

ping the mighty dollar rather than the Creator, and all covetousness is idolatry. The World Trade Centre, with its twin towers, was very much akin to a heathen temple.

In Zephaniah 1, a chapter which also contains a reference to silver and gold not being able to save (v. 18), we read of “a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers” (v. 16). This reminds us of Isaiah’s reference to “the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall” (30:25), and Ezekiel’s prophecy of the great shaking when “every wall shall fall to the ground” (38:20).

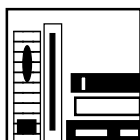
It is sobering to realise, however, that, applying the principle of John 19:11, the terrorists would have had no power to wreak destruction unless God had given them authority. What happened was a sign of enormous magnitude whose import we can only guess at this moment. In Lot’s day they bought and sold, just as they were doing on the American stock market, when it

“rained fire and brimstone from heaven” (Lk. 17:28,29).

We must be prepared for the Lord’s coming, or, like those on whom the tower of Siloam fell, we will all likewise perish (13:5). There were scenes of rejoicing in the Palestinian camps when the news broke, but the Almighty will recompense them, for “he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished” (Prov. 17:5), and, “Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth” (24:17).

We who are awaiting that great day of our Lord’s appearing do not rejoice at America’s tragedy, but we do take comfort from seeing God’s arm made bare, a foretaste perhaps of that momentous time still to come when the stone made without hands will smite the image on the feet and break it in pieces. Until then let us strengthen the things that remain and build and defend the walls of Zion.

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Reviews

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The language of Scripture*

John Carder

BROTHER GRAEME Mansfield’s attractive-looking little book *The Romance of the Hebrew Language* has the advantage that it links the names of the Hebrew letters as they appear in the AV of Psalm 119 with the printed letters. It is therefore a useful supplement to the AV and provides a link with concordances. It is a devotional book rather than an attempt to teach Hebrew. However, the book has some errors, some not so important and some important or misleading.

The forms of the Hebrew letters displayed are those of printed Hebrew Bibles. Although the Hebrew Bible was put into print soon after the introduction into Europe of printing with movable type, it does not take us back beyond A.D. 1488. The print type faces were based on the hand-written medieval scrolls then in existence. The script of those scrolls is shown as ‘Rabbinic Hebrew’ on the first page of the chart of ancient

alphabets at the front of the Tregelles translation of Gesenius’s *Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*.¹

Earlier alphabets

Of course, there was Hebrew writing many centuries earlier. Many copies of Biblical books were

* The Romance of the Hebrew Alphabet, G. E. Mansfield. Available from Logos, Box 220, Findon, South Australia 5023, Australia, e-mail ed@logos.org.au, at AU\$13.20. Also available from local agents. UK agent Sister Carol Middleton, 17 School Street, Dunchurch, Rugby, CV22 6PA, e-mail Carol@carolmid.fsnet.co.uk, at £7.26. It is not known whether the cost includes postage.

1. See my article “Some things that concordances do not tell you” ([Sept. 2001, p. 358](#)) for a review of the various reference books about Biblical Hebrew.

found among the so-called Dead Sea Scrolls, copied between about 100 B.C. and A.D. 70. The script is called Jewish Bookhand, and, like the Rabbinic Bookhand, can be read, with some difficulty, by those who know modern Hebrew. This form of alphabet was developed in the school of scribes set up by Ezra after the return from exile, and was probably introduced by Ezra himself.

There was, however, a much earlier form of Hebrew letters in use in the reigns of the kings before the Babylonian exile. The longest text in this ancient script is the famous inscription found in Hezekiah's water tunnel under the City of David. It describes the meeting of the two digging teams who had worked from both ends of the tunnel. The style of the letters is shown on the first page of the Tregelles chart as Ancient Hebrew. In *Unger's Bible Dictionary* there is an illustration, No. 434, of the damaged Hezekiah inscription, under the heading 'Siloah/Siloam'. Even without knowing Hebrew, one can see that it is clearly very different from the later scripts and needs specialists to read it. In some of the scrolls of about the time of Jesus, mentions of the Divine Name are made prominent by being written in the ancient script.

The names given to the letters in *The Romance of the Hebrew Alphabet* are those shown in the AV of Psalm 119. That is called the 'English Academic' style, as it was used by the university dons and Anglican divines (often the same people) in the reign of King James I. It differs from the pronunciation now used in Israel, which is called the Sephardic.

The derivations of meanings of the Hebrew letters given in *The Romance* are similar to those given in the Tregelles version of Gesenius. Tregelles worked on the assumption that a Phoenician and Greek alphabet preceded any Hebrew alphabet, and that the Hebrew was based on them. The Oxford or Brown Driver Briggs (BDB) version of Gesenius does not offer any derivation for the Hebrew letters.

