

## **Was the New Covenant Written in Hebrew?**

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Thy World is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. Psalm 119:105

**Opening Prayer:** Father, guide our hearts to find Your truth and be changed by it.

### **Why is it important to discover the language in which the New Testament was written?**

Because a language possesses an inner structure, a specific flavor, and idioms of its own. Each language brings with it a cultural background. All of these elements shape the way of thinking of those speaking it.

To understand more precisely and with any real depth the language of Jesus and His disciples, it would be ideal if we could read His words in the original language (as do the Jews with the Tanakh, the "Old" Covenant). The next best would be to reconstruct the text from the language one has at hand. That is because a language's idioms are only fully comprehensible in the context of that language. To literally translate idioms from language to another language only makes them absurd and reveals their foreign origin.

All of the above elements make it important to know the original language of the New Testament. Take the problem of idioms, for instance. What does "taking my hair" mean in English? Nothing at all, since it is from an idiom in Spanish -- "tomar el pelo" -- equivalent to the English "pulling my leg." In order to translate it dynamically, then one has first to know it was originally in Spanish, and only then one may try to find an equivalent idiom in English, as we did.

On the other hand, what would happen if we assumed "tomar el pelo" was taken from the French? We would be at a loss to find in French anything such as "prenez le cheveux." We would conclude, erroneously, that the original writer had a poor grasp of French. And this is exactly what happened with the New Testament language, as

we shall try to prove, with the "French" in our hypothetical example standing for Greek and/or Aramaic, and our "Spanish" for Hebrew.

What we will try to prove, then, is that the New Covenant's original language was neither Greek nor Aramaic (as popularly believed), but Hebrew -- the same Hebrew that the "Old" Covenant was written in. It is only natural that it should be Hebrew, since we are dealing with the same country, only in a latter period of its history.

Are there any proofs that the original language was Hebrew, and not Greek or Aramaic? Yes, there most definitely are, both external and internal to the Scriptures. We will deal with the external proofs first.

## **THE EXTERNAL PROOFS FOR A HEBREW ORIGINAL**

There are several external sources, i.e. outside Scripture, pointing to Hebrew as the written language of the New Testament, as Dr. David Bivin has most eloquently attested. [Bivin and Blizzard Jr, *Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus*, 1988, pp. 45-78.] These sources are the testimony of the Church fathers and the Dead Sea Scrolls. We will examine these two external sources, albeit briefly.

### **The testimony from the church fathers.**

- Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, c. 150 A.D. said: "Mathew put down the words of the Lord in the Hebrew language, and others have translated them, each as best he could."
- Irenaeus (120-202 A.D.) Bishop of Lions, France, wrote: "Matthew, indeed, produced his Gospel written among the Hebrews in their own dialect."
- Origen (c. 225 A.D.) said: "The first Gospel composed in the Hebrew Language, was written by Mathew..for those who came to faith from Judaism."
- Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea (c. 325 A.D.), wrote: "Matthew had first preached to the Hebrews, and when he was about to go to others also, he transmitted his Gospel in writing in his native

language" (Ecclesiastical History III 24, 6).

- And Jerome, translator of the Scripture into Latin (Vulgata or Vulgate version), says the same.

### **The Dead Sea Scrolls**

The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered by an Arab shepherd boy in the caves of Qumran, in the Judean wilderness contains a treasure load of Scripture: some 40,000 fragments of rolls, with 600 partial manuscripts, both scriptural as well as non-scriptural. Says Dr. Bivin: "Of the ten major non-biblical scrolls published to date, only one, the Genesis Apocryphon, is in Aramaic. The most recently published scroll, and the longest to date (28 feet, equivalent to over 80 Old Testament chapters), is the now famous Temple Scroll, also written in Hebrew...If we compare the total number of pages in these ten sectarian scrolls, we again find a nine-to-one ratio of Hebrew to Aramaic (179 pages in the nine Hebrew scrolls to 22 pages of Aramaic in the Genesis Apocryphon)." [Bivin & Blizzard Jr., op. cit. p. 49,52.]

In sum, as far as the external evidence is concerned, both the Church Fathers as well as the recently discovered Dead Sea Scrolls state quite clearly and without any subtlety that Hebrew was the language spoken and written at the time of the Rabbi Yeshua.

### **THE INTERNAL PROOFS FOR A HEBREW ORIGINAL**

Internal proofs for Hebrew being the original language spoken by the Rabbi Yeshua are equally direct and even more convincing, for we can take the New Covenant and prove it now, in our own native language, be it English or Spanish or any other.

First of all, Scripture itself says the language of the Rabbi Yeshua and His disciples was Hebrew. Despite this scriptural proof, various translations, especially the NIV, have changed the original "Hebraisti" (which does not require one to be a Greek scholar to understand it says "Hebrew") for "Aramaic" (see John 19:13, 19; Lk. 23:38; Acts 21:40).

In addition, there are over 5366 manuscripts of the New Covenant in

Greek, each differing from the other and containing several hundred variants. However, in each one of these manuscripts there are idioms which are almost meaningless in any language -- including Greek -- except in Hebrew! How can such a thing be explained unless it is because the original was Hebrew?

