

“The spoken languages among the Jews of that period were Hebrew, Aramaic, and to an extent Greek. Until recently, it was believed by numerous scholars that the language spoken by Jesus’ disciples was Aramaic...Jesus did, from time to time, make use of the Aramaic language. But during that period Hebrew was both the daily language and the language of study. The Gospel of Mark contains a few Aramaic words, and this was what misled scholars. Today, after the discovery of the Hebrew Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus), of the Dead Sea Scrolls and of the Bar Kokhba Letters, and in the light of more profound studies of the language of the Jewish Sages, it is accepted that most people were fluent in Hebrew. The Pentateuch was translated into Aramaic for the benefit of the lower strata of the population. The parables in the Rabbinic literature, on the other hand, were delivered in Hebrew in all periods. There is thus no ground for assuming that Jesus did not speak Hebrew; and when we are told (Acts 21:40) that Paul spoke Hebrew, we should take this piece of information at face value. This question of the spoken language is especially important for understanding the doctrines of Jesus. There are sayings of Jesus which can be rendered both into Hebrew and Aramaic; but there are some which can only be rendered into Hebrew, and none of them can be rendered only in Aramaic. One can thus demonstrate the Hebrew origins of the Gospels by retranslating them into Hebrew.”¹

Israeli Jewish professor David Flusser, 1989

APPENDIX 1

IT’S ALL *HEBREW* TO ME

You have probably heard the old expression that is often uttered when you are having a hard time understanding something in *your tongue*, “It’s all Greek to me.” Our real question in understanding the origins of the New Testament as a God-inspired piece of Jewish literature is, “Was it Greek or was it Hebrew?”

In recent years, many Israelis have pointed out to me that they cannot accept the New Testament as a Holy Book from God if its original rendering was in a heathen tongue—Greek! The first time I heard this, I did not know what to say. However, since that time, I have devoted myself to extensive study on this subject. I reached the conclusion that if this issue was a stumbling stone, preventing some Jews from realizing the truth of Jesus, I should undertake an effort to discover the entire truth, and to remove the stumbling stone, which has caused Jews to ask, “Is Jesus our Messiah or Not?”

I searched and discovered some rather interesting literary treasures supporting the Hebrew origin of the Gospels of Jesus! I am only giving my answer here for the purpose of helping the Jews of the world out of a difficult situation, which has caused many problems and questions for quite some time. We suspect not only “Christian” liberal theologians but many Diaspora rabbis as well, will probably be upset to see the proofs of the Hebrew origin, since the theory that the

¹David Flusser, Ph.D., *Jewish Sources in Early Christianity*, p. 11.

Gospels were originally Greek has caused many Jews, the world over, to dismiss the New Testament on that basis alone.

SCHONFIELD HELPS ELIMINATE THE “GREEK” STUMBLING STONE WHICH LEVINE PRAISED

An example of this stumbling stone used by rabbis past and present, can be seen in the book, *You Take Jesus, I'll Take God*, by Samuel Levine. As far as our studies are concerned, Levine untruthfully and vainly claims: “...the New Testament was written originally in Greek, even though Jesus was a Jew who probably spoke Hebrew as his native language, and all of the apostles were Hebrew speaking Jews. This shows the strong antipathy which the Jewish people felt towards the whole idea. As Gibbon, in his famous history of the Roman Empire, points out, the Jews in Israel found it unnecessary to publish or at least preserve any Hebrew text of the New Testament. So why accept Jesus if the vast majority of his own people rejected him?”²

However, Hugh Schonfield, a Jewish scholar who did not profess Jesus' Messiahship at the time, pointed out: “The famous Cæsarean MS. may have been the very one brought back by Pantænus from India, having descended through Clement of Alexandria to Origen, who may have brought it to Cæsarea, where, with the rest of Origen's collection of MSS, it may finally have passed into the hands of Pamphilus who deposited it in his library. The library is believed to have been burnt by the Arabs at the capture of Cæsarea in A.D. 653. The last we hear of a Hebrew Gospel is in the ninth century. Cod. Tisch. 3 (7), a Greek MS. of the Gospels, dating from this period, having in Matthew four marginal quotations from ‘the Jewish,’ one of which is identical with one of Jerome's quotations from the *Gospel of the Hebrews*.”³

