

Was the New Testament Originally Greek?

In an effort to deny the importance of Yahweh's great Name, there are those who mistakenly contend that the New Testament was originally written in Greek. They assume that because the sources from which our New Testament is translated are Greek, that the names Yahweh and Yahshua as revealed in the Hebrew are missing in the New Testament and therefore unnecessary. Is this true? Here are some facts revealing why the Hebrew manuscripts of the New Testament are not extant, though clearly evident, and why worship today has strayed from the "faith once delivered."

Those who maintain that the original New Testament text was Greek believe they have the right to call Yahweh by the titles "Lord" (from Old English meaning *keeper of the loaf*) or the noun "God" (Old English, from Anglo-Saxon/German), or perhaps call Him "Eternal," as does James Moffatt in his translation.

Yet, the Name Yahweh is the only Name Yahweh Himself has given us by which He wishes to be remembered:

"And Elohim said moreover unto Moses, Thus shall you say unto the children of Israel, Yahweh, Elohim of your fathers, the Elohim of Abraham, the Elohim of Isaac, and the Elohim of Jacob, has sent me unto you: this [is] my name for ever, and this [is] my memorial unto all generations." Exodus 3:15.

Interestingly, Moffatt apologizes for substituting "The Eternal" for Yahweh's Name in his translation. Note his candor:

"Strictly speaking, this ought to be rendered 'Yahweh,' which is familiar to modern readers in the erroneous form of 'Jehovah.' Were this version intended for students of the original, there would be no hesitation whatever in printing 'Yahweh.' But almost at the last moment I have decided with some reluctance to follow the practice of the French scholars and of Matthew Arnold (though not exactly for his reasons), who translate this name by 'the Eternal,' except in an enigmatic title like 'the Lord of hosts.' There is a distinct loss in this, I fully admit, to drop the racial, archaic term is to miss something of what it meant for the Hebrew nation..."

Moffatt implies that those who insist on substituting the Name Yahweh with "the Eternal" are not really interested in being deep students of the Bible, but are content to accept human substitute titles instead of calling on the very Name Yahweh has Himself selected as His memorial Name to be remembered by all generations.

Moffatt agrees that students of the true or original texts know and call Him by His correct Name Yahweh. Those referring to Yahweh as the "Eternal" grudgingly concede that the titles "God" or "the Lord" are incorrect. Humble reverence directs His people to call Him by the Name He chose for Himself...Yahweh!

The all-powerful Creator tells His creation what we must call Him. We cannot decide what is appropriate to call Him. We as His creation can no more name our Creator than children can name their parents!

Yahweh's Name is the same the world over. He revealed it to those who understood and spoke Hebrew. Names are transliterated into other languages. That is, the sound is brought over into another language, using its alphabet to produce the same sound.

Devout Hebrews Writing Greek?

Every book written in the New Testament was written by Israelites whose native language was Hebrew (with the possible exception of Luke). This raises the question, were any of the 27 New Testament books first penned in Greek? Some critics declare that in spite of the preponderance of Israelite authors, the entirety of the New Testament was written in the Greek language.

A number of competent scholars, however, contend that the New Testament was first written in Hebrew (or Aramaic, a sister language), basing their assertion on valid grounds.

“The writers were Hebrews; and thus, while the language is Greek, the thoughts and idioms are Hebrew...If the Greek of the New Testament be regarded as an inspired translation from Hebrew or Aramaic originals, most of the various readings would be accounted for and understood,” Dr. E. W. Bullinger, **Companion Bible** (app.94).

“...we must not forget that Christianity grew out of Judaism...The Pauline epistles were letters written by Paul to small [Messianic] congregations in Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome. These early [believers] were mostly Jews of the dispersion, men and women of Hebrew origin...The Epistles were translated into Greek for the use of converts who spoke Greek.” **Holy Bible from the Peshitta**, George Lamsa, p.xi.

