

Part III

*Messiah, His Disciples,
and
The Sacred Name*

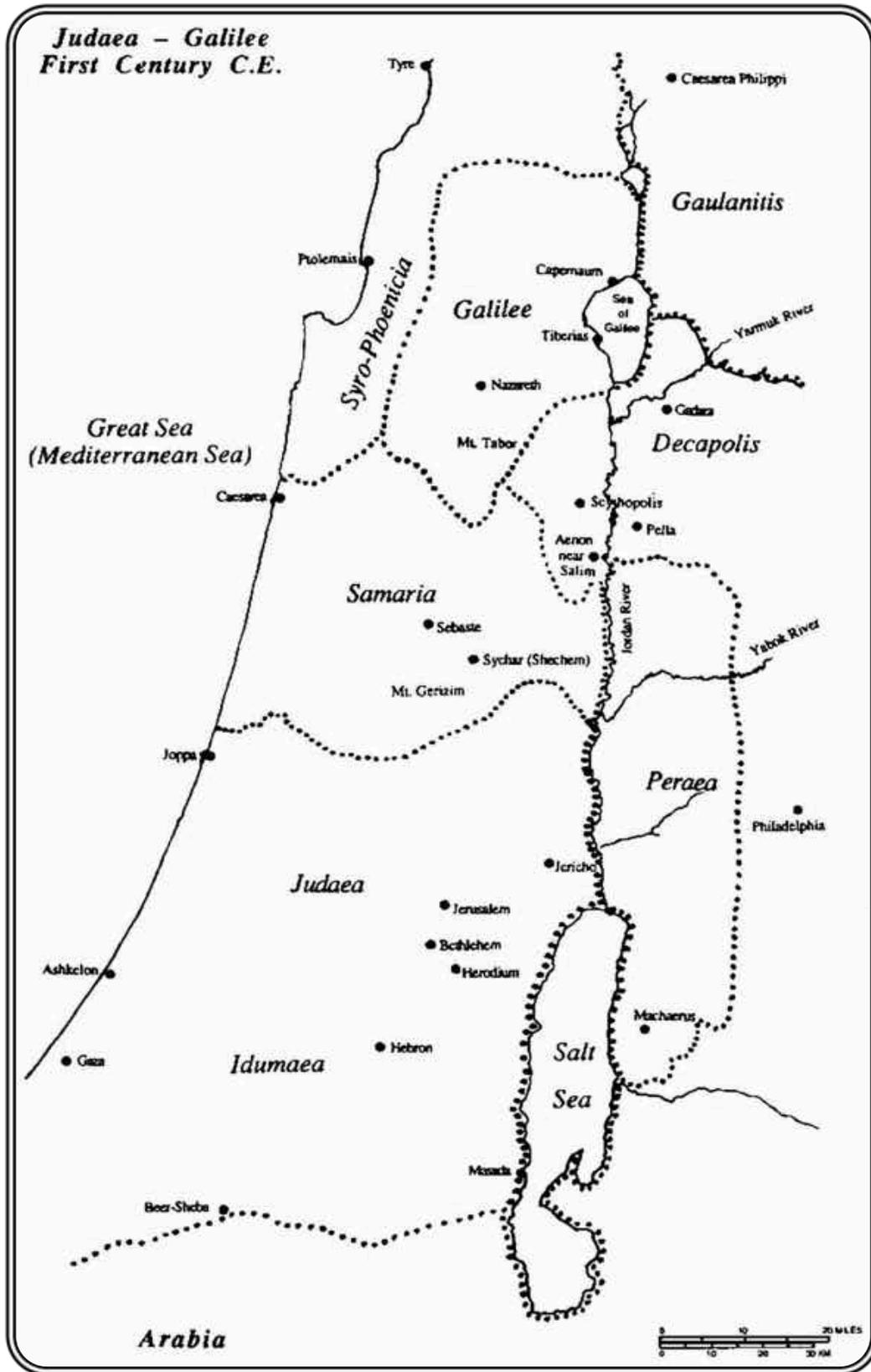
Introduction to Part III

Our investigation now turns to an argument specifically advanced by many Christian churches. Most Christian groups claim that their members are exempt from knowing and using the name Yahweh because the messiah and his disciples never taught or used it. If the sacred name had been of any great consequence for the followers of the messiah, they contend, the New Testament certainly would have said so. The New Testament, it is pointed out, comes down to us in Greek, thereby reflecting not only the fact that the Jews of Judaea during the first century C.E. spoke Greek but that the messiah and his apostles also taught and wrote in the Greek language. In turn, this means that Greek is also an “inspired” language for scriptural study. Since the “inspired Greek” of the New Testament does not use the sacred name, the theory contends, a Hebrew name for *eloahim* is no longer required.

What makes this assertion so presumptuous is that it ignores the fact that the New Testament has much to say with regard to the sacred name. It brings to mind the charge made in both the Old and New Testaments against most of the so-called followers of the Scriptures, who have eyes and ears to see and hear but “seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, nor do they understand.”¹ Not only does the New Testament report that the messiah and his disciples knew and used the sacred name, it goes on to show that they taught the sacred name as a basic scriptural doctrine. As with the loyal prophets of Yahweh before them, as a direct result of their using and teaching the sacred name, the messiah and his followers were persecuted and murdered!

