**Jesus was a Hebrew, not Aramaïc, speaker**



**by**

**Damien F. Mackey**

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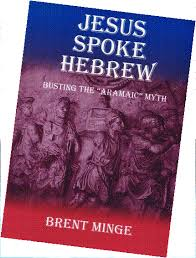
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*“in the Hebrew tongue” (Acts 26:14)”.*

***Brenton Minge***

***Jesus Spoke Hebrew*, written by Brenton Minge, is a most important book for, as its sub-title reads: *Busting the “Aramaic” Myth.***

**I give here only the beginning of it, but recommend that one reads the entire book itself:**

[](http://amaic-alphaomega.blogspot.com/2014/05/what-language-did-jesus-speak-pope-and.html)

**JESUS SPOKE HEBREW**

The powerful Mel Gibson movie, The Passion of the Christ, has once again raised the question of what language Jesus actually spoke. Some say it doesn’t matter, and in one sense they are right. Jesus is still the Saviour of the world, who walked on water, raised the dead, and made atonement for our sins by his blood, whether he spoke Hebrew or Hindustani. Yet in another sense it DOES matter. If your natural language is, say, English, and I go about claiming it to be Dutch, I am clearly misrepresenting you. While there is nothing whatever wrong with Dutch, it is a simple matter of fidelity to the record, and of doing justice to the person. By the same token, if Jesus’ “mother-tongue” was Hebrew, then it is as much a misrepresentation to claim he spoke Aramaic – as is all but universally held – as to say Churchill spoke in Spanish, or Tolstoy wrote in Norwegian. But there is another issue at stake. Aramaic is nowhere mentioned in the New Testament. Yet on numerous occasions it speaks of the “Hebrew” language in first century Judaea – from the title over Jesus’ cross “in Hebrew” (John 19:20), to descriptions of places like Gabbatha and Golgotha “in the Hebrew tongue” (John 5:2; 19:13, 17; Rev. 9:11; 16:16), to Paul gaining the silence of the Jerusalem crowd by addressing them “in the Hebrew tongue” (Acts 21:40; 22:2), to Jesus himself calling out to Paul, on the Damascus road, “in the Hebrew tongue” (Acts 26:14). In each instance, the Greek text reads “Hebrew” (Hebrais, Hebraios or Hebraikos), the natural translation followed by nearly all the English versions, as also by the Latin Vulgate and the German Luther Bible. Do we have the right to insert “Aramaic” for this plain reading – particularly when the Jewish people of the period, as we shall see, were so insistent on distinguishing them? The evidence is compelling that we do not, and that the New Testament expression, “in the Hebrew language”, ought to be taken as read.

DEAD SEA SCROLLS

The Dead Sea Scrolls, known to date from the same general period, reveal an overwhelming preponderance of Hebrew texts. The figure is generally accepted as around 80%, with Aramaic and Greek taking up most of the balance. In their comprehensive translation of the Qumran literature, Michael Wise and others observe that: “Prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the dominant view of the Semitic languages of Palestine in this period was essentially as follows: Hebrew had died; it was no longer learned at mother’s knee.

It was known only by the educated classes through study, just as educated medieval Europeans knew Latin. Rabbinic Hebrew … was considered a sort of scholarly invention – artificial, not the language of life put to the page. The spoken language of the Jews had in fact become Aramaic … The discovery of the scrolls swept these linguistic notions into the trash bin … the vast majority of the scrolls were Hebrew texts. Hebrew was manifestly the principal literary language for the Jews of this period. The new discoveries underlined the still living , breathing, even supple character of that language … prov[ing] that late Second-Temple Jews used various dialects of Hebrew…”[1]. This sheer dominance of Hebrew goes far beyond the Biblical writings, which actually comprise, by Emanuel Tov’s calculations, just 23.5% of the overall Qumran literature.[2] It includes also the famed Copper Scroll (written, as Wolters notes, in “an early form of Mishnaic Hebrew”[3]), the day-to-day letters (where Hebrew, says Milik, is the “sole language of correspondence”[4]), and its general commentaries and literature (where, as Black concedes, “Hebrew certainly vastly predominates over Aramaic”[5]). No wonder the Scrolls are said to “prove that late Second Temple Jews used various dialects of Hebrew”. And not just as an “artificial” language, but a “natural, vibrant idiom”, as the Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls declares[6]. How else can such extensive evidence of the Hebrew language be taken – from commentaries to correspondence, from documents to daily rules? Likewise with the sixteen texts found at Herod’s stronghold of Masada, all predating the fortress’ overthrow in 73. No less than fifteen are definitely in Hebrew[7], with some doubt over the final one. Is it conceivable that Hebrew would have been used for ordinary communications (Biblical texts are again in a minority) if it was not the language of daily life? Surely the burden of proof must lie with those who would argue otherwise.

MOSES SEGAL

Well before the Scrolls and Masada provided their archaeological insights into Hebrew’s place in late second temple language, Moses Segal had come to the same conclusion on purely linguistic grounds. Co-translator of the Talmud and winner of the Israel Prize for Jewish Studies, Segal was a Hebrew lexicographer of the first order. While still believing that Jesus, as a Galilean, probably spoke Aramaic, he was in no doubt that the prevailing Judaean language of the time was Hebrew, as he already wrote in 1927: “In earlier Mishnaic [rabbinic] literature no distinction is drawn between Biblical Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew. The two idioms are known as Leshon Hagadesh, the Holy Tongue, as contrasted with other languages … What was the language of ordinary life of educated native Jews in Jerusalem and Judaea in the period from 400BCE to 150CE? The evidence presented by Mishnaic Hebrew and its literature leaves no doubt that that language was Mishnaic Hebrew”.[8] Such is the observation of one of the outstanding Hebrew scholars of the twentieth century, and editor of the Compendious Hebrew-English, English-Hebrew Dictionary. For Segal, as for the Dead Sea scholars, there is no doubt that the “language of ordinary life” in first century Judaea “was Mishnaic Hebrew”. It was the first language acquired by children in the home, and the natural medium of communication in daily speech. As Milik early recognized, “Mishnaic [Hebrew] … was at that time the spoken dialect of the inhabitants of Judaea”.[9]

WHAT IS GOING ON?

It is astonishing, in light of this, that the Aramaic assumption – at least as it pertains to the language of first century Judaea – still persists. As relatively recently as 1994, Angel Saenz-Badillos could claim, in his major study A History of the Hebrew Language, that “the exile [ie., 586BC] marks the disappearance of the [Hebrew] language from everyday life, and its subsequent use for literary and liturgical purposes only”.[10] What is going on here? On the one hand, the clear archaeological and linguistic evidence for Hebrew’s daily use in late second temple Judaea, yet on the other a protracted scholarly denial of the same! No wonder Oxford’s Edward Ullendorff takes Saenz-Badillos to task: “I cannot accept the author’s novel argument [cited above] … This assumption would curtail the active life of Hebrew by about half a millennium. Of course colloquial Hebrew will have changed somewhat, possibly as a result of external influences, during the post-exilic era, but it no doubt remained the principal vehicle of communication”.[11] Time was, when Saenz-Badillos’ obituary for Hebrew as a living language would have held centre-stage. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church spoke for virtually the entire scholarly world (Segal and Harris Birkeland[12] two notable exceptions), when, in its first edition of 1958, it confidently stated that Hebrew had “ceased to be a spoken language around the fourth century BC”.[13] Yet such was the mounting weight of evidence to the contrary, that by its third edition, in 1997, this had become “Hebrew continued to be used as a spoken and written language … in the New Testament period”.[14] This represents a remarkable about-turn, due, not least, to the extensive publication of the Scrolls in the intervening period. How fitting that from the lowest geographical region on earth – the Dead Sea – where death reigned even in its name, there should break forth from the “dead”, as it were, the vindication of Hebrew’s primary place in the language of first century Judaea, exactly as the New Testament consistently showed! Truly, “this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes” (Psalm 118:23).