We read that Peter and John were untaught, unschooled, illiterate, ordinary men. “*Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with [Yahshua], Acts 4:13.*”

Impetuous Peter was, along with James and John, a fisherman. Peter and the others who became fishers of men hardly would be expected to write their epistles in a second language, but would logically write in Hebrew, their native tongue. Greek might be more prevalent in cosmopolitan trading and business centers such as Caesaria than in Galilee, but it was neither the language of the Apostles nor of the Temple.

Greek is a very precise language, while Hebrew is picturesque and poetic, using similes, metaphors, and allegories (The Hebrew Bible contains only 8,198 different words-by contrast the English language includes more than 550,000 words.) Renowned Jewish historian Flavius Josephus wrote that although he far exceeded those of his own nation in Jewish learning, he could not pronounce Greek with sufficient exactness, and that “our nation does not encourage those that learn the languages of many nations...”

Furthermore Josephus reveals, “The Greeks called old nations by names of their own, Antiq. i,v, and put the Hebrew names into their own form, c.vi.” This explains why some Hebrew

names end up in English texts in a Grecianized form.

Because the Greek language adds suffixes in its declension of nouns, such as ending with s in the nominative, masculine singular, vestiges of Greek influence appear in our King James Bible not only in the Latinized name of the Savior “Jesus,” but many other Hebrew names ending in the Greek s, such as: Judah = Judas, Isaiah = Esaias, Eliyah = Eliseus, Uriah = Urias, Hezekiah =Ezekias, Jechoniah = Jechonias.

The Greek has no sh sound and no h in its alphabet, only a rough breathing mark at the beginning of a word. Thus, we can see that the strong Greek influence remains with us even today, as evidenced in the King James Bible. And we can see how the “sh” in Yahshua’s Name was changed to the “s” in the Grecianized “Jesus.”

Importance of the Greek Language

Greek is a very exact language, a prime reason that Yahweh has preserved both the Old and New Testaments in the Greek. His wisdom has gone unrecognized by most Bible teachers.

Let us examine the history of Greek influence upon our civilization. The importance and influence of the Greek language and culture has its roots with Alexander the son of Philip of Macedonia. *Time-Life’s* book **Empires Ascendant** on page 31 states:

“Few men changed the world so profoundly. In his brief reign- scarcely 13 years- Alexander conquered more territory than any other warrior before or since. In his epic march across Asia, he pulled a vast tide of humanity in his wake, not only soldiers but a massive influx of traders, administrators, and ordinary settlers. He vastly broadened the ancient world’s horizons, mixing races and cultures, carrying civilization into a new more cosmopolitan age.”

After Alexander’s death at Babylon, his kingdom was divided among four generals. This is alluded to in Daniel 8:5-7, 21-22. Verse 8 refers to Alexander’s untimely death as the he-goat’s horn, which is broken, and his kingdom divided into four. Greek culture and influence (known as Hellenism) continued among these sprawling kingdoms. To emphasize this concept, we quote the following:

“Most cities welcomed Hellenism, however, because of it, educated men throughout the ancient world, spoke one language-a common Greek known as Koine. Business was conducted in Koine, laws were passed in it, and books written in it, including all the New Testament and much of the Old Testament...The mystery religions of Thrace and Asia Minor had long been popular among Greeks. Now the Persian god Mithra, with his firm insistence on unswerving duty, gained favor among army officials. His cult which employed secret rites of baptism and rebirth long before Christianity began, would eventually be carried through the Roman soldiers. Another pervasive faith was the Egyptian belief in Isis and Horus, holy mother and tender babe, and in the father Osiris, resurrected from the dead. It, too, was to spread throughout the Mediterranean world. The Hellenistic kingdoms survived for well over a century, tied together by common bonds of language, culture, and trade,” Ibid.

At the time of the Messiah, Koine Greek language was the international language. The Hebrew Old Testament had already been translated into Greek, known as the “Septuagint,” from the Latin *Septuaginta* meaning “70” and often represented by the Roman numerals LXX. It is said that 72 Jewish translators sent from Jerusalem produced the version for Ptolemy II for his

library in Alexandria, Egypt, in the third century BCE.