To set the stage for the evidence that the messiah and his disciples taught the doctrine of the sacred name, we must first examine two germane issues: the language spoken in Judaea and Galilee by the common people during the time of the messiah (which was Hebrew-Aramaic, not Greek); and the legal prohibition established by the Jewish religious leaders during that period forbidding any common man from speaking the sacred name—a law that was staunchly opposed by the messiah. With this background established we shall advance into the study of the messiah and his teaching of the sacred name.

¹ For example see Deut., 29:2–4; Isa., 6:9–10; Jer., 5:21–25; Ezek., 12:1–2; Matt., 13:10–17; Mark, 4:10–14; Luke, 8:9–10; John, 12:37–40; Acts, 28:25–27; 2 Cor., 3:13–16; Eph., 4:17–23.



The Language of Judaea and Galilee

It is held by numerous Christian groups that Yahushua the messiah (called “Jesus Christ” in most English translations) and his apostles did not use or teach the sacred name יהוה (Yahweh) because the language of the common man living among the Jews in the first century C.E. country of Judaea and Galilee was Greek. Their ultimate proof of this is the fact that the New Testament comes down to us in Greek and not Hebrew. Moving upon the assumption that the disciples of the messiah, being Jews of Judaea-Galilee, composed the New Testament in Greek, those advocating the “inspired Greek” doctrine in turn extrapolate that the messiah and his disciples must have used the Greek language in their teaching and normal everyday speech.

This inspired Greek concept is fueled by the fact that the few fragments left to us from the late second century and the manuscripts from the fourth and fifth centuries, from which our present copies of the New Testament are derived, are in Greek. In these surviving ancient versions, in quotes from the Old Testament and in other places where the sacred name should appear, we find that the name Yahweh has been replaced, primarily with the Greek terms Θεός (*theos*) and κύριος (*kurios*), meaning “deity” and “sovereign.” Therefore, in the minds of many Christian theologians, this evidence proves that the authors of the New Testament documents intended us to understand that for the Christian Church the sacred name is no longer relevant and that there is no necessity to know and use it.

The misguided notion that the messiah and his disciples spoke and wrote in Greek has gained widespread acceptance because of the desire and need to believe that the original documents of the New Testament were “inspired” in Greek. Indeed, many cherished teachings would fall if Christians were to acknowledge that the New Testament was to be understood in Hebrew-Aramaic thought. The belief that there is no need to use the sacred name is chief among these doctrines. Nevertheless, this popular Christian theory is false. The Jewish people living in Judaea-Galilee during the first century C.E. spoke Hebrew and Aramaic (a dialect of Hebrew), the same languages used in the Old Testament, and actually loathed the Greek language. The evidence will also demonstrate that the messiah and his followers, like the Jews among whom they lived, spoke and taught in Hebrew-Aramaic.

Hebrew-Aramaic Versus Greek

It is improper to couple the script and language found in the earliest surviving New Testament documents with the language spoken in Judaea and Galilee during the first century C.E. Not only do these remaining fragments post-date the originals by at least a century and more—and the larger manuscripts several centuries—but all are found outside of Palestine. Greek was the lingua franca of the ancient western world during that period. It would have been quite natural for the original Hebrew manuscripts to have been translated into Greek shortly after their composition. The fact that these documents and fragments left to us are written in Greek, therefore, proves nothing.

In our Volume II we shall demonstrate that, contrary to popular opinion, the New Testament was originally composed in Hebrew-Aramaic, the same language used in the Old Testament, but it was shortly thereafter translated into Greek as an aid for those numerous converts who could not read Hebrew. Unfortunately, the original Hebrew texts were later suppressed and destroyed by both the Jews (who saw them as heretical) and the Christians (who came to view them as Judaizing).² For our present purpose now, we shall concentrate upon the evidence demonstrating that the language spoken in Judaea-Galilee by the messiah, his original twelve apostles, and the other Jews living there during the first century C.E. was Hebrew-Aramaic.

The Jews of Judaea and Galilee during the first century C.E. despised the Greek language. All historians specializing in Jewish history are aware of the great sacrilege committed by the Greek-speaking Syrians under Antiochus Epiphanes (175–164 B.C.E.) against the Jewish people, their capital city Jerusalem, and their Temple. The forced Hellenization policy that was perpetrated upon the Jews of Palestine by Epiphanes created a tremendous backlash, resulting in revolt and the establishment of the Hasmonaean (Maccabean) priest-kings as rulers of Judaea.³ The majority of the Jews of Palestine, left with a bitter taste from this forced Hellenization policy of the Greek Seleucid ruling house, became heavily anti-Greek. They were not only against the Greek culture but the Greek language. The Jews chose instead to continue with Aramaic as their language of international trade, which had long been the lingua franca of the Middle East.⁴

What often confuses the adherents to the “inspired Greek” view is the fact that many of the Jews living outside Palestine and within the Graeco-Roman world did know Greek, especially in Egypt, Asia Minor, Syria, and Greece. But these fell under different circumstances. They were not living in a land dominated politically by Jews, but in countries controlled by Greek-speaking peoples and perforce had to acquire that tongue. Indeed, evidence that some of these Greek-speaking Jews resettled in Judaea is also well-known, i.e. some

² See Vol. II, the Chap. entitled, *The Original Language of the New Testament*.

³ See EJ, 3, p. 74, 7, pp.1455f. Also see the histories cited below, Chap. XII, n. 5.

⁴ See EJ, 3, pp. 259–282; and see Vol. II.

of the Alexandrian Jews from Egypt.⁵ But these minority populations hardly constituted a small percentage in Judaea and Galilee in the first century C.E., let alone rival the majority of Hebrew-speaking Jews.

