

The Betrayal of the Jewishness of Jesus:

I would like to suggest what the core elements are to this betrayal are, and some pointers to how this developed historically, and then finally to how we may be able to come 'back from the brink' that such betrayal may well lead to.

I suspect that many, if not most who are actually guilty of this betrayal have absolutely no idea that this is the reality, but rather imagine something almost the antithesis of such a statement.

My first and foremost witness alongside our recently improved knowledge of the historical background to this development is the late, great Professor Flusser.

Flusser¹ is in my view undoubtedly the greatest scholar on the life of times of 'Jesus' seen since of recent times if not for 1800+ years.

But Flusser was even more than that because he approached those who have betrayed 'Jesus' with such compassion and sensitively which included referring to this Jewish man whose name was actually Yeshua by this Greek invention of a name 'Jesus'².

And it is in fact Flusser himself who has made this very argument so powerfully and with such solid conviction from a very deep and broad appreciation of the relevant facts.

Flusser (who was an orthodox Jew, just like Yeshua and Rav Sha'ul – the Apostle Paul³) has stated that: *"... I know that it is not so easy for Gentiles to accept the thorough Jewishness of Jesus. Because then it would mean that they had received a foreign god and not their own ancient pagan gods. So they have to assimilate Jesus to the Greek gods."*

Again, most reading this who may be part of this betrayal may still not see how Flusser could possibly be speaking to and about them, but please bear with me as the deception is so strong and so deep, with a very extensive and sad history.

But another quote from Flusser should begin to make the connection and inference clear. Flusser stated: *"As far as you depart from the Hebrew background of the Gospels as far as you go farther from the Jewish origin of the Gospel and of the Jewishness of Jesus by this I would even say you betray Jesus himself."*⁴

So what has caused this departure from the Hebrew background of the Gospels, and the Jewishness of Yeshua?

To set the scene we need to reflect on what we now know regarding Israel in the time of Yeshua. Our understanding of Israel 2000 years ago has been dramatically altered over the last 50-70 years as a result of the findings of the Dead Sea Scrolls and other related recently discovered ancient scrolls such as those in the Cairo Genizah.

It is now very well established that the *'lingua franca'* of Israel in the early 1st century was Hebrew, not Aramaic, not Latin and certainly not Greek.

As Flusser states as well:

"It is very improbable ... that he (Yeshua) has spoken Greek. ... He knew both languages of the Land: both Aramaic and Hebrew. But when he taught, he taught clearly only in Hebrew."

For instance, the saying 'Kingdom of Heaven' doesn't exist in Aramaic. All the parables in the rabbinic literature are in Hebrew.... And my experience is that it is impossible to translate some of the words of Jesus into Aramaic."

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2000/nov/14/guardianobituaries>

² I will use his actual Hebrew name from here on in this article.

³ See my book 'Defending the Apostle Paul: Weighing the Evidence' - <https://www.amazon.com.au/Defending-Apostle-Paul-Weighing-Evidence-ebook/dp/B009TLLK0U/>

⁴ <https://www.jerusalemerspective.com/14412/>

So what is the new evidence that has led to such a strong conviction amongst the experts on this matter that Hebrew was the primary language of Yeshua and all his early disciples.

A century ago this was not the accepted wisdom.

The revelations from the study of the Dead Sea Scrolls were most convincing and dramatic. Because of their influence, the highly respected *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, which in its first edition, in 1958, had stated that “*Hebrew had ceased to be a spoken language around the fourth century B.C.*”, revised this statement in its third edition (1997) to instead state: “**Hebrew continued to be used as a spoken and written language...in the New Testament period.**”

Prof. Gary Rendsburg of Rutgers University is a leading expert on the Dead Sea Scrolls (also known as the Qumran Scrolls and dated from around 250 BCE up to 50 CE) states that: “*Of the 930 assorted documents from Qumran, 790, or about 85% of them are written in Hebrew (120 or about 13% are written in Aramaic, and 20 or about 2% are written in Greek). Of these 930, about 230 are biblical manuscripts, naturally are in Hebrew, so in actuality the percentage of Hebrew texts is 80%.*”

On the other hand, our Hebrew texts are the longest ones, such as the Temple Scroll, the Community Rule, the War Scroll, and the Hodayot—with only the Genesis Apocryphon as a lengthy Aramaic scroll.

