Matthew – Evidence for a Hebrew Autograph

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Updated: 15 April 2016

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Introduction

This paper discusses evidence for the Gospel of Matthew originally being written in Hebrew and not Aramaic. This paper is made available for those who wish to begin exploring the topic at hand and is in no way exhaustive.

Numerous church fathers mention a Gospel written by Matthew in Hebrew. The last few centuries of scholarship often assumed that Aramaic and not Hebrew was the language of 1st Century Israel, and therefore concluded that references to the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew was actually to an Aramaic Gospel or to a collection of sayings of Jesus in Aramaic. Unfortunately many still hold this view. However, research during the 20th century, including the examination of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Bar Kochba letters, and the Mishna, show that Hebrew was indeed a living language in the 1st century and most likely was the primary language of the land of Judah.

The Language(s) of First Century Israel

The purpose of this paper is not specifically to discuss the larger topic of the languages spoken in Israel in the time of Jesus. However it is necessary to show that Hebrew was indeed a living language at the time, if a claim is to be made that Matthew wrote his gospel in Hebrew. While one might argue that Matthew didn't speak Hebrew but may have simply written in Biblical Hebrew (see Kilpatrick)– a language that was still in religious use, it is unlikely that he would do this, since the purpose of his gospel is

popular use[1]. In other words, Matthew would have written in the popular language of his audience, the language that Jesus himself used.

First century Israel is now thought to be a tri-lingual environment (Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic). (See Notley "Preface" p3ff; see especially Safrai p225ff)

Hebrew

The late David Flusser, is among numerous scholars who have realized that Hebrew was indeed a spoken language in the time of Jesus. He states plainly "I belong to those scholars who believe that Jesus' teaching was in Hebrew and that the Semitic language behind the first three Gospels was Hebrew." (Flusser p128)[2]

An analysis of the evidence for Hebrew being used as a living language in Israel during the time of Messiah and afterwards follows:

Hebrew in Other New Testament Books

Hebrew as a language is referred to several times in the N.T. Four place names are said to be Hebrew: Bethesda (John 5:2), Gabbatha (John 19:13), Golgotha (John 19:17) and Armagedon (Revelation 16:16). Elsewhere there is the angel over the bottomless pit "whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon" (Revelation 9:11).

In Acts 21:40- 22:2ff Paul speaks in 'Hebrew': "And when there was a great silence, he spoke to them in the **Hebrew** language, saying, 'Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now.' And when they heard that he spoke to them in the **Hebrew**

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[1] For an argument that Matthew's gospel served a liturgical purpose in early Christian congregations, see Kilpatrick p59ff. However such a liturgical use does not point to Matthew writing in a 'dead' language, but more likely in a living and understood language.
[2] Flusser goes on to explain that the term 'son of man' though occurring in the Aramaic portion of the book of Daniel as a messianic figure, is actually a Hebrew idiom. Jesus refers to himself by this Hebrew idiom numerous times.

language, they kept all the more silent." Paul goes on to point out that he was born in a

Greek city but was raised in Jerusalem. Later in Acts 26:14 Paul testifies that he heard

Jesus speaking in Hebrew: "And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice

speaking to me and saying in the **Hebrew** language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting

Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'" (Acts 26:14).

All together, we have these eight references to the Hebrew language being used,

and no references to Aramaic[3]. In addition to these we have the sign over the cross being

written in Hebrew, Latin and Greek (Luke 23:38 and John 19:19; also discussed at

Matthew 27:37 below). Aramaic is absent again.

Other Semitic words and names are transliterated into Greek but are not

specifically said to be from Hebrew. They are:

Matt 1:23	Immanuel	God with us
John 1:38	Rabbi	Teacher
John 1:41	Messiah	Christ
John 1:42	Cephas	Stone
John 9:7	Siloam	Sent[4]
Acts 1:19 (cf Matt 27:8)	Akel Dama	Field of Blood
Acts 4:36	Barnabas	Son of Encouragement
Acts 9:36	Tabitha	Dorcas[5]
Acts 13:8	Elymas	Sorcerer
Hebrews 7:1-2	Melkizedek	King of Righteousness
Hebrews 7:1-2	King of Salem	King of Peace

Acts 1:19 is especially interesting: "And it became known to all those dwelling in

Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of

Blood." The author of Acts specifically calls this the language of Jerusalem. (Matthew

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[3] The view that "Hebrew" in the NT actually refers to the dialect of Aramaic used in Israel (Black p48) is most likely incorrect. None of the gospel writers refer to Aramaic.

[4] Though it might seem insignificant and useless to translate this proper noun, it fits with Jesus 'sending' the man to go wash.

[5] Note that though the narrative refers to her as Dorcas, Peter calls her by her Hebrew name – Tabitha.

27:8 also has this place name in a parallel account but it is translated into Greek and is not a transliteration.) If it can be shown which language these words are transliterated from, either Hebrew or Aramaic, then we would have strong evidence for which language the Jerusalemites were speaking in the first century. Notice that elsewhere in the book of Acts, Luke speaks of the Hebrew language, but here Hebrew is not specifically mentioned.

Jesus at Zaccheus' house

Luke's account of Jesus dining at Zacchaeus' house shows Hebrew was being used by Jesus to make a play on words in Hebrew: "And Jesus said to him, 'Today **salvation** has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.'" (Luke 19:9-10) The word 'salvation' in Hebrew is Yeshuah – identical in root and sound to Jesus name in Hebrew - Yeshua. The people present would have heard: 'Today Jesus has come to this house...'. The fact that Jesus is here referring to himself is evident by the second part of the verse "for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save...". Though the word for salvation is feminine in Hebrew and adds a final Hey, the pronunciation would sound the same (or very similar) as the pronunciation for Jesus name. This word play is strong evidence of Hebrew being spoken and not Aramaic since the word play does not work in Aramaic. The homophonic word play is also necessary to make good sense of the context, for if Jesus wasn't making a word play, what sense does the verse make. Jesus is the one who came to the house.

Extra Biblical Evidence of Hebrew as a Spoken 1st century language

Dead Sea Scrolls

Aramaic is conspicuously lacking in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Only two texts have been found in Aramaic, plus a few other minor fragments, compared to the numerous texts found in Hebrew and a minor quantity in Greek.

Bar Kosiba Letters

The Bar Kosiba (Bar Kochba) letters are written in Hebrew and date to a time of 100 years later than when Jesus taught in Israel. Though these letters seem to show some Aramaic influence, they are clearly written in Hebrew. If anything, the Aramaic influence upon the Hebrew helps to explain why Jesus on occasion used Aramaic phrases. Aramaic apparently had an influence on the Hebrew of the time in a similar fashion to the way many Arabic phrases and words have entered into Modern Hebrew today. Additionally coins from the Bar Kosiba rebellion were re-minted in Hebrew with ancient Hebrew letters, rather than in Hebrew with Aramaic letters or in Aramaic with Aramaic letters.[6]

Shmuel Safrai states "Hymns, prayers and biblical works written in Hebrew were discovered, as well as documents composed in the Mishnaic Hebrew dialect. Among them were letters containing Hebrew slang and abbreviated Hebrew forms characteristic

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[6] The modern Hebrew language, Hebrew bibles and the dialect of Jesus' day are written using the Aramaic block letters, which were adopted while the Jews were exiled in Babylon. Hebrew before the destruction of the first temple was written in a different script. This early Hebrew script continued to be known and used in Jesus' time, but on a limited basis. For example, Biblical texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls would typically be written in the newer block letters, but the older script would be used for the name of God.

of everyday speech." (Safrai "Spoken..." p229).[7] This shows that Hebrew was still being used as an everyday language in the period following the destruction of the temple in 70AD.

