

The background of the cover is a photograph of a desert canyon. The rock formations are light-colored and show distinct horizontal layering. Several cave openings are visible, some of which are dark and shadowed. The overall scene is arid and rugged.

# THE COMMON LANGUAGE

JESUS  
HEBREW  
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ARAMAIC

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# THE COMMON LANGUAGE JESUS, HEBREW, AND ARAMAIC

**DANUTAS N BROWN**

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# Contents

In what language was Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount preached? .....	4
The Biblical Evidence .....	5
Aramaic being used requires an interpreter .....	6
Different Theories on who are the Galileans .....	10
The Dead Sea Scrolls.....	14
Netanyahu and Pope Francis Dispute the Language of Jesus .....	18
Two Instances of Aramaic – Mark 5:41 and Mark 7:34 .....	24
Does Jesus call the Canaanite woman a dog? .....	28
Are we with or without chastisement? .....	33
How did Jews view Aramaic?.....	34
My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me? .....	38
Aramaic in the Book of Daniel .....	43
Ezra and the finishing of the work.....	49
Conclusion .....	53

## In what language was Jesus's Sermon on the Mount preached?

It is a simple question, but there is much disagreement on the answer. It is generally accepted that Jesus and the disciples knew to various degrees (at least) 3 languages: Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic; with arguments about how proficient they were in each (Judea was a trilingual environment). But what was the language Jesus used to teach the common people? What language did John the Baptist preach in? Some say Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament and the language of the Israelites (seemingly the most obvious answer); some argue Greek, the language of the New Testament (the language Jesus's words were recorded in); but the consensus among scholars is Aramaic. It is the language used in Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ*. But what is Aramaic? And was this really the vernacular of the Jews at that time? I argue in this booklet that new evidence shows that while the Jews could speak Aramaic, for the majority it was NOT their first language, and it was not the language Jesus and John the Baptist preached in to the common Jew.

Aramaic is also called Syriac or Chaldean, and it rose to prominence first in the Neo-Assyrian Empire around 800BC. It is this empire that besieged Jerusalem in the time of the prophet Elisha. Babylon, the kingdom that succeeded Assyria, inherited the language. When Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem and took the Israelites captive, the Hebrews had to learn this new language in the Babylonian court (now present-day Iraq). Many of the enslaved Jews picked up this language at the time of Babylonian and Persian rule, as it had become the lingua franca of the Middle East (the common language, like English now). Much of the Talmud is written in this language.

Why is this important? There are those who argue that only highly educated Pharisees understood the Hebrew language, and that the common people did not know it well or at all. This has the implication that the common Israelites listening to the *Sermon on the Mount* would not have known the language the Torah and the Prophets were written in. This would limit their ability to understand the prophecies. The disciples' understanding of the

scriptures would be limited and suspect, as they were fisherman and didn't have higher theological education. And how could Jesus quote scripture in Aramaic when there was no Aramaic translation during His lifetime?

If Jesus was quoting scriptures to the people and His Hebrew was poor (because he hadn't learned in the school of the Pharisees), could He be misquoting? And if He was quoting Hebrew to people who didn't understand Hebrew, what was the point? In Aramaic there was no shared acceptable translation like there was in Greek with the Septuagint, so if He spoke in Aramaic did He translate the scripture verses Himself?

There is no doubt that Jesus did speak Aramaic, as there are some Aramaic words in the Gospels. The most famous is Jesus on the cross when He said: "And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46) If Jesus normally did speak Hebrew, why did He say this in Aramaic?

There is also the fact that parts of the Old Testament are in Aramaic, particularly in Ezra and Daniel. Why is this so? How did the Jews understand Aramaic and its relationship to them, and its relationship to Hebrew? There are interesting answers to these questions.

## The Biblical Evidence

What language does the Bible say was spoken by the Jews? The New Testament continuously mentions Hebrew being used, such as in the title placed on the cross being "in Hebrew" (John 19:20):

"And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin."

Some words are given "in the Hebrew tongue," such as Bethesda, Gabbatha, Golgotha, Abaddon, and Armageddon (John 5:2; 19:13, 17; Rev. 9:11; 16:16).

Paul gaining the silence of the Jerusalem crowd by addressing them “in the Hebrew tongue” (Acts 21:40; 22:2):

“...Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue...”

Jesus calling out to Paul, on the Damascus road, “in the Hebrew tongue” (Acts 26:14):

“And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.”

Are we to take these as meaning Aramaic? That is what many scholars do, because words like ‘Golgotha’, or ‘place of the skull’, seem to be closer to Aramaic than Hebrew. The problem is, does that mean we can interpret every time Scripture says “in Hebrew” as meaning “in Aramaic”? Some argue precisely that, saying that what is meant by “Hebrew” here is whatever language the Jews spoke, but this is highly confusing when the two are distinct languages. If “in Hebrew” in the New Testament Greek always meant “in Aramaic”, how would the Bible tell us if somebody were actually speaking Hebrew and not Aramaic? Are the two languages interchangeable? We will see that though the two languages were both Semitic, in the minds of the Israelites themselves the two languages were distinctly separate.

### Aramaic being used requires an interpreter

Let us look at what some commentators say of this verse, about the field that was bought by the Pharisees from the money that Judas got and then gave back to them for betraying Jesus.

“And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of Blood.” (Acts 1:19)

Adam Clarke says this about this verse:

“This *proper tongue* was not the Hebrew; that had long ceased to be the *proper tongue* in Palestine: it was a sort of Chaldaio-Syriac which was commonly spoken.

Regarding Paul addressing the people “in the Hebrew tongue” in Acts 21:40, Albert Barnes says:

“The language which was spoken by the Jew, which was then a mixture of the Chaldee and Syriac, called Syro-Chaldaic [Aramaic]. This language he doubtless used on this occasion in preference to the Greek, because it was understood better by the multitude, and would tend to conciliate them if they heard him address them in their own tongue.”

As I searched EG White database, I found a book called *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (1883) by Alfred Edersheim, a Jewish convert to Christianity (but not to Adventism). This book was famous in its time and often used as a resource by the Pioneers. It rehearses the common pre-Dead Sea Scrolls opinion:

Altered circumstances had brought many changes to the new Jewish State. Even the language, spoken and written, was other than formerly. Instead of the characters anciently employed, the exiles brought with them, on their return, those now common, the so-called square Hebrew letters, which gradually came into general use [this part of the letters is true, was done by Ezra]. The language spoken by the Jews was no longer Hebrew, but Aramaean, both in Palestine and in Babylonia [speaking of exiles who didn't return]; in the former the Western, in the latter the Eastern dialect. In fact, the common people were ignorant of pure Hebrew, which henceforth became the language of the synagogue. Even there a Methurgeman, or interpreter, had to be employed to translate into the vernacular the portions of Scripture read in the public services, and the addresses delivered by the Rabbis. (Chapter 1 of *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, A. Edersheim)

There is no doubt that Hebrew vanished as a language *after* Jesus was killed, Jerusalem fell to the Romans, and Judah/Israel ceased to exist as a nation. But here this famed author is saying it was dead *during* the time of Jesus



(because it slowly became lost after the Babylonian destruction of the 1<sup>st</sup> Temple in 586 BC); and that in the time of Jesus an interpreter, called a Methurgeman, was required to “translate into the vernacular the portions of Scripture read in the public services, and the addresses delivered by the Rabbis.” What is this Methurgeman, and did Jesus need one when He preached? Here is the entry on Meturgeman in the 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia:

With the return of the exiles from captivity the religious instruction of the people was put into the hands of the Levites (Neh. 8:7-9; 2 Chron. 27:8-9; 35:3). These functionaries were called מְבַרְרִים ("teachers"). In all probability the language of instruction was still Hebrew. **How long the Levites continued in the office of teachers and how long the Hebrew language remained intelligible to the masses are unknown;** but at a later time, when Aramaic had become the vernacular, and religious instruction had ceased to be the exclusive privilege of the priesthood, the Levitic מְבַרְרִין ("teacher") gave way to the lay כְּתוּרְמָנִן ("interpreter," "translator")...

The weekly lesson from the Pentateuch and the Prophets was read by a member of the congregation, and the meturgeman had to translate into the vernacular the Pentateuchal lesson verse by verse; from the Prophets he translated three verses at a time. While the reader of the Hebrew text was forbidden to recite by heart, the meturgeman was not permitted to read his translation from a book, or to look at the Hebrew text when translating, in order that the people should not think that the translation was contained in the text. The meturgeman was also forbidden to raise his voice higher than that of the reader of the text...

It is noteworthy that the meturgeman, whether explaining Bible or Mishnah, was not held in much esteem by the public; and in Talmud and Midrash he is frequently referred to with contempt.

Do we ever see such a process of spoken interpretation in the Bible? There is one place where it should have happened if this was actually being done in the time of Jesus:

And he [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the



book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,

“The Spirit of the Lord *is* upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.” [Jesus quotes Isaiah 61]

And he closed the book, and he gave *it* again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.” And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, “Is not this Joseph's son?” (Luke 4:16-22)

Jesus here must have read in Hebrew, because there was no written Aramaic translation, nor was it allowed. Yet there is no translator here. Where is the meturgeman that is to translate into Aramaic for the people to understand? This shows that the people in the synagogue must have understood Hebrew. Why such a commitment to Aramaic exclusivity even when it goes against what is clearly written in the Bible? The following is from Brent Minge’s excellent polemic *Jesus Spoke Hebrew: Busting the “Aramaic” Myth*:

[There was] No rigmarole with lowered voice or translation [the Aramaic translation had to be said in a softer voice than the Hebrew]. 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 [Aramaic written translations] were only widely introduced to counter the decline in Hebrew,
- (b) They [Interpreters] were clearly not present on this occasion
- (c) **The exclusive language of liturgy and worship in late second temple Israel was Hebrew in any case.**<sup>1</sup>

## Different Theories on who are the Galileans

Some accept that Hebrew was the language of Judea, but not of Galilee. I will quote now from an article that deals with the mystery of the Galileans. Who were they and what is their history?

