesis* Chapter 24, Rebecca (an attractive young lady who later turns out to be evil) journeys to meet for the first time with Isaac, to whom she will shortly be married. Isaac is portrayed in scripture as good, although ruthlessly deceived in his old age by Rebecca and Jacob who conspire to deceive him *by exploiting his growing blindness* (it is a theme which keeps recurring in scripture: the ‘blind’, even when they mean well, labour under a persistent disadvantage because they are not able to recognise what is set forth to be evil).

Rebecca travels to meet Isaac *mounted upon a camel*. The story is packed with much significant detail, but shortly we are told:

LXX	καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ἰσαακ	And Isaac went out to
Gn.	ἀδολεσχήσαι εἰς τὸ πεδῖον τὸ	meditate <i>in the plain</i>
24:63	πρὸς δείλης καὶ ἀναβλέψας	towards evening. And looking
	<u>τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς</u> εἶδεν	up <i>with the eyes</i> , he saw
	καμήλους ἐρχομένας	camels coming.

In the narrative Isaac has gone out to meditate. He looks up *with the eyes* [*in Greek: τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς*]. Isaac is not yet blind. He sees camels coming. But if we are not to be classed as blind then we are expected to see something more than camels. Without doubt you will have seen something more yourself. But the key question is this: did you recognise what you saw? Did you see through the disguise?

The word in Greek for *a serpent* is ὄφις. Portrayed throughout scripture’s narrative as an evil deity, the cunning serpent is definitely not ‘good news’. Indeed at Rv.12:9 he is given as “*the great dragon, the ancient serpent, the one called a devil and Satan, the one deceiving the whole world*”.

When Isaac looks up *with the eyes* [τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς], what we should be able to make out, concealed amidst the text, is ὄφις [*a serpent*]. Already the same opportunity has been afforded several times in connection with what Abraham ‘sees’ (qv. Gn.13:14, 18:2, 22:4, 22:13) ... and before him the woman Eve (Gn.3:6).

Those with a good memory may recall how Abel was slaughtered after he went out with evil Cain εἰς τὸ πεδῖον [*into the plain*]. Here Isaac too goes into the plain - and meets with his evil wife-to-be. Perhaps you are just beginning to gain new sight ... catching the flavour of how scripture worked for those ‘*in the know*’ in the Hellenist world? If so, you will realise how little of this could ever have been grasped by a person reading in translation. For in translation to Latin (which never was a language of scripture, and never will be) τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς becomes merely *oculis*. All who read in translation suffer instant blindness: for now there’s no ‘*serpent*’ to see.

But for those who read in Greek, this further ‘*camel*’ riddle may now be quite easy to solve.

Mt. 19:24	πάλιν δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν, εὐκοπώτερόν ἐστιν κάμηλον διὰ τρυπήματος <u>ράφιδος</u> διελθεῖν ἢ πλούσιον εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ.	But again I say to you, it is easier (for) a camel to go through (the) hole <u>of a</u> <u>needle</u> than (for) a rich person to enter into the kingdom of God.
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The *hole in a needle* constitutes the *narrow gate* mentioned already in the same gospel (Mt.7:13-14). The solution to this riddle appears to be very similar to the one involving Isaac. Once again we have a camel, once again we can make out ὄφις [*a serpent*]. This time the letters are jumbled up, but still it’s not hard to see.

The Amazing Power of the Human Mind

I cdnuolt blveiee taht I cluod aulacly uesdnatnrd waht I was rdanieg. The phaonmneal pweor of the human mind!

Aoccdrnig to rscheearch taem at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it deosn't mttae in what oredr the ltteers in a wrod are, the only iprmoatnt tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteer be in the rghit pclae.

The rset can be a taotl mses and you can sitll raed it wouthit a porbelm. Tihs is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe.

Such a cdonition is arppoiately cllaed Typoglycemia ! > > :-)

Amzanig huh? Yaeh and yuo awlyas thought slpeling was ipmorantt.

The above text (of which the true origin is obscure and may not be the University of Cambridge) first circulated on the internet in September 2003. What we may learn from it is that merely jumbling up the letters of the words in a passage does **not** necessarily destroy meaning. For where a language is already familiar to the reader, the human mind does have the ability to pick out more than exactly what is written.

By a modest extension of the same principle, selected words in scripture may be concealed in a mis-spelled form wholly within other words spelled correctly. It is no use claiming that readers would be unable to follow what has been done where the word ὄφις is concealed within the word ραφίδος. The jumbled passage cited above demonstrates clearly (but working in English) that recognition of this kind would really have been quite easy for those with a trained eye who were accustomed to reading in Greek and knew what they were looking for.