Mishnah

The Mishnah was 'sealed' or completed by 200 AD and yet it too was written in Hebrew, with a certain amount of Aramaic influence. Shmuel Safrai states "Mishnaic Hebrew differs from Biblical Hebrew, but not because it was translated from Aramaic as some scholars have thought. Rather it is the result of independent linguistic and historical developments related to the Hebrew language itself in the Second Temple period." (Safrai "Spoken..." p229). He goes on to show that the types of literature in the Mishnah demonstrate that Hebrew was a living spoken language at the time.

Parables

"Thousands of parables have been preserved in complete or fragmentary form, and are found in all types of literary compositions of the rabbinic period, both halachic and aggadic, early and late. All of the parables are in Hebrew." (Safrai "Spoken..." p238). This shows that Jesus' method of teaching was very common among rabbis and was most likely in Hebrew since all the parables from the later rabbinic period were in Hebrew.

After reviewing Mishnaic Hebrew, Rabbinic Literature, The Writings of Josephus, The New Testament, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and Non-Rabbinic literature, Safrai

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[7] One also needs to take into account Hanan Eshel's article showing that between the first and second Jewish revolts, no Hebrew economic documents were found, but that 39 Greek and 11 Aramaic economic documents were found from the period (Eshel p256). One explanation may be the suppression of the Hebrew language by the Romans after the first revolt – perhaps such documents were only allowed to be drawn up in other languages, though I cannot produce firm evidence for such an explanation. One must also consider the presence of Nabatean documents that were also found in the area.

concludes that "Although the Jewish inhabitants of the land of Israel in the time of Jesus knew Aramaic and used it in their contacts with the ordinary, non-Jewish residents, Hebrew was their first or native language. It is especially clear that in enlightened circles such as those of Jesus and his disciples, Hebrew was the dominant spoken language." (Safrai "Spoken..." p234) He also states, "Hebrew was the dominant written language in the whole land of Israel in the time of Jesus. It is therefore quite possible that not only did Jesus give his teaching in Hebrew, but that his biography was written in that language as well." (Safrai "Spoken..." p244).

Aramaic

Aramaic Phrases in the Gospels

The view that Hebrew was Jesus' language is in stark contrast to scholarly opinion that existed before the discovery and examination of not only the Dead Sea Scrolls, but also of numerous 1st Century inscriptions and before the evidence from the Mishna was considered. Indeed today, scholars who have not considered the evidence from these sources will often state that Aramaic was the language of Jesus[8]. They will often point to the words of Jesus that are recorded in Aramaic, but fail to recognize that in these few instances where Jesus speaks in Aramaic, translation is provided, indicating that the reader might not understand. This is important evidence that Hebrew and NOT Aramaic was the daily language of the people of Israel at the time. Since the rest of Jesus' words are not recorded in Aramaic, why did the Gospel writers preserve these few phrases?

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[8] Matthew Black presents the common opinion of his day that Aramaic was the language of Jesus (Black p15ff), but goes on to point out that "we possess no Aramaic writing of any extent belonging to the first century" (Black p18). Black briefly discusses the new (in his time) discoveries at Qumran, which demonstrate that Hebrew was a living language (Black p47).

Most likely because Jesus, on these rare occasions, chose to speak in a language that was not his native tongue and not known to the original audience.

Similarly when Jesus quotes from the Hebrew Bible, such as at Matt 22:35-40 (compare Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18), no translation or explanation is needed because the hearers understood the Hebrew Bible in Hebrew. Likewise when Jesus read from Isaiah in the Synagogue no explanation or translation was needed because the hearers understood Hebrew. Only on the rare occasion when he deliberately used Aramaic, was translation necessary. (see also quote of Psalm 118:25-26 at Matt. 21:9.)

At the triumphal entry (Matt. 21:9), the crowds shouted out a quote from Psalm 118:25-26, which is obviously in Hebrew. This shows that at least here the crowds made us of Hebrew. The reason can only be either that they spoke Hebrew as their first language or had such zeal for the scriptures being in Hebrew that they chose to go against their mother tongue and use Hebrew here. However the evidence is for the former, since they do not directly quote the Psalm but merely allude to it but still use Hebrew and not Aramaic or Greek.

Consider the following parallel verses from Matthew and Mark, which have been commonly understood to be Jesus speaking in Aramaic:

Matthew 27:46-47 "And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?' Some of those who stood there, when they heard that, said, 'This Man is calling for Elijah!'"

Mark 15:34-35 "And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' which is translated, 'My God, My God,

why have You forsaken Me?' Some of those who stood by, when they heard that,

said, 'Look, He is calling for Elijah!'"

Both gospels have textual variants that could indicate that these where Hebrew words or

Aramaic words. Kilpatrick provides the list of variants (p104-105). He also points out

that only at Matthew 27:33 does the writer have one of the 'Aramaic' phrases found in

Mark (Golgotha – actually Hebrew, see below). Concerning our verses under question

Kilpatrick states, "This lack of sympathy with Aramaic and the contact with Hebrew

suggest that at Matt 27:46, too, the quotation was in Hebrew. It must nevertheless be

recognized that such a conclusion is probable rather than certain." (Kilpatrick p105).[9]

Here however, I make the radical suggestion that Jesus may not be quoting Psalm

22:1(2). The first clue is obvious – Psalm 22 says עזבתני (azavtani) which does not sound

or appear as the word found in the gospels. Rather, if he is speaking Hebrew, Jesus may

be quoting a different messianic Psalm (if quoting at all) - Psalm 42:9(10), which reads:

"why have you forgotten me" – שכחתני (shachachtani). This idea is also supported within

the gospels themselves – In John 16:32 Jesus states, "...you will be scattered, each to his

own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me."

Though it has become common Christian tradition to believe that God forsook Jesus in

his sufferings based on the translations in the passages in Matthew and Mark and their

supposed connection to Psalm 22, in reality Jesus never says God forsook him in the

sense of departing from him. Additionally the Hebrew Bet and Kaf letters look very

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[9] Though Kilpatrick supports the conclusion that the Semitic background of Matthew is Hebrew and not
Aramaic, he does so only to support his argument that the church that produced Matthew's gospel had long
separated from the Aramaic speaking community. See Kilpatrick p105. It must be remembered that
Kilpatrick wrote in 1946 – before the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered and long before they were
analyzed, thus he follows the old school idea that Aramaic and not Hebrew was alive at the time. He says
that "the slight knowledge of Hebrew shown (in Matthew) could be traditional...a little academic" (p105).

similar. If Matthew was translated from Hebrew, the translator may have misread the letters and wrote 'shabachthani' in place of 'shachachthani'. Mark then may have relied on the Greek translation of Matthew and carried over the spelling error.[10]

Supposedly Aramaic phrases occur in Mark 5:41; 7:34; and 14:36. At Mark 5:41, I believe Jesus deliberately chose to speak in Aramaic to make a play on words that is not possible in only Hebrew. The word *TLT* means 'lamb' in Hebrew but in Aramaic can also mean 'little girl'. Jesus apparently wanted to call her a little lamb and a little girl. Elsewhere he seems to refer to his young disciples as lambs (see the reinstatement of Peter – 'feed my lambs' – John 21:15).