There are so many of these Hebraisms, one of the most common of them being "Son of man." What does "Son of man" mean in English, Spanish, German, or any other language? Absolutely nothing -- except in Hebrew. The expression "Ben Adam" means literally "son of Adam" and by extension "son of man," and "man," Adam being of course the first man alive. In any street corner in Israel you may hear, "Here comes this Ben Adam," meaning, "Here comes this man." This example, which occurs no less than 92 times in the Tanak (the Jewish Scripture) and 43 times in the New Covenant (Cruden's Concordance) is obviously the same Hebrew idiom.

It is said that the New Covenant was written in Koine Greek, common Greek, because it is found to be a poor kind of Greek. When we find these many Hebraisms as there are there, we begin to understand that it is not Koine Greek lying there, in the substratum of the text, but a Hebrew original. Since the Hebrew original was almost literally translated into Greek, the text sounds like poor Greek.

Let us take another example, the idiom "Peace be to you," appearing twelve times in the New Covenant. What kind of a greeting is "Peace be to you" in English, Spanish, French, or any other language -- except Hebrew? It is meaningless, again. Only in Hebrew does it make any real sense. This is the most common, everyday greeting in Israel today, the world-famous "shalom." It literally means "peace," but it is used as an everyday greeting meaning anything from "Hi" to "How are you?" according to the intonation and the mood of the speaker.

The third internal proof of the Hebrew character of the New Covenant is the use of two very Jewish ways of speaking: that of repeating things twice, and the answering of a question with another question. Yeshua did both quite often. In Matthew 27:46: "...My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" and in Luke 20:2-3: "And spake unto him, saying, Tell me, by what authority doest thou these things? or

who is he that gave thee this authority? And he answered and said unto them, I will also ask you one thing and answer me..."

It is important to stress that these two characteristics, especially the former, are strongly associated with the Hebrew. We don't see them in English or in any other European language.

### **If this is true, then...**

How did it come about that "everybody knows" that the New Testament was originally written in Greek or Aramaic? We will deal with these questions now as they provide the latter half of the answer to the original question of this article: In which language was the New Testament originally written?

### **The assumptions and prejudices leading to both the Greek and Aramaic theories.**

First of all, let us say that the issue of the New Covenant being written in Greek or Aramaic was non-existent prior to the Fourth or Fifth Century A.D. It has been a rather modern theory.

The question is: What basis does the "Aramaic theory" have? What are its external and internal proofs? The answer -- quite unbelievably -- is: None!

There are a few isolated loaned words in Aramaic present in the New Covenant, which are far outweighed by the Hebrew words and idioms.

The "Greek theory" is based on the fact that the New Covenant manuscripts that survive are in that language, and not one single copy remains of the Hebrew originals. Admittedly, this would be a good enough basis, but only if we disregard the other evidence: the statements by the church fathers, the Hebraisms, the idioms, the language of the Dead Sea Scrolls, etc.

In sum, what we have are assumptions by theologians. These assumptions have historically been based upon or influenced by ugly, anti-Semitic prejudices. Why do we say prejudice? Is there a basis for

raising up the ugly specter of anti-Semitism within the Church? Judge for yourself.

## **The Church: A History of Unremitting Anti-Semitism**

Historically, the Church has had a consistent record of being very anti-Semitic most of the 2,000 years of history. Consider the Inquisition, with hundreds of thousands of Jews (and real Christians) tortured and slaughtered simply because of their being Jews. Consider the anti-Semitic statements by the fathers of the Church, such as Chrysostom, Eusebius, Origen, Cyril, Hyppolitus, and even Martin Luther, the father of the Reformation...

- The true name of our Lord was Yeshua. What we have is a very Gentile-sounding "Jesus"...
- There are several references to Yeshua speaking Hebrew in Scripture and Paul speaking Hebrew. Westcott and Hort, two New Age occultists (See "New Age Versions of the Bible" by G. Riplinger, A.V. Publications, 1993.) changed the word "herbaisti" to "Aramaic," in addition to the 5000-8000 other alterations they made to their version of the Greek text. (Editor's note: The Westcott & Hort version of the Greek text, which is supported by more than 95% of the surviving ancient manuscripts.)

The above shows us the "Aramaic" or "Greek" theories were not isolated mistakes or misconceptions, but part of a worldwide, centuries-old dejudaization campaign by the anti-Semites within the church to make it judenrein, despite the fact that we worship a Jewish God of Israel and the promised Messiah of Israel.

The external and internal proofs show, on the other hand, that the New Covenant was written in Hebrew in its original and not in Greek or in Aramaic.

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History of the Bible - [www.literatureclassics.com/ancientpaths/bibhist.html](http://www.literatureclassics.com/ancientpaths/bibhist.html)

Jesus Spoke Hebrew - [www.sharesong.org/JESUSSPOKEHEBREW.htm](http://www.sharesong.org/JESUSSPOKEHEBREW.htm)

A Brief Overview of Bible History <http://users.rcn.com/lanat/biblehistory.htm>

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