Now perhaps you are beginning to see how scripture functions as a self-learning text, with its riddles graded in difficulty from elementary through to the more advanced.

We find that the following theme crops up five times in the three synoptic gospels, so clearly it is quite important:

Mt.	ὅστις γὰρ ἔχει, δοθήσεται	For whoever has, it will be
13:12	αὐτῷ καὶ περισσευθήσεται:	given to him and he will have
	ὅστις δὲ οὐκ ἔχει, καὶ ὃ ἔχει	in abundance: but whoever
	ἀρθήσεται ἀπ' αὐτοῦ.	does not have, even what he
		has will be taken from him.

And yes, already this *is* our experience. First we obtained a solution to one riddle, then shortly the solution to another. Now this new riddle about abundance makes for three. Is the entire theme of scripture starting to unravel in our hands?

It is easy to appreciate that once you latch on correctly to the underlying convention employed by these gnostic authors, you will quickly see more and more of what they mean. Meanwhile those who do not 'see' can be led far astray - through taking literally all that is said, while persistently missing the central point.

In that regard, there is heavy irony in the fact that the gospel narrative itself is populated so thickly with those encountering Jesus who are said to be either blind or deaf. At one point we are even told how Jesus smears mud in the eyes of a man who is blind from birth (Jn.9:6). It is hard to take this seriously as the way to restore someone's sight. But which readers of these stories pause to consider that they themselves may be numbered along with those mentioned in the gospel narrative ... blind and deaf to the **λόγος**, both to the *message* of scripture and to the *identity* of Jesus himself?

In truth, everywhere that scripture is read - *and most particularly where it is read in translation to Latin or to another vernacular language* - these afflictions of sight and hearing are certain to take their toll. And from the dire lack of books similar to this one, it is plain that hardly anyone in our age does manage unaided to spot the critical themes of scripture - and most never spot them at all.

Indeed such is the premature enthusiasm with which so many lock down meaning for scripture *before they have even learned to understand*, that these persons end up clinging on for dear life to the wrong end of the scriptural 'stick'. And in this way they are caught in a trap from which they never contrive to escape.

Surely it must be worth our while to penetrate the mind of these ancient authors and understand aright what they wrote. They are clearly great philosophers, imaginative and highly astute. What they write is deeply clever, steeped in a Gnostic ideology and painstakingly expressed in Greek. It is a *mystery* for the reader to solve: the term crops up twenty eight times in just ten of the *New Testament* books.

In this passage from *Luke*, the author has Jesus speak as follows:

Lk.	ὁ δὲ εἶπεν, ὑμῖν δέδοται	But he said "To you it is
8:10	γνῶναι τὰ μυστήρια τῆς	given to know the mysteries
	βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ, τοῖς δὲ	of the kingdom of God, but to
	λοιποῖς ἐν παραβολαῖς, ἵνα	the rest in parables - that
	βλέποντες μὴ βλέπωσιν και	seeing they may not see,
	ἀκούοντες μὴ συνιῶσιν.	and hearing they may not
		understand".

Is it not clear that the function of the so-called *parables* is actually to preserve the mystery by limiting the circle of those who know what it is? Far from enlightening the reader (as so often is claimed) the function assigned to the parables is to ensure that many will **not** see, and will **not** understand. It is a rôle in which they are surely most efficacious.

The Fate of the ‘Many’

It follows from what we have learned so far that the gospels are examples of *esoteric* texts. They are directed for a select few who possess beforehand, or can acquire, enough knowledge to understand them. And if we ask what becomes of the *many* who lack this knowledge, again the authors have Jesus give the answer:

Mt.	εἰσελάτατε διὰ τῆς στενῆς	Enter in through the narrow
7:13	πύλης: ὅτι πλατεῖα ἡ πύλη καὶ	gate. For broad (is) the gate
	εὐρύχωρος ἡ ὁδὸς ἡ	and spacious the way which
	ἀπάγουσα εἰς τὴν ἀπώλειαν,	leads to destruction - and
	καὶ <u>πολλοί</u> εἰσὶν οἱ	<u>many</u> are those entering in
	εἰσερχόμενοι δι' αὐτῆς:	through it.

The ‘*many*’ - those who don’t manage to catch on - are, in all their unwitting and misguided confidence, going like lemmings on the broad and spacious way which leads to their own destruction.

How ironic that the Catholic church (named from Greek καθ’ ὅλικός = *for the whole* community) should think of itself as the conduit by which not just many, but *all* men may be (as it claims) ‘saved’.