*This might, of course, be the accident of preservation—that is to say, the Aramaic documents are much more fragmentary than the Hebrew ones—but in general we may state that **the language of choice for the Qumran community was Hebrew** and that the percentage of Hebrew material among the Dead Sea Scrolls is actually higher than the aforementioned 80%, perhaps even approaching 90%.”⁵*

But there is much, much more.

The Tosefta preserves a tradition that the famous sage Rabban Gamaliel I (1st Century C.E. and the teacher of Rav Sha’ul, the Apostle Paul) once banned (from use in the Temple) a translation of Job into Aramaic (Tosefta Shabbat 14:2⁶).

But why? Why would he speak so derisively of this translation?

Apparently in the synagogues when the Tanakh was being read and spoken out loud to the assembly, the Hebrew text was sometimes translated into Aramaic ‘on the fly’ and spoken in Aramaic. As Aramaic grew in popularity and as a common language, especially in some areas of Israel like the Galilee, and also in the Diaspora, this became a well-known practice.

I don’t know if Gamaliel objected to this at all, but apparently the written Targum versions, while being highly accurate with ‘*80-90% of the Hebrew text’s linguistic information – morphological, syntactical and semantic*’, they also contained a lot of midrashic or ‘paraphrastic’ commentary (i.e they were an ‘amplified’ version, or paraphrase like ‘The Message’ is a paraphrase of the NT).

If so, it is understandable that this senior and very revered Rabbi might object to such versions being used in the synagogues at least, even if they were popular as it appears, with the general population.

The book, *Targum and Scripture: Studies in Aramaic Translations and Interpretation in memory of Ernest George Clarke*⁸, edited by Paul V M Flesher, also makes the very significant point, that “**The Palestinian Talmud [more commonly known as the Jerusalem Talmud] even contains a passage that forbids the use of written translations in the synagogue (Y Meg. 4:1, 28a or 74d).**” (p 62).

⁵ <http://jewishstudies.rutgers.edu/docman/rendersburg/396-qumran-hebrew-studies-on-the-texts-of-the-desert-of-judah/file>

⁶ “It once happened that Rabbi Halafta went to Rabban Gamaliel, to Tiberias, and he found him sitting at the table of Johanan ben Nezif, with the Targum (i.e. Aramaic translation) of the Book of Job in his hand. Rabbi Halafta said to him: “I remember that Rabban Gamaliel the Elder, your father’s father, would sit on a stair of the Temple Mount. They brought before him the Targum of the Book of Job, and he said to the builder, ‘Bury it under the rubble.’” - Tosefta Shabbat 14:2

⁷ <http://trove.nla.gov.au/work/27823855?q&versionId=33577534>

⁸ ibid

And “Third, Willem Smelik has recently shown that in the early rabbinic period, the Palestinian rabbis did not like translations into Aramaic. Their remarks in Palestinian rabbinic texts repeatedly indicate that the rabbis reject the targums (Aramaic translations) usefulness and validity.”

And for how long did this primacy of Hebrew last? It would appear at least until 130-135 CE and the time of the Bar Kochba revolt. The esteemed LXX scholar Emanuel Tov also argues that Hebrew remained the language of the Rabbi's through to at least 135 CE:

"Since the only text quoted by in the Rabbinic literature and used for the base for the Targumim and Vulgate is the MT [Masoretic Text – written in Hebrew], it stands to reason that it was the text embraced by the Rabbis. Furthermore, all the texts used by the religious zealots of Masada and the freedom fighters of Bar Kochba found in all other sites in the Judean Desert except for Qumran are identical with the medieval MT." ⁹

The evidence is now very strong that Hebrew continued to be used for Bible commentary and liturgical texts to military communications and legal documents through the time of Yeshua and even for centuries afterward. Judean coins from the period of the Great Revolt (70 CE) and of the Bar-Kochva Revolt (135 CE) also bear Hebrew inscriptions.