Jesus was a Galilean. That much we know. The question of who exactly the “Galileans” were during Biblical times is a much more complicated matter. The origins and identity of the people dwelling in this northernmost part of Israel at the time of the Second Temple remains an unsolved and fascinating riddle of history-made even more interesting by the fact that the Galilee was the venue for most of Jesus’ ministry...

It was the scene of some of the most memorable events of Jewish history. Galilee also was the home of our Lord during at least thirty years of his life. The first three Gospels are chiefly taken up with our Lord’s public ministry in this province... His first miracle was wrought at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, and his last, after his resurrection, on the shore of Galilee’s sea. In Galilee our Lord delivered the Sermon on the Mount, and the discourses on The Bread of Life, on ‘Purity, on Forgiveness,’ and on Humility. In Galilee he called his first disciples...

Galilee was settled by the tribes of Zebulon, Naphtali, Issachar and Asher. The region later belonged to David’s kingdom and then to the

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<sup>1</sup><http://danielbenyaacovysrael.blogspot.com/2013/06/did-yehoshua-spoke-hebrew-or-aramaic.html>

northern nation of Israel. The situation was straightforward enough until the Assyrians under Emperor Tiglath-Pileser III conquered Israel in 733 BCE, and obliterated the kingdom entirely under his successor Shalmaneser V in 722 BCE. Most historians believe that the victorious Assyrians, as was their custom, evacuated and relocated the entire population out of the Galilee and replaced them with other peoples from their far-flung empire.

Out of Jewish sovereignty for the next 600 years, Galilee returned to Jewish political control when the Hasmonean rulers conquered the region and added it to their short-lived kingdom-along with Idumea, the ancient kingdom of Edom, east of the Dead Sea. One school of scholarship says that John Hyrcanus forced the Gentile Galileans and Idumeans to convert to Judaism more or less at sword-point, marking the one and only forced mass conversion to Judaism's in its 4,000 year history. Thus, in Jesus' time, the Galilee contained many Jews whose ancestors had only been Jewish for about a century. [note: I believe this theory to be wrong]

Another school of thought, however, says that when the Assyrians conquered Israel and evacuated the Galilee, they left the land virtually empty [I believe the following argument]. Says *Religion Today* contributor Paul Flesher:

At this moment, Galilee drops out of history for the next 600 years. To be sure, 2 Kings 17 tells of the resettlement of Samaria, but Galilee is not mentioned.

Archaeological research now reveals this was not just an oversight of the Biblical writers. Surface surveys indicate no human occupation of the Galilee during the sixth and seventh centuries BCE. A few scattered, small settlements began to appear in following centuries, mostly military outposts and a few small farming communities which sent their harvests to the coastal cities. The same conclusions can be drawn from the excavations of major sites as well. So Galilee remains essentially empty for more than half a millennium following the Assyrian invasions.

The archaeological evidence reveals a sudden change about the start of the first century BC. Over a period of a couple decades, dozens of new villages appear. This indicates that a new, rather large, population comes into Galilee. The trend continues for the next half century or so, with many new settlements appearing and then growing larger.

Who were these new inhabitants? These new archaeological findings indicate that they were transplanted Judeans. The ancient historian Josephus relates how Alexander Jannaeus, the King of Israel from 102 to 76 BC, extended the northern boundary of his Judean-centered country into Galilee during his reign using military means.

...First, the currency of the region is now that of the Judean Jannaeus and his successors; it is not that of the coastal cities or of Damascus further north in Syria. Second, excavated village areas reveal the same interest in religious purity common among Judeans, with ritual baths cut out of the bedrock and houses that contained stone bowls, cups and plates that were impervious to impurity. Third, the Galileans followed a Judean diet in that they did not eat pork; no pig bones are found in the garbage dumps.

So the archaeological research of recent decades now shows that the Galilean population of Jesus' time were descendants of Judean immigrants of a century or so earlier.

...Regardless of their origins, however, the points about Galileans on which virtually everyone could agree was their fierce attachment to what they regarded as Judaism, their uncompromising patriotism, and their unstinting courage. Perhaps no sector of the Jewish population fought the Romans with more valor, refusing to surrender even when Judeans were ready to come to terms. As the great contemporary Josephus recorded, Galileans were "always able to make a strong resistance on all occasions of war; for the Galileans

are inured to war from their infancy ... nor has the country ever been destitute of men of courage.”<sup>2</sup>

The vast majority of people who lived in Galilee at the time of Jesus were immigrants from Judea who resettled the area during the time following Judas Maccabeus, under the Judean Hasmonean Dynasty, starting from around 160 BC. From the article *Were the Galileans “Religious Jews” or “Ethnic Judeans?”* by Markus Cromhout:

“Also the view that Galilee had many Gentiles must be abandoned. Any significant Gentile presence in the first century is not attested by the archaeological record. This stands in glaring contrast to the surrounding regions which were predominantly Gentile, although which also had “Jewish” minorities.”

Overall, the archaeological evidence combines to suggest that from the Hasmonean annexation of the territory, “Jews” dominated the region. “Galilean Jews had a different social, economic and political matrix than Jews living in Judea or the Diaspora ... but they all were Jewish.” This also means that they lived according to the broader pattern of “common Judaism”, and along with other “Jews” lived out their identity as a form of protest against foreign cultural influences.<sup>3</sup>

Brett Minge has some good thoughts on this point also:

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. The very synagogue itself took its architectural shape from the “Galilean model”. 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

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.travelujah.com/stories/who-were-galileans-days-jesus>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/hts/v64n3/v64n3a08.pdf>

population of Galilee, is a discrimination which is historically untenable.

Regardless, all this evidence may not be totally convincing if it wasn't for a great discovery that brings alive the era just prior to Christ. Praise God for one of the greatest blessings given to the people of the end-time to shore up their faith – The Dead Sea Scrolls.

## The Dead Sea Scrolls

Discovered in the aftermath of WW2, the Dead Sea Scrolls consist of hundreds of manuscripts and fragments from three centuries before the time of Christ up into the 1<sup>st</sup> century after Christ. It is miraculous that so much has survived until present, which is due to the unique climate of the area – dry and constant at 400m below sea level – and the chemicals and salts used on the parchment to make them last longer.

I first became a Christian when in astonishment I read Uriah Smith's (who was a channel of Adventism's understanding at the time) monumental work, *Commentary on Daniel and Revelation*. I thought to myself: it is impossible for such prophecies just to be made up by men, because they range over such a long period of time. I later learned that one of the main arguments against the book of Daniel is that it was not written in the time it claims to be written (6<sup>th</sup> Century BC), but that it was rather written in the time of Antiochus between 200-100 BC, and that is why the prophecies work. But the Dead Sea Scrolls do away with this 2<sup>nd</sup> theory by showing the Book of Daniel to already have been accepted into the Canon of the Hebrew Bible by 100 BC; which was only possible if it was much older and actually came from the time Daniel says it was written in.

I had a chance to see some of the Dead Sea Scrolls and other ancient artifacts when there was a special exhibit at the Museum of Science in Boston in 2013 (they are normally kept in Israel). I remember being astonished at the great Isaiah scroll, and also the coins with David's face on them. And I saw with sadness the little Ashtoreth idols that were found in all the houses of the Jews also. This exhibit helped encourage me that the

ancient Jews were not liars or delusional, with a made-up religion, but that there was a historicity and a devotion to truth in their relationship to their national religion.

Before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the oldest known manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible dated to the 10th century A.D. The Dead Sea Scrolls include over 225 copies of biblical books that date up to 1,200 years earlier.

These range from small fragments to a complete scroll of the prophet Isaiah, and every book of the Hebrew Bible except Esther and Nehemiah. They show that the books of the Jewish Bible were known and treated as sacred writings before the time of Jesus, with essentially the same content.<sup>4</sup>

What do the Dead Sea Scrolls tell us about the language of the Jews at the time of Jesus? This would be information that was unavailable to Biblical commentators prior to 1947, such as Clarke, Barnes, and Edersheim. The 1996 book *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* says this about the language at the time of Jesus (excerpted from [here](#)).

#### The Languages Used in the Scrolls

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, the written language of the Mishnah, Tosephta, and other rabbinic literature of 200 C.E. and later, 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. Even in this tongue, literary production was thought to be meager. Accordingly, prominent scholars writing in the mid-1940s (on the

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<sup>4</sup><http://theconversation.com/the-dead-sea-scrolls-are-a-priceless-link-to-the-bibles-past-105770>



eve of the scrolls' discovery) expressed doubts that the composition of a Semitic Gospel was even possible. Edgar Goodspeed, for example, argued: "The Gospel is Christianity's contribution to literature. It is the most potent type of religious literature ever devised. To credit such a creation to the most barren age of a never very productive tongue like Aramaic would seem the height of improbability. For in the days of Jesus the Jews of Palestine were not engaged in writing books. It is not too much to say that a Galilean or Jerusalem Jew of the time of Christ would regard writing a book in his native tongue with positive horror."

The discovery of the scrolls swept these linguistic notions into the trash bin. Here were hundreds and hundreds of texts, tangible evidence of substantial literary productivity. Apart from copies of biblical books, about one out of six of the Dead Sea Scrolls is inscribed in Aramaic. Clearly the writing of an Aramaic Gospel was eminently possible. Yet 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. A few texts pointed to the use of Hebrew for speech as well as writing. These works (for example, A Sectarian Manifesto, text 84) displayed a missinglink type of Hebrew, intermediate between the form of Hebrew used in the Bible and that used by the rabbis. Rabbinic Hebrew was shown to be no invention, but simply a development from the ordinary spoken Hebrew of biblical times.

The scrolls have therefore proven that late Second-Temple Jews used various dialects of Hebrew along with Aramaic. (These two languages are closely related—Aramaic is to Hebrew as French is to Italian.) For writing, however, they generally tried to imitate biblical Hebrew, an older form of the language. The situation would be analogous to our trying today to write in the style of Elizabethan Page English...

A small minority of the scrolls were written in Greek. Their discovery has vouchsafed us a further glimpse into the linguistic complexity of first-century Jewish society. Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek:

each was being used in particular situations of speech and writing. We are only just beginning to discover some of the rules for those uses, to bring to bear the more sophisticated perspectives of sociolinguistics.