The Testimony of Josephus

Proof that the Jews of Palestine during the first century C.E. continued to speak Hebrew and Aramaic, and were in fact unfamiliar with Greek, comes from the first century C.E. Jewish historian Josephus. Josephus was born in Jerusalem to a noble family of priests. After studying the various Jewish sects, he also became a priest and joined the most popular religious group in Judaea, the Pharisees. Highly educated, he was proficient in Jewish history. In 66 C.E. Josephus was entrusted with an important commission as general of a military force from Galilee.⁶

Between 75 and 79 C.E. Josephus wrote a history of the Jewish wars with Rome.⁷ He informs us that this work had originally been “composed in my vernacular tongue” (i.e. Hebrew-Aramaic),⁸ and had been sent to the Israelites living within the Parthian empire.⁹ He also tells us that, “with the aid of some assistants,” he later translated this edition into Greek.¹⁰ Yet, Josephus found his task as translator immensely wearisome because, as he informs us,

⁵ For example, the Tosef. Meg., 3:6, reports that during the first century there existed a “synagogue of Alexandrians in Jerusalem.” That there was a “synagogue” in Jerusalem attended to by Hellenic Jews called Libertines, Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia, a list of names indicating a Greek-speaking community, is also attested to in Acts, 6:9. Yet, the very fact that these Greek-speaking Jews had their own synagogue actually proves that Greek was not part of the language of Judaea. If it had been there would have been no reason for them to join together into one synagogue. They would have simply attended any one of a number of Jewish synagogues in that sprawling community.

⁶ That Josephus was from a noble priestly family see Jos., *Life*, 1. In his *Apion*, 1:10, Josephus writes that he was “a priest and of priestly ancestry,” and that he was “well versed in the study” of the “sacred books” of the Jews. He also boasted that he “made great progress” in his education and had gained “a reputation for an excellent memory and understanding.” “While a mere boy,” he goes on, “about fourteen years old, I won universal applause for my love of letters inasmuch that the chief priest and the leading men of the city constantly used to come to me for precise information on some particular in our ordinances” (*Life*, 2). Josephus claims to have been fully accomplished in all three of the major Jewish sects (Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes) as well as having gained three years experience under a man named Bannus (who lived in the wilderness wearing clothing made from trees and using frequent ablutions of cold water day and night for purity’s sake). After these experiences, and being but nineteen years of age, Josephus returned to Jerusalem and joined the majority sect or party of Judaism, called the Pharisees (*Life*, 2). That Josephus served for a time as commander in Galilee see Jos., *Apion*, 1:9; *Wars*, 20:4–5; *Life*, 7–8.

⁷ That Josephus wrote and published his work of the Jewish wars with Rome sometime between 75 to 79 C.E., see Thackeray, *Jos.*, II, Intro., p. xii.

⁸ Thackeray, *Jos.*, II, Intro., pp. ix–xi, 4f, n. a, “Aramaic or Hebrew.”

⁹ Jos., *Wars*, pref. 1–2. The Parthian Empire of the first century C.E., called “the up-country barbarians” by Josephus, ruled over old Assyrian-Babylonian country, the region today commonly called Iran, and various adjoining lands to these. According to Josephus, living in this vast land “beyond the Euphrates river” were the ten exiled tribes of Israel, who in his day had become “countless myriads whose number cannot be ascertained” (*Antiq.*, 9:5:2). It was to these exiled tribes of Israel that Josephus had sent his book on the Jewish wars, originally composed in the Hebrew-Aramaic language. For the ancient identity of these ten exiled tribes see our forthcoming book entitled, *The Sax*.

¹⁰ Jos., *Apion*, 1:9.

he had to translate “so vast a subject into a foreign and UNFAMILIAR TONGUE.”¹¹ These comments illustrate two things: first, the vernacular or native tongue of the Jews of Palestine was not Greek; and second, Greek was a “foreign and unfamiliar tongue,” even for a highly educated Judaeen priest like Josephus.

At the end of another great work produced by Josephus, entitled *Antiquities of the Jews*, he makes yet one more important claim that the Jewish people of his time had little knowledge of the Greek language:¹²

For those of my own nation freely acknowledge that I far exceed them in learning belonging to the Jews; I have also taken a great deal of pains to obtain the learning of Greek letters and prose, although I have so long accustomed myself to speak our own tongue, that I cannot pronounce Greek with sufficient exactness: for our nation does not encourage those that learn the languages of many nations, and (who) so adorn their discourses with the smoothness of their periods; because they look upon this sort of accomplishment as beneath their dignity, not only to all sorts of freemen, but (also) to as many of the servants as please to learn them. But they give him the testimony of being a wise man who is fully acquainted with our laws, and is able to interpret their meaning: on which account, as there have been many who have done their endeavors with great patience to obtain this learning, there have yet hardly been so many as two or three that have succeeded therein, who were immediately well rewarded for their pains.

The priests and religious scholars of Judaea were the educated class among the Judaeans. Yet the priest Josephus (born to a priestly family and educated as a Pharisee, the dominant religious party in Judaea) considered Greek a “foreign and unfamiliar tongue.” He even required “some assistants” to translate his Hebrew-Aramaic into Greek. Further, after a long period of study into the Greek language, Josephus still found it difficult to speak Greek; it was “beneath their dignity” as Jews of Palestine to even learn a foreign language. We have no choice but to conclude that the vast majority of Jews living in Judaea and Galilee were completely unfamiliar with the Greek language.