THE TALMUD

A clear distinction was made, among the Jewish people themselves, between Hebrew and Aramaic. Not only was Hebrew the choice of scholarship and literature, but it was also upheld as the normative language of daily life. “In the land of Israel”, said the Mishnah, “why the Aramaic tongue? Either the Holy Tongue (Hebrew, sic) or the Greek tongue”.[15] Aramaic had no “prestige”, and “commanded no loyalty”, as Safrai and Stern observe, whereas Hebrew had both. Even in the later times of the Talmud, it was forbidden to retrieve a burning Aramaic manuscript from a fire on the Sabbath, whereas it was permitted of a comparable Hebrew text.[16] To depart from the synagogue service during a Hebrew Bible reading was forbidden, but not for an Aramaic reading.[17] Even memorising the Scriptures in Aramaic was not enough, whereas just to hear them in Hebrew, without understanding a word, was to “perform [one’s] obligation”![18] To the Jewish people, it was Hebrew that was “the Holy Tongue”, whereas Aramaic was seen as “the language of the Evil Force”.[19] Not that the latter was rejected altogether, but that it was regarded as a second fiddle language to Hebrew – the real “tongue of the fathers” and medium of ordinary speech. Thus the Jerusalem Talmud declares that “Four languages are of value: Greek for song, Latin for war, Aramaic for dirges, and Hebrew for speaking”.[20] That was the place for Aramaic – in “dirges”. But to Hebrew belonged the high ground of daily speech (“for speaking”) and worship.

Thus for a Jewish father not to speak to his son “in Hebrew”, from the time he was a toddler, and teach him the Law, was “as if he had buried him”.[21] Concerning Aramaic, by contrast, the rabbis warned: “Whoever makes personal requests [in prayer] in Aramaic, the ministering angels pay no attention, since angels do not understand Aramaic”[22]. This, of course, is not a canonical position, but merely reflects the depth of feeling against Aramaic among the Jewish scholars. Indeed, the Talmud relates an earlier occasion when Gamaliel – the same Gamaliel under whom Paul had studied (Acts 22:3), and whose astute word concerning the Christians is recorded in Acts 5:34-40 – was sitting on the still-unfinished temple steps. Someone showed him a copy of an Aramaic translation of Job, the first and at that time the only “Targum”. So disgusted was he by it, that he told the builder to “bury it under the rubble”.[23] Such was the regard for a pioneering attempt at an Aramaic portion of Scripture, in the Judaea of Jesus’ time! The internal Jewish evidence is thus all one-way traffic for Hebrew.

JOSEPHUS

As a contemporary, and largely an observer, of the final years of the second temple, Josephus (37-100AD) is an invaluable witness to the period.

While not without his faults, they are, as historian Paul Maier notes, heavily outweighed by his credits, particularly for the period during which he and his parents lived, when, as Maier says, he is “at his best”.[24] Like the Mishnah and Talmud, Josephus takes pains to distinguish Hebrew from Aramaic, showing that it was Hebrew that was spoken in the first century Israel of which he was largely a part. When news of the emperor Tiberius’ death is hastily conveyed to Agrippa on his way to the bath, the message is given “in the Hebrew tongue” (glosse te Hebraion, Antiquities xviii, 228). Presumably Hebrew was the most natural and readily understood language in such an emergency situation. Concerning this “Hebrew tongue”, he writes in another passage: “… though their script seemed to be similar to the peculiar Syrian (Aramaic, sic) writing, and their language to sound like the other, it was, as it happened, of a distinct type” (idiotropon, Ant. xii, 2, 1. Thackeray translation). Thus elsewhere he writes: the “Sabbath … in the Hebrew language” (Ant. 1:33); “Adam … in Hebrew signifies …” (Ant. 1:34); “Israel … in the Hebrew tongue” (Ant. 1:333); “written in the Hebrew books” (Ant. ix, 208); “the books of the Hebrews” (Ant. x, 218). It is difficult to see how “the Hebrew language” here can denote anything but Hebrew. Not only do the uniquely Hebrew connotations of “Sabbath”, “Israel”, etc., require it, but so too does the fact that, at the time of Josephus, the only holy “Hebrew books” possessed by the Jews were the actual Hebrew Scriptures – the Aramaic Targums (Job aside) not yet having come into being. So when we come to Josephus’ address to his own countrymen from outside the walls of besieged Jerusalem, there can be no doubt as to what language he speaks. He addresses them, of course, “in their own language” (War 5:9, 2), which he explicitly states, of the same episode, to be “the Hebrew language” (War 6:2, 1). Given the consistent meaning of “Hebrew” as real Hebrew, not Aramaic, elsewhere in Josephus, and the distinction he himself draws between the two languages, how can “Hebrew” here be taken at anything other than face value? That is, Josephus’ address to the Jews of around 69AD, like Paul’s address to the Jews of around a decade or so previously in the same city, were both – as the respective texts of Josephus and Acts state – “in the Hebrew language” (Acts 22:2). Logic would further require that the only reason this was so, was because “the Hebrew language” was the vernacular of Judaean Jews at the time.

JOT AND TITTLE

But what does this mean, in terms of our enquiry into Jesus’ language? A great deal, actually. Self-evidently there is a nexus between the Jewish vernacular of first century Israel, and the language Jesus spoke. It would fly in the face of common sense if the “Word made flesh” addressed the very countrymen he was first sent to by his Father, in anything other than their normal tongue.[25] As face answers to face in a mirror, so the prevailing language of his people at the time must, by any reasonable standard, have been the language Jesus used. Once that “prevailing language” is established, it requires no great leap to determine what Jesus spoke. The only way around this is to resort to the artificial construct of an “interpreter”, or to the circuitous explanation of Jesus being fluently bi- or tri-lingual during his earthly ministry, which – though by no means inconceivable or, still less, impossible, for the very Son of God – certainly has no actual support from Scripture, and must remain, therefore, a supposition. Consistent with this, we find Jesus speaking of the “jot” and “tittle” of the Law in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:18). By universal consent, this refers to the text of the Hebrew Bible. Let two modern authorities suffice – one Catholic, one Protestant: “‘Jot’ refers to ‘yod’, the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet; ‘tittle’ is a slight serif [or hook] on a Hebrew letter that distinguishes it from another”. (The New Jerome Bible Commentary, emph. added). Likewise John Broadus, in his Commentary on Matthew: “Jot, in the Greek iota, signifies the Hebrew letter iod (pronounced yod) … tittle – in the Greek, horn – denoting a very slight projection at the corner of certain Hebrew letters …” (emph. added). Would Jesus have used such a term, indeed two of them, both referring to the “Hebrew letters” of the “Hebrew alphabet”, if his immediate audience did not understand Hebrew? Would a French speaker, addressing his or her own countrymen today, use the umlaut of the German Bible to illustrate a point! Hardly. The most obvious conclusion is that, as Jesus was referring to the Hebrew alphabet – which no one disputes – his hearers must have understood that same alphabet, otherwise the point would have been lost on them. Logically, therefore, Jesus must have been speaking Hebrew, and his audience must have understood him in Hebrew. Should it be objected that, as the Hebrew and Aramaic alphabets were the same, Jesus could just as well have been referring to the Aramaic alphabet, we would respectfully reply that this is to miss the point. Jesus expressly says “the jot and tittle of the Law”, there being but one “Law” in Israel – the Hebrew Bible. Even the Talmud declares, “the Torah is in Hebrew” (Soferim 35a).

