

“look upon me whom they have pierced” (Zech. 12:10) they will repent and Ezekiel will “shew them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof”. Thus the prophet who witnessed the abominations of the house of Israel (ch. 8) will be privileged to show a repentant nation the new house of prayer, which will not be defiled.

I believe this will be fulfilled at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ for the following reasons:

- 1 Ezekiel clearly states: “For in Mine holy mountain, in the mountain of the height of Israel, saith the Lord GOD, there shall *all* the house of Israel, *all of them in the land*, serve Me: there will I accept them, and *there will I require your offerings*, and the firstfruits of your oblations, with all your holy things. I will accept you with your sweet savour, when I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; *and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen*” (20:40,41).
- 2 Again Ezekiel declares: “And the heathen shall know that I the LORD do sanctify Israel, *when My sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore*” (37:28). Thus will the Divine purpose with Israel, which was declared from their beginning as a nation (Ex. 19:5,6), be accomplished.
- 3 It is surely inconceivable that nine detailed chapters of Scripture were given in the knowledge that they would never be fulfilled.
- 4 Ezekiel is not the only prophet who speaks of animal sacrifice and the temple in the age to come.
- 5 Part of Ezekiel’s vision concerns the waters which flow from under the threshold of the temple; these waters become a river which divides into two. The result of this is the healing of the waters of the Dead Sea. For this to be accomplished, geological changes will have to be made in the land of Israel. These changes will be the result of the earthquake described by Zechariah when the feet of our Lord touch the Mount of Olives.

This being said, it is important to restate that the animal sacrifices will only be for the mortal population of Israel and for any Gentile who wishes to be joined to the Lord (Isa. 56:3-7); the immortal saints will not be involved. This is possibly the reason why Brother Hughes cannot see any hint of a mortal and immortal population coexisting; in this respect they will not.

The purpose of animal sacrifices was never to take away sins, as Brother Hughes shows from

Hebrews. Animal sacrifice may be described as a visual aid to teach those involved the seriousness of sin and the enormous achievement accomplished by our Lord in his perfect sacrifice. The mortals of the coming age who wish to draw near to the Lord will have to learn this. When the righteous King reigns in Jerusalem, and the priesthood has been purified, for the first time in its history the nation will give acceptable offerings on a regular basis which will be pleasing to their God.

Regarding Revelation 21, this is surely a symbolic vision that speaks of the spiritual Jerusalem. Every symbol in Scripture requires something literal as a foundation. Ezekiel speaks of the literal Jerusalem, a literal river, literal trees, etc. These literal things are used by the Spirit as symbols to describe the qualities of spiritual Jerusalem. There is no temple in this vision, and the reason for this becomes apparent when the purpose of the literal temple is considered; it is to separate between holy and profane. Everything in Revelation 21 is holy, it comes down from God; thus there is no need for a temple.

Geoff Cave

Hebrew and Greek important, not Aramaic

As a Christadelphian, I have always believed and understood that the Old Testament Scriptures were originally written in Hebrew, with parts in Aramaic, and that the New Testament Scriptures were originally written in Greek. I believe these original Scriptures were Divinely inspired, and are utterly incapable of error except for errors in transcription or translation. This view is undermined by the Catholic Church, for example, which regards the Latin Vulgate translation as Divinely approved, and therefore incapable of error even where it conflicts with the Hebrew or Greek.

Unfortunately, the article “The importance of Aramaic” ([Dec. 2002, p. 459](#)) in my view goes down the same route by stating that the patriarchs spoke Aramaic, that the Jews abandoned Hebrew for Aramaic after the exile, and that Aramaic was used by Jesus and the New Testament writers and even by non-Jews. An extension of this is that the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures are merely translations and either not inspired or not as inspired as the Aramaic. This mistaken view is vigorously promoted by a ‘Christian’

group on the Internet, who believe that the original manuscripts of both the Old and New Testaments were in Aramaic. Unfortunately, the article in *The Testimony* corresponds with some of their arguments, and in my view undermines the inspiration of the Bible.