At Mark 7:34 a translation of the transliteration of a supposedly Aramaic word is given, again indicating that this word was out of the norm and therefore not understood by those who spoke only Hebrew. Supposedly the word 'ephphatha' is an Aramaic Etpaal form, though the transliteration leaves something to be desired in the way of accuracy.

Mark 14:36 has the word 'Abba' and the word 'father' back to back and in fact they mean almost the same thing. 'Abba' is actually closer to the English terms of endearment: 'daddy' or 'dad'. 'Abba' is still used by Jews in Israel today who speak only Hebrew and not Aramaic. The word may have developed from Hebrew or may have been adopted from Aramaic. Either way, it is within the realm of the Hebrew language by the 1st Century.

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[10] Here the reverse idea – that of Matthew relying on Mark does not work, since it is not generally claimed that Mark relied on a Hebrew text here. In fact this one little point has the Greek gospel of Matthew appearing exactly when it was traditionally considered to have been written – before the temple's destruction and before the gospel of Mark. This is turn makes the underlying Hebrew text of Matthew extremely early.

Golgotha

Golgotha is a name derived from the Hebrew for 'skull'.   But the 'a' vowel at the end is thought to be the Aramaic definite article. However this is a place name and thus a proper noun, which doesn't need the article. It could just be a name derived from the Hebrew word for skull. Indeed John states in his Gospel that it is Hebrew! (John 19:17). John records three words as being 'Hebrew'. They are all place names and all end in an 'a' vowel: Bethesda (John 5:2), Gabbatha (John 19:13) and Golgotha (John 19:17).

Greek

Robert Thomas argues for widespread use of Greek in the land of Israel at the time (Thomas p310). Though not all his arguments are strong – for example the idea that Peter spoke to Cornelius in Greek (Acts 10). Here the internal evidence may allow for them to have spoken in Hebrew, since the description of Cornelius is of a man who appears to have been a proselyte - praying to the God of Israel and giving alms to the people. He is also told by the angel to send to Joppa for "Simon whose surname is Peter" (Acts 10:5). That the angel calls Peter by his Hebrew name may be indicative of a Hebrew conversation. In this passage there is no clear evidence as to what language was used.

In Matthew 16:18, Thomas claims that the play on words between 'petra' and 'petros' cannot be reproduced in Hebrew or Aramaic, and "is best explained as occurring in a discussion originally carried on in Greek" (Thomas p311). However, Thomas is completely wrong here, for the Aramaic Peshitta has the play on words, using the name Cephas.

Thomas goes on to state, "In all likelihood, Jesus' conversations with the syrophoenician woman, the Roman centurion, and Pilate were in Greek. Stephen (Acts 7) and James (Acts 15) quote from the Septuagint, thus giving evidence of their facility in the Greek language." (Thomas p311) However on all points Thomas' argument is weak here. The Syrophonecian woman may have spoken Aramaic. A comparison of the gospels (Matt. 8:5ff and Luke 7:2ff) show that the Roman Centurion actually sent Jewish Elders to Jesus rather than choosing to talk to Jesus himself – Jesus surely spoke to the Jewish Elders in Hebrew. Jesus conversation with Pilate may well have been in Hebrew – for what language did Pilate address the crowds in? As to the use of the LXX, it cannot be proved that the disciples were using this in Acts, since they may simply have been using a Hebrew text that was closer to the LXX than to the Masoretic textual tradition.

It is clear that Greek was in widespread use at the time, but one must be careful about making assumptions as to what degree it was used by Jesus and his early followers.

Latin

Latin appears as one of the languages on the sign on the cross probably because the Romans executed Jesus and that was their official language. The significance of Latin is only in that it actually appears on the sign while Aramaic does not. It is hard to believe that if Aramaic was spoken widely, that Hebrew, Greek and Latin would appear on the sign but not Aramaic[11]. Very few of the observers would have understood Latin, yet even this language is given precedence over Aramaic in this case.

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[11] The idea that everywhere that Hebrew is mentioned, Aramaic is actually intended is based only on the assumption that Hebrew was dead at the time and Aramaic was the popular language. The substitution of the word Hebrew for Aramaic would have to be universal since both Luke and John refer to Hebrew and so do the early church fathers. Such a universal substitution is highly unlikely.

Early Witnesses to the Hebrew Version of Matthew

Church Fathers:[12]

Papias (150-170 CE)

"Matthew put together the oracles [of the Lord] in the Hebrew language, and each one interpreted them as best he could. [As quoted by Eusebius; Eccl. Hist. 3:39] [13]

Koester states, "This remark has been variously interpreted, and the scholarly debate has not produced a definitive and generally accepted explanation. In Eusebius's report, this quote from Papias's writings follows immediately upon his quote from the same author about the Gospel of Mark. Thus the reference to Matthew as the author of 'the sayings' is widely understood as a reference to the canonical Gospel of Matthew, and there can be no question that this is what Eusebius thought when he copied Papias's information." (Koester p316. Kilpatrick agrees – p3). Koester goes on to point out three possible difficulties: That in regard to Matthew, Papias is only recorded as referring to the 'sayings' of Jesus, whereas regarding Mark he says that he wrote 'the things said and done by the Lord'.

Koester second objection is merely out of a prejudice when he states "Papias's reference to a "Hebrew" composition by Matthew is extraordinary because it is certain that there never was a Semitic (Hebrew or Aramaic) original of the Gospel of Matthew". His weak 'evidence' is in his footnote: "The Greek literary style of the Gospel of

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[12] The reader is referred to the more recent work by James R. Edwards *The Hebrew Gospel and the Development of the Synoptic Tradition* (Eerdmans, 2009).
[13] p283 THE ANTE-NICENE FATHERS VOLUME 1 Edited by A. Roberts and J Donaldson

Matthew and its use of Greek sources (Mark and Q) and materials exclude this." (Koester p316-317) Herein lies the seriousness of my current paper as touching source criticism.

Koester's third objection "there is no evidence for the existence of various differing translations into Greek in which the Gospel of Matthew could have been circulating in its earliest period, as is claimed in Papias's statement" (Koester p317). Here Koester makes a few bad assumptions. The first assumption is that Papias speaks of all these various translations being translations into Greek. However Papias never mentions Greek. Though we do have the tradition that James the Less (James the half-brother of Jesus) translated Matthew's Hebrew Gospel into Greek (Foxe I,4). At the same time there is the tradition that Thomas translated Matthew's gospel into the Indian language.[14] Second Koester makes no analysis of the various Greek textual traditions that have come down to us (Western, Alexandrian, Byzantine, and others).

Koester himself points out, "To be sure, that Matthew was the oldest Gospel and that it was originally written in Aramaic (or Hebrew) is the traditional view, which was held from the time of the ancient church." (Koester p317) Kilpatrick points out the Jewish character of the Gospel: "It must be admitted that, once the suggestion of translation from a Semitic language had been made, it gained immensely in plausibility from the outstandingly Jewish character of the Gospel." (Kilpatrick p5).

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[14] Eusebius states: " Pantænus was one of these, and is said to have gone to India. It is reported that among persons there who knew of Christ, he found the Gospel according to Matthew, which had anticipated his own arrival. For Bartholomew, one of the apostles, had preached to them, and left with them the writing of Matthew in the Hebrew language, which they had preserved till that time." Church History 5.10.3 Online at: http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2501.htm "Thomas was called 'Mar Toma' [Lord or Bishop Thomas] so Pantaenus, who knew Hebrew but not the Indian languages, may have misheard this as 'Bar Tolmai', the Hebrew name for Bartholomew" (Barton - Chapter 14).