“EXAGGERATED” INFLUENCE

But what of Jesus’ reference to “mammon” in the same sermon (Matt. 6:24) – quite possibly an Aramaic word? This is no difficulty. Loan words frequently occur between languages, as with Italian words like pizza and pasta today in English. There is no reason why Hebrew should be any exception. Yet we must beware of reading too many “Aramaisms” into the New Testament. In a parallel context, Segal observes that “Aramaic influence on the Mishnaic Hebrew vocabulary has been exaggerated …. It has been the fashion among writers on the subject to brand as an Aramaism any infrequent Hebrew word …. Most of the ‘Aramaisms’ are as native in Hebrew as they are in Aramaic.”[26]

Even the very term “Mishnaic Hebrew” can, through overuse, become an historical exaggeration, as though second temple Hebrew were a different species from “normal” Hebrew – an inevitable result of emphasizing small differences rather than recognizing greater commonalities. Just as Elizabethan English and modern English are still, whatever their differences, both English, so Biblical Hebrew and “Mishnaic” Hebrew are likewise both Hebrew.

DEMOLISHED

In New Testament studies, an over-exuberance for Aramaic at first led C.K. Barrett to attribute a quotation in John (Jn. 12:40) to Aramaic influence, only to change it to Hebrew in his commentary of eight years later.[27] Luke 6:7, too, was once held by scholars like Black, Fitzmyer and Wilcox to be an “Aramaic” construction, found nowhere else in the Greek of the period. Subsequently, J.A.L. Lee demolished this in his study “A non-Aramaism in Luke 6:7”, citing no less than 23 parallel constructions in Greek literature of the period![28] Time and again the Aramaic assumption has turned out to be a lemon, prompting Semitist Kenneth Kitchen to observe that “some ‘Aramaisms’ are actually Hebraisms in Aramaic”.[29] What is more, merely because a word does not appear in the Old Testament Hebrew Bible, does not automatically make it a candidate for the Aramaic club. “Hosanna” and “Gehenna” are words not found in that form in the Hebrew Old Testament. Yet both occur in Mishnaic Hebrew, and are found, in identical form, in the modern Hebrew dictionary. Yet they were once claimed to be “Aramaic”. And even if originally they were, so what! “Restaurant” and “serviette” are good French words, yet today they are well and truly part of standard English. Besides, as Glenda Abramson has noted, there were some 20,000 words in “Mishnaic” Hebrew, as against some 8,000 used in the Old Testament Bible.[30] Thus there is statistically a 2½ times greater likelihood that a Hebrew word will not be found in the Old Testament, yet still be a regular part of the Hebrew language of the New Testamental period. So the days are gone for the reflex assignation of “Aramaic” to any New Testament Semitism not found in the Old Testament.

**A Reader’s Comments**

According to a Jewish reader:

Hey man: Holy Tongue in Hebrew is "L'shon haKodesh", nothing else !!! 

"G" does NOT replace "K" in Hebrew. Ever!   
  
And yes, In Judah the language of peon and scholar alike was Hebrew, and in the Galilee it was a mix of Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek.

**The “Eloi, eloi …” spoken during the Crucifixion**



*“The key that has been overlooked in the whole question of Yehoshua’s [Jesus’s] mother tongue is the distinctive Galilean accent.  Whereas Jerusalem Jews*

*spoke a sort of “Oxford” Hebrew, their Galilean brethren spoke a type of “Scottish” Hebrew – that is, a Hebrew whose pronunciation differed from*

*their own.  The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia notes this in observing,*

*of the Galileans, that “their pronunciation of Hebrew (sic) was different*

*from that of the Jews of Judaea”.*

***Brenton Minge***

Continuing on with Brenton Minge’s important work, Jesus Spoke Hebrew, here taken from: <http://danielbenyaacovysrael.blogspot.com.au/2013/06/did-yehoshua-spoke-hebrew-or-aramaic.html>

**“GHOST WORDS”**

**T**hat this vice – of seeing “Aramaisms” when they are not really there – is still disturbingly with us, can be seen from Michael Sokoloff’s penetrating review of the highly respected *Koehler-Baumgartner Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*.  He writes:

            “Unfortunately, as we shall see in the following notes, the author of the Aramaic section … has included in his discussions a large number of *ghost words from ‘Jewish Aramaic’, non-existent* and unreconstructed vocalizations of *Aramaic words*, and even *Hebrew words which were mistakenly quoted as being Aramaic”*, adding, in his footnotes, that the author *“quotes Hebrew words as if they were Aramaic”.****[[31]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn31" \o ")[31]***

This is a trenchant criticism.  Here we have one of the leading Hebrew-Aramaic lexicons of our time, taken to task for perceived “ghost words from ‘Jewish Aramaic’” (ie., they do not exist), “non-existent and unreconstructed vocalizations of Aramaic words” (ie., they are artificial creations), and “Hebrew words … mistakenly quoted as being Aramaic” (ie., it simply confuses the two languages).  How cautious this should make us against an uncritical acceptance of so-called “Aramaisms” in the Bible, and the frequently recycled textbook claims concerning them.  While some may indeed be in the text, many more exist only in the eye of the beholder!

**YEHOSHUA AT NAZARETH**

**Yehoshua**’ appearance at the synagogue of Nazareth, where he first read from and then expounded Isaiah 61, is highly instructive.  In later times, when the Targums were required in Jewish worship, the following was the laboured format for such readings:

            “… the Hebrew Pentateuch was read … *one verse at a time.*  It was then *translated orally, without reference to the written text …*  The translation was to be *recited in a lower voice* than that of the reader.  All these precautions were to ensure that the uneducated public would not mistake the Aramaic translation for the original Torah”.[[32]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn32" \o ")[32]

None of this with Yehoshua’ reading on that occasion.  First he “stood up to read”, then he sat down and “began to say to them … gracious words” (Luke 4:16, 20 – 22).