The article quotes the late Aramaic scholar George Lamsa as claiming that the differences between Aramaic and Hebrew are small, like those between "American English and English spoken in England". The Holy Scriptures themselves prove that this is wrong; Isaiah 36:11-13 records that Rabshakeh was asked to speak in Aramaic ("Syrian" in the AV), rather than Hebrew, precisely in order to stop the ordinary Jews from understanding what was being said. If native speakers of Hebrew could not understand Aramaic, this clearly proves that the two languages are mutually unintelligible. Anyone who has learned enough Hebrew to do the daily readings, for example, will come to a standstill on coming to the Aramaic portions of the Old Testament. It is true that anyone familiar with Hebrew will make very rapid progress in Aramaic because of the similarity of the grammar and much common vocabulary, but this is not the same as understanding it automatically.

Regarding the claim that the patriarchs spoke Aramaic rather than Hebrew, Abraham is called "Abram the Hebrew" (Gen. 14:13) precisely because he spoke Hebrew. Abraham came into Syria at a time when Ebla (Tell Mardikh) was a great city. The language of Syria at that time was not Aramaic, but a Hebrew dialect, as was shown in *The Testimony* itself in a Quarterly Special on the significance of the Ebla discoveries.¹ Far from the original language of Syria being Aramaic, it was in fact Hebrew; Hebrew was already a written language and flourished as far back as the third millennium B.C. Abraham and Sarah were told to call their son Isaac, a Hebrew name. It is true that Laban spoke Aramaic, but, when Laban and Jacob made a covenant between them, Laban used an Aramaic name, Jegar-Sahadutha, whereas Jacob used Hebrew names, Galeed and Mizpah (31:43-49). Clearly Jacob preferred Hebrew. Joseph, too, spoke Hebrew. He was called "the Hebrew servant" (39:14,17; 41:12).

The claim that Paul spoke Aramaic on such occasions as that recorded in Acts 9:20 is disproved by the fact that it is explicitly revealed to us that Paul spoke Hebrew (21:40; 22:2), and that Jesus spoke Hebrew to Paul on the road to Damascus (26:14).

Let us remember the importance of Hebrew, rather than Aramaic, in the plan and purpose of God. Hebrew is the *only* language which God is recorded as speaking. The superscription on Christ's cross was written in Latin, Greek and Hebrew, not Aramaic (Lk. 23:38; Jno. 19:20). The Greek New Testament reveals to us that Bethesda is in the Hebrew tongue (Jno. 5:2), that Gabbatha (the Pavement) is in Hebrew (19:13), that Golgotha is Hebrew (v. 17), that Abaddon is Hebrew (Rev. 9:11) and that Armageddon should be understood as a Hebrew name (16:16). The number of the beast (666) in Revelation 13:18 works out as the Roman system in Hebrew, Latin and Greek, but not in Aramaic.

There may appear to be a smattering of Aramaic words in the New Testament, but this does not mean that the New Testament was originally written in Aramaic. English has a smattering of French words and phrases, such as *bon appetit*, *coup de grâce*, and *coup d'état*, due to the historical links between England and France, but this does not mean that all English speakers speak fluent French or that French was the original language of England. Similarly, Hebrew has always had a few Aramaic words due to the connection between the holy language and Aramaic.

It is even doubtful whether words claimed to be Aramaic in the New Testament are Aramaic at all. Those who can read Hebrew will have met these words in their reading of the Old Testament and will be very familiar with them from the Hebrew portions of the Scriptures. Regarding the first three examples in Table 1 of the article, *raca* means 'empty' or 'vain' in Hebrew (Strong's numbers 07385 and 07387) and "*Talitha cumi*" comes from *talith*, meaning 'a lamb' (Strong's numbers 02922 and 029240), and *kumi*, the feminine imperative form of the ordinary Hebrew word for 'to rise', used over 600 times (Strong's number 06965 and occurring in this exact form in Isaiah 60:1 and many other passages). In the case of "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani*", *El* is one of the Hebrew words for God, used 245 times in Scripture (Strong's number 0410), with *Eli* simply meaning 'my God'. In fact, this *cannot* be Aramaic, because in Aramaic 'my God' would be *Elahi*, as in Daniel 4:8; 6:22; 9:4,18,19. *Lama* simply means 'why' or 'wherefore', and is used 145 times in the Hebrew Old Testament.

