

CHRIST REVEALED



Un-Aired Episode 11

Transcript

Patrick Gentempo: Halvor Ronning, thanks so much for doing this. Can you give us a bio sketch on you?

Halvor Ronning: Starting with being born in a British hospital in Beijing, China, but growing up as a Minnesota boy in a little village of Belview of 500 people, going on to high school in Grand Forks, North Dakota, but finishing high school in Chicago. How is that for development, in terms of small town to big city?

Patrick Gentempo: Why Beijing, why were you born there?

Halvor Ronning: My father and my grandfather were both missionaries in China.

Patrick Gentempo: You graduated high school in Chicago, and then where did you go?

Halvor Ronning: Well, I think one thing that helped was my mother was quite a supporter and she put me in the Chicago youth of the year contest of B'nai B'rith, and so I was one of the five runner ups, and when I ended up studying in Israel and applied for a scholarship to the Hebrew University, that helped my CV and I ended up having a full year scholarship at the Hebrew University, which is probably one of the more critical points in my life which has ended up with me being in the land nearly 50 years.

Patrick Gentempo: Well, we're in the suburbs of Jerusalem right now, correct? You've been here 50 years?

Halvor Ronning: In 1962 I came as a student and I had a goal, and that was to learn one of the biblical languages thoroughly, because prior to that I had Fulbright scholarship to study in Germany and I was so happy with gaining fluency in a foreign language. I thought it would be great if I had a fluency in one of the biblical languages, and it was touch and go between Greece and Israel, but Greek is a spoken language and it has changed so much more between biblical times and the present day than the Hebrew, which hasn't been spoken that whole time, and so modern Hebrew is closer to biblical Hebrew than modern Greek is closer to ancient Greek.

Patrick Gentempo: I see, that's interesting, and because of studying languages and biblical languages, or Hebrew specifically, is that what got you into kind of your central focus in study over these years?

Halvor Ronning: Yes, because I was thinking knowing a biblical language, biblical language thoroughly would mean that I could interpret for myself, because for example at the seminary I had two fine Christian men as Old Testament professors but one of them believed in replacement theology, that the church has replaced Israel, and the other one was a young soldier in the second World War and he saw visibly himself, when they conquered the concentration camps, Jews still alive but skin and bones dying after they had all the medical help available.

He was so traumatized that he said, "They don't need Jesus," and here's how he did it, Jesus says, "Nobody comes to the father but by me," that's true, but the Jews are already with the father. Well, that's not biblical either, because Jesus said, "I came to the lost sheep of the

house of Israel.” That forces a person to think for one’s self and being able to have the tools of knowing a biblical language thoroughly is something that drove me to come here, and then things have developed from that.

Patrick Gentempo: With that, and looking at biblical languages and how the Bible has been interpreted in multiple languages, where are some of the challenges, issues, or maybe in some instance, somewhat humorous things that occur as a result of the translation?

Halvor Ronning: One of the humorous things that happens when you bring Bible translators to this country is their reaction to what they’re seeing. The reason they’re coming is because 22 years ago we went to the Hebrew University and said, “Look, you’ve got special programs in agriculture, you’ve got special programs in medicine. What are you doing for Bible translation,” and they said, “Well, doesn’t everybody have the Bible,” we said, “No, there are 7,000 languages in the world.”

At that time there were only about 450 that had a translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Tanakh. Now the program has run for 22 years and I ended up with people from Papua New Guinea and Chad and 35 different countries standing on the Mount of Olives looking across at Mount Zion, which is just about a kilometer away, and the and the guy from the Papua New Guinea says, “Mountains? These aren’t even hills,” and the fellow from Chad said, “No, these are mountains.”

Then I tell them, “Well, wait a minute, just forget English or any European languages that you’ve been consulting as you’ve been doing your translations. You are now seeing what the Bible is talking about, pick the right word so that your people will get the right idea from the very beginning,” and a fellow from Nagaland in northeast India said, “Oh no, I read that Jesus went from the temple mount to the mount of olives across the Kidron valley, and where I live a valley is like from one mountain range to another and I used the word that made it sound like 50 kilometers instead of one kilometer. I’m going to have to redo the New Testament too as well as the Hebrew Bible.”

That’s just a little tiny taste of the kinds of things that can happen when you bring Bible translators here so that they can experience the land as kind of a living visual experiential dictionary of the Bible instead of reading commentaries.

Patrick Gentempo: This is really fascinating, because you’d wonder, well, how important are some of these nuances, and I guess the answer it’s very important for getting an understanding, because so much is about the land and the landscape and how it’s described would be one thing, but then there are other words, like you said the Bible is translated into Arab there’s some limitation in words to translate with, like Palestinian and Philistine, for example. Can you speak that out a little bit?

Halvor Ronning: That’s one of the tragedies of translation into the Arabic language, that they only have one word that covers both Palestinian and Philistine. Well, the Philistines are Europeans. They were sea people that tried to settle in Egypt and didn’t succeed, Egypt was too strong, so they settled

on the coast of this country in an area that then became known as Philistia.

When you're speaking Arabic you can't tell from the one word in Arabic if we're talking about the Philistines who came into this country in the 15th Century BC, or thereabouts, when the Israelites were coming in from the east, from the desert, between the philistines; these Europeans, and Arabic people who conquered this country in 638 AD.

You read your Bible and you could think Goliath was a Palestinian, and he's not; he's a European that settled here and has nothing to do with the Semitic Arab people. There are problems like that that are rather severe.

Patrick Gentempo: Very severe, because having that wrong changes the whole complexion of the story.

Halvor Ronning: Sure, because-

Patrick Gentempo: ... and roots of it.

Halvor Ronning: One group is European invaders, centuries and a half before Christ, and the other is Arab invaders from the east and not from the west seven centuries after Christ.

Patrick Gentempo: Some of these are maybe nuances, like you said, how wide is the valley from the land you're from, and some of these are literally cultural in nature saying is this a European or an Arab that we're trying to describe here, which would change somebody's whole understanding of the Bible.

You really have made a lifelong study of trying to identify, characterize, where some of these issues may lie in trying to bring light to them. What would you say are some of the most significant ones?

Halvor Ronning: I consider myself land of the Bible, my wife who grew up here is the language of the Bible. Let's take some more gentle examples to start out with, good old favorite Psalm 23, "Goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life." Well, when you look at the text it says, "Goodness and mercy will pursue me all the days of my life," or in Psalm 23 we could take, "He leads me beside the still waters. He leads me in paths of righteousness," it's actually two different words.

Some of our English translations catch it, two different forms of living, one more gentle leading and one more directive leading, so you could use lead and guide. Some issues are not strictly linguistic but more a matter of Jewish background.