A look at some of the letters

The first Hebrew letter, *alef* or *aleph* (pp. 38-39), is in itself silent, but when it occurs in the middle of a word it requires a slight pause. It does not represent the letter 'a'. It is classed as a consonant and may take any of the vowel sounds. Apart from the 'a', it can take an 'e' sound, as in the first letter of the title *Elohim*; also an 'i', as in *ishah*, 'woman' ('man', or *iysh*, starts with *alef*

yod). The other so-called 'silent' letter, the *ayin* (pp. 60-61) is properly spoken with a throaty guttural sound. Thus the name Gaza does not start with the Hebrew 'g', *gimel*, but with *ayin*. The crusaders interpreted the throaty sound as a 'g', so that for Europeans and English-speakers it has been 'Gaza' ever since.

The sixth letter of the alphabet (p. 45) has many functions. It is the third letter of the Divine Name. As a consonant it is sounded as *vav* in the Sephardic, as *vau* in the AV, or as *wav* or *wau* in other English systems. It is the single-letter equivalent of the English 'and', and in Hebrew it never stands alone, but is always attached to the word it refers to.

In Biblical Hebrew the letter *vav*, when prefixed to verbs in the 'continuous' form, shows that they are to be understood as indicating past action. That shows up particularly in the AV in forms such as 'And God said' or 'And God saw'. The word order in that case is, literally, 'And-said God' or 'And-saw God'. In both Biblical and modern Hebrew a *vav* in the middle or end of a word can indicate an 'o' or a 'u' sound according to context.

The *yod* (p. 49), as Jesus remarked in his reference to 'jot and tittle' (Mt. 5:18), was in his day the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, as it still is. However, in the pre-Exilic alphabet it was a full-size, rather complex letter. It is hard to see why *The Romance* should say (p. 49), "the *Yod* is often seen but not heard; it is generally not even pronounced". In fact it combines the functions of the English letters 'y', 'i' and, in all except the earliest editions of the AV, 'j'. For example, in the Hebrew it is the initial letter of all the following names: Israel, Isaac and Isaiah; Jerusalem, Jacob, Joshua, Jeremiah, and many others; also, the first letter of Ezekiel, which may be transliterated as *Yechezqel*.

The last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the *tav* or *tau* (pp. 73-74), is said in *The Romance*, and by many commentators, to represent the cross of Christ. That is far from obvious in the printed form of the letter, but it is quite clear in the pre-Exilic form, where it is a simple cross or 'x'. Some authorities say that its origin was to mark livestock selected for some purpose.

Historical background

The main error in the book is in the section on Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (1858-1922), concerning whom it says that, following the work of Ben-Yehuda, Hebrew "had grown from a dead

language unused for two thousand years to a living vibrant tongue: the language of the nation" (p. 29). Though widely believed, that statement is simply not true; but it opens up a wide background.

An immediate question is, Where did the various translators of the Bible into English find their source documents and their knowledge of Hebrew to translate the Old Testament? The early translators, Bede, and Wyclif and his colleagues, used only the Latin Vulgate. In 1530, Tyndale published his Pentateuch, the five books of Moses, which he had translated from the Hebrew. He had translated, but not published, the later books of the Old Testament before his execution in 1536.

A new beginning

The disaster of A.D. 70 did not result in a total clearance of Jews from the land. The losses were greatest in Judea, but a considerable population remained in the Galilee and along the coast. With the destruction of the temple, the Sadducean priestly hierarchy disappeared from history, but groups of rabbis reorganised Judaism to be centred on the synagogues and maintaining the Scriptures. They formed a body called the Academy, which at times was called a Sanhedrin. It was very different from the pre-war body, which had been dominated by the Sadducees, and which had appeased the Romans and opposed Jesus.

The Jews were never entirely severed from the Hebrew language; there were always rabbis and synagogues available. A distinction must be made between Biblical Hebrew, which remained constant, and the various everyday languages Jews had to cope with in the course of their long and complex history. Most present-day English speakers know only their own language and so find it difficult to envisage quite ordinary people having at least to get by in several languages.

The new centre for the Academy was first at Yavne (Jamnia) south of what is now Tel Aviv. Later it moved several times, and ended up in Tiberias by the Sea of Galilee. Two famous rabbis were Yohanan Ben-Zakkai, who established the Academy, and Gamaliel of Yavne, grandson of the Gamaliel mentioned favourably in Acts 5:34.

The Academy maintained the Hebrew calendar, and Gamaliel simplified Hebrew grammar, starting what in time became modern Hebrew, with specific tenses for past, present and future.

This was done to help the general population, which was increasingly using Aramaic for everyday matters. The Academy also, about A.D. 100, relegated the non-Biblical books, which were maintained in Christian circles and became known as the Apocrypha. The Academy in Tiberias also worked on what is known as the Jerusalem Talmud, until, about A.D. 500, it was closed down by the Byzantine church.

The medieval period

A famous exchange of letters in about A.D. 960 illustrates how widely Hebrew had survived. They were written by the Jewish secretary of a Moorish (Muslim) ruler in Spain, and the king of a nation-state in what is now south Russia, which had converted to Judaism. An interesting feature is that the grammar of the letter from Spain is more Biblical in style than the letter from Russia, which is more like modern Hebrew.