The church might do well to recall the story *Luke* makes Jesus tell:

Lk.	εἶπεν δὲ τις αὐτῷ, κύριε, εἰ	But one said to him, “Lord,
13:23	<u>ὀλίγοι</u> οἱ σωζόμενοι; ὁ δὲ	are they <u>few</u> , those (who are)
	εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς,	saved?”. But he said to them
13:24	ἀγωνίζεσθε εἰσελθεῖν διὰ τῆς	“Strive to enter in through the
	στενῆς θύρας, ὅτι <u>πολλοί</u> ,	narrow door - for <u>many</u> , I say
	λέγω ὑμῖν, ζητήσουσιν	to you, will seek to enter in,
	εἰσελθεῖν καὶ οὐκ ἰσχύσουσιν.	and will not have the strength

13:25	<p>ἀφ' οὗ ἂν ἐγερθῆ ὁ οἰκοδεσπότης καὶ ἀποκλείσῃ τὴν θύραν, καὶ ἄρξησθε ἔξω ἑστάναι καὶ κρούειν τὴν θύραν λέγοντες, κύριε, ἄνοιξον ἡμῖν: καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς ἔρει ὑμῖν, <u>οὐκ οἶδα</u> ὑμᾶς πόθεν ἐστέ.</p>	<p>From whenever the ruler of the house may rise up, and may close the door, and you shall begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, `Lord, open to us!`: then answering he will say to you `I do not know you, where you are from.`</p>
13:26	<p>τότε ἄρξεσθε λέγειν, ἐφάγομεν ἐνώπιόν σου καὶ ἐπίομεν, καὶ ἐν ταῖς πλατείαις ἡμῶν ἐδίδαξας:</p>	<p>Then you shall start to say `We ate in your presence and we drank, and you taught in our streets`.</p>
13:27	<p>καὶ ἐρεῖ λέγων ὑμῖν, οὐκ οἶδα [ὑμᾶς] πόθεν ἐστέ: ἀπόστητε ἀπ' ἐμοῦ, πάντες <u>ἐργάται</u> <u>ἀδικίας</u>.</p>	<p>And he will say, speaking to you `I do not know [you] where you are from. Get away from me, all workers of iniquity`.</p>
13:28	<p>ἐκεῖ ἔσται ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων, ὅταν ὄψησθε ἀβραὰμ καὶ ἰσαὰκ καὶ ιακώβ καὶ πάντας τοὺς προφήτας ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ, <u>ὑμᾶς δὲ ἐκβαλλομένους</u> <u>ἔξω</u>.</p>	<p>There will be the whimpering and the grinding of the teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God - <u>but yourselves thrown out outside.</u></p>

The Nature of ‘A Mystery’

Some six billion copies of the Bible have been sold in translation to many languages. Yet what a tragedy that these ‘Bibles’ lack the Greek source. On account of this omission their message is corrupted, the *mystery* badly obscured. No one will ever learn from these what the original authors hoped for the reader to understand. It is impossible.

Of course *mystery*, as a fictional genre, was never confined to the ancient world. Its method has been retained in the present age. After the Bible, the writer with most books sold (an estimated four billion) is Agatha Christie. Her first crime novel was titled *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. Aficionados may recognise these features:

- From the outset the plot is established in the mind of the writer. But for the reader it lies at first concealed behind apparently innocuous detail in the narrative.
- Someone is killed, setting off the quest to identify the one responsible for the atrocity.
- The killer goes unrecognised (it may be in disguise).
- The story develops with all manner of detail. To begin with no pattern is readily identifiable.
- There is a risk that the reader will overlook the smallest of details, some of which may turn out to hold a vital significance.
- The reader may be led far astray, at least for a time.
- The *mystery* is finally resolved when we learn *to recognise* the person who committed the original offence.
- This is achieved through coming to know the real significance of the details presented in the narrative, including perhaps the personal traits of the offender.
- In this way is the *mystery* ultimately laid bare.

Scripture shares most of these features. But throughout there is just one *mystery*. Established in the early chapters of *Genesis*, it is developed and recursively elaborated in each of the books which follow. With crime novels it is usual to disclose in the final chapter the solution to the *mystery*. But with scripture there is no final chapter. Instead the readers must solve the *mystery* for themselves ... as we shall do in this book.