Talmudic and Other Jewish Evidence

Other evidence comes from the Talmud. In the work entitled *Baba Qamma* we read that Gamaliel II, who held the position of Patriarch in Judaea beginning

¹¹ Jos., *Antiq.*, pref., 2.

¹² Jos., *Antiq.*, 20:11:1.

in about 80 C.E., and his family were permitted to learn Greek only because they were “near to the government.”¹³ As R. Travers Herford comments, “The Patriarch was the official representative of the Jews, and since as such he must have had frequent intercourse with the government, the knowledge of Greek was necessary.”¹⁴

Yet even for families, like that of Gamaliel II, who worked in high public positions where many contacts with foreigners were made and Greek was necessary, permission had to be obtained to even learn the Greek language. The experience of Gamaliel II becomes even more poignant when we consider that it took place after 70 C.E., the year that Jerusalem and its Temple were destroyed and the last vestiges of Jewish political independence came to an end.

The general attitude towards Greek culture is also expressed in the Talmud during the story of Ben Damah’s request to his uncle, Rabbi Ishmael (early second century C.E.), to study Greek philosophy. Mimicking the general theme mentioned by Josephus, permission was denied and a verse from Joshua, 1:8, was held as authority, “You shall meditate upon it (the Torah) day and night,” after which Ishmael ordered his nephew, “Go seek a time when it is neither day nor night, and therein study Greek philosophy.”¹⁵

Even the attitude of the Judaeans towards any Greek translation of the Old Testament was negative. The Talmud, for example, in response to the propaganda exhorting the virtues of the Greek Septuagint version, invented a myth that the day that the Septuagint was produced Palestine was struck by a severe earthquake that shook every inch of ground in that country. The reason for this ominous sign, they explained, is the fact that the almighty was demonstrating his anger that his sacred words had been translated into a heathen tongue. Rabbinical Jews regarded this translation as a national disaster, “like the day on which the golden calf was made.”¹⁶

With the end of the Jewish revolt under Bar Kochba in 135 C.E.—which brought about the complete annihilation of the Judaeans, the exile or murder of most of the Jewish population, and the repopulation of Judaea-Galilee with foreign peoples—Hebrew officially ceased to be the language of Judaea.¹⁷ But even long after the Bar Kochba revolt, at a time when one would expect great inroads by the Greek language among the remnant of Jews left in Palestine, Hebrew-Aramaic was still held as the proper tongue for the Jews remaining in the homeland. For instance, Rabbi Judah the Patriarch, who edited the Mishnah at the beginning of the third century C.E., is said to have always spoken Hebrew in his home, as did the maidservants of his household. Yet, being Patriarch, like Rabbi Gamaliel II before him, he was a student of Greek—a necessity for his post.¹⁸

¹³ B. B.Q., 83a. Also see App. C.

¹⁴ CTM, p. 89.

¹⁵ B. Men., 99b.

¹⁶ Expos., Nov., 1900, p. 348f; ADB, 4, p. 439.

¹⁷ EJ, 2, p. 685.

¹⁸ Danby, *Mishnah*, pp. xx–xxi.

The small percentage of Greek-speaking Jews that returned to live in Palestine during these years is not only reflected in Josephus' statement that Greek was an "unfamiliar tongue" for his countrymen but by the literary finds generally labeled as the Qumran scrolls. Among these ancient documents found in Judaea, Greek texts of the Bible are rare. The overwhelming number of such documents, as well as Targums and other writings, are produced in Aramaic and Hebrew. Even when a Greek text is found, it is acknowledged by scholars that it was created or possessed by Greek-speaking Jews who settled in Palestine and is not reflective of the main population.¹⁹

The Testimony of Non-Jews

Other ancient writers also testify that the language of the Jews living in first century Palestine was Hebrew and not Greek. Papias (early second century) and Irenaeus (second century) tell us that the apostle Matthew wrote his text "in the Hebrew language" and "among the Hebrews in their own dialect."²⁰ Jerome likewise writes that Matthew composed his work about the messiah "in Judaea in Hebrew" but that this text "was afterwards translated into Greek, though by what author is uncertain."²¹

Similarly, Eusebius (early fourth century)—speaking of the New Testament book to the Hebrews—states that the apostle Saul (in Greek called "Paul") had "spoken in writing to the Hebrews in their native language, and some say that the evangelist Luke, others say that this same Clement translated the writing."²² Jerome tells us:²³

He (Paul) being a Hebrew wrote Hebrew, that is his own tongue and most fluently while the things which were eloquently written in Hebrew were more eloquently turned into Greek.

Each of these records proves that the language of the Jews living in Palestine during the first century C.E. was Hebrew, "their native language," not Greek. Letters and works composed by Matthew and Saul (Paul) and sent to the Jewish assemblies in Palestine were only later translated into Greek by some unknown scribes for the benefit of the Greek-speaking assemblies living elsewhere.

Evidence from the New Testament

Though the New Testament documents left to us are in Greek, much can be gleaned from them which demonstrate that the actual language used in the

¹⁹ J. P. Siegel goes so far as to argue that the Greek-speaking Jews of Jerusalem possessed a copy of the Scriptures written entirely in Hebrew (IEJ, 22, 1972, pp. 39–43). In the evidence he cites, though, it appears that only the sacred name was written in Hebrew with gold letters while the rest of the text was in Greek, common practice in the ancient Septuagint translations during this early period. Also see Vol. II.