Only 25% of the Dead Sea Scrolls is religious writings. Of these non-religious writings, Hebrew still remains the main language of use, not Greek nor Aramaic. Extraordinary linguist Jozef Milik, who worked deciphering the Dead Sea Scrolls, had this to say in 1960:

The thesis of scholars like [Moses] Segal, ben-Jehuda, and Klausner, according to whom Mishnaic Hebrew was a language spoken by the population of Judaea during Persian and Greco-Roman periods, is no longer a hypothesis; it is an established fact. Several *legal* documents from Murabbaat are in Mishnaic Hebrew; but they are less numerous than those in Aramaic. But Mishnaic Hebrew is the sole language of *correspondence*. [meaning personal letters were all in Hebrew] (Taken from [here](#))

Remember that the prevailing theory prior to the Dead Sea Scrolls was that Hebrew was a dead language. This is professedly not true, as Milik says above that Hebrew being spoken by the population of Judaea was “an established fact.” Yet in the face of massive archaeological findings, still many continue to parrot the idea that Hebrew was lost from everyday usage from the time of the exile, 586 BC.

Let us look at what the common notion among scholars of the time was again:

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.

Did Ellen White agree with this notion that Hebrew “was no longer learned at mother’s knee?” Her forthrightness on this matter is all the more remarkable because she wrote before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls:

From the earliest times the faithful in Israel had given much care to the education of the youth. The Lord had directed that even from babyhood the children should be taught of His goodness and His greatness, especially as revealed in His law, and shown in the history of Israel. Song and prayer and lessons from the Scriptures were to be adapted to the opening mind. Fathers and mothers were to instruct their children that the law of God is an expression of His character, and that as they received the principles of the law into the heart, the image of God was traced on mind and soul. Much of the teaching was oral; but the youth also learned to read the Hebrew writings; and the parchment rolls of the Old Testament Scriptures were open to their study...

The child Jesus did not receive instruction in the synagogue schools. His mother was His first human teacher. From her lips and from the scrolls of the prophets, He learned of heavenly things. The very words which He Himself had spoken to Moses for Israel He was now taught at His mother's knee. As He advanced from childhood to youth, He did not seek the schools of the rabbis. He needed not the education to be obtained from such sources; for God was His instructor. (DA 70)

Remember Jesus is born in a humble village in Galilee, and He didn't study in any Rabbinic school. Yet at the age of 12 he could converse with the Pharisees in the Temple in Jerusalem, which must have been done in Hebrew. (Luke 2:39-52)

## Netanyahu and Pope Francis Dispute the Language of Jesus

In 2014 the Pope and the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, had a public disagreement on the language of Jesus. It became a big discussion in Israel, with multiple commentators debating it. Netanyahu says first that Jesus spoke Hebrew, and then he is corrected by the Pope, who says "Aramaic." On commenting on this interaction, the prevailing opinion in newspapers is that the Pope got this one right. It shows how, even with all the discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls, a traditional belief just doesn't easily

fade away; especially if such an opinion fits nicely with a dispensational mindset, cutting off Jesus from the Old Testament.

I found one article by Randall Buth in Haaretz Newspaper, Israel's oldest and most respected newspaper (it leans center-left liberal), that addressed the discussion. Underlined is my emphasis.

Around the turn of the millennium, I received an email from a party looking to create a film script [should be Mel Gibson's *Passion of Christ*] about a first century Jewish sage teaching in Aramaic. Since my PhD was in Aramaic, and Semitic languages are an area of expertise, would I be interested? It aroused my curiosity, so I wrote back with a question: Since Jewish teachers in the first century tended to use Hebrew, why would the filmmakers want an Aramaic script? I received a short response that this film script was about Jesus, as if that was enough said. I declined their offer.

Last week's news controversy over Jesus' language, sparked by the exchange between Israel Prime Minister Netanyahu and the pope, brings to light how an Aramaic-only speaking Jesus has been enshrined within the academy and society at large. Elon Gilad's Haaretz article "What language did Jesus speak?" is a prime example.

Gilad starts his case by quoting John 20:16 where Mary Magdalene addresses Jesus as Rabbouni, "my master, my teacher." Since the Hebrew word rabbi is widely known by specialists and the common reader alike, the assumption is made that rabbouni cannot be Hebrew and must be Aramaic. But the gospel writer called the word Hebrew, not Aramaic, and he was correct. Rabbouni is, in fact, excellent Mishnaic Hebrew. It is attested in Codex Kaufmann of Mishna Ta'anit 3.8. Mistaken conclusions like Gilad's are perpetuated by wrong assumptions which lead to wrong expectations. A century of Israeli Mishnaic Hebrew scholarship has laid the foundation for a different perspective.

Three backdrops to the language situation of Judea and the Galilee in the first century should actually reverse the expectations regarding Jesus and his languages: The colloquial nature of

Mishnaic Hebrew, the anachronistic and foreign character of the Aramaic Targum translations, and the exclusivity of Hebrew in story parables.

A common fallacy presents Hebrew usage in first century Judea and the Galilee as a strictly sacred, literary language, comparable to Latin in Medieval Europe. The notion that both Hebrew and Latin were monolithic is erroneous. During the Second Temple period, Hebrew had developed into two social dialects. The high register was a literary dialect used for prestigious communication, known today as “Late Biblical Hebrew,” the language of books like Ezra and Nehemia and much of the Qumran writings. The low register can be seen in works like the Copper Scroll from Qumran Cave 3, and in various papyri, graffiti, and inscriptions from the Second Temple period, as well as the tannaitic and amoraic writings of rabbinic literature. Already in 1908, M.H. Segal had pointed out to the scholarly world that Mishnaic Hebrew showed the marks of the internal development of a colloquial language - it was definitely not an artificial usage by a scholarly elite.

Secondly, it is argued that first century Judean and Galilean Jews needed a translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Aramaic Targums. The argument runs that the existence of the Aramaic Targums must mean that the people did not know Hebrew. However, the Targums served an interpretive interest beyond simple translation, a commentary that elucidated and expanded the plain text. Also, although many Aramaic writings are found among the Qumran community’s scrolls, except for the foreign (imported) Job and a potential text for a pilgrimage holiday, there is no Aramaic Bible. The Targum traditions that we have stem from the 2nd and 3rd century C.E. At this point in time, a widespread, first-century Aramaic Targum practice in Israel remains speculation and the evidence available, meager though it is, actually points away from such an assumption.

Parables are the third piece of the linguistic puzzle. Certain Jewish literary genres were always in Hebrew, one of which was the rabbinic story parable. In rabbinic literature, even within Aramaic

contexts, the story parable was always given in Hebrew. The potential connection with Jesus is obvious, since Jesus, too, is frequently characterized as someone who taught the populace in parables. The parable genre was used for making a point that could be readily grasped by all levels of society. They were a popular literary genre, not “highbrow” or “elitist.”

Archaeology has also been heralded as decisive evidence in the Aramaic-only Jesus. According to Gilad: “In the Galilee, where Jesus lived, Aramaic had taken over by the time Jesus was born. In the south, in Judea, archaeological evidence shows that some pockets of Hebrew still remained during the first century C.E.” This is ironic. The real problem is that we have virtually no archaeological evidence for first century Semitic (Aramaic or Hebrew) languages in the Galilee. We do have Galilean names found in the south, and they are Hebrew!

All of the above is to point out that there are strong evidences that support the prime minister's comments on Jesus. Yes, in all probability Jesus did teach in Hebrew. Contra Gilad, Bibi's father, a historian, could be proud of his son. However, the pope countered that Jesus spoke Aramaic. He, too, is partially correct. The Gospel of Mark records at least two utterances in Aramaic, both in private healing accounts, Mark 5:41 and 7:34.

The problem arises when people try to push the issue into exclusivity, either one language or the other. This reaches the most problematic point on the words of the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46, Mark 15:34). It is probable that Matthew's transliteration reflects the original form of the story, and that Mark is the one who has edited the sounds. Matthew appears to have Jesus referring to Psalm 22 either in Mishnaic Hebrew, or a mixed language, while Mark has Jesus speaking fully in Aramaic, similarly to the two healing accounts mentioned above. In any case, a few statements in Aramaic do not prove its exclusivity.

It is no longer questioned nor considered a viable option that only Aramaic was a colloquial language in the land in the first century. Hebrew was also a colloquial language and a candidate for any

teaching with Jewish audiences throughout the land, and may be the primary candidate for such teaching. As for a mother tongue, we simply do not know enough to speak about any particular family situation anywhere in the country.

Why is there such an emphasis on an Aramaic-only Jesus? What is the sub-text that unifies many of those who suggest that Jesus taught in Aramaic? If Jewish teachers tended to use Hebrew in the first century, then a Jesus that teaches in Aramaic can be portrayed as “non-Jewish” or “less-Jewish.” Some will be comfortable with that. Historically, many Christians have wanted to emphasize a universal (and non-Jewish) orientation for the Church and an Aramaic-teaching Jesus fit that role model. Ironically, the same motive might have been comforting within a Jewish context: Jesus is not one of “our Jewish teachers” and incidentally, he did not even teach in our language. Both sides could miss the real Jesus.

A Hebrew and Aramaic-speaking Jesus challenges long-held misconceptions. And even if we disagree, Netanyahu and the pope demonstrated that we can begin discussing these issues amicably.<sup>5</sup>

There are a few significant ideas in this article I want to expand upon. The first is the mention of a high and low Hebrew. This is a common development in many languages; as a language ages, it develops a colloquial form that is different from its older forms, which is often called the ‘classical’ form. The classical form would tend to be preserved in writing. In English, we could compare the colloquial/slang English of the inner-city with the ‘classical’ English of the King James Bible. They are different, but they are not separate languages; and with a little practice a high-school dropout can still read the King James Bible. But it does not mean that we would preach in 17<sup>th</sup> century English.

Presumably Jesus would use colloquial Hebrew to speak to the common people. This leads to the next interesting point made by Buth; that story

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<sup>5</sup><https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-why-jesus-was-a-hebrew-speaker-1.5250513>



parables were *always* told in Hebrew and they were not “elitist”. Parables were Jesus preferred method of teaching, and so this must have been done in Hebrew.