BIVIN AND BLIZZARD BLOW AWAY THE GREEK THEORY AND EXPOSE THE HEBREW FACTS

For some reason, God chose to write the Old Testament in Hebrew. He also used a Hebrew dialect called Aramaic in certain places, such as Daniel 2:4-7:28, Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26, Jeremiah 10:11 and Genesis 31:47. Likewise, many would expect that if the

²Samuel Levine, *You Take Jesus, I'll Take God*, pp. 69-70.

³Hugh J. Schonfield, *An Old Hebrew Text of St. Matthew's Gospel*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1927, pp. 194-195.

New Testament was also God's message to mankind, it would use the same *language*. So what are the facts?

Here are a few which I uncovered in a very interesting book entitled, *Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus: New Insights from a Hebraic Perspective*, by scholars David Bivin and Roy Blizzard, Jr.: "...Papias, Bishop^[4] of Hierapolis, in Asia Minor (mid-second century A.D.). Concerning the Hebrew origin of the Gospels, he states: Matthew put down the words of the Lord in the Hebrew language, and others have translated them, each as best he could (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* III 39, 16).

Irenaeus (120-202 A.D.) was Bishop of Lyons in France. Most of his literary endeavors were undertaken in the last quarter of the second century A.D. Irenaeus states: Matthew, indeed, produced his Gospel written among the Hebrews in their own dialect (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* V8, 2).

Origen (first quarter of the third century), in his commentary on Matthew, states: The first [Gospel], composed in the Hebrew language, was written by Matthew...for those who came to faith from Judaism (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* VI 25, 4).

Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea (circa 325 A.D.), writes: Matthew had first preached to the Hebrews, and when he was about to go to others also, he transmitted his Gospel in writing in his native language (*Ecclesiastical History* III 24, 6).

These are but a few of the references in the writings of the early church fathers that indicate a Hebrew origin for the Gospels. In addition to these, there are many references in the later church fathers (the Post-Nicean Fathers, from approximately 325 A.D.). Epiphanius [died 403 A.D.] for instance, writes at length about the Jewish-Christian sect of the Nazarenes: They have the entire Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew. It is carefully preserved by them as it was originally written, in Hebrew script (*Refutation of All Heresies* 29, 9, 4)...Jerome (died 420 A.D.), was by far the most knowledgeable in Hebrew of all the church fathers....Concerning Matthew's Gospel, Jerome writes: Matthew was the first in Judea to compose the gospel

⁴The word "bishop," as used in the New Testament, describes a local autonomous simple personage, who had a place in caring for the membership of his congregation. It was different from what we see today in the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox "Churches." The meaning was altered and falsely expanded upon many centuries after Jesus when these two "churches" were used as political entities. From within, the architects attempted to overturn the true church's belief in an individual relationship with Messiah. This forced the true believers' church underground for over 1000 years until after the Reformation in the sixteenth century, when they were able to reemerge without fear of papal and Byzantine persecution for their pure faith. The bishops we see today in the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Churches act as heads of diocese and still dress as if they possessed some special political authority—their costume, of course, being only symbolic.

of Christ in Hebrew letters and words...Who it was that later translated it into Greek is no longer known with certainty. Furthermore, the Hebrew text itself is still preserved in the library at Caesarea which the martyr Pamphilus assembled with great care (*De Viris Inlustribus* 3)... A revolution is taking place in our understanding of the New Testament. With the rebirth of Israel in 1947-1948 came the dramatic discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. These priceless, ancient manuscripts, followed a few years later by the discovery of the Bar-Cochba letters, became vital contributions to a fuller understanding of the New Testament writings.

Many scholars in Israel are now convinced that the spoken and written language of the Jews in the Land of Israel at the time of Jesus was indeed Hebrew; and that the Synoptic Gospels were derived from original Hebrew sources.

