

# Hebrew/Aramaic Origin of the New Testament

We accept both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, and generally follow the King James translation because many reference works are based upon that version.

Churchianity itself is tainted with Greek thinking, Hellenized creeds, and unscriptural practices derived from Greco-Roman infusions through a Greek-translated New Testament.

Scholarship is increasingly validating the case for a Hebrew original New Testament. We include some of their documentation in this short study.

Examining all the evidence, we conclude that the New Testament was inspired in Hebrew (or Aramaic) and then later translated into Greek. The testimony to this is voluminous and logical. One needs only to consider that the writers were themselves Hebrews, and "while the language is Greek, the thoughts and idioms are Hebrew" (*Companion Bible*, appendix 94).

At the end of this article is a list of scholars and their treatises supporting an original Hebrew New Testament. This list is by no means comprehensive. Other enlightened experts have come to the same realization that the New Testament was originally a collection of Hebrew works. The Bible's Hebrew writers were led by the Holy Spirit to write in their native Hebrew language, just as Paul (Shaul) was spoken to from On High in the Hebrew tongue, Acts 26:14.

## New Testament Based on Old

The inquiring Bible student soon realizes that the New Testament is undeniably Hebrew in grammar, idiom, and thinking. This opens up a whole new understanding of the essence of truth for the New Testament believer. If the New Testament is rooted in the Hebrew Language, then its teachings also derive from the Hebrew culture and are embedded in the Hebrew - and not pagan Greek - view of truth.

Those who would object to this reality must be asked the question, does arguing for a Greek New Testament bring one closer to the truth, or take one further from it, knowing that the Old Testament is a thoroughly Hebrew work? Is the New Testament a complete replacement of Old Testament teachings, with entirely new truth flavored with Hellenistic thought, practice, and understanding?

Not according to the Apostle Paul. He wrote that the New Testament is built on the foundation of the Old Testament prophets as well as the apostles, Ephesians 2:20. Yahushua (Jesus) the Messiah gave the directive to "*search the Scriptures,*" John 5:39. The only "*scriptures*" existant at that time were those of the Old Testament. The New Testament writings were not yet finished and compiled.

In His parable of Lazarus, Yahushua (Jesus) again advised the unknowing to listen to "*Moses and the prophets,*" meaning the Old Testament, Luke 16:29. It was these same Old Testament Scriptures that the "*noble Bereans*" used to establish truth in Acts 17:11, and the very ones Paul told Timothy would make one perfect, 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

Aside from approaching truth from the right scriptural foundation, there is another important reason for coming to grips with the original language of the New Testament.

One of the arguments advanced against the verity of the sacred Names is that the Names would appear as "God" (*Theos*) and "Jesus" in the New Testament Greek text. The logic goes, if such titles and names are in the "original" text, then who are we to change them to something else?

Apart from this argument's erroneous premise ("God" is not the same word as the Greek *Theos*: "Jesus" is only partly a Greek term), we must ask, is it legitimate to change someone's name simply because you are writing about him in some other language? Names are transliterated, not translated.

If a book about the president of the United States were written in or translated into Russian, would the author or translators look for a Russian equivalent name for "George Bush"? Of course not. His name would still appear as George Bush.

By the same token, the Father's and Son's Names are the same in every language. Therefore we must call on them by their names revealed through the Hebrew tongue. There is no more a Russian equivalent name for "George Bush" than there is a Greek or English equivalent of the Hebrew "Yahweh" and "Yahushua." "God", "Lord", and "Jesus" are not equivalents, they are **replacements**.

## Hebrew Words Out of Place?

A peculiar discrepancy within the New Testament is this: if the New Testament were originally composed in Greek, why does it contain many untranslated Hebrew words? Why did the writers go to all the trouble of preserving Hebrew terms in their Greek writings?

The only valid explanation is that the Greek language had no equivalent words for these uniquely Hebrew terms taken from an original Hebrew text and translated into Greek.

These Hebrew survivals attest to a Hebrew original - and a Greek (and English) translation that brought them across unchanged from the Hebrew.

The following HEBREW words are included in the King James New Testament, as taken from the Greek translation (some are Aramaic).