No rigmarole with lowered voice or translation.  Just a straight reading from the Hebrew Scriptures, followed by a plain exposition to an audience that clearly understood both them and him.  Their negative reaction was not due to any linguistic change of track, but rather to their taking exception to his claim that the Gospel was poised to pass from Israel to the Gentiles, as represented by the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian (vv. 25 – 27).

What are we to conclude, in light of these “givens” that

(a)       The Targums were only widely introduced to counter the decline in Hebrew,

(b)       They were clearly not present on this occasion, and

(c)       The exclusive language of liturgy and worship in late second temple Israel was Hebrew in any case,[[33]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn33" \o ")[33]

but that **both Yehoshua and his Nazareth audience spoke, and were speaking on that occasion, *Hebrew*.  There seems no honest way around this.**  Indeed, the very notion of a Hebrew-born Messiah, first making his appeal to the Hebrew people (‘the lost sheep of the house of Israel’), supported by the Hebrew Scriptures, in anything other than the Hebrew language would seem a contradiction in terms.

What is more, Galilee as a region was well-nigh as Jewish as Judaea.  Josephus described its population in his day as predominantly Jewish, while *“Hebrew language and literature”* still *“dominated the region at this time”*[[34]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn34" \o ")[34], as Chancey and Meyers note.   The Mishnah says that

*“The men of Galilee wrote in the same manner as the men of Jerusalem”.****[[35]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn35" \o ")[35]***

So Jewish was Galilee, in fact, that in 102BC its cities were considered fair game by an enemy on the Sabbath, knowing the Galilean Jews would not go out to battle on their day of rest.[[36]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn36" \o ")[36]  The very synagogue itself took its architectural shape from the “Galilean model”.[[37]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn37" \o ")[37] Tiberias, in Galilee, later became the seat of the Sanhedrin, and it was there that the Mishnah received its final form.  To suggest, therefore, that while Hebrew might have been the vernacular of *Judaea,* Aramaic will have to do for the Jewish population of *Galilee,* is a discrimination which is historically untenable*.*

**SAMARITAN DEALINGS**

**Yehoshua**’ considerable dealings with the Samaritans – his discourse with the woman at the well, his healing of the tenth leper, the welcome on one occasion from “many [who] believed *because of his own word”,* and their refusal on another to have him stay in their town [[38]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn38" \o ") [38] –further point to his language as having been Hebrew.  Reduced today to some 600 people (the last remaining group on earth who still sacrifice the Passover lamb), the Samaritans are proud of what they see as their *unbroken custodianship of the Hebrew language from earliest times.*  The centrepiece of Samaritan life has always been the ancient Hebrew scroll of Moses’ five books, written in early Hebrew script, which every Samaritan child is required to read from the age of four or five.  As *Encyclopaedia Judaica* notes:

            “The child reads the Pentateuch *in the ancient Hebrew script*, and in the special Samaritan pronunciation, as transmitted from generation to generation, and also learns writing.  *Able children complete the reading of the Pentateuch at the age of six,* but some take as long as until the age of ten”!![[39]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn39" \o ")[39]

So strict is their insistence on Hebrew that, to this day, Miriam’s song of triumph at the Red Sea is read in Hebrew over the bride at every Samaritan wedding, while, following a funeral, the **entire Hebrew Pentateuch** is read at the home of the grieving family on the following Sabbath.

It hardly needs to be said that such a people, so jealous of their Hebrew scroll and so zealous for the preservation of the spoken Hebrew language down to this day, spoke Hebrew at the time of Christ.  Indeed several Samaritan writings have been found in the Dead Sea Scrolls – all in Hebrew – prompting some scholars to argue that the Scrolls community was actually Samaritan![[40]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn40" \o ")[40]  A futile case, almost certainly, not only because of the geographical location of Qumran in Judaea rather than Samaria, but also because of the numerous Psalms, Prophets, and other historical Old Testament books found at Qumran – none of which the Samaritans accept as part of their Bible.  Yet it does highlight the Samaritan commitment to Hebrew, and their unbroken continuity of the Hebrew language from before Ezra (whom they denounce as a “revisionist” of the Hebrew script!), down to modern times.

What are we to make of this, in terms of Yehoshua’ repeated encounters with the Samaritans?  Must the stilted explanation be invoked that he “switched languages”?  **Is it not more natural, and certainly more consistent with the evidence, to accept that as *they* spoke Hebrew – about which there can be no doubt – so did *Yehoshua*.**[[41]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn41" \o ")[41]This is confirmed by the fact that the Samaritan woman, in her conversation with Yehoshua, used the **Hebrew term “Messiah”** (Jn. 4:25), not the Greek “Christ” – one of only two times this Hebrew expression is used in the Gospels, and showing the language in which their discussion must have taken place.

**THE GALILEAN ACCENT**

**T**he key that has been overlooked in the whole question of Yehoshua’ mother tongue is the *distinctive Galilean accent*.  Whereas Jerusalem Jews spoke a sort of “Oxford” Hebrew, their Galilean brethren spoke a type of “Scottish” Hebrew – that is, a Hebrew whose pronunciation differed from their own.  The *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* notes this in observing, of the Galileans, that “*their pronunciation of Hebrew* (sic*) was different from that of the Jews of Judaea”.****[[42]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn42" \o ")[42]***Thus the Talmud declares that

            “The Judaeans … were exact in their language … but the Galileans … were not exact in their language …  A certain Galilean once went about enquiring, ‘Who has *amar?’*  ‘Foolish Galilean’, they said to him, ‘do you mean an ‘ass’ for riding (hamar), ‘wine’ to drink (hamar), ‘wool’ for clothing (amar), or a ‘lamb’ for killing (amar)?’”[[43]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn43" \o ")[43]

In both cases – “the Judaeans” and “the Galileans” – the *same Hebrew language is clearly being spoken*.  Yet the Galileans speak it *with a different accent* (“their *pronunciation of Hebrew* was *different* from that of the Jews of Judaea”).  There are historical antecedents for such regional differences.  In the celebrated “shibboleth/sibboleth” case of Judges 12:6, both tribes were speaking the same Hebrew.  Yet those from Gilead could pronounce “sh”, whereas those from Ephraim could not.

Around the period of Yehoshua’ ministry, the Dead Sea Scrolls similarly reflect these dialect differences.  Scrolls specialist Elisha Qimron draws attention to ***“illusory* cases of defective spelling**”, which reflect no more than *differences in Hebrew dialect:* “Ancient Hebrew was divided into dialects … in dealing with Hebrew as a living language, we must recall that we are dealing with … *different traditions of pronunciation”.*[[44]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn44" \o ")[44]  In much the same way, Noah Webster in his early *Webster’s Dictionary,* distinguished within American English between the New England dialect, the Southern dialect, and the general American dialect – though all, of course, represent *English****[[45]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn45" \o ")[45]****.*

This is a salutary warning against *over-speciation*, or reading too much into slightly varying forms.  As the repeated “Aramaic” mirages, already noted and dispelled, have highlighted, academy assumptions can be “too-clever-by-half”.

