

## The importance of Aramaic

I read with interest the article of the above title by Brother Dennis M. Elliott ([Dec. 2002, p. 459](#)). As Christadelphians reject the existence of 'demons', George Lamsa's translation of Matthew 8:28-34 and Mark 5:1-20 from the Aramaic should be of particular interest, as there is no reference to 'demons' in the Aramaic manuscript from which he translated (the Mortimer McCawley Manuscript).

I am not surprised that Brother Elliott received some opposition to his article, as expressed by Brother Ewan MacLeod in "[Hebrew and Greek important, not Aramaic](#)" ([Feb. 2003, p. 53](#)). Many Christadelphians, astute Bible students as they may be, seem loathe seriously to consider anything other than the AV. Brother MacLeod presented his concerns quite well, but he is not correct in stating that Josephus' works were written entirely in the Greek language; *The Wars of the Jews* was written in Aramaic. His works that were written in Greek were, according to the experts, a very poor attempt at classical Greek, with Josephus himself stating that he found Greek very difficult, and that Jews would rather feed their children swine's flesh than undertake learning that language.

The question was also raised in the February correspondence regarding the meaning of 'Hebrew', as in "Abram the Hebrew" (Gen. 14:13). It is not necessarily the case that 'Hebrew' here indicates a descendant of Eber, as stated by Brother Benson, as the root of the word 'Hebrew' indicates 'one who crosses over', or 'those on the other side' (usually of a river), among many other meanings.

According to *Strong's Concordance*, a Syrian was an Aramean. This being so, applying Deuteronomy 26:5, "A Syrian ready to perish was my father", to the patriarchs reveals that Abraham would have been an Aramean. This poses further problems, for if Abraham was an Aramean, surely he would have spoken that dialect. Whence the change from Aramean to Hebrew?

Finally, the article "[Archaeological evidence for the existence of Jesus](#)" ([Mar. 2003, p. 102](#)) reveals the importance of Aramaic, especially as this is the first archaeological evidence for the existence of Jesus Christ. The article refers to one expert as stating that "The forms of the letters [Aramaic] are consistent with the period, and the actual usage of Aramaic is too".

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## Comment

I think we should be careful about welcoming the fact that an Aramaic manuscript of the New Testament does not include the term 'demons' in Matthew 8:28-34 and Mark 5:1-20. This implies that every one of the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament is corrupt in this respect, surely an unacceptable conclusion. Also, there are other references to 'demons' in the New Testament, including in the Luke account of the same miracle (8:26-40), and we surely cannot dispose of them all on the same basis.

Regarding the idea that Abraham was an Aramean, Aram, the founder of the nation of Aram, or Syria as we know it, was the son of Shem (Gen. 10:22). Eber, the ancestor of Abraham, was a descendant of another son of Shem, Arphaxad (11:10-14). The term 'Aramean' or 'Syrian' is therefore not applicable to Abraham by virtue of his descent.

Regarding Deuteronomy 26:5, this surely does not refer to Abraham but to Jacob. The passage reads: "A Syrian [Aramean] ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous". Abraham did not sojourn in Egypt and become a great nation, though he did visit once, nor is there any record of him being "ready to perish". The facts fit Jacob, who lived for many years in Syria and on returning to Canaan feared for his life at the hands of Esau. He is not called a Syrian because it was his native tongue but because of his residence there prior to entering the land again.

Though he was not a descendant of Aram, Jacob's father-in-law Laban is referred to as a Syrian (Gen. 31:20), presumably because his family had been resident there for over a hundred years. It should be noted that, when an altar was made on the border between Syria and Canaan, Jacob gave it a Hebrew name and Laban a Syrian name, showing that at this stage there was a distinction between the two languages (31:47). It seems reasonable to suppose that Abraham and his family, as wanderers in Canaan, preserved Hebrew, the language of their forefather Eber, whereas the family of Nahor, Abraham's brother (Laban's family), adopted Aramaic, the language of the country in which they became resident.—*T.B.*