Here are some further references to a camel which are given in *Mark* and may yet turn out to hold real significance:

Mk. 1:6	καὶ ἦν ὁ ἰωάννης ἐνδεδυμένος τρίχας καμήλου καὶ ζώνην δερματίνην περι- τὴν ὀσφύν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐσθίων ἄκριδας καὶ μέλι ἄγριον.	And John was clothed with camel hair and a skin belt around his loins - and eating locusts and wild honey.
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If John the Baptist is clothed with camel hair this tends to suggest that he is a keeper of camels ... and perhaps that he has killed one to make use of its pelt. We shall learn more about John in later chapters. Meanwhile here are some more clues about him which may help to elucidate the *mystery*:

Lk. 7:33	ἐλήλυθεν γὰρ ἰωάννης ὁ βαπτιστῆς <u>μὴ</u> ἐσθίων ἄρτον <u>μήτε</u> πίνων οἶνον, καὶ λέγετε, δαμόνιον ἔχει:	For John the Baptist came <u>not</u> eating bread <u>and not</u> drinking wine, and you say <i>he</i> has a demon.
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And here are some clues about Jesus, announced to shepherds by ‘*an angel of a lord*’:

Lk. 2:11	ὅτι ἐτέχθη ὑμῖν σήμερον σωτὴρ ὃς ἐστὶν χριστὸς κύριος ἐν πόλει δαυίδ:	For there was born to you today a saviour - who is Christ, lord in a city of David
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2:12	καὶ τοῦτο ὑμῖν τὸ σημεῖον, εὐρήσετε βρέφος ἐσπαργανωμένον καὶ κείμενον ἐν φάτνῃ.	And this for you (is) the sign : you will find a foetus <i>wrapped and laid up in an animal feed trough.</i>
(verses omitted here)		
2:16	καὶ ἦλθαν σπεύσαντες καὶ ἀνεύραν τὴν τε μαριάμ καὶ τὸν ἰωσήφ καὶ τὸ βρέφος κείμενον ἐν τῇ φάτνῃ:	And they came hurrying and found both Mary and Joseph, and the foetus ... laid up in the animal feed trough.
2:17	ἰδόντες δὲ ἐγνώρισαν περὶ τοῦ ῥήματος τοῦ λαληθέντος αὐτοῖς περὶ τοῦ παιδίου τούτου.	And seeing it, <u>they gained</u> <u>knowledge</u> ... concerning the word spoken to them about this child.

Each clue here has something to do with food or diet. In the case of Jesus, the shepherds are told quite explicitly that this is to be ‘a sign’ to them; and the writer asserts that, seeing it, they *did* indeed gain knowledge about the child Jesus.

We may not understand this yet. But there is one thing we should notice before moving on. John the Baptist comes consuming *neither* bread *nor* wine, these being foods derived respectively from cereal crops and from fruit. Yet the infant Jesus is found in the animal feed trough. Babies generally take milk from their mothers: but does this ‘child’ prefer cereal as its food? We might expect that shepherds would be familiar with what goes into an animal feed trough, most likely to be cereals or grasses.

The later narrative of the gospels makes it clear how Jesus as an adult is accustomed to consume *both* bread *and* wine ... but equally clear that *these are foods which John avoids*. In Chapter 4 of this book we shall turn our attention to the early chapters of *Genesis*. It is then that we may understand the basis for the mutually exclusive diets specified in the gospels for Jesus and for John.

Looking Ahead

If scripture relies upon riddles and allegorical parallels to convey significant meaning then we are left with the risk that many innocent readers will not solve the *mystery* at all. Only those who pay meticulous attention to what the Greek authors wrote will be ready to master the riddles and discover what it's all about. Indeed the authors anticipate just this outcome. They suggest that the *mystery* is accessible only to the few ... to those who can understand.

It is open to any reader to deny that such a restriction exists. But what if it were true that the authors of scripture intended the majority of their readers to be led astray on the strength of what was written? Then those in denial would be those excluded from the mystery.

The doctrine of the Catholic church was largely established by the end of the fourth century CE. Since then some dogma has been added, but little in essence has changed. In the sixteenth century the Protestant Reformation brought a great challenge to the church. But the central tenets of its doctrine were still inherited by all the churches which today identify themselves as Christian.

In this book we shall solve the *mystery* of scripture. It will then be clear that those persons responsible for established doctrine were amongst 'the many' who never understood. They never managed to solve the *mystery* at all. It is a remarkable conclusion. Yet as this book unfolds we shall find it hard to escape. For anyone who does succeed in penetrating the mystery will expose the established doctrine to be merely that of those deluded, deluded through their failure to recognise the core theme of the very scriptures upon which they seek to rely.

How regrettable that so many should be led so far astray, and for so long. Ignorance pervades the modern world as much as in the past. Where the Christian tradition is concerned, what was mistaken in the early centuries remains mistaken today. What was denied then is still denied to this day. Yet where a *mystery* is set forth in narrative form, the way to solve it is to read with care, to remember what you have read, and finally to engage the power of reason. It is only through systematic analysis of all the evidence that any sound conclusion may be reached.