These scholars, fluent in both Greek and Hebrew, have proposed impressive solutions to major problems of New Testament interpretation. Important discoveries which they have made serve to illuminate the very Hebraic style of speech used by Jesus and his first followers, and to make possible a more accurate translation of the Gospels....Professor David Flusser^[5] of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the world's leading Jewish authority on the New Testament and early Christianity, holds strongly to the view that the *Life of Jesus* was originally composed in Hebrew. He claims there are hundreds of Semitisms (Semitic idioms) in the Synoptic Gospels which could only be Hebrew....Dr. Moshe Bar-Asher, who has inherited the late Professor Yehezkiel Kutscher's reputation as the foremost Aramaic scholar at the Hebrew University, says that he believes the Synoptic Gospels go back to a Greek translation of an

⁵In his review of the book, *Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus*, Jeffrey Magnuson addressed the subject of the New Testament Gospels having been originally written in Hebrew. "...Professor David Flusser and Dr. Robert Lindsey have been working together in a unique and fruitful collaboration. They have gathered around them a group of other scholars, Jewish and Christian, and formed the Jerusalem School for the Study of the Synoptic Gospels, whose research is challenging some of the most basic traditional assumptions of New Testament scholarship....Anyone who speaks Hebrew and lives in modern Israel will be familiar with the meaning of idioms that apparently were unknown to the Greek translators of the original Hebrew 'Life of Jesus,' such as *asoor* and *mootar* which are translated literally in Matthew 16:19 as 'bound' and 'loosed,' but in context mean 'forbidden' and 'permitted'....For those trained in the field of biblical studies, the new approach to the New Testament advocated in this book will either offer a key to unlocking **long-hidden mysteries**, or signal a challenge to interpretations which many consider sacrosanct. However the book is received, it certainly marks the first time in history that Christian scholars, fluent in the Hebrew language and living and working in Israel, have collaborated with Jewish scholars on New Testament studies." Jeffrey Magnuson, "The Original Text," *Jerusalem Post*, July 12, 1985, © used by permission. Bold mine.

original Hebrew....Dr. Pinchas Lapide, Director of the School for Translators and Interpreters at Bar-Ilan University in Tel Aviv, has written an article entitled "The Missing Hebrew Gospel" (Lapide 1974). In this article he discusses the Hebrew origins of the Gospels. Dr. Lapide, a scholar fluent in more than a dozen languages, states: No less significant is the fact, borne out by subsequent documentary finds at Murabba'at, Nahal Heber, and on Masada, that throughout the first Christian century (and later), religious topics were mainly recorded in Hebrew (Lapide 1974:169).

Dr. Lapide concludes: The past century has witnessed the unexpected discovery of such literary treasure-troves as in the Cairo Geniza and the Qumran and Murabba'at caves. It is not impossible than an excavator may yet unearth a fragment of that earliest Hebrew Gospel 'according to the Jews' (Lapide 1974:170)."⁶

The greatest Jewish scholars of our generation, David Flusser, Moshe Bar-Asher and Pinchas Lapide, all agree that the first book of the New Testament was originally written in Hebrew. Lapide is even optimistic about a soon-to-come archaeological unearthing of the original Hebrew Gospel. It is interesting that most rabbis, when technically referring to the New Testament, call it the "Greek Testament." They refer to it this way to distance it from the Hebrew Scriptures, known as the Jewish Bible, which is the Christian Old Testament. I have yet to hear of a rabbi, contemporary or medieval, who ever commented on whether the New Testament was in Hebrew or not. Why? Because a Hebrew New Testament could provoke further Jewish interest in Jesus!

THE ATTEMPTED DECEPTION OF AN ISRAELI FRIEND

Rachel, an Israeli friend of mine, told me that the rabbis tried to challenge her Jewish faith in the New Testament by telling her, "The New Testament couldn't possibly be a holy book because it was written in Greek, not Hebrew."