So what about Aramaic then? Both brings up the Targums, Aramaic translations/paraphrases of Old Testament. But these only were put into writing *after* the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. There was no written Targums in the Apostolic era. The Targums initially were not allowed to be written down, being an oral tradition, and therefore even if some Targums had begun to be passed around, Paul could not write “it was written” about something that didn’t exist in writing in Paul’s time. If Aramaic was the exclusive language of the Judeans, this would mean that the Greek speaking Jews actually had huge religious advantages because at least they had the Septuagint to refer to, while the Aramaic speaking Jews had no text to refer to. Does this make sense? Did God leave the common people to whom He is sending His Son with no capacity to read the Torah?

Both then mentions some of the reasons why people believe that Aramaic was the main language. That is because there are some Aramaic words used by Jesus and also by the Jews in the proper names of places (Golgotha, Gethsemane). Regarding the proper names of places, in America we have places named Massachusetts and Connecticut, which are Native American words – does that mean we speak a Native American language? No. It is common to incorporate words from foreign languages into ours, especially of places. In English we also have other words from other languages, like ‘cigar’ from Spanish, ‘guru’ from Sanskrit, ‘cartoon’ from Italian. It doesn’t mean we know those languages. Why foreign words are being used by Hebrews for certain places or things is unclear, but it is not good evidence that the language was commonly used by the Jews amongst themselves, nor is it evidence that Jesus was preaching in that language. For sure many of the Jews knew Aramaic, especially those Jews who lived in areas where there was more connection with the neighbouring nations, but it was not the language that Mary taught Jesus in.

## Two Instances of Aramaic – Mark 5:41 and Mark 7:34

Both then mentions two places which he says are instances of Jesus definitely speaking Aramaic. They are in Mark 5:41 and Mark 7:34. It is interesting to see where these events happened, because it was an area that Jesus chose to do most of his miracles – around the Sea of Galilee, also called the Gennesaret.

In Mark 5:1 it says this:

“And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes.”

They had been on the western side of the lake, in Galilee, and now they come to the Eastern side, into the area called Decapolis. This is a Gentile area.

“The eastern shore of Gennesaret was not uninhabited, for there were towns here and there beside the lake; yet it was desolate region when compared with the western side. It contained a population more heathen than Jewish, and had little communication with Galilee. Thus it offered Jesus the seclusion He sought, and He now bade His disciples accompany Him thither.” (DA 333.3)

It is here that Jesus removes the unclean spirits whose name is “Legion,” and allowed the demons to go in the pigs, killing them. These pig farmers were obviously gentiles, as Jews would have no part with pigs. The man who had his demons exorcised wants to go with Jesus, but Jesus tells him: “Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee. And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel.” (Mark 5:19-20)

This area of Decapolis would have used Aramaic, or Syriac, and this place is now part of present-day Syria. It is possible that Jesus could have spoken Aramaic with the people here. (Note: it is possible that these peoples had their own native tongues beside Aramaic, but used Aramaic to communicate with Jesus because it was a common language – the gentiles

were probably multilingual, and being so close to Israel they would know Hebrew to varying degrees)

Jesus goes back “by ship unto the other side” (Mark 5:21) again, back to the city of Capernaum. This city Jesus spent so much time in, dwelling there in between His journeys to and fro, that it was called “his own city” (Matthew 9:1). The exact location of Capernaum is unknown, so completely has it perished in accordance to the woe that Jesus pronounced on it in Matt 11:23 and Luke 10:15. Ellen White dedicates a whole chapter of *Desire of Ages* to the city:

Capernaum itself was well adapted to be the center of the Saviour’s work. Being on the highway from Damascus to Jerusalem and Egypt, and to the Mediterranean Sea, it was a great thoroughfare of travel. People from many lands passed through the city, or tarried for rest in their journeyings to and fro. Here Jesus could meet all nations and all ranks, the rich and great as well as the poor and lowly, and His lessons would be carried to other countries and into many households. Investigation of the prophecies would thus be excited, attention would be directed to the Saviour, and His mission would be brought before the world...

Jesus met the people on their own ground, as one who was acquainted with their perplexities. He made truth beautiful by presenting it in the most direct and simple way. His language was pure, refined, and clear as a running stream. His voice was as music to those who had listened to the monotonous tones of the rabbis. (DA 253.5)

Jesus’s teachings were clearer not because of a change of language from the Rabbis, but because of His manner and style of teaching; and His choice of subject matter. There is no issue of translation from Hebrew into Aramaic, and it is clear that the foundation of His teachings was the word of God, which must have been understood by the people even in Galilee.

But let us continue to the story in question: the use of Aramaic with Jairus’s daughter. Jairus was the ruler of the synagogue, and an elder of the Jews, and he pleads for Jesus to come heal his daughter. Jesus arrives at the house where the girl has already died, clears the house of all except the father, mother, and 3 disciples – Peter, James, and John.

And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise. (Mark 5:41)

Jesus approached the bedside, and, taking the child's hand in His own, He pronounced softly, in the familiar language of her home, the words, "Damsel, I say unto thee, arise." (DA 343.2)

If these words of Jesus, "Talitha cumi", are Aramaic, it would make this girl's home not Israel, but somewhere else. This is strange, but that is what is implied here – it is the language of *her* home, not *their* home; i.e. not Jesus's home. I wonder if this means that Jairus's wife was not Jewish, or that the girl was maybe adopted or a daughter of the mother from a previous marriage. If this were true, this would probably be unusual for a ruler of the synagogue, and it would mean that Jairus was not as racist and bigoted as some of the other Jews; seeing that he humbled himself from his high position to plead for the life of his non-Jewish daughter. It would also explain the surprise the disciples had that Jesus agreed to this request. They are never surprised when Jesus helps Jews, but they are always surprised when he helps gentiles.

The heart-broken petition, "My little daughter lieth at the point of death; I pray Thee, come and lay Thy hands on her, that she may be healed," had touched the tender, sympathetic heart of Christ, and He had at once set out with the ruler for his home. (ST June 1, 1904)

**Though the disciples had seen so many of His works of mercy, they were surprised at His compliance with the entreaty of the haughty rabbi;** yet they accompanied their Master, and the people followed, eager and expectant. (DA 342.3)

This is conjecture, but what is proved here is that the Aramaic used here was considered by Ellen White to be the first language of the girl but not of Jesus and the disciples, or it should say "in the familiar language of *their* home." If the reader doesn't agree with my conjecture, at least it must be admitted that this must be a separate language to what Jesus usually used. If not, why give the original language here at all when Jesus was already

always using that language? I believe that there is an element to this story of trying to soften the hearts of the disciples towards the gentiles, something that Jesus would continually touch upon in different ways.

The other example Buth mentioned is Mark 7:34. Notice where this took place; it was in Decapolis, which is not a part of Israel.

And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him. And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue; And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, 'Ephphatha,' that is, 'Be opened.' (Mark 7:31-34)

Ellen White says this about what happened here:

As He came again into that region, a crowd gathered about Him, and a deaf, stammering man was brought to Him. Jesus did not, according to His custom, restore the man by a word only. Taking him apart from the multitude, He put His fingers in his ears, and touched his tongue; looking up to heaven, He sighed at thought of the ears that would not be open to the truth, the tongues that refused to acknowledge the Redeemer. At the word, "Be opened," the man's speech was restored, and, disregarding the command to tell no man, he published abroad the story of his cure. (DA 404.2)

Jesus went up into a mountain, and there the multitude flocked to Him, bringing their sick and lame, and laying them at His feet. He healed them all; and the people, heathen as they were, glorified the God of Israel. For three days they continued to throng about the Saviour, sleeping at night in the open air, and through the day pressing eagerly to hear the words of Christ, and to see His works. At the end of three days their food was spent. Jesus would not send them away hungry, and He called upon His disciples to give them food. Again the disciples revealed their unbelief. At Bethsaida they had seen how, with Christ's blessing, their little store availed for the feeding of the multitude; yet they did not now bring forward their all, trusting His power to multiply it for the hungry crowds. Moreover, those whom He fed at Bethsaida were Jews; these were

Gentiles and heathen. Jewish prejudice was still strong in the hearts of the disciples, and they answered Jesus, “Whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?” But obedient to His word they brought Him what they had,—seven loaves and two fishes. The multitude were fed, seven large baskets of fragments remaining. Four thousand men, besides women and children, were thus refreshed, and Jesus sent them away with glad and grateful hearts. (DA 404.3)

Then taking a boat with His disciples, He crossed the lake to Magdala, at the southern end of the plain of Gennesaret. In the border of Tyre and Sidon His spirit had been refreshed by the confiding trust of the Syrophoenician woman. The heathen people of Decapolis had received Him with gladness. Now as He landed once more in Galilee, where His power had been most strikingly manifested, where most of His works of mercy had been performed, and His teaching given, He was met with contemptuous unbelief. (DA 404.4)

Jesus had already done a miracle to feed the masses at Bethsaida, but the disciples don't think He will perform a miracle to feed the people in Decapolis. Why? Because they are gentiles and heathen. Just like even though He had cured many people, they still didn't think He would cure Jairus's daughter because she, I argue, is a gentile. We know that the Jews were bigoted against foreigners, particularly the Canaanites. The prejudice of the disciples is striking considering they had just prior to this event travelled with Jesus all the way to Phoenicia just to perform one miracle – removing the demon from the Canaanite's daughter.

### Does Jesus call the Canaanite woman a dog?

Looking westward, He could see, spread out upon the plain below, the ancient cities of Tyre and Sidon, with their heathen temples, their magnificent palaces and marts of trade, and the harbors filled with shipping. Beyond was the blue expanse of the Mediterranean, over which the messengers of the gospel were to bear its glad tidings to the centers of the world's great empire. But the time was

not yet. **The work before Him now was to prepare His disciples for their mission.** In coming to this region He hoped to find the retirement He had failed to secure at Bethsaida. Yet this was not His only purpose in taking this journey. (DA 399.1)

The disciples would need to understand that the mission of Christ was to save the world. As they were at that moment, they were actually impeding Jesus from His mission. The interaction with the Canaanite woman would be a lesson to them to widen their eyes to what Jesus wanted them to do.