John 19:19-20 reveals that Hebrew, Latin, and Greek were the languages spoken in Palestine at the time the Savior was impaled. Not all understood Greek, Latin, or Hebrew. When the Messiah was teaching His disciples on this earth, the Koine Greek continued as the international language, but was relatively unknown or not understood in the rural towns nor by the Apostles, according to French archaeologist Ernest Renan.

Impact of Growing Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism played a big part in the Gentile Christians' rejecting the study of Hebrew and rejecting the Old Testament. Men want to accept the Jewish Savior, but reject His message and the Old Testament verification of His Messiahship. This is true even today.

In His wisdom, Yahweh had prepared the world to receive the Old Testament in the Greek language. Daniel 8:8 (already alluded to) is recognized as a clear reference to Alexander and his conquest of the Middle East, promoting Greek culture and customs throughout his domain. The Old Testament was translated into Greek, now the New Testament would survive in its Greek translation.

The number of Gentile converts soon surpassed those converted from Judaism. This is evident by the seven deacons of Acts 6:5, considered to be of Hellenistic persuasion.

The Old Testament Septuagint Greek was used by early Christian scholars because of their disdain for the Jews and their ignorance of the Hebrew language, according to Adam Clarke.

At first the Jews lauded the LXX (Septuagint) as a masterful accomplishment, but when it was later appropriated by the Gentiles who spurned the Hebrew Old Testament texts, the Jews rejected the LXX as not being a faithful rendition.

McClintock and Strong's Cyclopaedia shows that the Jews lamented the perversion of the Septuagint by Christian scholars:

"But now the Jews saw to their grief that their Scriptures [LXX] were made the instruments for teaching the principles of a religion [Christianity] which they regarded as nothing less than an apostasy from Moses," p. 988, "Greek Versions."

"Jewish Christians" Keep the Truth

Interesting comments are given from the perspective of an Islamic author, critically observing three groups that had evolved from the Israelite religion. Author Shlomo Pines classifies them as Jews, Christians and what he terms "Jewish Christians." The "Christians" are viewed as gentiles who, because of their pagan background, rejected truth found in the Old Testament and abandoned the religion Yahshua lived and taught. The "Jewish-Christians" continued obeying the Old Testament. Pines' appraisal is very revealing:

"The Jewish Christians...are not vegetarians and they do not reject certain portions of the Old Testament...they are, as far as the observance of commandments is concerned, orthodox Jews...They thus carried on the old tradition of the first Christian community of Jerusalem," p. 39, from **The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity According to a New Source**.

"The break between "Gentile Christianity" and "Jewish Christianity" came when the "al-

Rum” [Roman or Byzantine Christians] complained to the Roman governors about the Jews. They were told by the Roman rulers that if they would separate themselves, praying as the Romans do (while facing east), eating things Romans eat, regarding as permissible such as Romans do, then the Romans would extend special favor to the Gentile Christian body, according to Pines.

When the Gentile Christians reported this offer to their fellow companions [Jewish Christians], they were rebuffed. The Romans should have no part in determining the religion of the Messiah, contended the Jewish Christians. They refused to surrender their New Testaments, but gathered them and fled. The Gentile Christians reported this to the Romans, who accordingly made a search for them, capturing some who were burned or killed, page 15.

“Gentile Christians” Drift from the Faith

Author Pines discusses how the Gentile Christians took counsel to replace the New Testament Evangel, seeing that the true and original was lost to them. They constructed their own. A great part of what was contained in the original was missing in their version. Acquaintances among the Gentile Christians were those who remembered much of the true Evangel, but because they were attempting to establish a following, the Gentile Christians refrained from communicating with them. Quoting from author Pines concerning the Gentile Christians:

“Then there is not among these a Gospel written in the language of [Messiah], which was spoken by Him and His companions, namely the Hebrew language, which is that of Abraham, the Friend of [Elohim] and of the other prophets, the language which was spoken by them and in which the Books of [Elohim] were revealed to them and to the other Children of Israel, and which [Elohim] addressed them. They have abandoned this language.

“Thus there is no Christian among them who in observing a religious obligation recites these Gospels in the Hebrew language: he does not do so out of ruse using a stratagem, in order to avoid public shame,” pp. 16-17.