These were the rabbis of Safed, Israel, known as *Sphat* in Hebrew. They are famous for a Jewish mysticism called "cabbala," which has caused insanity in some of their students. I know of a man who had to be hospitalized in a mental institution after studying "cabbala." His only desire was to sit in a room, day and night, with the lights off. Many of those rabbis will not accept a student for cabbalistic study unless they are over the age of forty, because they say "insanity could more easily occur."

⁶David Bivin and Roy Blizzard, Jr., *Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus: New Insights from a Hebraic Perspective*, pp. 46-48, 39-42.

These same rabbis are also famous for their deceptive attempts to convince Messianic Jews/Jews for Jesus, that Jesus is not their Messiah. After I showed Rachel some of the evidence supporting the Hebrew Gospel, it put her mind at ease.

RABBIS ARE SILENT ON THE HEBREW GOSPELS—HOPING TO HINDER JEWISH INTEREST?

If the greatest Jewish scholars of our generation concede that the original language of the New Testament was Hebrew, why do rabbis the world over remain silent regarding this exciting new knowledge? My belief is that they fear it may nurture a Jewish interest in Jesus at the layman's level. Because of their perpetual fear of assimilation, this is something they want to avoid at any cost, even at the cost of knowledge!

Non-Jewish scholars outside of Israel are also reaching the same conclusion, based on the new finds at Qumran.

There are many who now say that Hebrew was not in common use in Jesus' day. However, modern research proves otherwise. These liberal scholars assert, for reasons that do not make sense, that the language of Jesus' day was Aramaic.

TWO PROFESSORS DISPROVE THE ARAMAIC THEORY

In response to the assertions of these "scholars," David Bivin and Ray Blizzard, Jr. quote two outstanding scholars who cannot be refuted: "William Sanford LaSor, professor emeritus at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, is an outstanding Semitic scholar. In a lecture delivered in Jerusalem on April 24, 1982, he stated: With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, it now seems highly probable that the language Jesus spoke was Hebrew and not Aramaic. The sectarians at Qumran not only wrote their commentaries on books of the Bible in Hebrew, but their manual for new members (the *Manual of Discipline*) and books regulating the life of the community, such as the *Damascus Covenant*, were also written in Hebrew.

Professor Frank Cross, of Harvard University, is probably the leading living authority on the handwriting of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Professor Cross has stated that by observing the handwriting of the various scribes who copied the scrolls over the centuries at Qumran, it can be seen that the dominant language of Palestine, beginning about 130 B.C., was Hebrew. Since, after 130 B.C., the scribes of Qumran

no longer made mistakes when copying Hebrew texts, Cross determined that their principal language was Hebrew, and that they had an inferior knowledge of Aramaic grammar and syntax.”⁷

JESUS' ARAMAIC PHRASES EXPLAINED

There still remains the question, “Why do some of Jesus’ phrases use Aramaic words which transliterate to English as Aramaic?” As we have noted, there are sections of Aramaic in the Old Testament, so likewise, there are some in the New Testament. For example: “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 KJV).⁸

Our answer is that a few families in Israel at that time were from Babylon, and knew Aramaic better than Hebrew. Thus, Jesus spoke Aramaic to these people, because they understood it.

Proof of this is recorded in a story in the Talmud. David Bivin and Roy Blizzard, Jr. quote an article by the Jewish scholar Jehushua Grintz. They write: “The late Johoshua M. Grintz wrote an article entitled ‘Hebrew as the Spoken and Written Language in the Last Days of the Second Temple’ (Grintz 1960)...Grintz further emphasizes: ‘Moreover, Hebrew was then the main vehicle of *speech* [emphasis, the authors’] in Jewish Palestine, or at least in Jerusalem and Judea.’ He provides evidence for this statement with a relevant story, narrated in the Talmud (Nedarim 66b) about the difficulties an Aramaic-speaking Jew from Babylon had in communicating with his Jerusalemite wife (Grintz 1960: 46-47).”⁹

⁷Ibid, pp. 42-43.