Jewish numbers and status varied greatly over the centuries, and at times reached a very low ebb. But throughout there were at least trickles of Jews reaching the land. Also there were rabbis and synagogues to keep the Hebrew Scriptures and language before the people, even during periods of Muslim domination and oppression.

Following the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492, and from Portugal in 1496, some of them eventually arrived in the land, and they revitalised the Jewish community, especially in Galilee. They restored Safad, which had been one of the staging points of the Academy, as a centre of learning. It was there that the first book in Hebrew printed in the land was published in 1587.

Safad and the Galilee had a bigger Jewish population than Jerusalem at that time, and had many synagogues, the relics of which can be seen to this day, some being now restored. There was a strong Jewish woollens industry in the district, with five thousand looms operating.

The 1800s were a low point, an era of poverty and discrimination, with the land a neglected backwater of the failing Turkish Empire. Yet it was also a time of beginnings that eventually led to the restored Land of Israel.

Witnesses

Britain stationed a consul in Jerusalem from 1839. Among his duties was the protection of the Jewish population, who had no other form of security in that chaotic era. The first consul, Mr Young, served for six years, and the second, Mr Finn,

served until 1862. Later consuls were uninspiring.

James Finn and his wife Elizabeth were outstanding figures. They were both fluent in Hebrew, and they mixed missionary work with their official duties. Both Finn and his wife later wrote books about their experiences, and it is clear from them that Hebrew was quite widely spoken by the local Jews. It was often the only common language between the locals and Jews visiting from other countries. Even some of the Arab peasants round Safad and Tiberias could speak Hebrew with their Jewish neighbours.

The evidence given so far is surely enough to refute the statement, sometimes heard, that the Roman ban on Jews living in Jerusalem (or the whole land) was in effect until the nineteenth century when the Turkish sultan revoked it and allowed the first synagogue to be built.

The facts on which that misapprehension is based are that a British philanthropist persuaded the Turkish authorities to permit the building of a new synagogue to serve the expanding Jewish population of Jerusalem. Before that, the authorities had permitted only the repair of existing buildings. It was Sir Moses Montifiore, who visited the land seven times between 1827 and 1875 to improve the life of Jews there, who obtained the permission. It is beyond belief that successive sultans would have recognised in their empire the edict of a long-dead infidel, even if they had heard of Roman emperors.

The first Jewish agricultural school, Mikve Israel, built in 1870, and the village Petah Tikva settled in 1878, led to the First Aliyah and later Zionist settlements from 1882 onwards. Their policies involved manual labour to restore fertility to the land, and the use of Hebrew.

Eliezer Ben-Yehuda

What is said on pages 28-29 of the book about Eliezer Ben-Yehuda should be understood against the above background. Ben-Yehuda was a Zionist, and shared with others the determination that the Hebrew language should be an essential element in the restoration and upbuilding of Israel.

There is no intention to denigrate Ben-Yehuda, but it is difficult to see in what sense the statement can be true that, by the birth of their first child in Jerusalem, his first wife became "the first Hebrew mother in nearly two thousand years"; and the statement that Ben-Yehuda's first son, born some time before 1891, was "the first child to speak modern Hebrew as his mother tongue", would seem to need some qualification.

Calling Ben-Yehuda 'the father of modern Hebrew' is well deserved, though we should remember that distant ancestor, Rabbi Gamaliel of Yavne, who soon after A.D. 70 simplified Hebrew grammar by the use of distinct tenses. Without belittling Ben Yehuda or his monumental work, it can be said that he did not revive a dead language, he provided a basis for the new vocabulary needed for a modern language. The ultra-Orthodox Jews of his day, and to the present, opposed him and others because of their belief that Biblical Hebrew is a holy language. They therefore use Yiddish and other languages for everyday purposes.

Ben-Yehuda's monumental dictionary and thesaurus, only three-quarters finished by the time of his death in 1922, is undoubtedly of great value to scholars and to the Academy of the Hebrew Language, which he helped to found. But its sixteen volumes of six hundred pages each would hardly find a mass readership. His widest influence in his lifetime was personal example, by speaking only Hebrew, by his school teaching, and through the newspaper he published.

A son, Ehud Ben-Yehuda, was the senior editor of an excellent Hebrew-English and English-Hebrew one-volume dictionary. Despite its small size it has over thirty thousand vocabulary entries. It was first published in 1961 and is still in print. In it is a mention of Eliezer's dictionary and thesaurus of eight volumes. Possibly that was a later edition, but it would still have been a formidably large work.

The author wishes to thank Brother Don Weldon for his work in transmitting this script.

Statistics of the Exodus

Sister Debbie Hurn (see letter on [pp. 395-7](#)) has written a detailed study under the above title dealing with problems presented by the high numbers involved and reviewing solutions. She would be pleased to e-mail a copy to anyone interested. Address: bdhurn@telstra.easymail.com.au.