Ireneus (170 CE)

Ireneus stated: "Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia." (Against Heresies 3:1.1)[15]

"The Gospel according to Matthew was written to the Jews. For they laid particular stress upon the fact that Christ [should be] of the seed of David. Matthew also, who had a still greater desire [to establish this point], took particular pains to afford them convincing proof that Christ is of the seed of David; and therefore he commences with [an account of] His genealogy."[16]

Origen (210 CE)

"Among the four Gospels, which are the only indisputable ones in the Church of God under heaven, I have learned by tradition that the first was written by Matthew, who was once a publican, but afterwards an apostle of Jesus Christ, and it was prepared for the converts from Judaism, and published in the Hebrew language." (Origen being quoted by Eusebius; Eccl. Hist. 6:25.4)[17]

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[15] <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.ix.iv.ii.html> also in THE ANTE-NICENE FATHERS VOLUME 1 p823 Edited by A. Roberts and J Donaldson. Also in Eusebius' Church History 5.8.2
[16] p1145 THE ANTE-NICENE FATHERS VOLUME 1 Edited by A. Roberts and J Donaldson
[17] <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.xi.xxv.html>

Eusebius (315 CE)

"For Matthew, who had at first preached to the Hebrews, when he was about to go to other peoples, committed his Gospel to writing in his native tongue, and thus compensated those whom he was obliged to leave for the loss of his presence." (Eccl. Hist. 3:24.6)[18]

Epiphanius (370 CE)

Epiphanius speaks of a Hebrew version of Matthew used by the Ebionites, but this version may be a corrupted one. (Panarion 29:9:4) See also Panarion 30.3.6/7 where he also speaks of a Hebrew of John and Acts as well.[19] Epiphanius' reference to a Hebrew Matthew adds little to the argument for a Hebrew autograph behind the Greek version, since he does not point to it being the authentic Hebrew original.

Jerome (382 CE)

"Matthew, also called Levi, apostle and aforetimes publican, composed a gospel of Christ at first published in Judea in Hebrew for the sake of those of the circumcision who believed, but this was afterwards translated into Greek though by what author is uncertain. The Hebrew itself has been preserved until the present day in the library at Cæsarea which Pamphilus so diligently gathered. I have also had the opportunity of having the volume described to me by the Nazarenes of Berœa, a city of Syria, who use it. In this it is to be noted that wherever the Evangelist, whether on his own account or in

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[18] http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.viii.xxiv.html

[19] Shem Tov apparently had a copy of John in Hebrew as he makes an argument after Matthew 21:9 that John and Matthew change the Hebrew word חמור to the Hebrew word אתון - here he is referring to Zechariah 9:9. He also refers to the passage in John as 'perek 28' which is actually John 12:14 in our Bibles, thus showing a different Hebrew division (see Howard p179).

the person of our Lord the Saviour quotes the testimony of the Old Testament he does not follow the authority of the translators of the Septuagint but the Hebrew. Wherefore these two forms exist "Out of Egypt have I called my son," and "for he shall be called a Nazarene." (*Lives of Illustrious Men*, chapter 3).[20]

Isho'dad (850 CE)

Concerning the names of Jesus' ancestors that are missing from the genealogy in chapter one of Matthew's gospel:

"And it is clear also that the Evangelist left them [the names in the genealogy] out, from this, that his book was in existence in Caesarea of Palestine, and everyone acknowledges that he wrote it with his hands in Hebrew; and these names are not in *it*;..." (Ishodad's Commentary on Matthew 1:7-11, Ishodad p9)

Shem Tov's Hebrew version (c. 1380)

The Spanish Jewish philosopher Shem-Tob ben Isaac Shaprut produced a work called *Eben Bohan* in which he put forward a version of the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew, which may be based on an early Hebrew Manuscript of Matthew.

George Howard, who has studied and translated this text, states "The preponderant weight of evidence, therefore, suggests that Shem-Tob only copied, not translated, his Matthew and that his Matthew was already in Hebrew when he got it." (Howard p179)

Howard also states "The evidence as a whole presupposes a Hebrew text of Matthew that existed from ancient times and was used among the Jews for polemical

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[20] http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf203.v.iii.v.html

purposes against Christians." (Howard p180)   However, Howard concludes that Shem

Tov's text "represents the original only in an impure form" (Howard p223).[21]

The Trinitarian Formula

The Trinitarian Formula occurs in two places in the bible:

> Matthew 28:19: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the
>
> name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:"
>
> 1st John 5:7: "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word,
>
> and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one."
>
> The fact that the Trinitarian formula in 1st John5:7 is a late addition, lends support

to the same in Matthew 28:19. Shem Tov may have been relying on a Hebrew manuscript

that lacked this formula, since his version lacks this verse.

> The consistent N.T. method of baptism is in Jesus' name (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 19:5;

Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3; 1Cor. 1:13-15 see also Acts 10:48 and 22:16) and we never see the

Trinitarian formula used in the N.T. for baptism, in spite of the Greek version of

Matthew 28:19.

> Curiously elsewhere in Matthew the Shema is lacking where Mark
>
> includes it:
>
> Matthew 22:37: "Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the LORD your God with all
>
> your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind.'"
>
> Mark 12:29-33: "Jesus answered him, 'The first of all the commandments is:
>
> 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is **one.** And you shall love the

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[21] For an alternative to Howard's conclusions, see Peterson. Regardless of Shem Tov's source(s), some of the variants may represent, even if by coincidence or reconstruction, the original Hebrew words of Jesus. See my discussion concerning selected verses from Matthew below.

LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength.' ... So the scribe said to Him, 'Well said, Teacher You have spoken the truth, for there is **one God**, and there is no other but He. And to love him with all the heart...'"[22]

Note that in Mark the twice repetition of God being ONE and the reiteration of the fact by the scribe in different words. All this is completely lacking in Matthew. I wonder about a deliberate modification of Matthew to delete these references to God being one and to add the Trinitarian formula in Matthew 28:19. The other possibility is that Mark was indeed written later than Matthew and he chose to include these extra phrases in order to combat a new doctrine that had arisen between the time of the writing of the Gospel of Matthew and his own writing. Either way, due to the importance of the Shema in Judaism, I am convinced that Mark reflects the actual complete words of Jesus.

Word plays in Shem Tov's Matthew

Howard points out 14 different passages in Shem Tov that have word plays in Hebrew where the same root is used in two different senses in the same passage. (Howard p198ff). Additionally Howard points out 11 different passages that contain Alliterations. These Alliterations consist of similar sounding or similar spelt words (Howard p200-201). Some of these word plays and alliterations will be discussed further below.

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[22] Concerning the four-fold versus three-fold formula, there is manuscript evidence that Mark may also have originally contained the three-fold formula. However Luke 10:25-28 must also be considered. Though the Luke passage is NOT a parallel passage since it is in a completely different setting and is not Jesus speaking, it does give some insight into the thought of the day. The manuscripts of Luke all have the four-fold formula. Since in Luke an expert of the law is speaking, we can surmise that the four-fold formula was popular interpretation of the command. For further discussion of this idea see Serge Ruzer p84 who states that in Second Temple Jewish literature both midrash and text would be quoted together without distinguishing between the two. Thus we see both the Lawyer in Luke and the Scribe in Mark stating a four-fold formula that shows both midrash and text mixed together.

Synoptic problems solved by Hebrew?