⁸W.E. Vine says that Talitha is: “...an Aramaic feminine meaning ‘maiden,’ [that has been]...transliterated in the N.T. Greek mss. *Koumi* or *Koum* (Heb. and Aram., *qûm* arise), which follows, is interpreted by ‘I say unto thee, arise.’ ” W.E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, With Their Precise Meanings for English Readers*, Vol. IV, Reference Library Edition. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, © 1940, p. 109. Vine notes that this word appears in the Talmud seven times on one page. During my eight visits and over eight years of work in Israel, I have had many friends named either Tal or Tali, which in Hebrew means “dew” and “my dew,” respectively. Jesus may well have said, “My Tal, arise to me,” in Hebrew, “Tali ta cumi.”

⁹David Bivin and Roy Blizzard, Jr., *Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus, New Insights from a Hebraic Perspective*, p. 40.

A HEBREW-SPEAKING BAPTIST PASTOR CORROBORATES THE HEBREW WORD ORDER OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

The late Dr. Robert Lindsey,¹⁰ a Baptist pastor who grew up and lived in Israel most of his life, made a monumental contribution to this issue from an evangelical perspective. Dr. Lindsey set out to translate the present Greek New Testament into Hebrew. He wrote the following in the foreword for the book, *Understanding The Difficult Words of Jesus, New Insights from a Hebraic Perspective*: “It gives me pleasure to commend this book to those who desire a closer acquaintance with what Jesus said and did in Galilee and Judea at the beginning of the Christian era. Scholars David Bivin and Roy Blizzard have here provided an introduction to the basic question of how best to approach and understand the words of Jesus—whether by limiting ourselves to the translation of the Greek texts, preserved so faithfully by the Church, or by exploring more deeply into the Hebrew texts lying behind our Greek ones.

My own encounter with the strong Hebraism of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke came several years ago when I had occasion to attempt the translation of the Gospel of Mark to Hebrew. What first caught my attention was the very Hebraic word order of the Greek text of Mark. Usually I only needed to find the correct Hebrew equivalents to the Greek words in order to give good sense and understanding to the text. In other words, the syntax or word relationships were just such as one would expect in Hebrew.

All this was particularly surprising to me, for I remembered the problems I had as a student studying classical Greek in trying to juggle the words of Xenophon, Homer, Aeschylus, and Plato into the patterns of word order that English demands. What difficulty I had making those ancient Greeks speak English! And now, translating New

¹⁰Bob went on to be with the Lord in 1995, while at his home in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Notices of his passing were published in Israeli papers. He lost the lower portion of one of his legs while rescuing an Israeli child from a mine field. He was the pastor of the Narkiss Street Baptist Congregation in Jerusalem from 1945-1987, and the author of *Jesus Rabbi & Lord: The Hebrew Story of Jesus Behind our Gospels* (1990). I knew him personally and attended his congregation many times. His warmth and kindness is already missed.

Testament Greek into Hebrew, I was finding Greek^[11] written as if it were Hebrew.^{”12}

AN ORTHODOX ISRAELI TYPESETTER BECOMES A BELIEVER

Thanks to Dr. Lindsey, and many other scholars, both Jewish and non-Jewish alike, the United Bible Society has produced one of the finest Hebrew translations of the New Testament to date, which is easily available in Israeli bookstores today.

An Israeli Yemenite Jew, Batya, a personal friend, typeset the New Testament to be printed by the Israeli publishing firm, Yanetz. She was an Orthodox Jew prior to doing the work. Originally, she was reluctant to do¹³ the project, yet after completing it, she became a