²⁰ Papias, cited in Eusebius, *H.E.*, 3:39:16; Iren., 3:1:1, and cited in Eusebius, *H.E.*, 5:8:2.

²¹ Jerome, *Lives*, 3.

²² Eusebius, *H.E.*, 3:38:2.

²³ Jerome, *Lives*, 5.

first century C.E., not only by the messiah and his disciples but by the Jews in general who were living in Judaea-Galilee, was Hebrew-Aramaic. This evidence comes from idioms, quotes, and statements found in the New Testament. As for the substitutions “*theos*” and “*kurios*,” which are found in direct quotes from the Old Testament, these were introduced into the New Testament translations much later via the adoption of the “ineffable name” doctrine by the Christians in the second century C.E.,²⁴ a doctrine already long practiced among the various sects of Judaism. As we shall establish in Volume II, ancient evidence proves that the earliest copies of the New Testament books did contain the sacred name.²⁵

Numerous words and terms remain in our Greek editions of the New Testament that are pure Hebrew and Aramaic. They were simply transliterated. For example, the words “amen,” “alleluia (Hallelu-Yah),” “messiah,” “sabbath,” “maranatha,” “abba,” “rabbi,” “Satan,” “hosanna,” and so forth.²⁶ It was necessary in a number of places for a Greek translation to be supplied for the Greek readers, i.e. “abba, (meaning) πατήρ (father),” “messiah, which is, being interpreted, χριστός (the christ),” “Kephaz (Keph), which is interpreted, πέτρος (small stone),” and so on.²⁷ These are editorial notes meant to aid the Greek reader who was unfamiliar with the Hebrew terms and names used in the original texts. There was simply no reason to do this unless the original words were spoken in Hebrew-Aramaic.

Some mistranslations of these original Hebrew-Aramaic terms have left the reader in total confusion. Let us take for an example the famous quote from Yahushua, translated from Greek into English to read, “it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”²⁸ The word translated as “camel” is found in our Greek text as “κάμηλον (*kamelon*).” While it is true that “*kamelon*” in Greek means “camel,” the word *kamel* in Aramaic means “rope.”²⁹ If we understand Yahushua’s allegorical line to mean, “it is easier for a rope to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of ܕܢܝܢܐ,”³⁰ his metaphor takes on a much clearer meaning. We will have much more to say on this subject in our discussion about what language was used in the original New Testament manuscripts.³¹

²⁴ See below Chap. XVII, ns. 5, 8. Also see Vol. II.

²⁵ Vol. II, see espec. Chaps. IX–XI.

²⁶ For a list of references to “amen,” see YAC, p. 32; for “alleluia” see Rev., 19:1–6; for “messiah” see John, 1:41, 4:25; for a list of references to “sabbath” see YAC, p. 829, nos. 4 and 5; for “maranatha” see 1 Cor., 16:22; for “abba” see Rom., 8:15 and Gal., 4:6; for “rabbi” and “rabboni” see Matt., 23:7–8; John, 1:38, 49, 3:2, 26, 6:25, 20:16; for a list of references to “Satan” see YAC, p. 836; for “hosanna” (“the savior [deliverer] is now”) see below Chap. XIV, n. 36.

²⁷ For examples see Mark, 14:36; Rom., 8:15; Gal., 4:6; John, 1:41f, 4:25.

²⁸ Matt., 19:24; Mark, 10:25; Luke, 18:25.

²⁹ See for example HBP at the verses cited above in n. 28. This translation is based upon the Aramaic version of the New Testament.

³⁰ Ibid.; ROSNB and BE both correctly restore the name Yahweh to this verse.

³¹ See Vol. II, Chap. IX, entitled, *The Language of the Original New Testament*.

Proof that the Jewish population living in first century Palestine regularly spoke Hebrew and Aramaic but not Greek—and that subsequently we are to understand the words spoken in the New Testament by the messiah and his disciples as originally in Hebrew-Aramaic thought and meaning—is further adduced from the absence of direct testimony. No place in the New Testament does it admit to the circumstance that the messiah or any of his twelve apostles spoke or wrote to these Jews in Greek. Nowhere, for example, do we read, “and the messiah spoke to them in the Greek language” or that “such and such an apostle said to the Jews in Greek.” Actually, the opposite is true. The best example of this comes in the discussions about Saul (Paul), who unlike the messiah and the twelve, was not a native of Palestine but in his adult life he did hold an important religious post in Judaea.³²

Saul’s Testimony

Saul was a Jew raised in Tarsus, Cilicia, a land located in southern Asia Minor.³³ In Cilicia the Greek language was commonly spoken. Saul clearly knew the Greek language, and if the population in Judaea, the messiah, or the other disciples knew Greek Saul most certainly would have been able to communicate in this tongue. What the New Testament reports in this regard is revealing. In the book of Acts we read that, while at Jerusalem, Saul was accused by the Jews not only of teaching a doctrine opposed to popular Jewish interpretation of that time but of bringing Greeks into the Temple.³⁴ This incident, by the way, tells us something of the attitude held by the Jews of Palestine towards the Greeks.

In the tumult that followed, Saul was taken to a fortress by Roman soldiers. On the way, Saul asked the chief captain if he would allow him to speak. The soldier responded, “Do you know Greek?,” indicating that Saul had addressed the Roman in Greek.³⁵ The surprise that Saul knew Greek comes from the fact that Greek was not generally spoken by the Jews in Judaea. If it had been, the Roman soldier would have had no need to ask the question.