“Behold, a Canaanitish woman came out from those borders, and cried, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.” Matthew 15:22, R. V. The people of this district were of the old Canaanite race. They were idolaters, and were despised and hated by the Jews. To this class belonged the woman who now came to Jesus. She was a heathen, and was therefore excluded from the advantages which the Jews daily enjoyed. There were many Jews living among the Phoenicians, and the tidings of Christ's work had penetrated to this region... It was her resolute purpose to bring her affliction to Jesus. He must heal her child. She had sought help from the heathen gods, but had obtained no relief. And at times she was tempted to think, What can this Jewish teacher do for me? But the word had come, He heals all manner of diseases, whether those who come to Him for help are rich or poor. She determined not to lose her only hope. (DA 399.2)

I have pondered much on what language this interaction was in. I at first thought Aramaic, because she is a Canaanite. That would explain some of the disgust the disciples have for her. But then I thought she, living so close to Israel, might know Hebrew, and therefore she would have thought a holy Jewish teacher needed to be addressed in Hebrew. She would have been ashamed to talk to Him in her own language. But I felt she might have not been confident in Hebrew. Mark 7:26 says she was a Greek, and that could be telling us that this interaction was in Greek, which she may have been more confident in and would have less hated connotations for the Jews than Aramaic. Regardless, her gods could not help her, and now she needed



the Messiah of a foreign nation – her identity was in flux... But Jesus would work in a way to ensure her that God loved her.

Does not Jesus understand Satan’s attacks on our identity? Satan tempted Him in the wilderness about whether God loved Him and whether He was really His Son. Throughout His ministry Christ was constantly having to reject the temptation of thinking that His Father was not there for Him, seeing as His mission was met with so many seeming failures and rejections.

He [Christ] desired them to see the ignorance existing in cities and villages close to the land of Israel. The people who had been given every opportunity to understand the truth were without a knowledge of the needs of those around them. No effort was made to help souls in darkness. The partition wall which Jewish pride had erected, shut even the disciples from sympathy with the heathen world. But these barriers were to be broken down. (DA 400.1)

Christ did not immediately reply to the woman's request. **He received this representative of a despised race as the Jews would have done. In this He designed that His disciples should be impressed with the cold and heartless manner in which the Jews would treat such a case, as evinced by His reception of the woman, and the compassionate manner in which He would have them deal with such distress, as manifested by His subsequent granting of her petition.** (DA 400.2)

Just as Jesus “designed that His disciples should be impressed with the cold heartless manner in which the Jews would treat such a case,” all humanity was to be impressed by the cold heartless manner in which we treated the Son of God when He came to this world. By the “compassionate manner” in which Jesus asked His Father to forgive us for we know not what we do, He teaches us how to have mercy and understanding for those who are different and opposed to us.

But although Jesus did not reply, the woman did not lose faith. As He passed on, as if not hearing her, she followed Him, continuing her supplications. Annoyed by her importunities, the disciples asked Jesus to send her away. They saw that their Master treated her with indifference, and they therefore supposed that the prejudice of the

Jews against the Canaanites was pleasing to Him. But it was a pitying Saviour to whom the woman made her plea, and in answer to the request of the disciples, Jesus said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Although this answer appeared to be in accordance with the prejudice of the Jews, it was an implied rebuke to the disciples, which they afterward understood as reminding them of what He had often told them,—that He came to the world to save all who would accept Him. (DA 400.3)

The Jews asked Pilate to crucify Jesus. They saw God as not hearing Jesus, and therefore supposed that their prejudice towards Jesus was pleasing to God. The parts of the Torah that demanded the death of the sinner they also thought pleasing to God and in accordance with their prejudice.

In His dealing with the Canaanite woman, Jesus humbled Himself to help her in such a way that would enlighten her and His disciples' understanding; it must hurt Him that He needs to portray such hardness. This is part of His cross (denial of self), and this He does because He sees that the woman also has an understanding of the cross; that she is willing to deny herself and see grace where it seems there is none.

What about Jesus at Calvary? Do we see grace there, or do we see condemnation, a threat from God to the world to do what I say or you will be executed?

"It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." And she said, "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." (Matt 15:27-28)

She begs for the crumbs that fall from the Master's table. If she may have the privilege of a dog, she is willing to be regarded as a dog. She has no national or religious prejudice or pride to influence her course, and she immediately acknowledges Jesus as the Redeemer, and as being able to do all that she asks of Him. (DA 401.2)

This process may be necessary for all of us; that for us to truly become children of Israel we have to first accept that we are dogs in our relation to Christ (we wanted Him dead), seeing our wretchedness and need (our

Laodicean condition), and then we can have the agape relationship with our Father in Heaven that Christ has with God.

The woman doesn't allow national or religious prejudice to "influence her course" – this is the Spirit of Christ. The woman was looked upon as a dog, and she was willing to be a dog to be a channel through which God could heal her daughter. Is this a clue to how Jesus felt on the cross, seeing as He was looked upon by the Jews as a dog? Jesus was willing to be a dog in their eyes so that the human race might be healed.

In this story, who was really the dog? She, or the disciples who were trying to drive Jesus away from her? Who was experiencing the cross and denying self here, the woman or the disciples? The woman. The disciples were watching her on the cross and thinking she was forsaken of God. The woman had to ignore their bigotry to reach the grace of Christ. Was she feeling like this?

Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help. Many bulls have compassed me: strong *bulls* of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me *with* their mouths, *as* a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. (Psalm 22:11-16)

This psalm is about Jesus on the cross, but it can be applied anywhere a man has taken up the cross (denying self) and is persecuted for it; when people are persecuted for Christ's "name's sake" – believing in or manifesting His character. The woman in coming to this Jewish Messiah is denying self, she believes in His character, and she is attacked for it by those who profess to believe in God. The disciples surround her and unwittingly are being used by Satan to attempt to break her faith that the Son of God should have blessings for ALL people.

## Are we with or without chastisement?

If we have limited views of God's grace, believing that some are beyond salvation, we are dogs. But if we ever recognize that we are dogs (for we all have been a dog at some point), we can remember this story, and know that God doesn't judge us for misunderstanding him. He didn't judge the woman nor the disciples. No matter how far we have gone, we can shift from dog to child, we only need faith.

My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. (Hebrews 12:5-8)

The last sentence is interesting. How can all be "partakers" of chastisement, yet some be "without chastisement"? We can be "without chastisement" if we don't believe God is a Father who is dealing with us in love for our own good; we see God's chastisement as condemnation, therefore rejecting His Fatherhood/character and by our own choice become bastards.

The disciples would be despised by their own Jewish brethren in the same way they despised the Canaanite woman. This lesson would come back to them and help them to forgive their Jewish brethren who misunderstood and scorned their declaring Jesus to be the Saviour of the world; just as they had misunderstood and scorned the Canaanite woman. They would remember how Jesus bore with them, and therefore they would bear long with their brethren too; all the while being zealous to take the gospel to the world "unrestricted by custom or nationality."

The same agencies that barred men away from Christ eighteen hundred years ago are at work today. The spirit which built up the partition wall between Jew and Gentile is still active. Pride and prejudice have built strong walls of separation between different classes of men. Christ and His mission have been misrepresented, and multitudes feel that they are virtually shut away from the

ministry of the gospel. But let them not feel that they are shut away from Christ. There are no barriers which man or Satan can erect but that faith can penetrate. (DA 403.1)

In faith the woman of Phoenicia flung herself against the barriers that had been piled up between Jew and Gentile. Against discouragement, regardless of appearances that might have led her to doubt, she trusted the Saviour's love. It is thus that Christ desires us to trust in Him. The blessings of salvation are for every soul. Nothing but his own choice can prevent any man from becoming a partaker of the promise in Christ by the gospel. (DA 403.2)

When the disciples would feel discouraged in the future, they could always remember the Canaanite woman, who, though knowing little, “trusted the Saviour’s love.” They remembered Jesus’s declaration to the woman: “O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt!”

### How did Jews view Aramaic?

When we think of things that separate us, we tend to think of skin color, gender, material wealth. But it is a people’s language that is the major vehicle of culture and tradition, uniting a people as distinct and separate from another people with a different language. The language becomes shaped by the worldview and shapes the worldview in return. Different peoples can become American if they know English, but without English it is very difficult to be accepted. The same is true in my homeland of Thailand: it is the Thai language that is at the heart of ‘Thai-ness’. The word *barbarian* was a Greek word that referred to all non-Greek speaking people, emphasizing their otherness. A difference in language is at the root of calling someone different than you a barbarian, primitive, or lower.

In Thai, my language, we call anything lame, silly, or stupid *Lao*, i.e. from the country of *Laos* – because we look down on that country. *Lao* becomes an adjective meaning *stupid*. In a similar manner, centuries of bigotry must have cast a foul tint on the meanings of many words in Hebrew. How much hatred and hostility had become engrained in the Hebrew language,

corrupting it and exerting a terrible influence on each successive generation of children who learned the language?

If the Jews looked down on their gentile neighbours around them, how would they look upon their common language of Aramaic? As Hebrew was a minor language compared to Aramaic, they would have been pressured to learn Aramaic too, and that must have annoyed them, just like it annoys many Thais that they need to learn English. It is here that I am really indebted to the work of Brent Minge and others who dug up what the Talmud and other writings at the time say of Aramaic (the writers of the Talmud denigrate Aramaic even as they often are writing in Aramaic! This is because after Jerusalem is destroyed, the nation of Judah vanishes and with it their national language; so when the Talmud is written later it is often written in Aramaic).

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”. 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. To depart from the synagogue service during a Hebrew Bible reading was forbidden, but not for an Aramaic reading. 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”!

To the Jewish people, it was Hebrew that was “the Holy Tongue”, whereas Aramaic was seen as “the language of the Evil Force” [From Zohar]. 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”.

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”. 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”.