¹¹ What Pastor Robert Lindsey did that was new and monumental was retranslate the Greek Gospel back into Hebrew. While some may deny the validity of what this brilliant man has done, I know enough Hebrew and Greek to see that his proof is irrefutable. Aside from that, an interesting commentary that the Gospels were later translated into Greek is found in C.C. Torrey's book, *Documents of the Primitive Church*, where he tells us: "Out of this condition of things, it may be remarked here, came the designation of the Christian gospel as *gilyon*. The origin of the word in the Greek εὐαγγέλιον has already been mentioned and taken for granted. But why a *Greek* name? The Semitic gospels mentioned in the Talmud in connection with canonicity certainly were not issued under a foreign title! Those who wished to gain acceptance for them as a new chapter in the revelation to Israel could never have made this grotesque blunder. The obvious fact is, that εὐαγγέλιον is the title originally appearing in the *Greek translation*, and that it was adopted by the Jews, in disparagement, after the gospels had been definitely rejected. The...gospel had been entitled כְּבוֹד, 'good tidings,' a word (either Hebrew or Aramaic) which is regularly rendered by εὐαγγέλια or εὐαγγέλιον. See, for example, LXX 2 Sam. 18:19-7; 2 Kings 7:9. The first of the Gospels, Mark, was introduced with the words: רִישׁ בְּרֵחָא דִּי יֵשׁוּעַ מְשִׁיחָא, 'The Beginning of the Good Tidings of Jesus the Messiah,' and in the Greek translation which soon followed (*Our Translated Gospels*, p. 1i) this was rendered: 'Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Henceforth, the story of the Nazarene Messiah...in Greek, *evangelion*. But the orthodox Jews would never have applied to an arch-heretical writing the term כְּבוֹד (!); so when the Nazarenes were definitely classed with the Gentiles, the Greek name, or rather, a convenient and perfectly harmless disguising of it, *gilyon*, was made to serve." Torrey's footnote to *gilyon* states: "...the Talmud itself by the mildly malicious puns on εὐαγγέλιον, גִּלְיוֹן גַּלְיוֹן and גִּלְיוֹן גַּלְיוֹן, the two former members of the compound meaning respectively 'falsity' and 'wickedness.' See the *Aruch* under the former compound, and the Munich manuscript of the Talmud in Shabbath 116a." Torrey also tells us of rabbis who hate the New Testament, as told in the Talmud: "Rabbi Tarphon would not only burn the books, but would also keep far away from any Christian place of assembling: If I were fleeing for my life, I would take refuge in a heathen temple rather than in one of their houses. Rabbi Ishmael, after agreeing as to the desirability of destroying the Gospels, expresses his horror of the heretics, quoting from Psalm 139: 'I hate them with perfect hatred.'" Charles Cutler Torrey, *Documents of the Primitive Church*, pp. 100-101, 103.

¹² David Bivin and Roy Blizzard, Jr., *Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus: New Insights from a Hebraic Perspective*, p. foreword.

¹³ After much thought and hesitation, she accepted the job of typesetting the New Testament because she needed the money. She said to herself, "I'll just type and ignore the subject matter." However, that proved to be impossible and her rich knowledge of the Old

staunch follower of Jesus as Messiah. Presently, she works with her husband, Barry, who is head of one of Israel's Messianic publishers and ministries, which produces many books about Jesus' Jewish Messiahship.¹⁴

WHY WAS THE NEW TESTAMENT TRANSLATED FROM HEBREW TO GREEK?

The reason the New Testament was translated into Greek in the first place was the same reason the Old Testament was translated into Greek centuries before the birth of Jesus. The Old Testament translation to which I am referring, the famous Septuagint, is so named because seventy rabbinical scholars worked on its translation. There was a simple reason for this translation. Although many Jews spoke fluent Hebrew in Israel during that era, the Jews who lived in the Greek-speaking countries, after the Babylonian captivity, needed to have a translation made available to them.

Greek was the universal language of that time (as English is in our time). In the book of Acts, Jesus told the Christians, of that time and onward, concerning the New Testament: "...you shall be My witnesses...to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8 NASB).

You cannot very well take a Hebrew Gospel produced in Israel to a Greek-speaking pagan (Gentile) world. Therefore, a Greek translation of the New Testament was necessary to take the message of the Messiah to the millions of Greek-speaking people, Jew and non-Jew, throughout the world! However, today, because Hebrew is a revived language in the new State of Israel (which was the predicted pure language; Zeph. 3:9),¹⁵ the Hebrew New Testament has been reassembled in its original form, through the art of Hebraic translation by brilliant translators!