**It was the *Galilean accent* which furnished the most striking examples of these “different traditions of pronunciation” in Hebrew.** Thus Spolsky and Cooper observe:

            “The Talmud goes on to discuss in considerable detail the kinds of mistakes the *people from Galilee* made in *their spoken Hebrew* (sic), … especially ... the careless *pronunciation* which led to humorous misunderstandings”.[[46]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn46" \o ")[46]

Recalling, of course, that what is held to be a “mistake” in one region, may be perfectly acceptable in another, just as “fulfill” (with “ll” ending) is deemed incorrect spelling in England, but represents correct usage in American English.  Shades of Qimron’s “*illusory* cases of defective spelling”!  To be different, is not necessarily to be wrong, particularly with something so supple as language.  Merely because the Scots call a lake a “loch”, does not make it “incorrect”!

**S**ignificantly **Matthew** draws attention to this Galilean accent, in reference to Peter’s denials during the night of Yehoshua’ trial:

            “Surely you are one of them, for *your accent gives you away*” (Matthew 26:73b, NIV).

Likewise with the Majority Text of the parallel passage in **Mark**:

            “Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean, and *your accent shows it*” (Mark 14:70b, NKJV, and margin).

Two things are self-evident from this comment.  First, that the Jerusalem bystanders *understood* Peter’s denials, even if they suspected them, so they *must have been speaking the same language as he!*  Yet that they also *recognised his Galilean accent* (“you are a Galilean, and your accent shows it”, “your accent gives you away”), just as a Londoner would immediately recognise a Scot today.  **Same language, yet unmistakable pronunciation!  No one, of course, recognises a different *accent* in someone speaking another *language.***

As Isaiah reminds us in his prophecy of Galilee’s future greatness, the region was called “Galilee *of the Gentiles”* (Isaiah 9:1).  Not because it was not Jewish, for he expressly calls it the “land of Zebulun and Naphtali”, two of the twelve tribes.   Rather does his comment bespeak the considerable *intermingling of Jews and Gentiles in Galilee* (typical of the way the Gospel itself would one day go forth to Jew and Gentile alike from the pre-eminent Galilean, our Lord Yehoshua Christ; cf. v6.).  Logically we would expect, from such an ethnic melting pot, a greater “Gentile” influence upon the Hebrew language in Galilee than in Judaea*, which is exactly what we do find.*  **Yet Hebrew it still remains, as we have seen from the Mishnah, the Talmud, the Jewish encyclopaedia, and the New Testament itself,** just as Glasgow English is every bit as much part of the English language as its Oxford cousin, minor regional differences notwithstanding.

**YEHOSHUA’ WORDS**

**N**ot surprisingly, the seven words of Yehoshua recorded in their original tongue, reflect these two aspects, namely

            (i)        their essential identity with known Hebrew; yet

            (ii)      some slight Galilean regional differences\*.

*Ephphatha* – Yehoshua’ command to the deaf mute to “be opened” (Mark 7:34) – is directly from the Biblical Hebrew *phphatha,* חתפ, meaning *“open”*, as found in the standard *Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament,*[[47]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn47" \o ")[47]*.* Thus even Bruce Metzger concedes that “‘ephphatha’ can be explained as either Hebrew or Aramaic”[[48]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn48" \o ")[48].  Isaac Rabinowitz is less ambivalent, declaring emphatically that “there are no valid philological grounds for affirming, and there is every valid reason to deny, that *ephphatha* can represent an Aramaic … form.  The transliteration can, indeed, *only represent the Hebrew* niphal masculine singular imperative …  *Ephphatha is certainly Hebrew, not Aramaic”.****[[49]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn49" \o ")[49]***

Likewise, *cumi,* or *cum*, in Yehoshua’ command to the dead daughter of Jairus to “arise” (Mark 5:41).  The word comes directly from the Old Testament Hebrew םוק, “cum”, meaning “arise, stand up, stand”, while to this day the modern Hebrew for “get up” is *cum*.[[50]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn50" \o ")[50]  What more appropriate, in the house of a synagogue ruler so familiar with Hebrew, than such a rich Hebrew command:  “arise” – not to his Sabbath congregation to rise from their seats, but to his very own daughter to get up from the dead!

*Eloi, Eloi* (“My God, My God”, Mark 15:34) is clearly related to the Hebrew word used at times for “my God” in the Psalms (cf.  יחלא, “my God”, Ps. 18:28; 139:19;  יחלא, “My God”, Mk. 15:34).  **Astonishingly – given that *Eloi, Eloi* has always been cited as proof of the *Aramaic* source of the words – we find that the Targum of Psalm 22:1(2) *does not begin with “Eloi, Eloi” but “Eli, Eli”, as in the Hebrew***.[[51]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn51" \o ")[51]  In two ways “Eloi, Eloi” is different from the Aramaic – with “oi, oi” instead of “I, I” and the short “E, E” instead of the long “Ay, Ay” (as in “day”).[[52]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn52" \o ")[52]

Clearly, we must look elsewhere than to Aramaic for its pronunciation.  The obvious explanation lies in the **distinctive Galilean accent** which we have noted.  That is, in *Eloi, Eloi* we have the Galilean Yehoshua quoting Psalm 22:1(2) from the Hebrew Bible, carefully recorded with his distinctive pronunciation by Mark.  With equal fidelity to what transpired, Matthew dispenses with the accent as such, but still records the same utterance straight from the Hebrew Bible. This alone can account for the seemingly contradictory facts that

(a)       the bystanders *misunderstood* the form of address (“he is calling Elijah”); yet

(b)       they *rightly understood* the rest of the cry as representing Yehoshua’ deep desolation (“Let us see if Elijah will *come and rescue him”)*, though obviously yet blind to the fact that here, in the very  week of the Passover, the Lamb of God was bearing the sins of the world.

Given that the cry was uttered “in a loud voice”, there is no possibility of it having been misunderstood on the grounds of its being inaudible.  The *only explanation,* therefore, that adequately addresses both questions (how could they have *misunderstood* Yehoshua, yet *perfectly understood* the rest of the utterance from the Hebrew Bible?), lies in the fact that **they** (ie. the Jewish portion of the crowd) and **he** (ie. Yehoshua) were speaking the **same Hebrew language**, but **he with a Galilean accent**.  If the *accent* is removed, there is no explaining how they could have misunderstood so loud a cry, while if a *different language* is invoked (they speaking Hebrew, he Aramaic), there is no way they would have understood him at all!

*Lama,* הםל (Mark 14:34), or *“lema”* in some texts, is the stock Hebrew Old Testament word for “why?”, and is used over 170 times in the Hebrew Bible[[53]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn53" \o ")[53].  The identical word, *lama*, also means “why?” in modern Hebrew.[[54]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn54" \o ")[54]

*Sabachthani,* ינתקבש, is directly from the Mishnaic Hebrew קבש, *sabach,* meaning “forsake, abandon”.[[55]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn55" \o ")[55]  It is identically reproduced by Matthew, who, as Douglas Moo notes, “betrays no fondness for Aramaic”[[56]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn56" \o ")[56], so its Hebrew identity is further confirmed.  To this day, the modern Hebrew for “forsake” – “zab” or “sab” – suggests an abbreviated form of it.