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”. Such was the regard for a pioneering attempt at an Aramaic portion of Scripture, in the Judaea of Yehoshua’s [Jesus’s] time!

This shows clearly the strength of feeling the Jews had against Aramaic. Humanly speaking, it is understandable. This is the language of Babylon and Assyria, the great pagan nations that destroyed Northern Israel and the Temple of Solomon. It should have been Hebrew that was the common language of the Middle East; but the Jews’ place as the head of nations was taken by Babylon and their language as the head of the languages of the Middle East was taken by Aramaic.

But spiritually speaking, the Jews totally misunderstood God’s plan for them. They had not taken the gospel to the world; they had not shown the law of God as a blessing that was good for all men and God as a loving Father who wanted to take care of all humanity. The difference in language with the nations around them became an excuse to construct walls of

separation ever greater. They felt no responsibility for the lost and dying, and didn't perceive that the gentiles bore "sorrows unknown to those more highly favoured." (DA 402.4) Many of these people hungered for the truth given to the Jews, but the Jews didn't see themselves as channels to share the truth. Instead the Jews believed that the truth resided with them because of birthright (in their blood) – and because the gentiles were not of the birthright, the Jews were taught to disregard them, and this became ingrained in their language and how they spoke of their neighbours.

The Jews were put into captivity in Babylon for 70 years to humble them. They were forced to interact with the other nations, and forced to be their servants. They were *forced to learn their language – Aramaic*. Now that they knew the lingua franca language of the gentiles, it was God's hope that they would share the great blessings they had received from God because of the greater ease of communication. But knowing the language didn't cause the Jews to empathize or share more. They instead used Aramaic words for anything they considered profane, evil, or dark. Thus it became used for "dirges," for names like 'Golgotha' – place of the skull, and for legal and business contracts. The use of the Aramaic language in this way gave it an atmosphere of negativity.

Jesus aims to show them that this superior judgmental attitude will end in their cutting themselves off from the kingdom of heaven. It is this zealous self-righteous condemning attitude that caused their forefathers to kill the prophets who were sent by God to warn and to teach. Their hardheartedness would end in their own destruction.

And he said, "Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; **But unto none of them was Elias [Elijah] sent, save unto Sarepta, a [gentile] city of Sidon [its name coming from the first-born son of Canaan], unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus [Elisha] the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.**"



And all they in the synagoge, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the edge of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. (Luke 4:24-29)

To continue to hold onto your hatred for your enemy is to hate the words that Jesus spoke: “love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven.” (Matthew 5:44-45). And to hate these words is to hate the person who speaks them; and to hate Jesus is to destroy yourself: “seeing you put it from you [the word of God] and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life...” (Acts 13:46)

But God is a merciful God, and He sends His Son to speak to us according to our own understanding. We saw that Jesus did that in the situation with the Canaanite woman and the disciples. He also did that in telling the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. Ellen White says this about the story and how Jesus operates:

In this parable Christ was meeting the people on their own ground. The doctrine of a conscious state of existence between death and the resurrection was held by man of those who were listening to Christ’s words. **The Saviour knew of their ideas, and He framed His parable so as to inculcate important truths through these preconceived opinions. He held up before His hearers a mirror wherein they might see themselves in their true relation to God.** He used the prevailing opinion to convey the idea He wished to make prominent to all... (COL 263)

### My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?

These terrible words at the cross haunted me when I first became a Christian. What did they mean? Jesus speaking these Aramaic words on the cross was also a mirror, while also making a point of empathy with all who suffer: “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani, which is, being interpreted

[translated], My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Remember that when we see the words "being interpreted" it means that it was not the usual language Jesus spoke. One of the most important moments in the history of the universe, when Jesus is to quote Psalm 22:1 which would point everyone to the prophecies of the cross, and Jesus doesn't do it in Hebrew! The Pharisees, who would surely have known the verse, misunderstood it, consciously or unconsciously.

"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" These words would not be misunderstood, but priests and rulers interpreted them to suit their own understanding. With bitter contempt and scorn, they said, "This man calleth for Elias." Jesus said, "I thirst." These words, which should have awakened compassion in every heart, were held up to ridicule by the priests, in whose hearts humanity was eclipsed by satanic malignity. One of the hardened Roman soldiers, touched with pity as he looked at the parched lips, took a stalk of hyssop, and dipping it in a vessel of vinegar, lifted it to the Saviour's lips. But from the mockers came the words, "Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him." (RH Dec 28, 1897)

"[It] appears to be Aramaic rather than Hebrew because of the verb שבק (*šbq*) "abandon", which is originally Aramaic. The "pure" Biblical Hebrew counterpart to this word, עזב (*'zb*) is seen in the second line of Psalm 22, which the saying appears to quote. Thus, Jesus is not quoting the canonical Hebrew version (*ēlī ēlī lāmā 'azabtānī*)" (Wikipedia)

How we look at what is happening at Calvary determines our understanding of justice and righteousness. These two perspectives are shown in Daniel 7 and Daniel 8, but before we go there we need to look at Calvary closely.

With amazement angels witnessed the Saviour's despairing agony. The hosts of heaven veiled their faces from the fearful sight. Inanimate nature expressed sympathy with its insulted and dying Author. The sun refused to look upon the awful scene. Its full, bright rays were illuminating the earth at midday, when suddenly it seemed to be blotted out. Complete darkness, like a funeral pall,

enveloped the cross. "There was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour." There was no eclipse or other natural cause for this darkness, which was as deep as midnight without moon or stars. **It was a miraculous testimony given by God that the faith of after generations might be confirmed.**

In that thick darkness God's presence was hidden. He makes darkness His pavilion, and conceals His glory from human eyes. God and His holy angels were beside the cross. The Father was with His Son. Yet His presence was not revealed. Had His glory flashed forth from the cloud, every human beholder would have been destroyed. **And in that dreadful hour Christ was not to be comforted with the Father's presence.** He trod the wine press alone, and of the people there was none with Him. (DA 753)

God was there with Jesus, but He didn't comfort Him. How painful this must have been for the Father! That He must allow His Son to feel forsaken in this terrible moment, not because God wants to, but because it is necessary to break the power of sin over men's hearts – the sinfulness that causes us to think when things are tough and we are suffering that we are condemned of God! Jesus had it tough, but He overcame this temptation to think He was forsaken of God. Even in our darkest moments when we feel that we are forgotten of God, we can know He is there if we claim the faith of the Son of God. This was a feeling articulated often in the Psalms and which Jesus assures us He understands and has overcome:

Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and forgettest our affliction and our oppression? (Psalm 44:24)

How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me? (Psalm 13:1)

In the thick darkness, God veiled the last human agony of His Son. All who had seen Christ in His suffering had been convicted of His divinity. That face, once beheld by humanity, was never forgotten. As the face of Cain expressed his guilt as a murderer, so the face of Christ revealed innocence, serenity, benevolence,—the image of God. But His accusers would not give heed to the signet of heaven. Through long hours of agony Christ had been gazed upon by the

jeering multitude. Now He was mercifully hidden by the mantle of God. (DA 754)

The people were convicted of His divinity, but they reject it. They determined to “esteem Him stricken smitten of God, and afflicted” (Isaiah 53:4). But then the people are given a taste of what being disconnected from God feels like, being without an intercessor.

The silence of the grave seemed to have fallen upon Calvary. A nameless terror held the throng that was gathered about the cross. The cursing and reviling ceased in the midst of half-uttered sentences. Men, women, and children fell prostrate upon the earth. Vivid lightnings occasionally flashed forth from the cloud, and revealed the cross and the crucified Redeemer. Priests, rulers, scribes, executioners, and the mob, all thought that their time of retribution had come. After a while some whispered that Jesus would now come down from the cross. Some attempted to grope their way back to the city, beating their breasts and wailing in fear. DA 754.2

Then the darkness that was on the people is lifted and put fully on the Saviour. The people no longer feel that God is angry at them, but they once again think that God is angry with Jesus, hardening themselves further. Jesus allows them to not feel condemned by taking the condemnation upon Himself.

At the ninth hour the darkness lifted from the people, but still enveloped the Saviour. It was a symbol of the agony and horror that weighed upon His heart. No eye could pierce the gloom that surrounded the cross, and none could penetrate the deeper gloom that enshrouded the suffering soul of Christ. The angry lightnings seemed to be hurled at Him as He hung upon the cross. Then "Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" As the outer gloom settled about the Saviour, many voices exclaimed: The vengeance of heaven is upon Him. The bolts of God's wrath are hurled at Him, because He claimed to be the Son of God. Many who believed on Him heard His despairing cry.

Hope left them. If God had forsaken Jesus, in what could His followers trust? (DA 754.3)

The people believed He was forsaken for claiming to be the Son of God – for blasphemy. This is mirrored by the lightning that seems to be trying to hit Jesus. Jesus adds to this impression by saying “My God, My God why has thou forsaken Me?”, and He does so in Aramaic, “the language of dirges.” A dirge is a lament for the dead...and Jesus is definitely lamenting all those who will perish because they cannot see the mercy of God.

Did God forsake His Son? It depends how you look at it. We know He didn't forsake His Son in the sense that He was unhappy with His Son and was punishing Him. But this is what the Jews at the cross must have thought when Jesus said those words. God was there, but He hid His presence so Jesus would feel how the sinner feels when He is cut off from God – God is allowing people to see what happens to the sinner (and His relation to the world around him) when the sinner is cut off. So in another sense Jesus was forsaken to sin, to drink the cup of sin in full. He was not acting on the cross. This was so we could believe that He truly understands us when we feel utterly forsaken and without hope, such as in Psalm 88, the leper's psalm.

Aramaic befits this complicated duality of light and dark, this mixture of what the people see and understand and what God aims to portray and achieve, because it is a mixture of the language of Babylon and the language of the oracles of God. Such a terrible expression Jesus chose not to say in the language of holiness.