For example, in Luke chapter 11 we have translations that say a Pharisee criticized Jesus for not washing before a meal, but if you look more carefully at the literal meaning of the Greek, he got criticized for not immersing himself before breakfast. There are two specifications that are missed in a more flat translation, and if you want to know what all that's about you go to the Encyclopedia Judaica, all these many

volumes, and under ablutions, ritual washings, you can read how there was a strict group of Pharisees that wanted to be ritually pure before they thank God for breakfast, so they immersed themselves every morning.

There's a paragraph on morning Baptists. I told that to one of my rabbi friends today and he said, "Yeah, I know. I'm a morning Baptist. I immerse myself every morning," and in Qumran they had two meals a day, they would immerse themselves both before the morning meal and before ... Morning and evening Baptists.

Then you get more power to the answer of Jesus that it's important to care about the external cleanliness, but how much more important the matters of the heart, and this happens over and over again with Jesus that some little incident happens and he uses it as a chance to give a teaching.

Patrick Gentempo: What is the field of synoptics?

Halvor Ronning: You're referring to the synoptic gospels?

Patrick Gentempo: Yes. Well, in the Proverb synoptics and what you write about so much.

Halvor Ronning: You are pulling a trigger on a dump truck. Let's see if we can zero in on the kind of insights you get when you study the synoptic gospels in this context. There's a group of us, we call ourselves the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Gospel Research, Jews and Christians, that meet once a month, and we read what Jesus said in the Greek New Testament but we'll ask ourselves what did he say in Hebrew, because of the insights that come. I'll give a light linguistic example then maybe other examples.

It's in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus said, "If your body ... If your eye is x," something or another, "Your whole body will be full of light." Our English translations don't know what to do with this Greek expression, *ophthalmus*, that's easy; *ophthalmic*, [haplus 00:13:42] and you have translations if your eye is single, if your eye is pure, if your eye is sound, if your eye is healthy.

The rest of the statement, "But if your eye is evil, how full of darkness you are." A lot of cultures have evil eye, it means you look at somebody and you're thinking, "What can I take from that person," envy, jealousy, miserliness. Greek has it, and English has it, and Hebrew has it, but Hebrew has the opposite idiom, whether somebody has a good eye.

I asked a teenager that was hitchhiking, "What does it mean if you say about somebody to have *ein tovah*, a good eye, or *ein hatov*, an eye of goodness," he said, "Well, everybody knows that's just another way of saying generous."

Here you have Jesus using this expression, "If your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light," because that expression means looking at somebody and thinking not what can I take from them but what can

I give to them. It's so obvious in the book of Proverbs, you have, "He who has a eye of goodness is he who shares his bread with the poor."

It's just a difference between generosity and miserliness, and once you've seen where it's coming from in Hebrew it's just simple and clear. It's a little bit scary, because then you start looking at yourself in this conversation, am I trying to give something or am I trying to get something. It's a little simple example but it has to do with our everyday life and how we relate to one another.

Patrick Gentempo: Over time you've done this study of comparing these languages and then I guess there's a comparison of the gospels and how they relate to each other.

Halvor Ronning: Yes, but there we're getting into a minefield, because in the early church they kind of took it that the gospels were written in the order that we have them, but then in 1830s there were a couple of German scholars who started the notion that Mark was the first gospel and Matthew and Luke were written later.

There was a whole kind of church political philosophical issues behind this, you had someone like David Friedrich Strauss claiming that we can't accept these magical stories of angels singing to shepherds in the early narrative, infancy narratives, we can't accept stories of a star appearing to wise men, so if we're going to get at any kind of historical core we are going to have to drop that.

Then the process went further, that's let's put aside Matthew and Luke because they have these stories and let's go to Mark who has kind of a fast moving story, from the baptism to the crucifixion. Well, then there are miracle stories in the gospel of Mark. Well, we can't have that either.

Then you go to the teaching material that is grouped in Matthew and Luke, Mark is only about 11,078 words and Matthew is over 18,000 words, Luke is over 19,000 words and they have a lot of teaching material and say, okay we can go with that, we get rid of the miracles but the teaching.

Just to give you an example, I read from the beginning and the end of the Sermon on the Mount to a group of theology students from Emory University, Atlanta Georgia, and one of the students said, "Oh, this is wonderful. Christianity is the greatest religion. There are no ethical teachings that can compare with the Sermon on the Mount. Doesn't really matter if Jesus ever lived or not, we have the greatest ethical teaching," and that moment you knew that he had never tried to live the Sermon on the Mountain.

Even the Ten Commandments will do you in, because toward the end it's not just, don't do this and don't do that, don't covet; it means don't even want what belongs to somebody else. Jesus takes that matter of intent and applies it all across the board, don't murder, don't even think about it, and don't commit adultery, don't even think about it, and he ups the ante.

Patrick Gentempo: It sounds like what you're saying is that people try to strip away any supernatural context.

Halvor Ronning: Exactly.

Patrick Gentempo: ... in saying that the only way to get a historical context is to strip these things away, as compared to maybe trying assess the argument in a logic for supernatural occurrence within the Bible, so these started a whole school, I guess, of study and I guess that to this day still persists.

Halvor Ronning: That's right. What we see is strange, that kind of the more Jewish background you understand about Jesus the more you understand his claims, and here I could give another example. In Capernaum, there's such a crowd around Jesus that some people with a crippled man lower him down through the roof in order to present him to Jesus.

Then what does Jesus say, "God forgives you your sins, I forgive you your sins," those are both active voice, grammatically. No, he says, "Your sins are forgiven you." Well, one of my friends Dr, who I actually mentored, Dr. Robert Lindsey, a Baptist pastor here in Israel for many years, was thinking, "You know, I wonder what Jesus said in Hebrew, whether the Greek translator flipped it into passive construction without even noticing."

What do you do when you have a question about what did Jesus mean? You go to what I love to call Jesus Bible. You go to the Hebrew Bible, because it says, scriptures, 24 times in the gospels alone, double that in the whole New Testament it says, it is written, 48 times in the gospels alone, double that in the whole ... And it's referring to ... The New Testament wasn't written yet. Jesus was the New Testament.

Wherever it says, scriptures, or, it is written, in the New Testament it is referring to the Hebrew Bible. He thought, "I won't find it in Jesus Bible," but he checked and he shocked himself, there it is in Leviticus 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8. Somebody goes and, the priest makes a sacrifice for that person, and the priest is standing at the door of the sanctuary and it says, "The priest will make atonement for him and his sins will be forgiven him," in the passive construction, but it's very unusual in biblical Hebrew.

It's like a stereotyped. It only occurs there, except twice I think in the book of Numbers, and Jesus dares to take this expression when he's just in a house in Capernaum, and who pick it up; the bright boys pick it up right away, "Who do you think you are? Only God can forgive sins."

One of the parallel accounts, "Who is this who's blaspheming?" It doesn't do to strip away all the supernatural and claim that Jesus is, if he lived at all, a wonderful ethical teacher. You get books, Jesus the Galilean peasant, Jesus the ... Almost the marginal Jew, Jesus the country bumpkin is what it amounts to, but here he is making claims that the bright boys; the Pharisees standing around him, they know where that expression comes from, they know what he's claiming about himself.