I give much more detail on these recent findings in my book *'The New Testament: The Hebrew Behind The Greek'* - <https://www.amazon.com.au/New-Testament-Language-Mindset-Hellenistic-ebook/dp/B009XO0NQU/> Also see Dr Ali Garza's short book *'The Hebrew New Testament: Evidence for the New Testament in Hebrew'*.

One of the realities that also comes out of our greater knowledge of these times is that even if Yeshua actually used Aramaic when he was teaching, it was evidently at the same moment translated into Hebrew, because from this time we have virtually no sayings or teachings from Israel recorded in Aramaic.

So what does all this really mean.

It means the original writings of the Good News of the Kingdom of God that were recorded as a result of the life, death and resurrection of Yeshua were written in Hebrew, to a Hebrew audience with a Hebrew and therefore Torah-centric mindset.

The evidence is also very well documented now that there were virtually no Gentile converts to the faith of Yeshua until at the very earliest around 45 CE (with Cornelius the Centurion). Therefore, the earliest versions of the Gospel were all in Hebrew with the Greek version of Matthew for example most likely not written until after 70 CE.

Flusser make this point quite forcefully in his argument that that the Greek Matthew was written after 70 CE by a Gentile/Greek person who did not have the best understanding of Jewish practices.

Amongst the evidence he cites is the use of the Greek word *'phylacteries'* meaning *'protective devices'* in Matt 23:5 which clearly indicates that the editor in translating the Hebrew *'tefillin'* did not really understand what these tiny scrolls really were!¹⁰

So what does this mean and what has happened since to bring about this betrayal of Yeshua?

Simply Gentiles somehow managed to remove all (or perhaps ironically 'bury under the rubble' as per Rabbi Gamaliel) the original Hebrew recordings of the Gospel of Yeshua and then used poor Greek translations to slowly and subtly, but very significantly alter the core message and introduce a great many falsehoods into the original faith of the followers of Yeshua.

It would be much more accurate to label this faith as 'Yeshua Judaism'¹¹ (as opposed to the modern faith of Israel which is more accurately labelled 'Akiva Judasim' as it essentially follows the dictates of Rabbi Akiva).

It is past time to try to return to this faith.

⁹ <http://www.emanueltov.info/docs/papers/11.large-scalediffs.2008.pdf?v=1.0> (p14)

¹⁰ For more detail on this and many related issues please see my book *'The NT: The Hebrew Behind the Greek'*.

¹¹ As suggested by Bruce Barham of <http://torahofmessiah.org/>

This in part requires both a recognition of what these falsehoods are¹², but also to replace the Greek and Hellenistic mindset that mainstream Christianity has adopted with the Hebraic Mindset and Torah-centric value system that Yeshua and all his early disciples and followers had.

Part of the approach is to reject that argument from one of the founders of the Protestant movement in Martin Luther that the Epistle of James is an ‘epistle of straw’¹³ and instead to reevaluate the centrality and true meaning of the message in this great letter of Ya’acov (James) the brother of Yeshua.

For example, among many things Ya’acov speaks out against:

- a superficial hearing of God’s Word;
- pious speech but little practice of the same i.e. hypocritical behaviour;
- the error of being dogmatic about Scriptural teaching, yet not fully understanding proper practice.¹⁴

But most crucially, Ya’acov calls for an obedience to Torah, and this means living righteously:

“22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness—and he was called a friend of God.