Howard makes a case for an original Hebrew gospel of Matthew being mistranslated as the reason for some synoptic problems. In other words, the Hebrew text was either physically distorted, misspelled or even misread by the translator, and thus resulted in alternative readings that are at variance with the other gospel accounts (Howard p215ff). For example the difference between Matthew 15:17 'is cast out' and Mark 7:19 'goes out' may have resulted from a dropped letter הושלך as compared to הולך. Howard shows several other examples, and more could probably be found. It is unfortunate that source-critical scholars have not given more consideration to such ideas.

Conclusion About Shem Tov's Matthew

Although Shem Tov's Matthew is not accurate to the original gospel of Matthew, it does contain significant variants that make some passages clearer, solves some synoptic problems and gives the reader an idea of some of the word plays Jesus may have used in his teachings – many of which will be discussed below. Unfortunately Modern Hebrew translations of the gospels have not taken advantage of Shem Tov or the other Medieval Hebrew Manuscripts that are available. In re-translating the gospels from Greek back into Hebrew, there are a variety of words and phrases that can be used to express the Greek in good Hebrew. It seems advisable to give weight to the already existing medieval manuscripts such as that of Shem Tov, and those by Sebastian Munster and Jean du Tillet from the 16th century, in choosing the wording of the Hebrew. Additionally weight should be given to quotations of Matthew in Hebrew found in early

Jewish and Anti-Christian writings[23]. Although all these sources have limited value in reproducing the original gospel, at least they provide a Hebrew source when multiple options that appear equally valid exist for reverse translating the Greek into Hebrew.

Internal Evidence

Methods

If we assume that Matthew wrote in Hebrew, but others translated it into Greek (and other languages), then we can expect to find Hebraisms more accurately portrayed in Greek in the other Gospels because Mark, Luke and John where choosing for themselves how to translate Jesus words from Hebrew to Greek. Luke seems to especially preserve Hebraisms well. See for example Notley L.T.L.O.T.FT. p107ff, where he argues for the value of Luke in showing the original message of a particular parable.

Selected Verse Analysis of Matthew

1:1

"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ" this is a common Hebrew formula found throughout Genesis. It is also found in Exodus, Chronicles and Ruth. Thus a Hebraism.

1:17

In Hebrew the letters of the name "David" add up to 14. 14x3=42. However only 41 names are listed. Luke's gospel, by comparison, contains 56 names from Abraham to

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[23] Howard points out four important sources (p160): The Book of Nestor (6-9th cent); The Milhamot HaShem by Jacob ben Reuben (1170); Sepher Joseph Hamekane by Rabbi Joseph ben Nathan Official (13th cent); and The Nizzahon Vetus (late 13th cent).

Jesus inclusively (Luke 3:23ff). However, Jehoiakim was left out between Josiah and

Jeconiah (see II Chronicles 36:1-9). Also note that Ahaziah (ruled 1 year), Joash (ruled

40 years) and Amaziah (ruled 29 years) are not included between Joram and Uzziah.

Also fourteen generations from the Babylonian captivity (Jehoiachin) to Jesus, is rather

few. Since Jesus is the 14th, this leaves 13 generations to fill a gap of about 606 years

(Assuming the II Chronicles account of Jehoiachin being 8 years old when he began to

reign is correct as compared with the II kings age of 18 and if the typical date for the

destruction of the first temple is correct - 586 BC). This would be 46 ½ years to a

generation. This seems like extremely long generations.

What is relative to our discussion here is the numerical significance in Hebrew of

David's name which is 14. David's name was spelt two different ways in the Old

Testament. Before the Babylonian exile, his name was spelt: דוד (Dalet-Vav-Dalet).

However by Ezra's time the spelling changed to דויד (Dalet-Vav-Yud-Dalet). [24] This

later, post-exilic spelling is found in the book of Chronicles and has a numerical value of

24 due to the additional Hebrew letter YUD. This letter was added to aid in

pronunciation. Since the exiles that returned from Babylon had been exposed to Aramaic

for a few generations, they most likely needed this pronunciation aid and others when re-

adopting the Hebrew language. Interestingly, Matthew is referring to the older spelling

in his gospel, which lacks the YUD that would have been useful to Aramaic speakers.

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[24] Dalet is the fourth letter of the Hebrew Alphabet and therefore has a value of 4. Vav is 6th and Yud is 10th.

1:21

The play on words (Jesus / Salvation) is only possible in Hebrew and is not common in Aramaic though it can be found in Targum. Justin Martyr realized this early and states: "And the name Jesus in the Hebrew language means (Savior) in the Greek tongue. Wherefore, too, the angel said to the virgin, "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." (p315 chp 33) Here the evidence is not only that Matthew wrote in Hebrew, but Mary, who was from Galilee spoke and understood Hebrew.

2:6 compared to Micah 5:1ff (4:14ff)

NIV – "Marshal your troops, O city of troops, for a siege is laid against us. They will strike Israel's ruler on the cheek with a rod. But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old from ancient times."

NJPS – "Now you gash yourself in grief. They have laid siege to us; They strike the ruler of Israel on the cheek with a staff. And you, O Bethlehem of Ephrath, Least among the clans of Judah, From you one shall come forth to rule Israel for Me – One whose origin is from of old, from ancient times."

These verses have traditionally been considered Messianic.

Both versions translate אלפי as 'clans'[25] instead of the usual and literal 'thousands' (KJV/ASV). The NIV does not coordinate its translation with Matthew 2:6, which

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[25] supported by Judges 6:15 and 1st Sam. 10:19, but 1st Sam 23:23 could go either way. Consistent with its translation of the Micah passage, the NJPS chooses to translate אלוף in Genesis 36:15 as 'clan', instead of as 'chief' (NIV) or 'duke' (KJV). This shows that the NJPS recognized the connection of the root to that in

quotes this passage and reads 'rulers of Judah'. Here Matthew is a significant early witness to this passage as Matthew was originally composed in Hebrew and then translated to Greek.[26] Indeed 'rulers' or 'princes' (KJV) is a reasonable translation of this Hebrew word based on Zechariah 12:5 and others (ignoring the vowel pointing).

That Matthew does not follow the LXX which reads 'thousands' is further evidence of Matthew's Hebrew original or at least to Matthew translating directly from the Hebrew of Micah and not quoting the LXX, thus diminishing the claimed importance of the LXX to the very early Church, particularly among the Jewish congregations.

2:23

"a Nazarene" - another play on words from the prophecy of Isaiah 11:1. Again showing that this gospel was originally written in Hebrew since that is the language that the play on words makes sense in. The name for the town of Nazareth comes from the root word for branch in Hebrew. However the Greek is Nazaret or Nazareth but manuscript P70 from Oxyrhynchus, Egypt (third century) contains various portions of Matthew and reads Nazara which sounds like an Aramaic form . Also see Zechariah 6:12 "Behold, the man whose name is the Branch…" where a different Hebrew word is used (tsemach).

3:3

"A voice calling 'in the wilderness make straight...'" or "A voice calling in the wilderness 'make straight...'". The question here is whether the words 'in the wilderness' are what the voice said *or* where the voice said it. One of the Isaiah Scrolls from Qumron

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Micah 5:2(5:1). This lends further credence to translating the Micah passage as 'rulers of Judah' if one will translate the Genesis passage and elsewhere as 'duke', 'ruler' or 'governor'.

[26] This view is debated today, but is supported in various places by the writings of Jerome, including his commentary on Matthew 23:35 and *Lives of Illustrious Men*, Book 5.

points to the former. Matthew may have quoted the poetry correctly but the Greek translator may have misunderstood.