THE JEWISH PROFESSOR PINCHAS LAPIDE CORROBORATES THE HEBREW NEW TESTAMENT

In conclusion, we quote Professor Pinchas Lapide, a Jew with unsurpassed qualifications, and who, to our knowledge, has not

Testament gave way to her realization that Jesus is the Messiah in the revelations of the New Testament.

¹⁴If you are interested in obtaining information on other Messianic Hebrew publications, fax us at: (404) 816-9994.

¹⁵Hebrew will be the language of the millennial kingdom. Isaiah predicts for our future: "In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the Lord of hosts..." (Isa. 19:18 KJV). Remember, Canaan was the land of Israel before the Israelites took residence there under God's divine providence. The language of Canaan is Hebrew. For additional evidence, see our chapter 29, "After the Messiah Arrives and Ends the War—Paradise!"

professed Jesus as his Messiah. Supporting his conviction that the New Testament was originally Hebrew, Lapide says: "It is certain, however, that all four Greek Gospels display distinct traces of an original Hebrew text in their vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and semantic patterns. Hence we cannot seriously question the existence of a 'Hebrew gospel'—no fewer than ten Fathers of the Church testify to it." Lapide's footnote reads: "1. Papias (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* III, 39, 1); Irenaeus (*ibid.*, V, 8, 2); Hegesippus (*ibid.*, IV, 22, 4); Jerome (*Contra Rufinum* VII, 77; *De vir. ill.* II; *In Matt.* 6, 11; *In Ezech.* 18, 7; *Adv. Pel.* III, 2 et al.); Origen (*In Matt.* XV, 14); Epiphanius (*Panarion* I, 29, 7 and 9); Theodoret of Cyprus (*Haer. Fab.* II, 1); Nicephorus Callistus (*Eccl. Hist.* III, 13); Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* II, IX, 45, 5); Pantaneus (Eusebius, *ibid.*, V, 10, 3)."¹⁶

WHY IS IT WORTHWHILE TO STUDY THE NEW TESTAMENT IN HEBREW?

We believe, by studying the New Testament in Hebrew, we can better understand exactly what Jesus said and in greater detail than we can from any other language. For example, there is a misconception that Jesus taught pacifism and that He was against capital punishment. However, when we study the Hebrew, this is not the case! The very important teachings of Jesus regarding our behavior toward one another is illustrated by David Bivin and Roy Blizzard. "It is widely accepted that Jesus taught a higher ethic epitomized in his statement, 'Turn the other cheek.' This has led to the belief that when attacked, one should not injure or kill in order to defend self, family, or country.

"The idea that pacifism was a part of the teaching of Jesus was popularized in the writings of Tolstoy. Pacifism, however, is not today, nor was it ever, a part of Jewish belief. The Jewish position is summed up in the Talmudic dictum, 'If someone comes to kill you, anticipate him and kill him first' (Sanhedrin 72^a). In other words, it is permissible to kill in order to defend oneself.

"Can it be, then, that Jesus was the first and only Jew to teach pacifism? It is very unlikely. We know that at least some of Jesus' disciples were armed (Luke 22:38; 22:50). Add to this the fact that, at one point, Jesus even suggested to his disciples that they purchase swords (Luke 22:35-37), and we begin to ask ourselves, Did Jesus really believe or teach pacifism? In reality, pacifism is a theological misunderstanding based on several mistranslations of the sayings of Jesus.

"The first of these mistranslations is Matthew 5:21, where most English versions of the Bible read, 'You shall not kill.' This is a

¹⁶Pinchas Lapid, *Israelis, Jews, and Jesus*, p. 3.

quotation of Exodus 20:13. The Hebrew word used there is ‘murder’ (*ratzach*), and not kill (*harag*). In Hebrew there is a clear distinction between these two words. The first (*ratzach*) means premeditated murder, while the second (*harag*) encompasses everything from justifiable homicide, manslaughter and accidental killing, to taking the life of an enemy soldier in war. The commandment very precisely prohibits murder, but not the taking of a life in defense of oneself or others.