I personally met a young American Jewish boy who had asked himself a certain question seriously from Jesus Christ superstar, "Do you really think you are who they say you are," and that was where he began to ask himself the question seriously, how the Holy Spirit got a hold of him to the point where he realized that the honest thing is to recognize who Jesus claimed to be, Peter said, "You are the anointed one of God, you are the messiah of God," and then accept it or reject it, but not to claim that he didn't claim it.

Here's where studying the background ... The son of man came to save the lost. Well, in our Christian theology we say son of man, humanity; son of God, divinity. In Jewish background the son of man is a higher more exalted figure than messiah; messiah can be a king or a priest who is anointed for responsibility of leadership and serving their people, but the son of man sits at the right hand of the ancient of days and is coming with power and glory in the last times riding on the clouds and exercising justice, a more exalted figure, and then Jesus says the son of man is going to suffer and die.

Peter, who has just said, "You are the anointed one of God," hears Jesus saying, "I'm going to suffer and die," no; that's not what the son of man does, and he critiques Jesus who has to say, "Get that satanic idea behind me that I wouldn't have to suffer and die." You see how Jesus pitches the answer of Peter, "You are the messiah of God," even higher; the son of man has to suffer and die.

It's powerful. That's why a friend of mine, David Bivin, created a magazine called Jerusalem Perspective that was published, printed for 15 years and now is online, given the new media options and opportunities, but he said it's not fair that we share these concepts with each other and we realize the power in the background but we need to spread these ideas so that people can learn about it.

Patrick Gentempo: You've spent a lot of, like you said, 50 years here in Israel and you keep referring to friends of yours that are of the Jewish faith or rabbis that you get together and you collaborate and talk about these scholarly issues relative to the Bible. What's that experience like, as a Christian here with your own context and your own faith, what's it like to be interacting with these people and what emerges from there?

Halvor Ronning: I remember, maybe one of the first couple of years that I was here, I wanted to do some bookshelves, so I went to a carpenter's shop of an old orthodox Jew and as he was talking about God I'm thinking to myself as a young intellectual, I know from my Christian perspective better than he does the love of God being expressed as lived out perfectly in the life of Jesus, but he loves God more than I do.

He had such a reverence, and more than reverence, a love for God, and I'm thinking to myself, how is it that I can intellectually think that I know more about his God than he does but I'm impressed, almost ashamed, that I don't have the experience of the love of God the way he does. That's a very humbling experience. Where it came to a hit was about five years ago, because I have been teaching for 40 years and more the two most important questions in the world.

Patrick Gentempo: Which are?

Halvor Ronning: Who do men say that I am, which means that it's worth for us Christians to be aware of what's out there, John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets; all wrong answers but in the right direction at least. Then Peter; the most important question in the world, who do you say that I am, and he says, "You are the anointed one of God."

Then about five years ago I thought, "That's in Mark chapter 8." In Mark chapter 1, a demon possessed man in the synagogue says, "I know who you are, the holy one of God." Saying correctly who Jesus is isn't the most important thing. What is the most important thing, it's another question of Jesus, and it's after his resurrection when he confronts Peter who had denied him three times and asks Peter three times, "Do you love me," that that's what counts.

It's rather scary, because Jesus tells how a man is praying to show what's wrong with him, "I thank you that I'm not like others, [inaudible 00:27:18] the men, have mercy on me a sinner." Praying doesn't prove anything. It might prove how you are out of touch with God. Saying correctly who Jesus is doesn't prove anything.

Demons know who he is. What is important? Do you love me. I think as we're considering evidences, a lot of people are asking for hardcore, hard evidence, "I want archeological facts and we can get into that," but what the Lord is looking for is emotional facts, emotional evidence, "Have you understood who I am and my love for you so that you are responding with love for me."

Patrick Gentempo: Do you find ... And this is very interesting, because you said you started out in a very intellectual way and lived your life as an intellectual-

Halvor Ronning: ... philosophy major.

Patrick Gentempo: Yeah, philosophy major and-

Halvor Ronning: Philosophy scholarship.

Patrick Gentempo: With that, there's this intellectual side of understanding these things, and you're having through this journey with Christ revealed and having really interviewed many of the people in the apologetic community and recognizing ... I've been referring to it as a Christian intellectual movement that I see, that's there, but then there's the part of ... As you're saying, that's the emotional side, the side of the feeling side in the heart, and you had characterized the fact saying that you'd admired this Jewish man who loved God more than you although you had the intellectual understanding.

Where does ... Is there a transition, or how did these things come together from the inspired part of being a Christian, where your intellectual prowess that has given you precision and the confidence in the faith that you adopted but yet there's the love that you feel, how did ... You've got so much experience and wisdom with this, how did these two things come together in a life?

Halvor Ronning: Well, a child can know enough about Jesus to want to give their lives to him and understand, as the parents and school teachers, teach the love of God and have a childlike faith, which is basically what it boils down to for all of us, and on the other hand the world's greatest genius has not plumbed all the depths of the scriptural message.

Those are the two things that have to be put together to be a person of faith, that it doesn't matter how much knowledge ... In fact, we know that Jesus said it's hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, to come under God's rule, because it's so likely they rely on what they have been able to accomplish.

I interpret that rich man, not just money or real estate and belongings, but also intellectually, rich in facts. I would even dare to say it's hard for a professor to come under God's rule and get off the pride. I heard one time a comment that professors have bodies only to carry their heads around, because that's where they're storing all these facts, and I know more facts than you do, and have you read that article or that one, [inaudible 00:31:04] so that ... That's not going to make it.

That's not what the Lord is looking for. However rich you are in facts or in belongings, that childlike understanding ... In fact, I sat with a German professor in Heidelberg, Germany, where I was studying, with just six of his students, he said, "I can tell you in one word whether you can trust your professors spiritually or not," and then he shocked us by saying, "Humor."

We're doing a double take and he said, "If you've got a professor who is so full of himself that he can't laugh at himself, if he doesn't know that he's a miserable sinner saved by grace and he can't sit loose about himself, he can't laugh at himself, go for it intellectually in terms of what information he may be able to impart you but don't trust him spiritually; he hasn't understood the basics."

Patrick Gentempo: Great advice. Did that stun you?

Halvor Ronning: It did at the time, but then it's starting to register. It took a long time. Here I am, all this learning and I'm teaching and love the land of the Bible, the field trips, and I've been doing that for ... Well, it's almost 50 years since I got my official Israeli guide license, of which I'm very proud, until I came to ... I feel like I'm a babe in the Lord, maybe only five years old, of understanding that it's response to the love.