3:9

"and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'. For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones." (NKJV) Here John the Baptist is using a play on words in Hebrew – אבנים – בנים.[27] This Hebrew play on these two words was apparently very common in the first century (See Matt 21:28 below). Josephus states that watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem would warn of a roman stone being thrown by saying in their ancestral tongue "the son is coming" (Notley – Appendix p299; Josephus WAR 4.272).

5:18

"For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled." A 'jot' is the Greek letter 'iota' and refers to the Hebrew letter 'yud'. A 'tittle' is a small stroke of the pen to complete certain Hebrew or Aramaic letters. The parallel account in Luke only refers to 'tittle' and not to the 'jot' (Luke 16:17)[28]. Again showing a translation of Matthew's original Hebrew into Greek, for if his gospel was originally written in Greek, the mention of the iota (yud) would probably not exist.[29]

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[27] Notley in the Appendix p299 and in footnote on 101 on the same page shows that this play on words doesn't really work in Aramaic.

[28] Yet as can be shown, Luke too is very Hebraic (see Notley's preface).

[29] The modern use of the phrase "not one iota" - meaning 'not one tiny bit' - does not necessarily reflect a similar usage of the Greek language 2000 years ago.

6:22-23

"evil eye" is a Hebrew expression meaning greedy.   See Deut. 15:9, 28:54,56[30] and

Proverbs 23:6, 28:22.   The context in Matthew also teaches this, both in the verses

before and after which are speaking about money: "For where your treasure is, there your

heart will be also." and "You cannot serve God and mammon"

7:6

חזיר – יחזר a play on words between the word for 'swine' and the word for 'turn' as shown

in the Shem Tov version. (Howard points this out).

9:19

Only Matthew refers to himself by the name 'Matthew' at his conversion (Matt 9:9).

Luke (5:27-29) and Mark (2:14-15) both refer to him as Levi. Later in the lists of

Apostles, all of the writers refer to him as Matthew, but Matthew himself adds the

designation 'the tax collector' (Compare Matt 10:3, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:15). I believe this

is a statement of humility. The term tax collector was a negative term and Matthew

continued to use it regarding himself even after his conversion, out of humility.

Additionally in the story of the Centurion, which occurs before Matthew's

conversion (Matt 8) we see several details that differ from Luke's account (Luke 7) and

this may be due to different second hand accounts they received – Matthew receiving an

account that was somewhat abbreviated in the details of who actually met with Jesus (the

centurion or the elders and friends), while at the same time receiving a more in depth

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[30] In Deut 28:56 the delicate woman becomes so greedy due to starvation that she refuses to share her placenta as a meal with her family members. A very graphic picture of the calamity that was to happen to Israel due to their refusal to listen to God (Deut. 28:15)

version as regards the words of Jesus. In other words Matthew's source was not

concerned with explaining that it wasn't actually the centurion himself, but rather was

concerned with conveying Jesus words. The accounts aren't contradictory if we view the

elders and friends words as representing those of the centurion.

However, another possible explanation is that early critics of Matthew's Hebrew

gospel may have pointed out that the centurion would not have been a Hebrew speaker,

and therefore Luke added the details about the centurion sending Jewish elders and

friends to speak to Jesus.

9:18ff

Matthew 9:18ff compared to Mark 5:22ff / Luke 8:41. Matthew has the daughter already

dead when the ruler of the synagogue comes to Jesus whereas the accounts in Mark and

Luke have her dying and only later, after the healing of the woman with the issue of

blood, does the synagogue ruler find out his daughter died. If we consider that the

Hebrew words for dead and dying (MTH) are spelt the same, the reason for the

discrepancy may be resolved.

The other difference between the accounts is that Matthew doesn't record Jesus

talking to the dead girl. Mark records both his words and their translation. Luke only

records their translation. Perhaps Matthew's zeal for the Hebrew language kept him from

wanting to record the Messiah implementing an Aramaic word here.[31]

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[31] Of course this is pure speculation building on the idea of Matthew's zeal for the Hebrew langauge. As for Mark lacking the words of Jesus, this is may be due to his reliance on Matthew's gospel.

10:25

'Beelzebul' (בעל זבוב) and 'master of the house' (בעל הבית) shows the Hebrew construction of Jesus sentence. Shem Tov's text reflects this.

10:36

"and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.'" In place of the Greek reading, Shem Tov reads, "The enemy will be loved ones" showing a Hebrew rhyme (האויבים – אהובים). It cannot be certain that this was the original reading in Hebrew, but it seems unlikely that Shem Tov would invent this word play and so many others on his own. [32] In this passage the play on the word 'love' is strong all the way through verse 39 in Shem Tov, which reads 'loves his life' instead of the Greek 'find his life'. Here Shem Tov makes a lot more sense, for what could be the meaning of 'to find one's life'. Such a phrase does not seem to make sense unless it has already been lost. Compare Shem Tov with the Greek:

Shem Tov: "The one who **loves** his soul will lose it, but the one who loses his soul for me will find it."

Greek: "He who **finds** his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it." (NKJV)

Not only does the Shem Tov version make more sense, it continues the word play on 'love' and adds the further similar sounding word for 'lose' אובד. Thus the whole passage becomes a word play between אוהב אויב and אובד. This is all highlighted in Shem

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[32] George Howard makes this point and explains this Hebrew word play among others in Shem Tov's Matthew version (Howard pp194ff).

Tov's version by the lack of verse 38, which doesn't work in the overall word play of the passage.

Shem Tov's version is also supported by the testimony of a similar but different passage at Luke 14:26[33], which, like Matthew, speaks of hating ones loved ones AND hating one's own life. This parallels perfectly with Shem Tov's reading in Matthew about loving one's soul. Additionally Luke places the part about taking one's cross (Matt 10:38) after the love statements, showing that this was indeed the words of Jesus, yet at some point may have gotten placed out of order in Matthew, where it may have originally existed in a different spot or not at all (as is reflected by it's lack in Shem Tov).

11:12

Jesus is possibly referring to Micah 2:12-13. One modern Hebrew N.T.[34] version translates the word violence as "פורצת".

12:42

"*The* Queen of the South". The first definite article is not actually part of the Greek text and its omission is standard in Hebrew. As Black points out, this use of the definite article here is "more Hebraic than Aramaic" (Black p93).

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[33] The actual parallel passage to Matthew 10 is Luke 12. In comparing the teachings of Jesus in the various Gospels, it must be remembered that Jesus would have taught the same things over and over again. The teachings from the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7) were no doubt repeated by Jesus in many other locales and at many other times. Thus we should not be confused when we see them crop up again in Luke 12 at a different point in His ministry. Not only would Jesus repeat His own teachings, his disciples would have also repeated them when they were sent out (Matt 10). By giving his teachings in easy to remember stories AND by using word plays, puns and rhymes, His teachings would be easy for the taught ones to remember and to repeat. (Black also noticed this – p 185).
[34] *Hebrew New Testament* The Bible Society in Israel 1995

12:50 – 'my brother' or 'my brothers'

The following passages in Matthew differs from Mark and Luke in several ways including the word 'brother' being in the singular in Matthew and being in the plural in Mark and Luke

> Matthew 12:50 "For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother."
>
> Mark 3:33-35 But He answered them, saying, 'Who is My mother, or My brothers?'...'Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother'"
>
> Luke 8:21 "But He answered and said to them, 'My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it.'"