The fact that Saul spoke Greek caused the Roman soldier to jump to an unwarranted conclusion. The captain challenged Saul, asking, “ἄρα (Then) are you not the Egyptian who before these days caused a confusion and led out into the desert the four thousand men of the assassins?”³⁶ Carefully notice that when Saul spoke Greek he was not identified with the Jews of Palestine but with some notorious criminal from Egypt who had just shortly before caused a great problem for the Romans. The confusion was caused because of the

³² Acts, 9:1–2, 26:10; Jerome, *Lives*, 5.

³³ Acts, 21:39, 22:1–5. Jerome, *Lives*, 5, notes that Saul was from the town of Giscalis in Judaea, but when this town had been taken by the Romans his family moved to Tarsus in Cilicia. Saul was later sent by his parents back to Jerusalem to study law, where he was educated by Gamaliel, a most learned man whom Luke mentions (cf. Acts, 5:34, 22:3).

³⁴ Acts, 21:26–29.

³⁵ Acts, 21:30–37.

³⁶ Acts, 21:38, “οὐκ ἄρα εἶ ὁ Αἰγύπτιος ὁ πρὸ τούτων τῶν ἡμερῶν ἀναστατώσας καὶ ἐξαγαγὼν εἰς τὴν ἔρημον τοὺς τετρακισχιλίους ἄνδρας τῶν σικαρίων” (ἄρα means “then, therefore”; see GEL, p. 113; SEC, Gk. #686).

tumult of the crowd against Saul and because Saul spoke to the soldier in Greek. If the Jews of Judaea-Galilee had known Greek there would have been no need for the soldier to single Saul out as a foreign troublemaker.

The captain, accordingly, had deduced that Saul must be the Egyptian they had been looking for. No such assumption would have been possible if Saul had spoken Hebrew, for it was the Egyptians, not the Jews of Palestine, who spoke Greek. Saul corrected the Roman and told him that he was a Jew and a citizen from Tarsus, Cilicia, and made a request to speak to the Jews of Jerusalem who had come against him. The captain granted Saul his request. If the Jews of Palestine commonly spoke Greek here was an excellent opportunity for the Greek-speaking Jew from Tarsus to stand up and demonstrate that principle. Yet the book of Acts twice tells us that Saul addressed his Judaeans adversaries "in the Hebrew language," and in one of these states, "and having heard that in the Hebrew language he (Saul) spoke to them (the Jews of Jerusalem), the more they kept quiet."³⁷ That is, once they found out that Saul was a Hebrew-speaking Jew and not a Hellenizer, the Jews of Jerusalem were more willing to listen to him. As Jerome notes in his *Lives of Illustrious Men*, Saul, "being Hebrew wrote Hebrew, that is his own tongue."

The Apostles

Let us now examine the evidence with regard to the apostles. After the messiah had been delivered up to the Jewish high priest, he was followed to the court of the high priest by the apostle Keph (Kephas; Cephas), translated into Greek as "Peter," also called Simeon. There, outside the court, Keph denied knowing Yahushua (called "Jesus" in the English translations) three times. It was during these denials that some who were standing about said to Keph, "Truly, from among them (the followers of Yahushua) you are, for you are a Galilaean and your speech agrees."³⁸ They did not say, "and you speak Greek," but rather that his dialect was identifiable with that spoken by a

³⁷ Acts, 21:40, 22:2.

³⁸ Mark, 14:70; cf. Luke, 21:56–59. Yahushua likewise was recognized as a man from Galilee (Luke, 23:4–7; and cf. John, 4:43–45, 7:52), and therefore would also have spoken with a Galilaean accent. This point is supported by the fact that Keph (Peter) was identified with Yahushua and his disciples because he was both a Galilaean and a man who spoke with the Galilaean dialect (Mark, 14:70). The assembly of disciples that gathered on the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) shortly after the messiah was resurrected are also identified as Galilaean (Acts, 2:1–7). Indeed, the entire movement came to be associated with the country of Galilee. Emperor Julian (fourth century C.E.) and Epictetus, for example, both refer to the assemblies as "Galilaean" (Julian, *Ag. Gal.*; cf. Gregory, *Ag. Jul.*, 76 [115]).

One of the chief cities of Galilee was called Nazareth, from which the surrounding country was also named, and the inhabitants were called "Nazarenes." Therefore, Yahushua, who was from Nazareth and often called "Yahushua of Nazareth" (for a list of references see SEC, p. 709), as well as his disciples, were all identified as Nazarenes (Matt., 2:23; Acts, 24:5). The Talmudic Jews often referred to Yahushua and his followers as "the Nazarenes" (see for example, B. Sanh., 103a, 107b; B. A.Zar., 6a, 16b; B. Taan., 27b). The name still exists in Arabic as the common designation for a Christian (DB, p. 434). Emperor Julian also uses the term "Nazarene" as equal to "Galilaean" (*Phot.*, letter #55). We will have more to say about the ancient "Nazarenes" in Vol. II, Chap. XI, entitled, *The Books of the Minim*.