We love him because he first loved us, and it's rather scary, if you want to learn to love more. He who has forgiven much loves much. That's why the one who says, "Have mercy on me a sinner," is the kind of person that then can respond to God's love who is a forgiving Lord and it gives you a chance to start over again.

Patrick Gentempo: Is this paradoxical to you, between what you feel when you understand those things and what that means to a human being, and then when you have the academic side of wanting to really study? How do you experience it?

Halvor Ronning:

I would think that they ideally go hand in hand and that as you grow in love for the Lord you want to know more and add to the facts and have correct facts and critique what you think and the facts you think you have and see, do I really have evidence, and am I able to present this to others, am I able to undermine the doubts if people are doubting that.

The skeptic says, "How odd of God to choose the Jews," and the cynic says, "It's not so odd. The Jews chose God," and the sassy Jew says, "It's not so odd, the goyim, the non-Jews annoy God," and the tired Jew says, "Let God choose some other stooge. You want to be the chosen people? Take it. You like our history? You can have it."

There's quite a number of Israelis who are practically in that category. As I hear these different options I'm thinking to myself, "If not the Jews, whom then to choose?" It's not their choice; the Bible says God chose Abraham, a wandering Aramean and calls him to this land, "This is the land that I'm going to give you," and has them as the showcase people for good and for bad.

They didn't choose their identity. We chose to put, in God we trust, on our coins. We decided to do that, and people are trying to get it off. In the case of Jews, they can't escape; God chose them and they have that identity. Digging in to God's way of working, of sending his son to be an example ... Actually I should tell another thing that happened when I read the beginning and the end of the Sermon on the Mount.

There was a bunch of theologians and a 25 year old son in a wheelchair, a cripple but brilliant, and a cynic. When I read the beginning and the end of the sermon on the mount to him he used an adjective that I would never ever ... I'm sure none of you have dreamt to use this adjective about the sermon on the mount. He said, "This teaching is vicious."

It took me a moment to grasp how much deeper was his reaction than the fellow who says, "It doesn't matter if Jesus ever lived or not." Be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect, that's vicious to tell a human being, nobody can do that, and so they just give up. Jesus did it for a man, so it doesn't matter much how I live.

I chewed on that for a long time, and one of my Jewish friends reacted and said, "The problem with Jesus is that he aims too high." If you have two groups of people and you have one group and say, "Let's not get carried away by this religious business and let's just tell people how to be good people and they'll make an effort and they'll succeed and they'll be honest and generous people and they'll feel good about themselves and they'll continue, but if you teach them, be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect, they'll just despair," I chewed on that one, because Jesus does aim high.

He's the only one that lived it perfectly, but he did it for me and then I out of thanks want to be more like him, so all the rest of my life I'm stretching to be more like him. It means all comparison falls away. It's not like, "Boy, am I ever glad I'm not like that Christian just barely

coming out of drunkenness and alcoholism and still tempted, or, “Oh, I’ll never be like that saint,” all the comparison just falls away.

I know that Jesus lived a perfect life; I want to be more like him out of thanks, that he forgives me. I think if you’ve got two communities and one says, “Let’s cool it, let’s not overdo this religious business,” and another who’s stretching to be more like Jesus out of thanks, not out of [inaudible 00:37:54], “Oh, I’m going to be more like Jesus,” but just out of joyful thanks, that that community is going to be more like Jesus. The insights just keep rolling as you do this precious thing of digging into the scriptures.

Patrick Gentempo: It gets interesting because now philosophically you’re looking at the moral versus the practical, and so when ... I guess this is the whole thing, is one idea would say independent of what it aspires to or if that’s cruel, is that the truth or is it not the truth, and then what the outcomes may be they may be, others would say, “Well, there might be other ways to get people to be honest and live more morally in their life,” but that’s not really the issue, is it, if you’re following Jesus. The issue is what’s true in the word and aspiring to that as compared to saying, “There might be other methodologies to get people to behave in life.”

Halvor Ronning: Well, “I am the truth,” this is not one of the logical [inaudible 00:39:00] options for how to detect whether something is true or not, empirical, or non-contradictory, theoretical, and different tests for truth. This is somebody standing and saying, “I am the foundation,” the word for truth in Hebrew is emet, something that has foundation, something you can lean on, the word for faith, emunah, the relationship of leaning on something that has foundation, in modern Hebrew the word for somebody who is a child nurse, [ominit 00:39:36], somebody you can trust to take care of your children even.

You have him claiming to be what a human being was meant to be, and then the question is, how do I measure up in relation to him. It’s not a matter of me checking out the [inaudible 00:40:00] logical or theoretical or practical or pragmatic value of a statement. I’m not testing; I’m being tested in my relationship to him.

A lot of people are too proud, they don’t want to be tested, and you find out that even these people who are asking for hard evidence, you can give them hard evidence out of archaeology and ... I will give an example. They found inscription at Tel Dan in the northern part of the State of Israel where it mentions Beit David, the house of David. It’s the first time that David’s name is mentioned outside of scriptures.

There are scholars who say David and Solomon never existed, so then here’s hard evidence, the king of Damascus is bragging, “I have defeated the house of David, I have defeated Melech Yisrael the king of Israel and Beit David, the house of David.” It’s presented at an archeological conference in Europe and the naysayers say, “Well, that’s easy to explain, the Israelis just planted it.”

I said, "But wait a minute, it's not in Hebrew, it's in Aramaic," which is very close, "And it's the king of Damascus bragging, I have defeated the house of David," "Oh, that's just how clever the Israelis are." Then you realize it's not a matter of evidence, it's a matter of they don't want to believe.

It's a spiritual issue, and so while you show them the evidence in the face they don't count it even though that's what they've been asking for. You realize that the information gathering is valuable, and I say it can undermine the doubts of the doubters because they're so sure that they've got it straight, and then you find hundreds of places that are mentioned in the Bible that have been identified, and out of over a thousand names of people, some 50 have been identified through archeologically and extra biblically.

Patrick Gentempo: Yeah, and fairly recently.

Halvor Ronning: Yeah, well, even in the time that I've been living here we know now for sure where was Goliath's home town of Gath. There was another town that was thought to be and now they realize, "Oops, we made a mistake. It was a few miles off, not so bad, but now we know where Gath was located."

These folks who are so confident that there's no evidence, when you bring the evidence it's kind of a backwards way of doing things, but you undermine their doubts, you cause them to doubt their doubts, "Well, wait a minute, maybe I ... Maybe I'm not right in doubting all this stuff when there's so much evidence coming out of the ground," you might even say.

Patrick Gentempo: Well, it is. At this point, nobody can possibly have any credibility if they say there's no evidence. The only thing they can try to claim is they don't like the evidence, right? That's really the thing, saying there's evidence. Now, we can debate whether you like the evidence or not, but to try to ... How absurd is it to assert, "Well, that was just planted by the Jews, and they're very clever in their scheme to do so," at this point that's beyond confirmation bias that they have.