“It is difficult to explain how English translators made this mistake since the Greek language also has separate words for ‘murder’ and ‘kill,’ and it is the Greek word for ‘murder’ (not ‘kill’) which is used in Matthew 5:21. Even with no knowledge of Hebrew, the English translators of the New Testament should here have correctly translated ‘murder,’ and not ‘kill.’

“A second saying of Jesus on which pacifism is based is Matthew 5:39^a, usually translated, ‘Do not resist evil,’ or ‘Do not resist one who is evil.’ Could Jesus possibly have said this to his disciples? If he did, his statement contradicts other scriptures such as, ‘Hate what is evil’ (Romans 12:9), and ‘Resist the devil’ (James 4:7).

“Again, Hebrew provides the answer. When we translate this verse back into Hebrew, we see that Jesus was not creating a new saying, but quoting a well-known Old Testament proverb. This proverb appears, with slight variations, in Psalm 37:1, 8, and Proverbs 24:19. In modern English we would translate this maxim: ‘Don’t compete with evildoers.’ In other words, do not try to rival or vie with a neighbor who has wronged you.

“Jesus is not teaching that one should lie down in the face of evil or submit to evil; rather, he is teaching that we should forego trying to ‘get back at,’ or take revenge on a quarrelsome neighbor. As Proverbs 24:29 says: ‘Do not say, ‘I will do to him as he has done to me. I will pay the man back for what he has done.’”

“Jesus is expressing an important principle which applies to our relationships with friends and neighbors. It does not apply when we are confronted with a murderer, rapist, or like person of violence; nor when we are facing the enemy on the field of battle. Jesus is not talking about how to deal with violence. He is talking about the fundamentals of brotherly relationships, about how to relate to our neighbor. If, for instance, a neighbor dumps a pail of garbage on our lawn, we are not to retaliate by dumping two pails on his lawn. If someone cuts in front of us in traffic, we are not to catch up and try to run him off the road. Wanting to ‘get even’ is, of course, a natural response; however, it is not *our* responsibility to punish our neighbor for his action. That responsibility is God’s. We are to respond to our neighbor in a way that will disarm and shame him for his actions. Proverbs 25:21 says: ‘If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat,

and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In so doing, you heap red-hot coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you.'

"Once we discover how to correctly translate Matthew 5:39^a, we can then correctly understand the verses which follow. Each verse is an illustration of how we should react to a hostile neighbor. If, for example (Matthew 5:39^b), a friend insults and embarrasses us by slapping us on the cheek, we are not to slap him back, but instead offer our other cheek. This, by the way, is probably the best-known of all the sayings of Jesus. It also is another of the sayings on which pacifism is based. Properly understood, however, it has nothing to do with battlefield situations, defending oneself against a murderer, or resisting evil. It is an illustration of how to deal with an angry neighbor, a personal 'enemy.'

"Mistranslation of Matthew 5:39^a has created a theological contradiction. But, when this saying is understood Hebraically, rather than contradict, it harmonizes beautifully with the rest of Scripture. Our response to evil *does* have to be resistance! It is morally wrong to tolerate evil. Our response to a 'hot-headed' neighbor, on the other hand, must be entirely different. His anger will only be temporary if we respond in a biblical manner....The responsibility of the godly person is to defuse a potentially divisive situation by 'turning away wrath.' We are not to seek revenge. If a neighbor or friend has wronged us and is in need of punishment, God is the only one who can administer it properly: 'Do not say, 'I will repay the evil deed in kind.' Trust in the LORD. He will save you' [i.e., 'He will take care of it'] (Proverbs 20:22). Our responsibility is not to react, not to respond in kind, to a belligerent neighbor. We are not to 'be overcome by evil,' but to 'overcome evil with good' (Romans 12:21)."¹⁷

¹⁷David Bivin and Roy Blizzard, Jr., *Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus*, pp. 106-110.