Even *talitha* (“little girl”, Mark 5:41), at first glance the “least” Hebrew of all the seven words, is known to have been used by other Jews of the period, as it occurs in the Targum of Genesis 34:3 for “young woman”[[57]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn57" \o ")[57].  Merely because a word is in the Targum, of course, does not preclude it from being Hebrew, as the Targums contain many words – by one count almost half – either identical, or very similar, to the Hebrew Bible[[58]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn58" \o ")[58].  *Talitha* too has Hebrew roots, coming from the Hebrew *talah*, meaning “lamb” – a term hardly out of place on the lips of the Good Shepherd.  Merely because it has a “tha” ending does not, of itself, make it “Aramaic”, since Gamaliel – whose strong views concerning Aramaic have already been noted – had a devout Jewish maidservant with the closely related name of *Tabitha****[[59]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn59" \o ")[59]****.*

This is not, again, to deny a possible Aramaic influence for *talitha*, just as “lassie” is a regional Scottish term derived from old Norse for a young woman.  Though not normally used in wider English, its use in Scotland does not mean the Scots speak “Norse”!

Why then, given the clear Hebrew lineage of all these words, and in every case their perpetuation to this day, either directly or in closely related form, in modern Hebrew, is there any need to cast around for an “Aramaic” explanation for Yehoshua’ speech?  It may have done for the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the *hubris* of German critical scholarship led it to downplay the “Jüdischen” at every turn – their history, their heroes, and their holy tongue.  But it will not do in the real world of 21st century scholarship, when fresh evidence is being uncovered, new insights are breaking forth, and the idols of the Schoolmen are at last being ground to dust.[[60]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftn60" \o ")[60]

[[1]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref1" \o ")[1] Michael Wise, Martin Abegg Jr., and Edmund Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls:  A New Translation* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1996), pp. 8, 9, emph. added.

[[2]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref2" \o ")[2] Emanuel Tov, “A Qumran Origin for the Masada Non-Biblical Texts?” *Dead Sea Discoveries,* 7:1 (2000), 63.

[[3]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref3" \o ")[3] Al Wolters, *The Copper Scroll* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), p. 11.

[[4]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref4" \o ")[4] J.T. Milik, *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert* (Oxford, 1955ff.), vol. 2, p. 70.

[[5]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref5" \o ")[5] Matthew Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (3rd edition, 1967), p. 47.

[[6]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref6" \o ")[6] Lawrence H. Schiffman and James C. VanderKam, eds., *Encyclopaedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Oxford University Press, 2000), vol. 1, p. 344, emph. added.

[[7]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref7" \o ")[7] Shemaryahu Talmon, “Hebrew written fragments from Masada”, *DSD* 3:2 (1996), 168.  Tov, op. cit., 57.

[[8]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref8" \o ")[8] Moses Segal, *Mishnaic Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford, at the Clarendon Press, 1927), pp. 2, 13; emph. added.  Likewise Jacob Neusner (ed.), *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* (Peabody, Mass., Hendrickson, 1999), p. 280, where Qumran Hebrew “is a *continuation of Late Biblical Hebrew, and is attested c. 200 BCE – c. 70CE*”; emph. added.

[[9]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref9" \o ")[9] J.T. Milik, *Ten Years of Discovery in the Wilderness of Judaea* (London, SCM Press, 1959), 95; emph. added.

[[10]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref10" \o ")[10] Angel Saenz-Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language* (1994), p. 52, emph. added; cited by Edward Ullendorff in his review of the same name, *Journal of Jewish Studies, xlvi,* 1-2.  (Spring/Autumn 1995), 287.

[[11]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref11" \o ")[11] Ullendorff, op. cit., 287, 288; emph. added.

[[12]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref12" \o ")[12] Harris Birkeland, *The Language of Jesus* (Oslo, Dybwad, 1954).  While Birkeland erred in supposing that, though ordinary Jews spoke Hebrew, the “upper class” spoke Aramaic, he was still closer to the mark with Hebrew than his modern detractors.  Cf. John P. Meier’s dismissive comment, “Birkeland’s work is almost an embarrassment to read today”.  John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew* (New York, Doubleday, 1991), vol. 1, p. 288.  Needless to say, Meier’s view is that “Jesus regularly and perhaps exclusively taught in Aramaic”, ibid., p. 268.

[[13]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref13" \o ")[13] F.L. Cross, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, first edition (Oxford, 1958), entry “Hebrew”, 614.

[[14]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref14" \o ")[14] F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, third edition (Oxford, 1997), entry “Hebrew”, pp. 741, 742; emph. added.

[[15]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref15" \o ")[15] *Tracate Sotah* 49 b, cited in S. Safrai and M. Stern, *The Jewish People in the First Century* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1976), vol. 2, pp. 1032, 1036.  Rabbi Meir (*c*. mid 2nd century), in a choice piece of “salvation by works”, said that “everyone who is settled in the land of Israel, and *speaks the sacred language* [ie., Hebrew] … is a son of the age to come”, j. *Sheqalim* 3, 3; cited in J.A. Emerton, “The problem of vernacular Hebrew in the first century AD”, *Journal of Theological Studies*, xxiv, 1 (1973), 15; emph. added.

[[16]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref16" \o ")[16] E. Levine, *The Biography of the Aramaic Bible*, in *Z.A.T.W.,* vol. 94, (1982), p. 358.

[[17]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref17" \o ")[17] *Megillah* 4, 4, cited in Levine, ibid., p. 374.

[[18]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref18" \o ")[18] D.H. Aaron in *The Blackwell Reader in Judaism*, ed. J. Neusner and A.J. Avery-Peck (Blackwell, 2001), 204.

[[19]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref19" \o ")[19] *Zohar*, Exodus 129, cited in Levine, op. cit., p. 359.

[[20]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref20" \o ")[20] Jerusalem Talmud, *Tracate Sotah* 7:2, 30a.

[[21]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref21" \o ")[21] *Sifre*, Deut. 46, cited in Safrai and Stern, op. cit., p. 1034; emph. added.

[[22]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref22" \o ")[22] b *Sota* 33a; b *Shabbat* 12b.

[[23]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref23" \o ")[23] b *Shabbat* 115a, j *Shabbat* 16:15c.  Elsewhere the same Gamaliel is recorded as having conversed “in Hebrew” with the emperor’s daughter; *b Sanhedrin* 90b-91b.  For the question as to whether the fragmentary Qumran Job should even be designated a true Targum, see David Shepherd, “Will the real Targum please stand up?”, *Journal of Jewish Studies*, LI, 1 (Spring, 2000), 113.

[[24]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref24" \o ")[24] Paul L. Maier, *The New Complete Works of Josephus* (Grand Rapids, Kregel, 1999), p. 13.  Idem, *Josephus:  The Essential Works* (Kregel, 1994), p. 11.  Per Bilde confirms Josephus’ accuracy re contemporary events:  “In fact, the accounts of Philo and, *especially, of Josephus* correspond with the Dead Sea Scrolls to a very large extent, as has often been demonstrated”; in Frederick H. Cryer and Thomas L. Thompson (eds.), *Qumran between the Old and New Testaments* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), p. 67, emph. added.

[[25]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref25" \o ")[25] See Matthew 15:24; John 5:36; 1:11.