Galilaeen. A. F. Walls concludes that Keph “spoke Aramaic with a strong north-country accent.”³⁹

That the apostles Keph and John only knew Hebrew-Aramaic is supported by the fact that both are said to be “ἀγράμματοι (unlearned in letters)” and “ἠδωται (uninstructed),” i.e. without a formal education.⁴⁰ It is also supported by the words of Papias, who personally knew John the Elder, the author of Revelation, who, in turn, personally knew some of the apostles.⁴¹ Papias states that John told him that Mark, who wrote the synoptic text by that name, “became Peter’s (Keph’s) interpreter.”⁴² If Keph knew Greek, why would he need an interpreter? At the same time, since even the highly educated in Judaea, like Josephus, found the Greek language difficult to master, how could one justify this linguistic knowledge for unschooled Galilaeen and Judaeen Jews like the apostles? As a result, A. F. Loisy concludes that Peter (Keph) did not know the Greek language and “would teach his hearers in Aramean.”⁴³

The use of Hebrew-Aramaic by the apostles is also supported by a statement found in the works of Jerome, the late fourth century C.E. author of the Latin Vulgate version of the Old Testament. Jerome reports that copies of the original manuscript published in Jerusalem by the apostle Matthew still survived in his day. This text, he adds, was composed in Hebrew—not Greek. He also makes another important observation:⁴⁴

In this it is to be noted that wherever the evangelist, whether on his own account or in the person of our lord the saviour quotes the testimony of the Old Testament he does not follow the authority of the translators of the Septuagint BUT THE HEBREW.

If the citations from the Old Testament used by the messiah and his disciples had originally been in Greek, why did Matthew quote from the Hebrew? Further, if he quoted the original Hebrew text in those places (and there are several) where the sacred name appeared, Matthew would have retained the sacred name.⁴⁵

The Words of the Messiah

Next, we shall examine the New Testament references which demonstrate what language the messiah used when he spoke to his disciples. As already shown, Saul knew Greek. If the messiah commonly spoke Greek he would find a comprehending ear in Saul. Yet, when the messiah first met with Saul,

³⁹ NBD, p. 971.

⁴⁰ Acts, 4:13.

⁴¹ See App. D, latter part.

⁴² Papias, cited in Eusebius, *H.E.*, 3:39:15.

⁴³ ONT, p. 67.

⁴⁴ Jerome, *Lives*, 3.

⁴⁵ For examples see Matt., 3:3 (Isa., 40:3), 4:4 (Deut., 8:3), 4:7 (Deut., 6:16), 4:10 (Deut., 6:13), 5:33 (Deut., 23:21), 21:42 (Ps., 118:22f), 23:39 (Ps., 118:26).

as Saul was traveling on the road to Damascus (in the country of Syria where Greek was spoken), we are told by the book of Acts:⁴⁶

And all of us having fallen down to the ground, I
(Saul) heard a voice speaking to me and saying IN
THE HEBREW LANGUAGE, Saul, Saul, why do you
persecute me?

When Saul asked to whom it was that he was speaking the voice said “I am Yahushua, who you are persecuting.”⁴⁷ Yahushua, therefore, would have used the Hebrew form of his earthly name, not the Greek.

It was this same Yahushua whose last dying words were, “*Eli, eli lama sabachthani?*,” which is Hebrew-Aramaic for “My *el*, my *el*, why have you forsaken me?” This statement was a direct quote from Psalm, 22:1.⁴⁸ Here is proof that the messiah cited the Torah using the original Hebrew verse.

Another proof that Yahushua spoke in Hebrew comes in Mark, 5:41. In this passage we are told that in healing a young girl, Yahushua took hold of her hand and said, “*Talitha, koumi.*” This verse follows the Hebrew with a Greek translation, “which is, being interpreted, ‘Damsel, to you I say, arise.’” “*Talitha, koumi*” is pure Hebrew-Aramaic.⁴⁹ Therefore, in the statement from Mark we have a direct quote of Yahushua left in the Hebrew. In the corresponding verse from the book of Luke (8:54), meanwhile, there is no indication of the original Hebrew. Only a Greek phrase remains. This evidence shows that Yahushua spoke to the girl in Hebrew-Aramaic, reflected by the scribe who translated Mark’s work, while the scribe translating Luke chose to leave out the transliteration of the original words.

In Mark, 7:34, we are told that Yahushua healed a deaf man by placing his fingers on the man’s ears and saying, “*Ἐφφθά (Ephphathah)*,” which this verse then defines as meaning, “be opened.” This term is Hebrew-Aramaic, based on the term פתח (phathah or phphathah), “to open.”⁵⁰ In Mark, 14:36, we read that the messiah began his famous prayer to Yahweh with the word “*Ἀββᾶ (abba)*.” *Abba* is Hebrew-Aramaic, based upon the Hebrew term אב (ab), meaning “father.”⁵¹ In this verse the Greek phrase ὁ πατήρ (*o pater*, i.e. “meaning father”) is added for definition.⁵² Insightfully, in the corresponding versions of this prayer given in Matt., 26:39, and Luke, 22:42, we find only the Greek term πάτερ (*pater*, father). These details prove that Yahushua spoke his prayer in Hebrew but that later translators of Matthew and Luke rendered it entirely in Greek.

⁴⁶ Acts, 26:14.

⁴⁷ Acts, 26:15.

⁴⁸ Matt., 27:46. That this statement is a quote from Psalm, 22:1, see AB, NT, p. 45; SRB, p. 10, n. j; NJB, p. 1657.

⁴⁹ See SEC, Gk. #5008 and 2891, and cf. Heb. #2924, טלה or טלהת (*teleth*), “lamb” (i.e. young girl, or an infant, see HEL, p. 100); and Heb. #6966, קום (*koom*), “rise.”