**Abba** ("dearest father"); **Messiah** ("Anointed one"); **Rabbi** ("my teacher"); **hosanna** ("Save! We beseech"); **Amen** (suggests trust, faithfulness); **talitha cumi** ("maid arise"); **ephphatha** ("be opened"); **corban** ("a dedicated gift"); **Sabbath** ("repose", "desist" from exertion); **Satan** ("adversary"); **mammon** ("riches"); **raca** ("to spit in one's face"); **cummin** (herb); **Maranatha** ("Master, I pray you overthrow"); **Passover** ("pass over"); **Emmanuel** (title meaning "El with us"); **Eli lama Sabachthani** ("my El, why have you forsaken me?")

Even more compelling evidence for a New Testament originally composed in Hebrew is found in the clear Hebrew word order extant in the New Testament.

Many sentences contain the verb-noun reversal common to Hebrew and Semitic languages.

Scholars also have long recognized that the grammar of the New Testament does not befit good Greek, but does reflect excellent Hebrew grammar.

In addition, many Hebraic idioms and expressions are scattered throughout the New Testament. Had the original been composed in Greek, these sayings would have been put into Greek form and expression.

For example, what did Yahushua (Jesus) and others mean by statements that don't make good sense in Greek (Or English) but are powerful in the Hebrew? Such expressions include: *"If your eye is evil"* (Matt. 6:23); *"let the dead bury the dead"* (Matt. 8:22); *"for if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry"* (Luke 23:31), and *"thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head"* (Paul in Rom. 12:20).

Numerous examples of Semitic poetry and reverse couplets (chiasmus) are dead giveaways to the original Hebrew of these books. Hebrew is also distinct for its colorful descriptions of simple, common acts.

For example, a beautiful expression in classical Hebrew is found in Luke 16:23: *"...he lift up his eyes...and saw..."* Other sayings peculiar to Hebrew and found in the Evangelists include: *"Lay these sayings in your years," "Cast out your name as evil," "He set his face to go,"* and *"The appearance of his countenance was altered."*

Whole sentences or paragraphs in the New Testament can be retranslated word for word back into the Hebrew. Luke 10:5-6 is just one example: *"And into whatsoever house you enter, first say, Peace be to this house. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again."* This passage is a synthesis of vivid Hebrew idioms unknown in the Greek.

## Greek Unpopular in Israel (Judea)

Many linguists and historians now attest that the Evangelists, the Acts, and the Book of Revelation were composed in Hebrew (see listing of these scholars

included herein). Early "church fathers" validate that the Book of Matthew was originally written in Hebrew (see Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* 3:39; Irenaeus' *Against Heresies* 3:1; Epiphanius' *Panarion* 20:9:4; Jerome's *Lives of Illustrious Men 3* and *De Vir.* 3:36).

Hebrew was the language of Judah and Galilee in the first century. Its sister language, Aramaic, remained the secondary tongue and the language of commerce. Jews in this area were not Greek-speaking. Their revulsion to the Greeks and the Greek language derives from the fact that the Maccabees had just defeated the Greeks and driven them and their pagan defilement from the Temple and Palestine.

The eminent first century Jewish historian, priest, and scholar Josephus admitted that he could not speak Greek fluently and that the Jews frowned on any Jew who did.

"I have also taken a great deal of pains to obtain the learning of the Greeks, and understanding the elements of the Greek language although I have so long accustomed myself to speak our own language, that I cannot pronounce Greek with sufficient exactness: for our nation does not encourage those that learn the languages of many nations" (*Antiquities*, 20:11:2).

If this illustrious scholar was unable to speak Greek sufficiently, how could the uneducated disciples write their books in Greek? From what we've learned, why would they even want to do so?

## A Hebrew Writing to Hebrews

The common perception is that Paul was a Hellenist Jew from Tarsus who wrote his letters to Greek-speaking assemblies in Asia minor, Rome and Greece.

Paul (*Heb.* "Shaul") was first and foremost a Pharisee - a Jewish sect opposed to Hellenization. He was of the tribe of Benjamin and a "*Hebrew of Hebrews*," Philippians 3:5. A note in the NIV Study Bible says the expression "*Hebrew of Hebrews*" means "in language, attitudes and life-style."

Paul was educated at the feet of Gamaliel, a great doctor of Hebrew law, Acts 22:3. Although he was born in Tarsus (a city speaking mainly Aramaic), Paul grew up in Jerusalem, the center of Pharisaic Judaism, Acts 22:3.

The epistles Paul wrote were to various assemblies of the Dispersion. Each assembly was composed of a nucleus group of Jews and supplementary collections of gentiles (read about the Thessalonians Assembly, Acts 17:1-4, as well as the Corinthians, 1 Cor. 10:1-2). The converted Jews in these assemblies would receive Paul's letters and then teach the gentiles among them. It wasn't the gentiles who were converting Jews to a Grecian-Roman faith with a Greek Savior and doctrines of mystery worship!