[[26]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref26" \o ")[26] Segal, op. cit., p. 8; emph. added.  Interestingly, “mammon” also occurs in the Mishnah, *Aboth* 2, 17.

[[27]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref27" \o ")[27] Craig A. Evans, “Isaiah 6:9-10 in Mark and John”, *Novum Testamentum* vol. 24 (1982), 133.

[[28]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref28" \o ")[28] J.A.L. Lee, “A Non-Aramaism in Luke 6:7”, *Novum Testamentum* vol. 33, 1 (1991), 28ff.

[[29]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref29" \o ")[29] As per J.D. Douglas and others, *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester UK, IVP, 1996), p. 67; emph. added.

[[30]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref30" \o ")[30] Glenda Abramson (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Jewish Culture* (Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 314.

[[31]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref31" \o ")[31] Michael Sokoloff, book review, *Dead Sea Discoveries* 7:1 (2000), 79; emph. added.

[[32]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref32" \o ")[32] M. L. Klein, “Palestinian Targum and Synagogue Mosaics”, *Immanuel* 11 (1980), 37, 38; emph. added.

[[33]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref33" \o ")[33] “The first sure references to the reading of the Targum in the Synagogue … actually date only to the period when the sages who had survived the Bar Kokhba revolt [135] and the subsequent persecutions regrouped at Usha in Lower Galilee”; so Zeev Safrai, *Immanuel* 24/25, (1990), 189.

[[34]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref34" \o ")[34] Mark Chancey and Eric M. Meyers, “How Jewish was Sepphoris in Jesus’ time?”, *Biblical Archaeology Review,* (July – August, 2000), p. 33.

[[35]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref35" \o ")[35] *Ketuboth* 52b., emph. added.

[[36]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref36" \o ")[36] *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem, Keter Publishing House, 1972), entry “Galilee”, vol. 7, p. 266.

[[37]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref37" \o ")[37] Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue* (Yale University Press, 2000), p. 198.

[[38]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref38" \o ")[38] See John 4:26; Luke 17:11-19; John 4:40-42; Luke 9:52, 53.

[[39]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984#_ftnref39)[39] *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 14, p. 743; emph. added.

[[40]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref40" \o ")[40] Thord and Maria Thordson, *Qumran and the Samaritans,* reviewed in *Dead Sea Discoveries*, vol. 6 (March 1999), 94 – 98.  Paul E. Kahle, *The Cairo Geniza*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1959), pp. 153, 154, re ancient Samaritan Hebrew speech.

[[41]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref41" \o ")[41] Whether or not Jesus may also on occasion have spoken Greek is a moot point.  Certainly there is no evidence for it, though it cannot be ruled out as a possible “second” language in cosmopolitan Galilee.  While Paul, as a learned former Pharisee, was fluent in both Hebrew and Greek (Acts 21:37, 40), Jesus never claimed any “academy” learning (cf. John 7:15), but rather that his doctrine was “His who sent Me” (v. 16).  As the “*Word* made flesh”, he was saturated with the Scriptures, and so wise beyond measure that, even at twelve years of age, he amazed the temple scholars with his “understanding and answers” (Luke 2:42, 46-47).  Yet, as the same “Word *made flesh*”, he chose in his Father’s will to be made like us, representatively, in all things,only without sin.  This naturally includes having a “mother tongue” – for which Greek, whatever its considerable status in first century Palestine, could never be a serious candidate, particularly in light of his known recorded utterances in their original, like *ephphatha,* *cumi*, *sabachthani*, etc..  Not forgetting, too, the pains that learning Greek caused even Josephus, who confessed that “because I have so long accustomed myself to speak our own tongue [ie., Hebrew], I cannot pronounce Greek with sufficient exactness”.  *Ant*. 20:11, 2.

[[42]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref42" \o ")[42] *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York, 1944), vol. 4, pp. 500, 501; emph. added.

[[43]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref43" \o ")[43] *Erubin* 53a and b, Soncino edition, vol. 5.

[[44]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref44" \o ")[44] Elisha Qimron, *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert:  Qumran Cave 4* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1994),  pp. 66, 107; emph. added.  Likewise F.I. Andersen, “Orthography in ancient Hebrew inscriptions”, *Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 36 (1999), 19, sub-heading “Hebrew Dialects”.

[[45]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref45" \o ")[45] Paul Johnson, *A History of the American People* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997), p. 801.

[[46]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref46" \o ")[46] Bernard Spolsky and Robert L. Cooper, *The Languages of Jerusalem* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 22; emph. added.  Interestingly, *The Universal Jewish Encyclopaedia* says that “these differences [ie., between ‘the Judaeans’ and ‘the Galileans’ in pronunciation] have survived in the Sephardic and Ashkenazic dialects” down to modern times! Op cit., vol. 4, p. 501.

[[47]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref47" \o ")[47] Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and C.A. Briggs, *Gesenius’ Hebrew-English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1958), p. 834.

[[48]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref48" \o ")[48] Bruce Metzger and Michael Coogan (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 272.

[[49]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref49" \o ")[49] Isaac Rabinowitz, “Ephphatha (Mark vii:34):  Certainly Hebrew, not Aramaic”, *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 16 (1971), 155; emph. added.

[[50]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref50" \o ")[50] Reuben Grossman and Moses Segal, *Compendious Hebrew-English Dictionary* (Tel Aviv, Dvir Publishing House, 1952), in. loc..  *The Oxford-English Hebrew Dictionary,* (Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 366.

\*  No pretence is made of one’s being a Hebrew expert (I barely scraped through my five years of seminary Hebrew).  But these are facts basically accessible to anyone prepared to do a little digging.

[[51]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref51" \o ")[51] Douglas J. Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Narratives* (Almond Press, 1983), p. 267.

[[52]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref52" \o ")[52] Ibid.

[[53]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984#_ftnref53)[53] Francis Brown and others, op. cit., p. 554.  James Barr, “Why? In Biblical Hebrew”, *Journal of Theological Studies*, vol. 36, (April 1985), 9.  Both the Received and Nestle texts have *lama*.

[[54]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref54" \o ")[54] Ernest Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language* (New York, Macmillan Publishing, 1987), p. 302.  Grossman and Segal, op. cit., p. 171.

[[55]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref55" \o ")[55] Grossman and Segal, op. cit., p. 371.

[[56]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref56" \o ")[56] Douglas J. Moo, op. cit.,  p. 267.