1. "Tell Mardikh: discovery of an empire", Arthur Gibson, *The Testimony*, Oct. 1976, p. 377.

Despite the article's claim that Jews abandoned Hebrew in favour of Aramaic, and that Aramaic was the usual spoken language at the time of Christ, there are volumes of evidence to the contrary. We have already seen the witness of the Divinely inspired Greek New Testament, which teaches that Christ and Paul spoke Hebrew in ordinary conversation, that Hebrew, Greek and Latin were used, and that Hebrew words repeatedly appear in the New Testament.

But what language was used for historical writings around this time? It is an undeniable historical fact that Josephus, a Jew, wrote his works in Greek. This was because Greek was very widely and commonly spoken at the time. Similarly, important inter-testamental historical works such as 1 and 2 Maccabees were written in Greek. Likewise, the New Testament was written in Greek because the call to the gospel had gone to the Gentiles and therefore a Gentile language was used. Roman writers, of course, wrote in Latin. Thus, the historical works of Julius Caesar, Tacitus and Suetonius were written in Latin, the Latin originals of which are available on the Internet.

But what language did Jews use at the time of Christ? The Mishnah, the huge body of Rabbinical discussion over the Law and how it should be interpreted in everyday life, was written almost entirely in Hebrew, not Aramaic, from about A.D. 50 to A.D. 220. See the Website <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~elsegal/TalmudMap/Mishnah.html> for details, or read the Hebrew text at <http://chaver.com/>. This proves beyond doubt that Hebrew was the living, spoken, vernacular language amongst Jews in the first and second centuries in the Holy Land, despite the article's claims to the contrary.

As the centuries went by and Jews wanted to distinguish between what was Divinely inspired (the Law, the Prophets and the Writings) and what was tradition, they started to use Aramaic (and sometimes even Arabic) to write commentaries and translations. Thus we have the Talmud or Gemara, the huge body of Jewish teaching which is itself a commentary on the Mishnah. This is written as a series of Hebrew statements with explanation and discussion in Aramaic. It was written from around 250 to 450 A.D. Details can be found at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~elsegal/TalmudMap/Gemara.html>.

However, even into Medieval times, classic Jewish scholars were still writing in Hebrew. For

example, Maimonides (1135-1204), also known as the Rambam, wrote the entire *Mishnah Torah* in Hebrew. Details can be found at <http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/biography/Maimonides.html>, and the original text can still be read today. The famous Jewish commentary on the Torah by Rashi (1040-1105) was written in Hebrew and can be read at many places on the Internet. These indisputable facts prove that Hebrew was still a vernacular language, used for producing new works intended to be read and discussed by other Jews, down through the centuries. And, of course, we have Eliezer Ben Yehuda, who revived and popularised the modern Hebrew language. He conceived the idea of Hebrew becoming a modern, spoken language when he was handed a Hebrew translation of *Robinson Crusoe* as a lad, proving that around the time of Brother Thomas and Brother Roberts Hebrew was *still* being used as a spoken and written language by Jews. Claiming that Hebrew *died out* as a spoken language after the exile is clearly wrong. In fact, after the exile Nehemiah strongly criticises those who cannot speak Hebrew (Neh. 13:23-29).

Hebrew, therefore, has always been the language that Jews regarded as the holy tongue and the language in which the Old Testament Scriptures were written (with sections in Aramaic). *Koine* (or common) Greek is the language in which the New Testament was written. Attempts to dispose of the inspired words of the Almighty God and replace them with a man-made translation such as the Aramaic Peshitta, the Latin Vulgate, the NIV, the AV or any other language version or translation should be rejected by all who love God and uphold the Truth.