From another perspective, by using Aramaic here it also shows that Jesus announces that He is sin-bearer for all, not just Jews. The Pharisees misunderstand Him; He is better understood by the gentiles who recognize their need for a Saviour. Just as Aramaic befits a dirge, so it is the gentiles who recognize their fallen condition and need for a Saviour, while the Jews as a people don't. “It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting; for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.” (Ecclesiastes 7:2)

In silence the beholders watched for the end of the fearful scene.  
The sun shone forth; but the cross was still enveloped in

darkness. Priests and rulers looked toward Jerusalem; and lo, the dense cloud had settled over the city and the plains of Judea. The Sun of Righteousness, the Light of the world, was withdrawing His beams from the once favored city of Jerusalem. The fierce lightnings of God's wrath were directed against the fated city.

Suddenly the gloom lifted from the cross, and in clear, trumpetlike tones, that seemed to resound throughout creation, Jesus cried, "It is finished." "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." A light encircled the cross, and the face of the Saviour shone with a glory like the sun. He then bowed His head upon His breast, and died. (DA 756)

### Aramaic in the Book of Daniel

It is with this background that we come to the use of Aramaic in the Book of Daniel. Daniel 2:4-7:28 is in Aramaic. The King has had a dream and wants the "magicians, astrologers, sorcerers, and Chaldeans" to tell him what he dreamed, for he had forgotten, and what it means. Their response to the king begins the Aramaic section: "Then spake the Chaldeans to the king in Syriack (Aramaic), 'O king for ever: tell thy servants the dream...'"

"O king.." is the beginning of the Aramaic. Daniel becomes a servant of the king; his name is changed to an Aramaic name; and he learns the language and becomes a channel for Jehovah to bless the Babylonian king through this foreign language.

The reason that Clarke gives for these chapters being in Aramaic, which Uriah Smith quotes in *Commentary on Daniel and Revelation*, and chapters 8 until the end of Daniel being in Hebrew, is this:

"We now come once more," says Adam Clarke, "to the Hebrew, the Chaldee part of the book being finished. As the Chaldeans had a particular interest both in the history and prophecies from chapter 2:4 to the end of chapter 7, the whole is written in Chaldee; but as

the prophecies which remain concern times posterior to the Chaldean monarchy, and principally relate to the church and people of God generally, they are written in the Hebrew language, this being the tongue in which God chose to reveal all His counsels given under the Old Testament relative to the New."

The last chapter in Aramaic is Daniel 7. It is the 4 beasts, paralleling Daniel 2 and detailing more of the history of the kingdoms of man, and gives detail of the little horn that speaks blasphemies against God, taking the place of God.

Then from Daniel 7:9 it shifts into one of the most glorious scenes of Heaven in the whole Bible.

I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened. I beheld then because of the voice of the great words which the horn spake: I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame. As concerning the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time. I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed. (Dan 7:9-14)

This is on the face of it a triumphant section – the books are opened! The beast is slain! Jesus receives an everlasting kingdom and all should serve

Him! But instead of praising God, Daniel is “grieved in my spirit in the midst of my body, and the visions of my head troubled me.” Something about this seemingly glorious scene troubles Daniel – why? And such a glorious scene of God and His Son, shouldn’t Daniel have written in Hebrew? Why in Aramaic, as if it were to be of particular interest to the Chaldeans and the Gentiles rather than the Hebrews? Why give such a glorious scene in a language associated with death in the minds of God’s people?

This section is hugely important for Adventists because it has shaped how they have perceived God in the context of the Investigative Judgment. This event, of the Son of man coming to the Ancient of Days, happened at Oct 22, 1844, and then what happened? “A fiery stream issued and came forth from Him...the judgment was set, and the books were opened.”

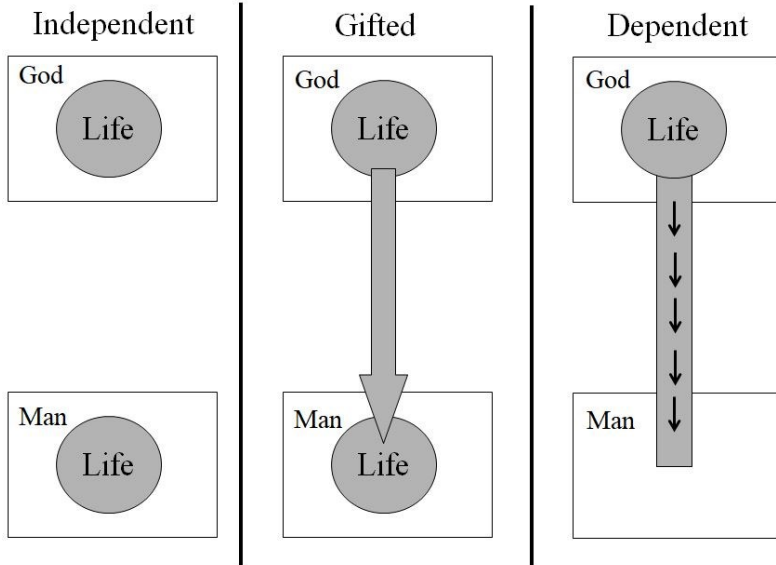
This is where our understanding becomes important. For men who believe they have life in themselves (inherent life, immortality of the soul), God’s law is seen as dominating and imposing. We either obey it, or God will execute us. To see God like this is not to have the faith of Jesus, it means you have yet to become a spiritual Jew. In this model, God becomes a God of force (of “evil force” as mentioned earlier in the Talmud?) and the judgment becomes a human process that is legal in nature, seeing the letter of the law rather than the spirit. A God of this sort must be appeased by our works the way a human ruler’s wrath must be appeased.

At the end when people in this Old Covenant, works-based appeasement mindset, see the great glory of God in the day of His coming, they will think themselves “smitten of God and afflicted,” when in fact it is their own inability to accept God as the life source that causes them to feel condemned and cut off. Entering into the new covenant requires recognizing that man is mortal and utterly dependent on God for life at every second we are alive.



<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>
<p>Man has an inherent life source (the divine) that originates within himself.</p>	<p>Man is given a life source by God (the divine) that he possesses within himself.</p>	<p>Man receives life through a relationship with God (the divine) outside of himself.</p>
<p><b>MAN IS DIVINE</b></p>	<p><b>MAN IS IMMORTAL</b></p>	<p><b>MAN IS MORTAL</b></p>

Life Source Systems



For those who come to see that God is not a God of force, that He does not rule His subjects the way human kings rule, a different model is given in Daniel 8 in Hebrew – for spiritual Jews (Romans 2:29). Daniel 8 lays out the

same history of kingdoms, but then shows God's relation to them. It is not to use force to overthrow them, but bringing this carnal system of power to an end through cleansing the sanctuary.

Yea, he [the Little Horn] magnified himself even to the prince of the host [Christ], and by him the daily [paganism] was [exalted, then] taken away, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down. And a host [Clovis] was given him [the papacy] against the daily [paganism] by reason of transgression, and it cast down the truth to the ground; and it practiced, and prospered.

Then I heard one saint speaking, and another saint said unto the wonderful numberer which spake, "How long shall be the vision concerning the daily, and the transgression of making desolate, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot?" And he said unto me, "Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed/justified." (Daniel 8:11-14)

The Aramaic ends at the end of Daniel 7. Daniel 8 is now in Hebrew. If we continue with the idea that Aramaic represents an Old Covenant view of God, focused on appeasing through our own works a political ruler/judge whose kingdom we think is like ours, then the Hebrew should portray a New Covenant perspective where it is God who works obedience in us as Creator, sustainer, and redeemer of the universe.

At first glance, it doesn't seem so...it just seems more embellishment of the same political ideas. But we see some hints: In Daniel 7 the four beasts are unclean; in Daniel 8 they are clean. We also see God's nonresistance of evil, allowing truth to be "cast down to the ground" to make the character of sin all the more clear. He allows Himself to be "trodden under foot," meaning that Christ continues to bear the cross without anyone knowing He is bearing it. But finally, at the end of the 2300 years, Jesus will cleanse/justify the sanctuary, cleansing the temple in Heaven by cleansing His people to be living stones in it.

You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:5)

God is wanting us to understand how agape works so we may allow Him to work in our lives. Like the human body needs water and food to survive, so we need God's Spirit in us to stay in His character and have the law written in our hearts. This is a design law process: outside of His law there is no life; we have no life in ourselves. We are only living today because Christ bears the consequence of our guilt – which would immediately overwhelm us and break our heart if we had to bear it – to give us a probation time to be reconciled to His Father. This is the New Covenant framework of judgment that God wants us to enter in, and it is represented in Daniel 8:14 by cleansing/justifying His people, rather than in Daniel 7:9-14 where He is portrayed as judging their works worthy of Heaven. Daniel 8 gives the spiritual understanding of Daniel 7:9-14.

When the sanctuary is finally cleansed, God's people will have cleared up their misunderstandings of Him, and the character of God manifesting out of His people will cause all to search themselves and judge themselves according to how they think God judges. Each will face the investigative judgment according to how they perceive God, whether to accept His mercy by seeing grace in Him, or by condemning themselves by seeing condemnation in God.

That which is a scene of condemnation from the viewpoint of the Old Covenant becomes a scene of purification in the New Covenant. **The prayer of Daniel in Daniel 9 gives us a type of the spirit required at the end of time – the saints will plead with God to do a cleansing work in them, not a vanquishing work of their enemies.** Daniel's prayer ends in this way:

Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake. O my God, incline thine ear and

hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name. (Daniel 9:17-19)

The sanctuary in the time of Daniel was destroyed, and work was soon to begin on a new temple by Ezra and Nehemiah. Jesus would come to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple as described in the prophecy of the 70 weeks, and cause “sacrifice and offering to cease.” Sacrifice and offering represent man’s desire to appease God. Even though the sacrificial system ended after the cross, man would continue to appease God and give gifts to God if God would do what man asked of Him. The sacrificial system ended with the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, but the mindset would not be overcome until the sanctuary was cleansed at the end of the 2300 years.

What Jesus did as a man on the earth 2000 years ago is a type of what Jesus will do to His church in the investigative judgment. Jesus cleansed the earthly sanctuary as a man to help us understand how He will cleanse the heavenly sanctuary. To understand this, we need to better understand the earthly sanctuary and the process of its construction up until the time of Jesus.