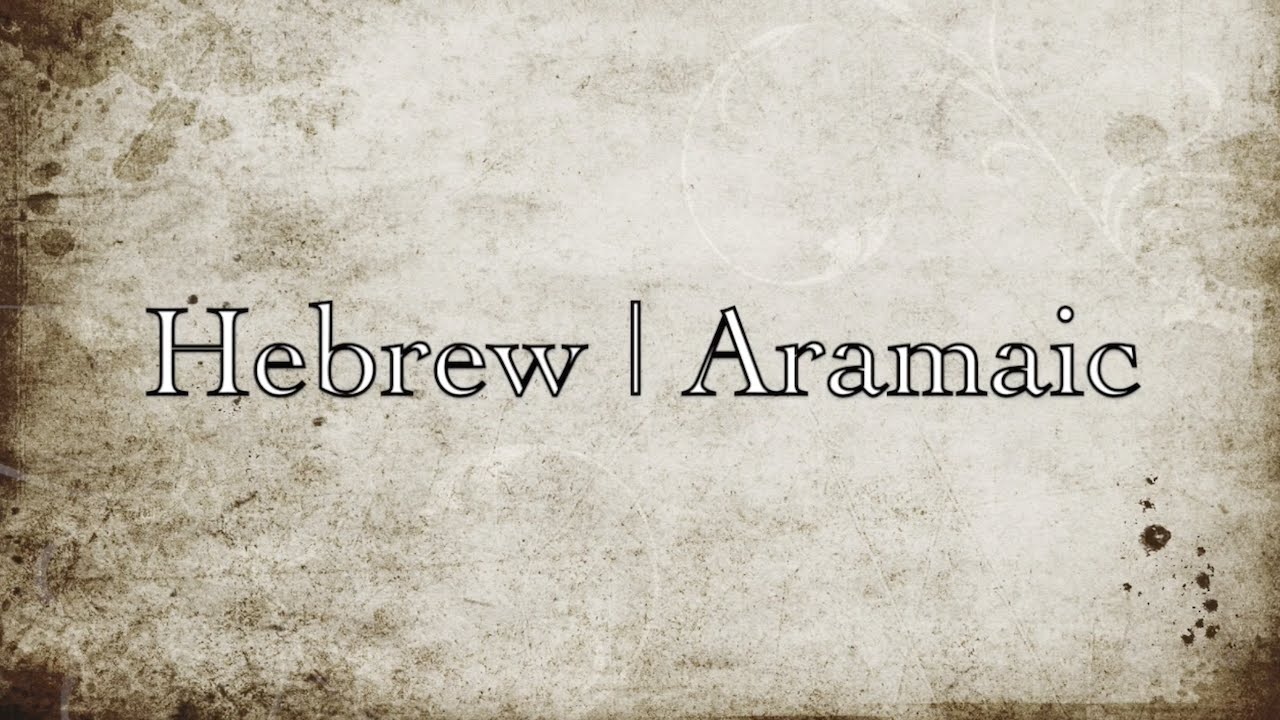
[[57]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref57" \o ")[57] Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1993), vol. 3, p. 332.

[[58]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref58" \o ")[58] Based on a specimen comparison from Genesis 48 in Alexander Sperber, *The Bible in Aramaic* (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1973), vol. 4(b), p. 411.  See also *Targumic and Cognate Studies*, ed. by Kevin J. Cathcart and Michael Maher (Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), pp. 61, 62, for a comparison between parallel texts of Targum On(k)elos and the Massoretic Hebrew.

[[59]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref59" \o ")[59] J. Israelstam and Judah J. Slotki, *Midrash Rabbah Leviticus* (London, Soncino, 1983), xix, 4.  That the still-used Hebrew name “Tabitha” is no longer held to mean “gazelle” (Acts 9:36, mg.) is no problem, as the Jewish *New Name Dictionary* lists “Davida” as related to it, and it means “fawn” (Jonathan David Publ., 1989, 153).  Compare the way the KJV near-equivalent of “hart” has virtually given up the ghost in less than *four* centuries!

[[60]](http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6596844591611460984" \l "_ftnref60" \o ")[60] It is hardly coincidental that Wellhausen, popularizer of the now-discredited “documentary hypothesis” concerning the *Pentateuch* (which Jesus expressly ascribed to Moses, John 5:46, 47), was also a leading proponent for an “original Aramaic” behind Mark’s Gospel – a view which likewise turned out to be a “fizzer”.  For an up-to-date and extensive expose of the Wellhausen Old Testament theory, see Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 1999), pp. 392 – 533.

**Overplaying the Aramaïc card**

[](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=48sdWUvxzR8)

*“We should expect there to be sound reasons for interpreting a word*

*contrary to its etymological meaning and its normal usage”.*

***Ken M. Penner***



This is a promising contribution regarding the pre-eminence of the Hebrew language in the Bible.

Ken M. Penner introduces his scholarly article, “Ancient names for Hebrew and Aramaic: A Case for Lexical Revision”, as follows:

<https://www.academia.edu/36889747/Ancient_names_for_Hebrew_and_Aramaic_A_Case_for_Lexical_Revision>

Despite the etymology and the usual meaning of the cognate adjective Ἑβραῖος “Hebrew”, the standard lexicon of New Testament Greek claims that the phrase τῇ Ἑβραΐδι διαλέκτω “in the Hebrew(?) language” in Acts refers not to Hebrew but to “the Aramaic spoken at that time in Palestine.” ….

Two of the most prominent English translations agree. Although Acts 21:40-22:2 uses the expression τῇ Ἑβραΐδι διαλέκτω to refer to Paul’s address to the crowd, the New International Version translates using “Aramaic.” Παῦλος ἑστως ἐπὶ τῶν ἀναβαθμῶν κατέσεισεν τῇ χειρὶ τῷ λαῷ. πολλῆς δὲ σιγῆς γενομένης προσεφώνησεν τῇ Ἑβραΐδι διαλέκτω … ἀκούσαντες δὲ ὃτι τῇ Ἑβραΐδι διαλέκτω προσεφώνει αὐτοῖς μᾶλλον παρέσχον ἡσυχίαν. “Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic, ‘Brothers and Fathers, listen now to my defense.’ When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic they became very quiet” (NIV). The NRSV does call the language “Hebrew” in its translation, but a footnote explains, “That is, *Aramaic.*”

We should expect there to be sound reasons for interpreting a word contrary to its etymological meaning and its normal usage. After all, Ἑβραΐς is simply a feminine form of the adjective normally meaning “Hebrew.” It is the masculine form of this word that Paul used when calling himself a “Hebrew of Hebrews” (Phil 3:5). And Ἑβραϊστί means “in Hebrew” both etymologically and as used by authors before and after the first century. For example, the prologue to Ben Sira says, “For what was originally expressed in Hebrew (αὐτὰ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς Εβραϊστὶ λεγόμενα) does not have exactly the same sense when translated into another language” (RSV). When Revelation 9:11 says Abbadon is a “Hebrew” name, it uses Ἑβραϊστί (ὄνομα αὐτῷ ῾Εβραϊστὶ ᾿Αβαδδὼν καὶ ἐν τῇ ῾Ελληνικῇ ὄνομα ἔχει ᾿Απολλύων). Revelation 16:16 uses it to explain that Armageddon is the name of the place “in Hebrew” τὸν τόπον τὸν καλούμενον ῾Εβραϊστὶ ῾Αρμαγεδών.

In this article I first review the reasoning behind rendering Ἑβραΐς/Ἑβραϊστί as “(in) Aramaic”, then identify patterns in ancient names for Hebrew and Aramaic, in which I show that Ἑβραΐς/Ἑβραϊστί never refers unambiguously to Aramaic but only refers to the Hebrew language. ….

[](https://walkingthebereanroad.com/page/8/)