Pines goes on to show the reason they declined to use the Hebrew language was that “the people of the Book” who spoke Hebrew quickly recognized the error and deception of the Gentiles Christian’s gospel, such as quotations from counterfeit authorities. Thus, they employed a language other than Hebrew so the men of knowledge would not grasp their teaching.

Pines notes the Gentile Christians, *“Accordingly, they gave up Hebrew and took up numerous other languages which had not been spoken by [Messiah] and His companions,”* page 17, *ibid.*

Language Used To Bypass Truth

“...Jewish Christian authors...also deplored the fact that the Christians...no longer read the Gospels in Hebrew, the language of [Yahshua], and all the prophets. Quite clearly, these Jewish Christians believed that they preserved and continued (perhaps clandestinely) the traditions of the first not yet corrupted Christian community of Jerusalem founded by the immediate disciples of [Yahshua] who professed His religion, i.e....observed the Mosaic Commandments,” page 65.

Pines goes on to recount how those denouncing the Hebrew Evangel were triumphant in

their use of foreign languages to convert many nations. This gave them the opportunity to bypass the Hebrew Scriptures who were numerous among the Jews. Thus, the Hebrew language and the Old Testament were set aside and Israelite laws ignored as more and more pagans took up New Testament “Christianity.”

When Christianity became the state religion of Rome, the position of the Jewish Christians worsened. They were the minority, and their beliefs became the heresy of the Romanized Christian world. The Jewish Christians found it easier to gather with the Jews at the synagogue (as did Paul), for both groups observed the Old Testament laws. However, paganism was baptized by the church and had become the state religion.

If we can rely upon Pines’ work, it is quite understandable that when Titus and his Roman legions destroyed Jerusalem in the year 70 C.E., and Hadrian put down the revolt of Bar Kochba in 135 C.E., that the Jews became fair game because of their insurrection. Along with the Jews, however, were the converts to the Messiah who continued to worship in the synagogue and Temple rather than take up the pagan celebrations of Gentile Christianity.

“The land was desecrated and stripped; Jews were tortured, murdered, and sold as slaves on the open market; and the site of the Temple was plowed under. From this time on Jerusalem increasingly became a Gentile city,” p. 509, the **Bible Almanac**.

Romans Destroy Hebrew Manuscripts

Angry, Hadrian was determined to destroy Jerusalem, vowing there would never be a city there. The Hebrew Scriptures had been misinterpreted by the Jews, assuming Ezekiel was referring to Rome as the enemy that would be overcome. Hebrew Scriptures were blamed for the Jewish insurrection. The Romans took vengeance upon the Jews, not recognizing converts to the Messiah. Unaware of a Hebrew New Testament, the Romans destroyed all Hebrew texts, including Hebrew scrolls of the Jewish-Christian New Testament as well. Rome did not differentiate between Old and New Testament Hebrew writings nor between Jews and Jewish Christians.

Later came a division between the religion of the Jews and the New Testament believers in the Messiah. Not only were the Romans responsible for eradicating many Hebrew New Testaments, but the Jews themselves took part in such activity.

Pines makes a point that the Jews and certain “Jewish Christians” worshiped together; *“After Him [Yahshua] His disciples were with the Jews and the Children of Israel in the latter’s synagogues and observed the prayers and the feasts of (the Jews) in the same place as the latter. However, there was a disagreement between them and the Jews with regard to [Messiah.]”*

Pines goes on to quote the *Toldot Yeshu*, detailing the great war and slaughter, cases of confusion, killings, and loss of money. *“Everyone was killing his relatives without pity. And yet they did not abandon the Torah of Israel. And the Jews could not enter the Temple because of the reprobates.”*

Eventually, there came a parting of the ways between the Jews and those who believed in the Messiah and kept the Commandments. These True Believers were persecuted by both the Jews and the pagan Christians down through history. Little is heard of them as the Romanized

Christianity gained the ascendancy and ruled in consort with the emperors of Europe.

Perhaps the recent discovery and publishing of the contents of the Dead Sea Scrolls will help shed more light on this era of history. The lack of any Hebrew New Testament continued.