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Comment

As the editor of the section in which the article appeared I would like to say that I did not regard the article as having any implications for the inspiration of the original Scriptures, otherwise it would not have been published. The article does not argue in favour of the idea that parts of the Greek New Testament are translations from an Aramaic original.

Regarding Brother MacLeod's statement that Abraham is called "Abram the Hebrew" because he spoke Hebrew, the usual view is that the term 'Hebrew' indicates a descendant of Eber (Gen. 11:14-17).

If the inspired originals of the New Testament Scriptures were written in Greek, then regardless of whether Jesus and the apostles preached in Hebrew or Aramaic, translation of what they said into Greek must have taken place. The fact that Paul spoke to Jews in Jerusalem in Hebrew and Jesus spoke to Paul on the road to Damascus in Hebrew does not *prove* that they did not use

Aramaic in other places and in different circumstances.

However, the idea that the Aramaic Peshitta version of the Bible can be of value in establishing the original text of Scripture seems very dubious, according to material on Websites details of which Brother MacLeod has supplied. See the panel below regarding George Lamsa.—*T.B.*

George Lamsa and the Peshitta version

There appears to be a movement in the USA dedicated to the view that the Aramaic Bible preserves the original Scriptures more accurately than any other source. Ideas to this effect can be found on the Website <http://www.livingtruth.net/AramaicBible.html>. This claims that the Peshitta enables later translation errors to be corrected, especially about the Holy Spirit and the soul, and says: "We believe that the reappearance of the Aramaic Bible is one of many signs that the dispensation of the Holy Spirit is in progress". The organisation putting over these views is called Metamind Publications, stated to be "dedicated to providing information that clarifies and reveals the truth of the Scriptures as Jesus understood them".

These views are vigorously opposed by conventional evangelicals holding orthodox church teachings. An article entitled, "George M. Lamsa: Christian scholar or cultic torchbearer?", by John P. Juedes, appears on <http://www.equip.org/free/DL010.htm>. This says that Lamsa's beliefs are not in accordance with orthodox church teachings. In some respects we would agree with Lamsa—for example, in denying that the devil is a supernatural evil being, in denying the existence of demons, in denying the personality of the Holy Spirit; in other cases we would agree that he is wrong, as in denying the literal resurrection of Jesus or his literal return. In general Lamsa's beliefs have a mystical oriental air about them.

The article cites Lamsa as claiming to be the only person on earth able to authoritatively translate the Bible into English, due to his knowledge of Aramaic and of Middle Eastern customs, his possession of original Aramaic texts and his knowledge of English. He maintained that all the New Testament was written in Aramaic originally, was not translated into Greek until after Constantine's conversion in 318, and that Aramaic manuscripts are the oldest known manuscripts of the Old Testament. There is no evidence for these claims, and examples of his translation given by Juedes are strange, seeming to deny, for example, the ministry of angels. Furthermore, the Peshitta version on which Lamsa places so much store is in fact fourth century in origin, being a distillation of earlier Aramaic texts into one version, which became the official New Testament of the Jacobite and Nestorian churches. However, it misses out 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude and Revelation, because these churches regarded these books as not authentic inspired books. Lamsa in fact has to rely on Aramaic versions other than the Peshitta for these books.

Two other WebPages on Lamsa are <http://www.bibletexts.com/qa/qa033b.htm> and <http://www.bibletexts.com/qa/qa023.htm>. These consist of answers to comments made on a Website run by a man called Robert Nguyen Cramer. In reply to two comments favourable towards the Lamsa Bible, Cramer quotes Bruce Metzger, a leading world authority on the New Testament text, as saying that Lamsa's claim to have translated the New Testament from original Aramaic manuscripts is a fraud, and that he would never produce the manuscripts from which he was supposedly translating. Metzger also points out that the whole of the New Testament could not have been written in Aramaic because the language would have been unknown to some of the ecclesias to whom Paul wrote, such as Rome or Corinth.—*T.B.*