24 You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.” - Ya’acov 2:22-24 (ESV)

*“Who among you is wise and understanding? **Let him demonstrate it by his good way of life, by actions done in the humility that grows out of wisdom.**” – Ya’acov 3:13*

I think that one of the biggest challenges to mainstream Christianity recognizing how much it has betrayed Yeshua and bringing about such a huge change in his focus and message, is for the academics and preachers within Christendom to look outside of their very narrow ‘echo-chamber’ and look to scholars like those at the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research for guidance in the much needed re-evaluation of their reliance on Greek as the text through which to translate and understand the Gospel message.

And there are a great many Jewish scholars who are more than willing to help with this re-alignment and re-evaluation, such as Prof. Mark Nanos (perhaps the leading scholar on the Apostle Paul alive today), Prof. Pamela Eisenbaum of ‘*Paul was NOT a Christian: The Original Message of a Misunderstood Apostle*’); Prof. Adele Reinhartz of ‘*Befriending The Beloved Disciple: A Jewish Reading of the Gospel of John*’ and Prof. Amy-Jill Levine of ‘*The Historical Jesus in Context*’ with Dale C. Allison & John Dominic Crossan’, to name just a few.

Also, the New Testament texts need to be restored to the underlying Jewishness and Torah-centric message that they originally conveyed. Such a vital and challenging task is also being undertaken by the Jewish translator Uriel Ben Mordechai¹⁵ who has already translated three of the NT letters, namely Hebrews, Galatians and Romans and is currently working on the Gospel of Yochanan (John).

Sadly, I am not optimistic that this transformation will occur.

The academics and preachers within Christendom (the use of ‘Christ’ instead of Messiah (*or Maschiach, which is closer in sounding and therefore an even better transliteration*)) is so indicative of the significance of the problem) have such a huge vested interest in maintaining the status quo and at the same time have, for the most part, huge blinkers on that appear to prevent them from even considering the thesis of the article and instead reacting to it by either totally ignoring it, or trying through many methods such as the logical fallacies of ‘appeal to authority’ and ‘genetic fallacy’ to delegitimize this whole argument.

¹² I detail some of them in my book ‘Doctrinal Pitfalls of Hellenism’ - <https://www.amazon.com.au/Doctrinal-Pitfalls-Hellenism-Studies-Greek-ebook/dp/B00D017CK8/>

¹³ Luther called it “*a right strawy epistle in comparison with the writings of Paul, Peter and John.*” - <http://www.biblicalstudies.com/bstudy/expostudy/james.htm>

¹⁴ For details on the central and powerful message of Ya’acov please see my article at circumcisedheart.info ‘James The Just – Re-evaluating His Legacy’ - <https://goo.gl/1N2vR9>

¹⁵ <http://www.above-and-beyond-ltd.com/store/books/if.html> I believe that these should become the ‘default’ versions we use.

So to try to overcome these vested interests and centuries of inherited bias perhaps we need to ask, how much do you really want to know and follow Yeshua?

How much do you really want to know the Almighty and if you do, how willing are to listen to Him?

When Moses spoke with the nation of Israel as Yehovah directed him he said '**Hear** (i.e, listen very carefully and **HEED** what I say) **O'Israel, Yehovah is our God, Yehovah is ONE. And you shalt love Yehovah your God with all you heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.**'

If you can hear this call today and this is truly your heartfelt desire, would it not be incumbent upon you to seriously question how well you know Yeshua, who and what he was, and in turn what Yehovah desires of those that truly know Him to the point of loving Him?

If so, then please take the message shared here seriously enough to be open to considering it; to doing the research and study required to properly evaluate the claims made here and decide for yourself who you are called to follow, the Hebrew Yeshua or the Greek Jesus?

To finish and to affirm my great admiration for the lifetime efforts of Prof. David Flusser, I conclude with his words:

"The purified Judaism of (Yeshua) is one of the few hopes...probably the only hope to live in our world."

Paul Herring
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www.circumcisedheart.info