⁵⁰ SEC, Gk. #2188, Heb. #6605–8. The dot or dagesh forte found in the letter פ (*ph*) indicates that this consonant is doubled (i.e. *phph*) (see IHG, p. 6), therefore the reading “*phphathah*.”

⁵¹ SEC, Gk. #5, Heb. #2. The form *abba* is Aramaic (the א [ah] sound ending many Aramaic words), see NJB, p. 1681, n. 14, d.

⁵² See AB, NT, p. 73.

Conclusion

The evidence has compelled the leading linguistic experts to conclude that the language of Judaea and Galilee during the time of the messiah was Hebrew-Aramaic and not Greek. The noted Biblical scholar F. F. Bruce, for example, concludes:⁵³

Aramaic is known to have been the common language of Palestine, and especially of Galilee, in the time of Christ, and was in all probability the language which he and his apostles habitually spoke.

Bruce also notes that the apostle Peter (Keph) spoke a “Galilaean Aramaic” and that the Greek translations left to us “in places preserves the Aramaic idiom quite unmistakably.”⁵⁴ The well-known linguist Edward Horowitz also points out that the language of Galilee and Judaea during the first century was Hebrew. He further writes:⁵⁵

Hebrew gradually ceased being a spoken language after 70 C.E., when the Jews were driven from the land of Israel by the Romans and were scattered throughout the world. Hebrew, of course, remained alive, and was used constantly in other ways. It was the language of prayer, study, reading the Torah, and correspondence. Above all it was used as the language of a tremendously rich literature of law, theology, philosophy, science, medicine, astronomy, poetry, grammar and other fields of human knowledge.

The Hebrew language in Judaea and Galilee only began to “gradually” decrease in use after many of the Jews of Judaea and Galilee were dispersed in 70 C.E., forced out by the Roman conquest and the destruction of Jerusalem and its sacred Temple. It especially faded after the failure of the Jewish revolt against the Romans under Bar Kochba, which ended in 135 C.E. and entirely removed even the outline of a Jewish state. Nevertheless, Hebrew certainly would have been continued by the generation that was dispersed as well as by those who remained in their homeland. But the period before 70 C.E. is when the messiah taught and the lion’s share of the New Testament was composed.⁵⁶ Therefore, the messiah and his apostles lived during the period when Hebrew-Aramaic dominated the culture of Judaea and Galilee, and at a time when Greek was despised.

There is an important question that many Christians fail to consider. Why would Yahushua (the Yahweh seen by the Patriarchs of the Old Testament) teach in Greek when he had originally given his Scriptures to the Israelites in Hebrew? This question is further enhanced when we consider that, while he

⁵³ NTD, p. 38.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 37.

⁵⁵ HHLG, p. 6.

⁵⁶ See App. D.

was sojourning on earth as a man, Yahushua was living among a Hebrew-speaking people who possessed copies of the original manuscripts of the Torah and the Prophets written in Hebrew. Why would he converse about his own book to them in another language?

With all of this evidence it becomes unthinkable to assume that the messiah and his disciples went about Galilee and Judaea teaching Scriptures to the Jews of these regions using the Greek language. They were in the land of the original Scriptures, among people who still spoke the language found in the Torah and who possessed copies of the original manuscripts of the Old Testament (there being as of this time no New Testament books and letters yet authored). When the messiah or his disciples quoted Scriptures, they would quite naturally use the Hebrew version, as Matthew's text shows, not the Greek Septuagint translation, which was meant for Greek-speaking Jews living outside of Palestine and in Greek-speaking countries.⁵⁷ The evidence also shows that, as was the case with Keph, the apostles, like their contemporary the Jewish priest Josephus, did not even know Greek (Josephus having only learned it later on in his life, and after he left Judaea to live in Rome).

Even if, despite the evidence, one were to continue to argue that the New Testament was originally composed in Greek, he still would be compelled to understand it from its underlying Hebrew thought and meaning. As F. F. Bruce reminds us, "The general religious vocabulary of the Greek language was pagan in character."⁵⁸ Greek meanings are simply not reliable. Neither does Greek carry with it adequate power to transmit the original Hebrew meanings. As the ancient translator of the Hebrew book later called Ecclesiasticus has warned us, finding it necessary to apologize for the various imperfections in his Greek translation, "For the things originally spoken in Hebrew have not the same force in them when they are translated into another tongue."⁵⁹ Yahweh, who does not change, revealed himself in the Hebrew tongue, not Greek. Therefore, regardless of what language the surviving texts of the New Testament are found, Yahushua and his disciples of Judaea-Galilee during the first century C.E. read, spoke, and taught in Hebrew-Aramaic.

These facts demand that when reading the New Testament we must understand that direct quotes from the messiah and his disciples and the various discussions carried on by these people were conducted in the Hebrew-Aramaic language. When the messiah or his apostles directly quote the Old Testament, for example, proper investigation demands that the original Hebrew verse be consulted. This practice will lead us to a much clearer and more in-depth understanding of the issues and doctrines that motivated the messiah and his disciples. It also reveals, as we shall illustrate, that regardless of which language the New Testament may or may not have been originally composed, the messiah and his disciples not only spoke and taught in the Hebrew-Aramaic language but regularly used the sacred name.

⁵⁷ For further discussion see Vol. II.

⁵⁸ BP, p. 159.

⁵⁹ Ecclus., Prologue.