These three passages are similar, but are apparently each in different contexts and cannot automatically be assumed to be the same words of Jesus from the same incident. Howard points out that the confusion between the plural and singular of brothers may be due to the different ways the word אחי can be read in Hebrew. Depending on the pronunciation it could be either 'my brother' or 'my brothers' (Howard p215). However, since the verses have no direct contradiction and may be from different periods in Jesus ministry, this point about the Hebrew is very weak.

13:54ff

When compared to the parallel passage in Mark 6:1ff two differences stand out. The first is that in Matthew Jesus is the 'son of the carpenter whose mother is Mary' while in Mark he is 'the carpenter the son of Mary'. Here the difference may be related to how each writer translated an underlying Hebrew text. However it is more likely that the variations

are due to the fact that Mark never mentions Joseph, whereas Matthew specifically

provides a genealogy of Jesus through Joseph and makes Joseph an important character

in the early life of Jesus (Matthew 2:13,19).

The second difference is the order of the names of Jesus' brothers. In Matthew

Simon comes before Judas, whereas in Mark Judas comes before Simon. Here I would

argue that Matthew's order is a deliberate choice to avoid associating Judas the brother of

Jesus with Judas the betrayer who was the son of Simon (John 6:71; 12:4; 13:2,26).

Additionally the order of names in Matthew – Jacob, Joseph, Simon and Judah –

is reminiscent of the events in Egypt – Simon being the brother that Joseph locked up

until the other brothers brought down Benjamin. Judah being the brother that stood as a

redeemer for Benjamin. Since Matthew already connected Jesus to the Exodus by

relating the story of his descent and return from Egypt (Matt 2:13ff), I believe the list and

order of names here is purposeful.

15:1ff – The eating with unclean hands

Comparing this passage with Mark 7:1ff, we notice that Matthew is clearly writing to a

Jewish crowd as he provides no explanation about the Jewish customs. Mark on the other

hand provides the following long explanation for his Gentile readers:

> For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a
>
> special way, holding the tradition of the elders. When they come from the
>
> marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things
>
> which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper
>
> vessels, and couches. (Mark 7:3-4)

Notice also Mark includes the word 'Corban' and then explains it. Matthew just has the explanation. (Mark 7:11 v Matt 15:5) Since Matthew is a translation from Hebrew, naturally we do not expect to see this word or other Hebrew words in general – (since they were all translated). Mark on the other hand includes lots of Hebrew (or Aramaic) phrases in his Greek text and then explains them. It must be remembered that John Mark was a Hebrew speaking Jew who probably personally saw Jesus. (Note in Acts 12:12 Peter goes to the house of the mother of John Mark in Jerusalem and perhaps Mark also reveals himself in his Gospel account – Mark 14:51-52).

16:17-18

Jesus consistently referred to Peter as Simon in all the gospels in actual speech (Matt 16:17-18, 17:25; Mark 14:37; Luke 7:40, 22:31; John 1:42, 21:15,16,17). Jesus only calls him Peter when he renames him at Matt 16:18 – parallel passages: Mark 3:16; Luke 6:14. Compare Cephas at John 1:42. And in Luke 22:34 – in addressing Peter concerning Peter's future denial. In Mark 16:7 an angel addresses him as Peter.

Simon is of course the Hebrew Shimon. Peter is a Greek name, but is the equivalent of Cephas and is indeed what John records Jesus as saying in renaming Peter: "...you are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas (which is translated, A Stone)". Here John provides the translation indicating Cephas is what Jesus actually called Peter. Peter then is just a translation of Cephas' name into Greek by the Gospel writers or the Gospel translators. The Aramaic Peshitta of Matthew 16:17-18, uses the name Cephas and makes a play on words between this name and its meaning of 'rock'.

Additionally, the name Simon Bar Jonah means Simon Son of Jonah. Though Bar is Aramaic for 'son' it is also attested twice in Biblical Hebrew and by the first

century was no doubt adopted by Hebrew speakers. By comparison, the term Boanerges (Mark 3:17) seems to be made of two Hebrew words: Benei (sons of) and ReGeSH (excitement) or ReGeZ (anger).

17:22 – Son of Man / Sons of Men

"...Jesus said to them 'The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men.'"

Here Shem Tov reads 'Son of Man...hand of sons of men' indicating a type of pun.[35]

18:27 – Unforgiving Servant

"Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.

Here Shem Tov has a play on words between 'compassion' (pity) – חמל and to forgive – מחל. Here also Shem Tov lacks the verb indicating that master also released the servant, which makes sense, since if he released him, he was no longer his servant, yet in verse 32ff we see that he is still his servant and his master still has control over his life. While a verb of 'release' may be part of the original gospel, it would have to indicate that the servant was released from that debt, not from his servitude and thus we simply have two verbs in a row for the idea of the servant being forgiven – slightly redundant. Though perhaps this may be similar to the Hebrew blessing 'be fruitful and multiply' – two terms in a row meaning the same thing essentially.

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[35] Unfortunately, modern Hebrew translations of the N.T. simply have the word אנשים – 'men'.

19:8-9 - divorce

"He said to them (the Pharisees), 'Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery."

Compare this passage to Mark10:10-12 - "In the house His disciples also asked Him again about the same matter. So He said to them, 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.'"

These two passages do not indicate additions or deletions by either writer rather each writer is recorded separate statements by Jesus. Matthew is recording Jesus' words to the Pharisees and Mark is recording Jesus' later words to his disciples. Each author chose a quote according to the audience he was writing for. Matthew was writing for a Jewish audience in the land of Israel where wives did not have the right to divorce husbands at all. Mark on the other hand records the words of Jesus that best fit Mark's Greek audience outside the land of Israel. Since Matthew's intended audience were the Jews of Israel, he likely would have written in their spoken language – Hebrew, rather than Greek.

21:18-19 - The Fig Tree

Compared to Mark 11:12-14 we notice Matthew does not include the line "...for it was not the season of figs". This is significant in that it shows that Mark was writing for an audience that may not have understood when the season of figs was in the land of Israel. Matthew on the other hand assumes that his audience knows that figs do not usually exist

on fig trees during Passover, but only start to develop later, thus no explanation of the season is given. As recorded by both, at Passover one could expect to find only leaves.[36]

Additionally in this story of the fig tree, Howard finds that Shem Tov records a nice two line poetically rhyming statement by Jesus בה רק העלים לבד - אל יצא ממך פרי לעולם ולֹא מצא (Howard p195).

21:28ff - Parables of the Vineyard and Psalm 118:22

Jesus tells two vineyard parables back to back, both involving sons, followed by quoting Psalm 118:22. In the second parable of the vineyard, the vinedressers reject and kill the son (Hebrew Ben בן). In the first parable Jesus also speaks about a vineyard and sons. However in the text that follows both of these parables, Jesus quotes Psalm 118:22 "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone...". At first there does not seem to be much of a connection, but when the Psalm is considered in Hebrew, we see Jesus making a play on words in Hebrew. Note the language of Psalm 118:22 in Hebrew: אבן מאסו בונים . 'Stone' in the Psalm and 'Son' in the second parable are very close rhymes and both are likewise rejected. Similarly the word 'builders' in the Psalm and 'sons' in the first parable are close rhymes. Thus both parables are connected to this Psalm which otherwise seems out of place, for what connection would one naturally make between builders/stone and vinedressers/son.   Indeed the landowner is the only one who builds anything (verse 33). Only when considering this long passage in Hebrew does it begin to make sense, and likewise would only have made sense to a Hebrew speaking audience. The fact that all three synoptic Gospels have this passage (Mark

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[36] Kilpatrick fails to notice such details in his assumption that Matthew was written in Greek outside the land of Israel.