Halvor Ronning: Well, one of my friends is a professor at the same Copenhagen University where you have this school, the Copenhagen school that David and Solomon never existed, and he said, "They are hopeless. You would at least hope that they would say in their introduction, 'We don't believe in God, we don't believe in the supernatural, so we are doing the best we can to explain these old texts.'" On that basis, that would at least be on a scholarship, but then when you pretend to be objective scholars, that's not fair, that's not true. You have so much of that.

One of the things that I love about Emmanuel Tove, one of the professors at the Hebrew University, is that he's very sharp on the distinction between objectivity and subjectivity. He says, "When you're translating the Bible, how many bibles do you want." If you've got an old text, wouldn't it be better to translate it and then footnote where this is unclear, and not ... As in one of the translations that was made in Jerusalem you have, of the Old Testament, Masoretic text, the

Septuagint Greek translation, and scholarly conjecture, all three used to make a beautifully clear meaning of the passage and it was even footnoted.

He says, "I'm a scholar, and we scholars aren't you. We have an opinion about something but maybe tomorrow I'll change my opinion because I evaluate the evidence differently," he said, "But that's not what you do with the word of God." There are a lot of professors for whom he's like a needle, who pops their balloons, because they are claiming objectivity and he's being honest in saying, "This is my subjective opinion to the best of my knowledge at the present about this matter, but I'm not claiming that I'm objective and it's the word of God."

Patrick Gentempo: With the study that you've had, all the years you've been doing it here, has there been a time when your faith was shaken?

Halvor Ronning: My faith was shaken in college years at a Christian college in the States, and I had believing teachers, so it's also there that I came to my own personal faith. It's amazing how this emotional intellectual play takes place.

I was actually shocked when Josh McDowell, who was head of ministry in the States to university campuses all over the States and has written a couple of books about evidence, evidence that demands a verdict on way or the other, and then even has another book further evidence, and he said, "In my experience," now this is a bit brutal, "When somebody comes up to me as a college student and starts complaining about the problems of the discrepancies or whatever reasons you shouldn't believe, you ask them who are you sleeping with now."

This is vanilla Billy Graham Josh McDowell speaking pointing out that there's reasons for not believing that are causing much of this doubt and not real truth seeking, and when they can doubt their doubts because they realize where they're coming from I don't want my life to be under a divine authority, especially if you don't yet understand him as a loving being and a forgiving being, I don't want ... And that ... Well, Luther, and that's my background, Lutheran, Luther was brutal.

He said, "Reason you whore, you prostitute, you have the things that you want to believe and then you reason," cooks up justifications, and there's a bit of depth psychology in that comment, and so we have to be checking our hearts as to where are we coming from. The scriptures promise, if you seek me you will find me, if you search for me with all your heart, if you're ready to look at your doubts and to question them as well as everything else you have a chance of opening your heart to the Holy Spirit.

Patrick Gentempo: Now the evolution of your experience, do you feel like you have ... And I've heard people use this phrase, I'm curious how you experience it, a personal relationship with Jesus?

Halvor Ronning: I have at the beginning. There's a German who wrote many stanzas of a song, "When morning gilts the skies my heart awakening cries, may Jesus Christ be praised. When evening shadows fall this rings my curfew

call, may Jesus Christ be praised. To him my highest and best sing I when love possessed, may Jesus Christ be praised. The whole wide world around resounds with the sound, may Jesus Christ be praised,” and I haven't reached that level of piety of that beautiful hymn, but it attracts me, it pulls me. I want to know more of that loving aspect of God and more of my need for forgiveness, since being forgiven much leads to loving much.

Patrick Gentempo: Now you have a world where, if I heard the data correctly at least in the United States, that 80% of Christian children who go off to college lose their faith.

Halvor Ronning: I hadn't heard that statistic but it's a real challenge I think for Christian parents sending their kids into the academic jungle with all the wild animals ready to devour them. Should you send your children to a Christian college or to the secular university? I think it would be wise to take a hard look at that Christian college, some of whom have drifted so far from the deep personal faith and desire to train Christian young people in their faith, they've drifted so far that you'd almost be better sending your child to a secular university where the kid knows, I'm under attack for my Christian faith, and finds a small or a large circle of fellow believers where they pray together and strengthen each other.

They may be in better shape than at a lukewarm Christian college where your professors are Christians but don't have a deep personal saving relationship to the Lord. That's a difficult decision to make and one that I would advise Christian parents to be praying about.

Patrick Gentempo: Yeah, no kidding. What do you want to see your legacy be, from all these years of effort?

Halvor Ronning: The professional legacy is one that's actually snowballing at present, and that is our vision to bring mother tongue Bible translators to experience the language of the Bible in the land of the Bible. We've been at the cutting edge of realizing that it's too much for a European or an American to go into a new culture and learn that foreign language and then learn Greek and Hebrew and translate from one foreign language to another foreign language.

Most of the 660 translations that are out there have been made from English and German or Spanish or some mother tongue of the translator into the new language. To actually bring somebody who already knows their own culture and their own language here to experience of the original context is going to lead to translations that are more feet on the ground and realistic without having to all that soon be revised again. That is the legacy that we have built, and we are needing prayer for transition.

I'm 81, my wife is 75, and we want to be turning this over to younger leadership to continue. I once read that the selection committee of the new director is the most important committee that an institution has because it can continue on the principles of biblical faith or it can start drifting.

Harvard, Yale, many of our universities were started by believing Christians, and they have drifted. That legacy is something that we are praying to protect and to find the younger people who can take it and roll with it and run with it and go further. Then of course we're praying for our own children and grandchildren, because they each have their own personal challenges and not always putting their walk with the Lord first. That's something that we pray a lot about too, is our own children and grandchildren.

Patrick Gentempo: I thank you very much for sharing your time and wisdom with us, and I wish for all those prayers to come true.

Halvor Ronning: Amen, amen. Amen, thank you.

Patrick Gentempo: Dr. Randall Buth, thanks for taking your time today. I've been very much looking forward to this conversation. Looking at your background, I think you have some special areas of expertise that are going to be very interesting for our project. Can you give us your own thumbnail of your own background and experience?

Dr. Randall Buth: Thank you for the invitation to be here, and I've looked forward to this also. I suppose I should go way back and go back to the '60s. I grew up in southern California, and that's probably enough said about the '60s but I came to faith in 1961, we didn't know it at the time but it was about to become a little point of social history in the United States because it became the Jesus movement.

I was running around in the beach communities at that time, and when you meet the Lord and things become such a change from black to white you want to share that, and so we started sharing with anybody anywhere. You meet all kinds of people and all sorts of questions would arise, you try to answer them and you look to the Lord for answers, and you keep learning.

You learn at a tremendous rate, and so that brings more questions and more learning. That led me to raise questions. People would say, "Well, what about this Bible, or that Bible and how do you know what it says," and so I said, "Okay, fair question. How do you know what it says," so I said better put that on my list, I better learn more about it.