### Ezra and the finishing of the work

There is one more significant instance of Aramaic in the Bible, and that is in the book of Ezra. Ezra the scribe was the chronicler of post-exile history, writing Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. It is interesting to note that he had no malice toward gentiles.

The experience of Ezra while living among the Jews who remained in Babylon was so unusual that it attracted the favorable notice of King Artaxerxes, with whom he talked freely regarding the power of the God of heaven, and the divine purpose in restoring the Jews to Jerusalem.

Born of the sons of Aaron, Ezra had been given a priestly training; and in addition to this he had acquired a familiarity with the writings of the magicians, the astrologers, and the wise men of the Medo-Persian realm. But he was not satisfied with his spiritual condition. He longed to be in full harmony with God; he longed for wisdom to carry out the divine will. And so he "prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it." Ezra 7:10. This led him to apply himself diligently to a study of the history of God's people, as recorded in the writings of prophets and kings. He searched the historical and poetical books of the Bible to learn why the Lord had permitted Jerusalem to be destroyed and His people carried captive into a heathen land.

To the experiences of Israel from the time the promise was made to Abraham, Ezra gave special thought. He studied the instruction given at Mount Sinai and through the long period of wilderness wandering. As he learned more and still more concerning God's dealings with His children, and comprehended the sacredness of the law given at Sinai, Ezra's heart was stirred. He experienced a new and thorough conversion and determined to master the records of sacred history, that he might use this knowledge to bring blessing and light to his people...

Ezra's faith that God would do a mighty work for His people, led him to tell Artaxerxes of his desire to return to Jerusalem to revive an interest in the study of God's word and to assist his brethren in restoring the Holy City. As Ezra declared his perfect trust in the God of Israel as one abundantly able to protect and care for His people, the king was deeply impressed. He well understood that the Israelites were returning to Jerusalem that they might serve Jehovah; yet so great was the king's confidence in the integrity of Ezra that he showed him marked favor, granting his request and bestowing on him rich gifts for the temple service. He made him a special representative of the Medo-Persian kingdom and conferred on him extensive powers for the carrying out of the purposes that were in his heart.

The decree of Artaxerxes Longimanus for the restoring and building of Jerusalem, the third issued since the close of the seventy years' captivity, is remarkable for its expressions regarding the God of heaven, for its recognition of the attainments of Ezra, and for the liberality of the grants made to the remnant people of God. Artaxerxes refers to Ezra

as "the priest, the scribe, even a scribe of the words of the commandments of the Lord, and of His statutes to Israel;" "a scribe of the law of the God of heaven." The king united with his counselors in offering freely "unto the God of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem;" and in addition he made provision for meeting many heavy expenses by ordering that they be paid "out of the king's treasure house." (PK 608-610)

Ezra does not appear in the history in his book until Ezra 7. But he lays out what happened before he came on the scene, and his use of language I believe is important. The Aramaic sections of Ezra are Ezra 4:8-6:18 and 7:12-26. They lay out the history of Persia's relation to the people of God. First is a letter from the Assyrian inhabitants of Samaria, telling Artaxerxes that you shouldn't let this people rebuild their city. "They will not pay toll, tribute, custom...so shalt thou find in the book of the records...that this city is a rebellious city" (Ezra 4:13, 15). Search is made, and it is seen that yes, this nation was formerly a threat, and therefore the building was stopped.

The temple ceased building until the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Darius (Ezra 4:24), when Haggai ("the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts"-Haggai 2:7) and Zechariah prophesied, encouraging the people to restart the construction. This authority to rebuild was immediately questioned by the Persian governor. The answer given by the Jews was to remind the Persians that King Cyrus 20 years earlier had ordered the building (Ezra 1:1-4). King Darius I found the decree of Cyrus, and issued his own decree to bless the work of the Jews:

And the God that hath caused his name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed. (Ezra 6:12)

The next verses talk of completion of the temple and its dedication, and you would think that at this point Ezra would switch into Hebrew. But Ezra writes in Aramaic up until this verse:

And the children of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy, And offered at the dedication of this house of God an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. And they set priests in their division, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses. (Ezra 6:16-18)

These verses are still in Aramaic...Why not switch into Hebrew? Because these things are not what symbolically causes us to enter into the rest of Christ. It is the next verse that begins the Hebrew again in relation to the Temple of God:

And the children of the captivity kept the Passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month. For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them pure... (Ezra 6:19-20)

The switch into being spiritual Israel is to enter into the presence of God at His times that are holy to Him because He invests them with His presence. It is at these times that eternity comes into our time, that we enter into covenant with our Father and allow Him to cleanse us. We come to understand our dependence on Him and free ourselves from this fallen world. The place may change, the priesthood may change, but the times remain consistent – it is a marker of God’s perpetual covenant, His power in past, present, and future. The final section in Aramaic is Artaxerxes blessing and sending Ezra to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:12-26). In response, Ezra says this statement of thanks that I hope will have a parallel at the end of time, which only will happen through a reconsideration of why Christianity has failed in the past like how Ezra studied why Jerusalem had fallen.

Blessed by the LORD God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king’s heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem: And hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counsellors, and before all the king’s mighty princes. And I

was strengthened as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me,  
and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me.  
(Ezra 7:27-28)

## Conclusion

First and foremost, I hope the reader will come away from this booklet believing that Jesus conversed with the people in Hebrew. Part of the basis of higher criticism, the idea that we know more about the Old Testament prophecies than the disciples of Jesus did, is because we think they didn't know Hebrew well. In the NIV, the word *Hebrew* is translated *Aramaic*, as in Paul addressed the Jews in Aramaic and Jesus addressed Paul in Aramaic. This is a terribly flawed translation of the word based on now disproved assumptions.

Saying this, I don't mean to disparage Aramaic. Jesus using Aramaic was part of His attempt to build a bridge between the Jews and the surrounding nations. Why was Jesus met by blasphemous unbelief in His home nation? Because they had a fixed conception of what the Messiah was going to do, a de facto creed, and Jesus healing of and preaching to the gentiles actually pushed the Jews away from accepting Him. But we remember that much of Jesus's teachings are done in a framework that we understand. The Jews understood Hebrew as holy and Aramaic as evil, so God teaches some important lessons through that lens – it doesn't mean that God Himself thinks Aramaic is evil!

In fact, the greatest missionary church was the Syriac Church, that used Aramaic as its base language with its magnificent Bible translation called the 'Peshitta' – which means *simple version*, or *common*, as in for all people. The great church of Asia, called the Church of the East, which stretched from India to China to the Caucuses, through Persia and Babylon, had at its base the Aramaic tongue. In *Truth Triumphant*, BG Wilkinson quotes the great Syriac defender of the faith Bardesanes (AD 154-222) as saying this about the good done by the church:



We are called Christians by the one name of the Messiah. As regards our customs our brethren abstain from everything that is contrary to their profession, e.g., Parthian Christians do not take two wives. Jewish Christians are not circumcised. Our Bactrian sisters do not practice promiscuity with strangers. Persians do not take their daughters to wife. Medes do not desert their dying relations or bury them alive. Christians in Edessa do not kill their wives or sisters who commit fornication but keep them apart and commit them to the judgment of God. Christians in Hatra do not stone thieves.

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English speaking Christians have been interested in the western expansion of Christianity--in history that involves their own origin and development - and little is accessible to them concerning the amazing missionary effort of the Church of the East. That the gospel of Christ's kingdom did confront the masses of Asia long ago, when the world's population was the densest there and civilization the most advanced, is today little appreciated by western Christians. How it fared in that confrontation is almost totally unknown.

The result is that when someone asks, "Where was the evangelical church of Christ during those long 'Dark Ages' of Europe when the Church of Rome usurped the place of the Holy Spirit?" there usually follows a notable silence. The Iona colony of Scotland may be mentioned, or the later Waldenses of the Italian Alps, both involving small numbers. There is a better answer to the question, however, and the following narrative seeks to shed some light on it.

The story of the Church of the East's mission to Asia is one that needs to be told to today's church. It is the story of a dedicated missionary effort and the ever expanding witness of Christians from Antioch to Peking, nearly 6,000 miles by foot, until multitudes of Christians lived from the 30th to the 120th longitude in medieval times. (John M.L. Young, *By Foot to China*)

I find it amazing that the language considered most oppressive to Israel would eventually become the greatest champion of the Gospel. Surely the last shall be first. Another beautiful thing about this is that this is the church that most closely worked with the Jewish converts to Christianity. The veil between Jew and Gentile was truly removed in this Church.

Widespread and enduring was the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath among the believers of the Church of the East and the St. Thomas Christians of India who never were connected with Rome. It also was maintained among those bodies which broke off from Rome after the Council of Chalcedon; namely, the Abyssinians, the Jacobites, the Maronites, and the Armenians. The numbers sanctifying the Sabbath varied in these bodies; some endured longer than others. (*Truth Triumphant*, BG Wilkinson)

I hope one day to put together material on the history of this church. By writing this I definitely hope the reader doesn't get the impression that I am upholding Hebrew as holier than any other language. There is no doubt that Hebrew is special, for the oracles are giving in it. But when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, the people heard the gospel preached in their own tongue. God wants to reconcile us to Him that we may be reconciled to each other. The word of God is a channel to know He who inspired the word, Christ Jesus and Jehovah His Father. May we have all racism and bigotry removed from our hearts and say "Amen" to Peter when he declares to us:

Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, *see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently*: Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

For all flesh *is* as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you. (1 Peter 1:22-25)

# THE COMMON LANGUAGE JESUS, HEBREW AND ARAMAIC

**DANUTASN BROWN**

What language did Jesus speak when He preached to the common man? The scholarly consensus is Aramaic, and this idea was portrayed popularly in Mel Gibson's movie 'The Passion of the Christ.' But there is one major problem with this idea - there was no Aramaic Bible at the time of Christ.

This booklet argues that new discoveries show that Hebrew was the common language of the Jews in the time of Jesus. The Jews at that time looked down on Aramaic. Yet Aramaic does make its way into the Greek New Testament. Why? Is there a lesson God wants us to learn about reconciliation through the filter of language?