12:1ff; Luke 20:9ff – both lack the first parable) only reinforces the fact that the Jews of Israel at that time where speaking Hebrew. However the fact that only Matthew includes the first parable and thus makes the additional word play possible further indicates that Matthew was indeed written in Hebrew.[37]

23:27-28

"...For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness..." Howard points out a pun in these verse between the word for tomb – קבר and the word for within – קרב. (Howard p195). Personally I think this is not a strong play on words as they are too far separated from each other in the sentences, however the concept of the Pharisees being like 'tombs' 'within' themselves is the central point. Howard could strengthen his point here if he can show that this was a legitimate way of using the word קרב in the first century.

23:35

"And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, form the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah[38], whom you murdered between the temple and the altar".

This seems to be a reference to 2nd Chronicles 24:21: "But they plotted against him (Zechariah), and by order of the king they stoned him to death in the courtyard of the LORD's temple." However in this passage Zechariah is called the son of Jehoiada. The reference by Jesus may be to Zechariah the prophet who is the son of Berekiah (Zech 1:1) The Targum Yonatan on Lamentations 2:20 says Zechariah, son of Iddo, was killed in the

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[37] For a deeper discussion of the second parable, see Buth/Kvasnica
[38] Luke 11:51 has the same account but doesn't refer to Berekiah.

Temple. However supporting my understanding is Jerome who indicates that the Gospel of Matthew in Greek is corrupt here and that the original Hebrew version read 'son of Jehoiada'. "In the Gospel the Nazareans use, we find 'son of Johoiada' instead of 'son of Barachia.'"[39] Also "The phrase son of Berechiah is absent from the important early manuscript Codex Sinaiticus, and a few other manuscripts"[40]

23:29-31 – Building the Tombs of the Prophets

There is a possible play on words here between those who build בונים and sons בנים. Obviously Jesus had to be speaking Hebrew and not Aramaic for this word play to work. Comparison to Luke11:47ff should be made, though Luke may be recording a different quote from a different circumstance (see Luke 11:45-46). Combined the passages in both Gospels seem to reinforce the deliberate play on words.

26:17 When Did Jesus Die

"Now on the first *day of the Feast* of the Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying to him, 'Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?'" (NKJV – italics indicate words not in the Greek text).

The differences between the gospels as to which day Jesus ate the Passover and which day he died may be indicative of difficulties with those had who translated Matthew's Gospel from Hebrew to Greek. Here Matthew seems to have Jesus eating the Passover at its normal time and dying the next day.

Mark 14:12 has "Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover *lamb,* His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare, that

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[39] http://www.tektonics.org/lp/matt2335.html.
[40] http://sabdiscussionboard.yuku.com/topic/1056

You may eat the Passover?" However at Mark 15:42 we read "Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath,"

Luke 22:7 is similar to Mark 14:12 and at Luke 23:54 we read "That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near."

John 13:1-2ff "Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father...And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the hear of Judas Iscariot, Simon's *son* to betray Him..." Here John has them celebrating the last supper before Passover. This is reinforced in John 19:42 "So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation *Day*, for the tomb was nearby" (That is the day before the Passover starts – Nissan 14). In John 19:31 we read "Therefore, because it was the Preparation *Day* that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken...).   Shmuel Safrai states "The phrase *Shabbat ha-Gadol* appears in an Arabic tomb inscription found in Ramleh (943 C.E.) which states that the deceased died on the day of "*Shabbat ha-Gadol,* at the end of the fourteenth day of Nissan." (Safrai E.T.I.T.N.T p50)

The issue here is a misunderstanding of the Sabbath. This Sabbath was not the normal weekly Sabbath, but rather the Sabbath of the 15th of Nisan – The first day of Unleavened Bread. Thus at Matthew 27:62, it is not called the Sabbath but rather we read "On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation...".

Jesus Passover week was like this: Wednesday night he at the 'last supper'. Thursday he was crucified and died around 3pm. His body was taken down, and laid in a

tomb. Friday was the special Sabbath of the 15th of Nisan. Saturday was the normal Sabbath. Sunday He rose from the dead. In the gospels, Sunday is called the first day after the Sabbaths (plural in Greek!).

27:5-8 – Judas' death

Compared to Acts 1:18-19, the accounts seem to differ as to how Judas died and perhaps even how the field got it's name. Significantly Luke provides the name of the field in both transliteration and translation, whereas Matthew only provides the translation. Again indicating that the whole of the book of Matthew is a translation.

27:9 Jeremiah or Zechariah

"Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet..."
Here Shem Tov's version reads 'Zechariah' – which makes sense since Matthew seems to be referring to the prophecy of Zechariah 11:12ff

27:37 Sign Over the Cross

"And they put up over His head the accusation written against Him: THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS." (NKJV) (cf. Mark 15:26, Luke 23:38 and John 19:19)

All four gospels record this sign over Jesus head. Luke and Mark agree with each other and Matthew and John agree with each other. The former two do not contain Jesus' name, while the later two do include his name. (John adds 'of Nazereth', which is lacking in the Greek version of Matthew, but exists in Shem Tov's Matthew!).

Luke and John contain the additional information that the sign was written in three languages – Hebrew Greek and Latin according to John and Greek, Latin and

Hebrew according to Luke[41]. This is significant. The order of the languages listed varies and is probably reflective of the language that was quoted by the author. In other words, John quoted what was written in Hebrew, while Luke quoted what was written in Greek. Thus the Hebrew version of the sign contains the name of Jesus while the Greek lacks it. This is consistent with Matthew being written in Hebrew, for Matthew's gospel agrees with John. Likewise it is consistent with the Greek nature of Mark's gospel and Luke's excellent Greek style, that these two quote the Greek part of the inscription, which did not contain Jesus' name. Since Jesus' name means 'salvation' in Hebrew, Pilate may have included his name in the Hebrew inscription as a further mockery, in the same way that he called him 'king of the Jews'. In Greek the mockery wouldn't work, so there was no need to add Jesus' name in the Greek part of the inscription.

Conclusion

There is significant external evidence that Hebrew was a living language in 1st Century Israel. Though many Israelites of the time were undoubtedly trilingual, Hebrew was likely their mother tongue. Jesus delivered his parables in Hebrew, made word plays and puns in Hebrew and conversed daily in Hebrew. At times he used Aramaic words or phrases, and in such instances the Gospel writers provided translation. Jesus may also have spoken some Greek as evidenced by his play on words with Peter's name. However most of Jesus teachings can be shown to have been in Hebrew. Shem Tov's Matthew may be descended from an original Hebrew version of Matthew, though it appears to have gone through several changes at the hands of the Jews who were not concerned with

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[41] Not all manuscripts of Luke contain the languages.

preserving it perfectly since they did not consider it to be Holy Scripture and only used it for polemics against Christians. Still Shem Tov's version can be useful in discovering word plays and puns that Jesus may have used.

In this paper I have pointed to several internal evidences of Matthew being written in Hebrew and of Hebrew being the primary spoken language of Israel at the time. Obviously we do not posses an original or even an early version of Hebrew Matthew, but the evidence for such is stronger than the evidence for the hypothetical version called Q. Additionally, as pointed out in this paper and the footnotes, the case for the primacy of Matthew over Mark is still strong.

The relation of a Hebrew Gospel to the existing Greek Version is unclear.   It is possible that our current Greek version of Matthew is a dynamic equivalent translation of the Hebrew version and not a word – for – word translation

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