Typically Paul went first to the synagogue when he traveled to contact these and other assemblies (Acts 13:14; 14:1; 17:1; 17:10, 18:4, 19:8). The language of the second Temple and synagogues at this time was Hebrew and Aramaic, not Greek.

His letters in Hebrew to these Jews (and gentiles) of the various assemblies would reflect his mission to take the Good News to *"the Jew first and then to the Greek,"* Romans 1:16.

As an example, Paul specifically addressed Jews of the Corinthian assembly: *"Moreover, brethren, I would not that you should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea"* (1 Cor. 10:1-2).

## Truth from Greek or Hebrew?

Understanding basic truth is to know that Yahweh chose the Hebrew peoples with whom to make a Covenant and through whom to bring the truth.

How much of a gentile should the True Worshiper be who is bathing in Scriptures first delivered to Hebrew patriarchs, Hebrew prophets, and Hebrew apostles and lived by a Savior from the human lineage of King David? Paul was no champion of the gentile cause. He was the champion of a Hebrew Messiah

and scriptures given in a Hebrew Old Testament. These were what he taught in his epistles. Note:

*"But this I confess unto you, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the Elohim of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets" (Acts 24:14). "Law and prophets" refers to the Old Testament Scriptures. Which culture, world-view, and mentality should prevail among True Worshipers today? A Greek-gentile heritage? Or the birthright of those grafted into the promised of Israel established by the Heavenly Father Yahweh Himself?*

Paul wrote to the assembly at Rome, "Who are Israelites; to whom pertains the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of Elohim, and the promises" (Romans 9:4).

If Christianity were honest with itself, it would openly acknowledge that it derives its faith from Hebrew and not Greco-Roman Scriptures. That its salvation comes from a Savior who came as a Hebrew not to establish a new religion but to build on what went before. Yahushua (Jesus) and the Scriptures are Hebrew.

If this one pivotal truth were taught today, real understanding of the Scriptures would break out everywhere, and the Bible would at last be revealed.

## Scholars Who Support A Hebrew Original New Testament

Following is a listing of some linguistic and Biblical authorities who maintain or support a belief in a Hebrew origin of the New Testament:

- Matthew Black, ***An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts***, third edition, entirety.
- D. Bivin and R. B. Blizzard, ***Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus***, entirety.
- E. W. Bullinger, ***The Companion Bible***, Appendix 95.
- Dr. F. C. Burkitt, ***The Earliest Sources for the Life of Jesus***, pp. 25, 29.
- Prof. C. F. Burney, ***The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel***, entirety.
- Epiphanius, ***Panarion*** 29:9:4 on Matthew.
- Eusebius, ***Ecclesiastical History***, III 24:6 and 39:18; V8:2; VI 25:4.

- Edward Gibbon, ***History of Christianity***, two footnotes on p. 185.
- Dr. Frederick C. Grant, ***Roman Hellenism and the New Testament***, p. 14.
- Dr. George Howard, ***The Tetragram and the New Testament in Journal of Biblical Literature***, vol. 96/1 (1977), 63-83. Also, ***Hebrew Gospel of Matthew***, entirety.
- Dr. George Lamsa, ***The Holy Bible from Ancient Eastern Manuscripts***, Introduction, pp. IX-XII.
- Dr. Alfred F. Loisy, ***The Birth of the Christian Religion and The Origin of the New Testament***, pp. 66, 68.
- Dr. Isaac Rabinowitz, ***Ephphata...in Journal of Semitic Studies*** vol. XVI (1971), pp. 151-156.
- Ernest Renan, ***The Life of Jesus***, pp. 90, 92.
- Hugh J. Schonfield, ***An Old Hebrew Text of St. Matthew's Gospel***, (1927) p. 7.
- Dr. Albert Schweitzer, ***The Quest of the Historical Jesus***, p. 275.
- R. B. Y. Scott, ***The Original Language of the Apocalypse***, entirety.
- Prof. Charles C. Torrey, ***Documents of the Primitive Church***, entirety. Also, ***Our Translated Gospels***, entirety.
- Dr. James Scott Trimm, ***The semitic Origin of the New Testament***, entirety.
- Max Wiolcox, ***The Semitism of Acts*** (1965), entirety.
- F. Zimmerman, ***The Aramaic Origin of the Four Gospels***, entirety.