I went back to school, studied biblical language, prayed about what to do with them, heard about the need to translate the Bible all over the world. The Lord opened up, in a miraculous kind of way, opened up a track where we got further training and ended up going to places like Sudan, Kenya, Chad, Africa, Israel, all connected with Bible translation over the last, I guess, 50 years now.

We've been living in Israel for the last 21, concentrating on teaching people, especially the biblical languages, asking the question how can we reconnect leaders in the church with the biblical languages; Hebrew and Greek, and how do humans best learn languages, what hinders humans from learning languages, and how can we put all of that together to help the Christian community, Christian community in general and then the Bible translation community in particular. About 20

years I spent in Africa working with Bible translation projects, both with SIO Wycliffe and also with United Bible Societies.

Patrick Gentempo: We're here right now on the hills around Jerusalem, and is this where you spend the majority of your time currently?

Dr. Randall Buth: This year, this is where I'm spending the majority of the time, and just for the sort of interesting side, we are actually sitting about 200 yards below where the ark of the covenant rested for 20 years.

Patrick Gentempo: Really? Tell me more about that.

Dr. Randall Buth: Right behind my right shoulder, about 200 meters up the hill, is the high point in this area. This was the Kiryat Ye'arim area, and if you read the story where the ark of the covenant was captured, up in what's today Rosh Haayin, Afek, they took it down to Ashdod, bad things started to happen to them, they sent it to Ekron, Ekron said, "Hey, we can't handle this," so they sent it to the ... Basically sent it back to Beit Shemesh, they didn't want it either and so it was brought up to Kiryat Ye'arim and it rested here until David's kingdom and they moved it on into Jerusalem.

Patrick Gentempo: The geography of the Bible is something you've also taken a very keen interest in.

Dr. Randall Buth: Some. When you live here it just comes with the turf.

Patrick Gentempo: Yeah, I guess it does. One of the things that I think is critical to mention to understanding the Bible, understanding Old and New Testament is the translation and can things be lost in translation or ... I've heard so many times people say, "Well, you know, they use this word but that's not really the intention of a particular word from Hebrew to English or Hebrew to," pick a language.

How painstaking was it for you to go in and actually say, "Okay, let me read the original, in some of the original languages, the Bible and then let me see how it's translated into other languages and make sure that the meaning is proper," what's that process like?

Dr. Randall Buth: Translation is a never ending process. People that are involved in translation know the frustrations of a translator, because you want to communicate several things and the language you're translating into forces you to make a choice.

You make a choice, and then you might want to change it later, and they're both right; it's not like one translation is wrong and the other is right. The problem is, is its translation; it's going from one language and one network of the whole code that's part of that language, and then you put it in a new language and a new culture and the translator has to make choices, and they're usually choices he doesn't want to make or she has to make them.

It's a very long, difficult process. One person once said to me, "Translations are never finished, they're published." What that means

is, is that the translator always has more that they would like to put into the translation and they simply can't do it; they have to make changes, compromises. That's all translation, all literature is always, you're always faced with that, and including in the Bible. That's why you have multiple translations. If a culture is rich enough, has enough time, they do one translation, then they'll do another, and another. It's not a bad process, it enriches the whole background.

Patrick Gentempo: For you, when you learnt Hebrew, for example, and then you read the Bible in Hebrew did it change for you at all, how you understood it?

Dr. Randall Buth: Yeah, it did. For one, it brings you right up close to the text. When you're reading it in translation you're reading it in a language that's tied to a different culture. When you're reading it in an original language there's a ... It virtually pulls you back into a different society or culture and you're getting to see the choices that are made in the original, and that raises a different set of questions.

People have asked, "So, what is that like," and I guess one thing you could say is it's like going from watching something in black and white to color. There is a difference, it's the same message, the same flow of the book, the same events are all taking place, but some of the coloration is different.

When we had our children growing up we would sometimes read the Bible together, and if they were reading in English sometimes I'd say, "Well, I want to know what it's saying," and I would go pick up my Bible and my children at the time would ask, "Well, Aba, so what does that say," and I would be looking at Hebrew or Greek and I would say, "Well, it's says the same thing," and they'd say, "So, why did you do that," and I said, "Because I wanted to know what it said," and they said, "But you just said it said what we said," and I said, "Yeah, but it's a little different."

They thought that's a puzzling way for their parent, their father, to talk to them. Now they've grown up, and two of them are now teaching Hebrew, and they know exactly what I was talking about and they've even said, "We understand what you were wrestling with," because when they're reading English now it does ... They want to ... so what did it actually say, which words were chosen.

When you read an article in Time Magazine, you see a word in English and you know that he chose word A and not word B, C, D that he could have synonyms that he could have chosen but he chose this word. Well, when you translate that into another language then you don't know what the set of synonyms were from which he chose, you just have now in a new language with its set of synonyms you now have a word that refers to that same idea, but you don't know which one of that set of synonyms that word is coming from, and so that's what you miss.

If it's a simple narrative, even there you miss little ... There's little poetic ties, the way they tell the story sometimes gives illusions and hints to things and you can see what an author is doing, you miss that. In poetry, everyone has always said poetry is a very difficult thing to

translate because poetry is not just what you're trying to say but how you're trying to say it. It's not just the content, it's also the form. It's the whole thing. Well, how do you translate that? The answer is, you can't really.

Poetry has always been something that has forced people to learn a new language. If you really want to understand and appreciate that poetry, you learn that language. Guess what; the Hebrew Bible is about 30% poetry.

Patrick Gentempo: What do you mean by that?

Dr. Randall Buth: What do I mean by that; well, the whole book of Psalms, the book of Proverbs, the book of Job, pretty much all of Isaiah, large sections of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, your minor prophets, most of your minor prophets are all poetry. Then there's Exodus 15, by the sea, that chapter 15 is a long poem. Judges 5 is a long poem. You get poems stuck into the narrative, you get books, you get large sections of some books. It's a large chunk of the Bible that's poetry.

Patrick Gentempo: I think you've laid out the dilemma; I'm not going to call it a problem but dilemma, really well in the sense that 30% of the Bible is poetry. Trying to translate poetry from language to another doesn't really capture the essence in many respects, or maybe essence, but not the nuance.

Dr. Randall Buth: Well, it gets the essence but you're missing the shape, you're missing the form. You don't know what the choices were that the original author had and which ones they made.

Patrick Gentempo: Right, and in that nuance is the experience to a large extent.

Dr. Randall Buth: Some of it, yeah.

Patrick Gentempo: Yeah, I would imagine. That's a pretty tall task then, to say, "Well, I'm going to become a translator and try to do my best to take it from one language to the next." Are there any highlights you would have saying, here are some of the critical areas that I really worked on where translation makes a big difference?