Truth and Manuscripts Under Attack

Later came the Crusades, which were religious wars from the close of the 11th to the end of the 13th century. It was Christian Europe against the Mohammedans for the conquest of the Holy Land. Conquered by Arabs in the 7th century, Palestine soon fell to Seljuk Turks in 1078, with their cruel ways and heavy taxes upon Christians living in Palestine.

The first of the seven Crusades began with the cry “Deus Vult,” (G-d Wills It!). Made up of a rabble from France, England, Flanders, and Lorraine, every member wore a cross. They ravaged the countryside, especially afflicting the Jews whom they murdered, then confiscated their property, burning their possessions and looting the country. These “Crusaders” did not differentiate between Jews and Jewish Christians (those Messianic converts who continued obeying Israelite laws). Those rejecting the cross were considered Jews and fair game. The victims were either burned or strangled- so there would be no shedding of blood!

The Middle Ages witnessed the Inquisitions, which were against heretics and all persons guilty of any offense against Roman Catholic orthodoxy. From Valentinian I and Theodosius onward heretics were subject to exile or confiscation, disqualified from inheriting property and under condemnation of death.

The condemnations of books were carried out from the burning of the Arian writings by Constantine to the burning of the Talmud by Justinian. The Inquisitors could not take proceedings against Jews as such. The Jews might profess their religion and observe its rites without being in a state of heresy; they were only heretic when they attacked Christian faith or community, made proselytes, or returned to Judaism after being converted.

After the expulsion of Jews from Spain under Queen Isabella, the attacks centered on Catholic converts descended from infidels (Jews). Note the following account:

“As late as 1715 a secret association was discovered at Madrid, consisting of 20 families, having a rabbi and a synagogue. A great number of people were denounced, sent to the gallows, or burnt, for having returned to their ancestral religion, on the flimsiest of evidence, such as making ablutions during the day time, abstaining from swine’s flesh or wine, using henna, singing Moorish songs, or possessing Arabic manuscripts.” **Encyclopaedia Britannica**, 11th Ed. P. 596, “Inquisition.”

Possessing “Arabic manuscripts” soon included the Hebrew scrolls, whether Old Testament or New Testament sections of the Bible. Resentment and arrogance play a big part even today among those who reject anything “Jewish.”

The young Greek conqueror tried his utmost to respect local customs, to revere local deities, to administer captured lands through existing hierarchies, and to win the populace to his side, page 26.

“Most cities, welcomed Hellenism, however. Because of it, educated men throughout the ancient world spoke one language-a common Greek known as Koine. Business was conducted in Koine; laws were passed in it, and books written in it, including all the New Testament and

much of the Old Testament. Greek architects, sculptors, artisans and goldsmiths left their imprint from the Apennines to Himalayas. Greek-style jewelry was worn in Siberia, and on the Indian subcontinent some statues of the Buddha wore Greek clothing and posed with and elegant Aegean grace...The Hellenistic kingdoms survived for well over a century, tied together by common bonds of language, culture, and trade.” Page 36.

Seminaries continue to teach Koine Greek and Hebrew. The Hebrew of the Bible is Sephardic or Temple Hebrew, while the language spoken today in Israel is Ashkenazi Hebrew, a Germanic dialect.

In His wisdom Yahweh allowed the Old Testament to be translated into Greek. To help the New Testament more easily cut across language and cultural barriers, it was the Greek copies that survived. There is no known “original” Greek New Testament existing, nor is there an original Greek Septuagint of the Old Testament.

English today is the world language. America probably actively promotes the Bible around the world more than all other countries combined. It behooves us to do all we can to promote Yahweh’s Name and His truth in every way we can.

Although there is no original Hebrew New Testament available today, history shows there was indeed an original, which contained the Name of Yahweh and His Son Yahshua. And we can now understand better how we have a Greek New Testament and why the sacred Name was changed in the Greek and then in the English. Yahweh says that Yahweh is His Name for eternity and is not to be changed. “This is my Name forever, and this is My memorial unto all generations,” Exodus 3:15. Not even a language can change that.

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