Dr. Randall Buth: I'll throw one out. Here's one where translation has not made a difference where it should have or could have, let's say. There's a passage that's very central to the Bible especially as viewed by, through the New Testament. There's a place where Abraham had gone down to Egypt, he came back, we get to Genesis 15 and God has Abraham cut up an animal and there is the, it's called the covenant of the halves, where he's cut up an animal and he gets a promise and a blessing but it's almost a curse, where he says, "Your family is going to go down to a land and the people that abuse them down there I'll punish them and then I'll bring them back after 400 years," it's like, "Yeah, I could use more blessings like that."

The trigger right before that, it says, "And Abraham believed God," and the author in Hebrew did something unexpected there that was not

translated that way in Greek Septuagint 200 years before the Christian era. We had a Greek translation and they smoothed out that little bump, there's a little bump in the chain there and it unexpectedly shifts and says, "Now Abraham was in the habit of believing God, and God reckoned it to him as righteousness."

Well, Greek came along and just says, "Abraham believed God," and so all of your European translations to this day have been influenced by that. You read it in the original and you feel that bump and you go, "Hmm," and it gets you thinking, and it's something that got me thinking once and I thought, "Well, you know, I think I understand Paul and James a little better now," because they both quote that verse and Paul says, "And God reckoned it to him as righteousness," there it is; he believed and God reckoned it is as righteousness.

James I think maybe felt that bump and feeling the, "And Abraham was on a walk, he's on a trajectory believing God," and it says, "And his faith was made perfect when he offered up Isaac." Both of them are right, "And his faith was made perfect when he offered up Isaac," James was seeing that whole trajectory, Paul was seeing the result, "And God credited it as righteousness," very decisive kind of thing, and to this day I don't think that has been clarified in most of the translations.

I think it's starting to make its way into a commentary here and there, but it's kind of been glossed over. That's an example. Mostly, it's what the translator faces, and this is why your question is hard to answer, the translator faces questions in every sentence, choosing words in every sentence.

Does he say, he traveled or he went? Does he say, he walked or he went? Little choices, but they all add up. Most are not significant, like the one I just mentioned, but it makes the work very heavy, very long. It's not an easy work for the translator. I think people like to badmouth translations, "Oh, this translation oh, but this one is good, but oh," and in fact all of those committees were bleeding and sweating working over that material.

Patrick Gentempo: I have to imagine, you talked about bleeding and sweating, there's people who have had a certain position based on these translations for some years and if somehow somebody like yourself comes along and says, "You know, I think that it's really better interpreted this way," and if it changes it for them they have kind of like this long term investment in the way that it was as compared to maybe a modified way.

I think sometimes this ties in to geography, doesn't it, because as you're saying, he crossed or he went across. When you start to describe, did he go down, did he go up, to describe where Jesus might have walked from point A to point B and they say ... Some people try to say, "Well, this is wrong, because that would be going up, not going down." Are those types of issues brought up in the type of work that you're doing?

Dr. Randall Buth: All of those are issues, and it ... Again, they become more critical in some languages rather than others. For instance, there may be a

language where the going up or the going down is very important. They have to choose one verb or another, or one prefix or something to do with that verb.

They may look at English that just says, went, or maybe the Hebrew Bible says, and he went. Everybody knows that he went up or down, because they know the land, but then if they're translating in Indonesia or New Guinea or Brazil, they have to make a choice and sometimes they don't even ... They find it very difficult to get a hold of that information, because they're not here, and commentaries don't talk about it, but all of a sudden for them it's an issue because of that language. This is, again, part of the challenge of a translator.

Patrick Gentempo: I'd have to imagine then being here in the holy land is an advantage to a translator to try to see, by witnessing the land and the archeological digs that have come, that it helps to even give better perspective as to maybe how this should be translated.

Dr. Randall Buth: It helps a lot what word are they going to use for city, what about hill, what about mountain, river. Again, depending on the country and the language they're working in they may or may not have problems with hills or mountains, rivers. What is called a river here might be a creek someplace else.

If you're from Nepal and the Himalayas, what do you call these? Well, these are not mountains, and yet within the culture they're trying to translate and bring the Nepalese into listening to a message that's being spoken within a different culture, and so that will affect things. They have to try to get the Nepalese to appreciate that this is a message being spoken within a different culture, at the same time they have to use words that are appropriate so the Nepalese understand what is this mountain, what is this river.

I was, last year I was beside the Ganges and the Ganga, and that's a big river, and as it leaves it's like ... It felt like three or four Mississippis, it was ... Because it actually divides up as it gets down near the Bay of Bengal. That is just one big river. You use a word for that, and I can come and show you a little ... A bridge goes over it and you wonder if there's even water in it, and am I going to use the same word there.

Patrick Gentempo: How many different languages have you worked in by now? Have you kept the count?

Dr. Randall Buth: I don't keep a count, because there are too many and they're all different levels of working with a language. You can teach in a language, you can speak to people in a language, you can read a language, you can work with ancient languages. Some you decipher, some you handle more fluently. You work as a consultant over the shoulder, you might say on another language; you put a number on it and you've ... It's like the translation thing, that old Italian proverb that says, if you've translated you've lied, and so if you give a number it's wrong.

We mentioned a river, this coming week we'll be taking some students down to a site that's connected to a river that plays into the story, and it isn't quite visible in the text because, again, the people that were writing the text they know the culture and the land, so they don't have to put all of the information in, but people reading the Bible today were outsiders looking back 2,000, 3,000 years and into a land, culture, and language that isn't part of us.

The famous story of, that I mentioned, because we're here in Abu Ghosh, I mentioned this; the ark. It was ... The battle took place down at what is today ... There's a national park there called Afek, why did it take place there. Well, that's a large natural spring. I don't know how many millions of gallons of water come out there but it comes out into a big huge lake pool and then slowly meanders down to the Mediterranean Sea, and in antiquity that made a river and a marshland.

The international road didn't just go up the coast from Tel Aviv, it came as they came out of Egypt and came up along the coast they then turned in and went inland to go around this little river and this little mini lake, the big pond that was a spring.

That was a little narrow point in the international road. The hills come down to the plain and the spring comes out and causes a little stream, and so there's two or three kilometers there where international travel took place. The Philistines had been in control of the land, the Israelis were filling their oats, because it says, "Now the word came to Samuel and said," it doesn't even say it's the word of the Lord, it says, "A word of Samuel," and that's a nice interpretive problem, but they go down and they're challenging the hegemony of the Philistines, they're saying, "Hey, we are the new man in town."

They go down there, and of course they fall on their face and they're defeated. I mentioned earlier how the ark was taken, went on a big circuit, eventually got brought back to the highlands, not to Shiloh, but they brought it back here to Abu Ghosh. Some people think that it's possible that Shiloh, after the battle down there had been wiped out ... No, we don't know for sure, it's not in the text, nobody says anything, Shiloh just disappears from history, but they bring the ark back to Kiryat Ye'arim which is where we are sitting to day.

All of that geographical background would have been known to the original audience, but also the geopolitical background, the fact that this ... They're having a fight over hegemony; who is going to really control things, who is going to control this international road; the children of Israel, to use the biblical term, had come down and were saying, "Hey, we are ready for this now. We are going to move you out of this area," that kind of political tension and how it plays in larger politics, again, the people would feel that and know that, but we read the Bible and it's just sort of flat there. I don't know what you would ... It's not language, it's not culture-

Patrick Gentempo: ... context.

Dr. Randall Buth: It's not geography, it's all of that put together.

Patrick Gentempo: That would make sense, having all those things that you just listed create a context and with that comes a deeper understanding. I think it's hard to find the right words; I'm starting to get it now as you say it. That's flat, there's less color, less resolution. I start to see what that means to have deeper understanding, more direct experience with the original language, et cetera. You've spent so many years doing this. What's the personal experience for you, where you've committed your life, what do you feel your purpose is in all this?

Dr. Randall Buth: What's happened for me, probably I've had two stages in life, the one was to work specifically in translation and spent the first half of my working life in that, and the second half has grown out of working in translation. In working with translators I also realized that the church needs people that have a real living access to the original text.

For the last 20 years I've been working on a related but a different question, which is how to re-engage Christian academia with the biblical source, with the Greek New Testament, the Hebrew Old Testament, how to do that in a living way, in a way so that people feel it in the same way that a German professor gets to feel his Goethe poetry, how can we do it so that teachers and pastors and translators get this kind of interaction with the original text.

I've been working on education, on pedagogy; how do human beings learn languages, are we really doing what could be done or should be done with the biblical languages, and I came to a conclusion about 20 years ago that the answer was, no, that we were in a little bubble. When it came to Greek and Hebrew we just set them aside and ignored everything we knew about human language, that ... We know how human beings learn languages and what is effective and we know what hinders learning of languages but when it comes to Hebrew and Greek we don't ask any of those questions that researchers have found with language learning and we just do the inertia of the status quo and if it turns out that in fact we are doing what hinders language learning so be it, and if we want to ... We don't even ask what will help in this case.

For the last 20 years I've been raising the question, how to reconnect Christian teaching leadership with the source texts. That's led to why we are sitting here today, because I just came out of teaching a class all morning with a first group of 15 people that are going to be living together for eight and a half months and will have to speak Hebrew and use the language in class, out of class, reading the text, engaging it in the way we would with any other language, but that doesn't happen with biblical languages.

About 20 years ago I was talking with a lot of Christian educators, I was looking for ways to send translators for special training where they would set up a program and they could get immersed in the language and use it and think with it and speak to each other in the language, really get the language inside them.

I wrote to all of these people and they kept writing back saying, "Hey, hey, no, no, not us," and some of them wrote back and said, "Why are you writing us? You actually have the background that could do this." I

thought about it and I said, "I think they're right." About 20 years ago we made a change to come back to this country; we were in Africa at the time working on Bible translation, that we could come here and start working on programs to teach both Hebrew and Greek in a living way.

This led in lots of different directions, and one of them is this school that I just mentioned, and this is a new project and it's geared especially for translators to try to squeeze into the shortest amount of time the most efficient productive time to get them up to a first plateau so they can be using their Greek and Hebrew efficiently in their translations.

Patrick Gentempo: I'll say, I think that's very worthy work, especially in the context of the Bible in the Old Testament and the New Testament and being able to trying to get closer to the original intent. It's one thing to say as I'm reading it in the language that I know, maybe it's my first language, I'm trying to interpret it just from that.

Dr. Randall Buth: Of course.

Patrick Gentempo: Now you have to go deeper in saying let's see the original language and then interpret from that to your language, and then interpret it again, or be able to go directly to the source. It opens up a whole new world, and obviously for any human being could be a lifelong course of study.

Dr. Randall Buth: Well, that's also true. It's also true. We want to get them engaged and not, you might say ignore the question, but we have three major religions in the world that are based on a scripture and how do we treat our languages, and they're different, and so the parable goes like this; there's a Muslim scholar from Indonesia and a Muslim scholar from Paris and they meet in Cairo and they speak to each other in Arabic, nobody thinks anything about that.

You have a Jewish scholar from Buenos Aires and a Jewish scholar from Moscow and they meet somewhere, Jerusalem, and they speak to each other in Hebrew and nobody thinks anything special about that either. Then you have a Christian scholar, someone comes from Mexico City, meets a Christian scholar from Germany, they meet in Athens and you know one thing for certain; they will not speak in Hebrew and they will not speak in Greek. Different communities, different relationships to the text.

Some of it gets into Bible practice, in that within Jewish culture you've always had both the source language and wherever they were. If you went to a synagogue in the United States or Germany you would hear the Bible read in Hebrew and you would hear local language, either translation or the sermon in the local language, and this has been the custom for maybe 1800 years, even longer, outside of the land of Israel.

Within a Jewish culture you had both language, and so nobody forgot the fact that there was a source; you heard it, you came in contact with it, and yet you wanted the understanding, so you had translation and discussion. In the Islamic community you have something quite

different; you have an original, and they know about the problems of translation so they just flat out say, “Well, there's no such thing, we don't translate our book, you just recite this. Here's your prayers, recite it and don't ... Just recite it, don't ... We'll tell you about the meaning later, don't ... Just recite it. Thank you very much.”

You've got a source text and the source text is almost the last word. Now, they do have translations of course and they do explain things in other languages, but in terms of a worship practice it's not integrated. Well, then we've got three spots on the triangle here, so you come to the Christian communities for the last ... Really, the whole 2,000 years, the whole history of the Christian church is based on translation.

The early Greek church was so connected to Greek that they really didn't want to hear much about the Hebrew Bible, it's like, “We've got the Greek Bible,” and so that set a precedent. You have a western church in Latin and then they work in Latin all the way through and you get to the reformation, but we need it in our language, so then they get English and Italian and French and German and it's to the point where people in Christian churches, they've heard that there's a source language but nobody is conscious of it; they don't interact with it, they don't see it or feel it, it's a ... Everything is in the world of translation.

That's why you get these questions like, “So, what translation should I be using,” the answer is all of them. Any one you can get your hands on, it's all going to bring a little light by having multiple translations. The consciousness of that relationship between source and translation is often not in the pew the way it would be, say, in a synagogue and in reverse the way it is in Arabic, so you've got three different ways of scripture based faith communities interacting with their text.

Patrick Gentempo: I can see that this is a very comprehensive subject and journey and I can also see that it needs to be kept alive in the academic world and in the faith community. I appreciate you, you bringing it to light here and giving us a better understanding of the significance of it and I wish you well in your continued efforts.

Dr. Randall Buth: Well, you're welcome.