

BOOK REVIEW—IS THE BOOK OF JOHN “GREEK” TO YOU?

Have you always supposed that the “unlearned and ignorant” John of Acts 4:13, whose native tongue was Aramaic, wrote the book of John in Greek? Haven’t you always been told that the entire New Testament was inspired in Greek? Would it surprise you to learn that such an educated man as C. F. Burney, M.A., D. Litt., Oriel Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture at Oxford in 1922, has amassed such a wealth of evidence that the book of John was written in Aramaic (a Hebrew dialect), that it places this fact beyond the range of reasonable doubt? For a thorough study of Dr. Burney’s thesis you may want to obtain a copy of his enlightening volume entitled **The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel**, but for the meantime allow these thoughts gleaned from his work, presented here in resume’ form to suffice. The book was published in 1922 by the Oxford at Clarendon Press and reveals a great deal of study on the part of the author.

Looking at the book of John from a linguistic point of view there are just too many “ands” to indicate Greek authorship. In other words the recurring use of “and ... and,” known as parataxis, reflects Semitic influence and is set forth as contributing evidence that the Book of John was translated into Greek from an Aramaic original. It was subsequently translated into English from Greek.

You have probably been told since early grammar school days never to make a sentence such as the following, “The gentleman who used to ride that horse—he lost his arm in the war.” You’ve probably even heard this same kind of anacoluthon crop up in daily conversation. But you would certainly not use such an anacoluthon in a term paper that your semester’s grade depended upon. In John, however, it is remarkably obvious in frequent occurrences.

Please note especially at this point, that both the “repetitive and” and the “grammatical blunder” mentioned above are properly used in the literature of Semitic-speaking peoples.

As an aside in reference to the Aramaisms and Hebraisms that appear in John, Professor Schmiedel is quoted as stating that Mark Hebraizes still more strongly than does Matthew. That Luke also has Hebraisms “and not only where he is dependent on Mark or Matthew but also where he had no exemplar before him.” Such statements make one wonder if the entire New Testament was inspired in Hebrew and Aramaic. Someday we may have positive proof that such a conclusion is justified.

Another striking piece of evidence in favor of Aramaic authorship is the overuse of locutions coincident with locutions of Aramaic which are repeatedly found to occur in the Book of John.

Inasmuch as it is impossible in translating to convey every nuance of meaning that would be understood in reading the original, there is a distinct loss in translating from Hebrew into Greek and then again into English. One such loss in the Book of John is the Jewish doctrine of the *Shekina*, or a visible dwelling of Yahweh among His people, typified by the pillar of cloud standing above the tent of meeting, as subsequently in Solomon’s Temple (See Ex. 33:7-11 and 1 Kings 8: 10-11).

In Hebrew, passages in which Yahweh is said to dwell, or to cause His name to dwell, in the midst of Israel, the Aramaic phrase is “He caused His *Shekinta* (Heb. *Shekina*) to dwell there. For example, Leviticus 26:12 would be rendered in Aramaic, **“And I will cause my *shekinta* to dwell among you.”** Aramaic employs the term *yekara* like *shekinta* in paraphrasing passages which describe the actual appearance of Yahweh in bodily form. The Aramaic paraphrase of Isaiah 6:5, for example, is “For mine eye has seen the *yekara* of the *shekinta* of the king of the ages.”

Therefore, it can be proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that when John describes Yahshua’s manifesting His glory in such verses as 2:11, 11:40 and 17:24, he has in mind the Aramaic *yekara*.

If you had been alive in the days of Yahshua and had heard the Hebrew Scriptures expounded in the synagogue in Aramaic, you would have recognized in Yahshua the fulfillment of the *shekinta* and *yekara* glory. If you will review the first chapter of John with this in mind, you will see that this is actually what his glad tidings were all about. You would have discerned superhuman power shining through the Master’s personality in His mighty acts and teachings and have apprehended that in His presence on earth Yahweh had sent His Son to dwell among men.

Another lamentable loss in translating John’s glad tidings into Greek and then English is the beautiful sacred song, flowing in Aramaic meter, which constitutes the first eleven verses of the book. In the poetic Aramaic, the thought emerges forcefully that just as Yahweh’s first creative act

was the formation of light, so the birth of Yahshua was the dawn of light in the midst of the spiritual darkness of the world. That just as the introduction of light into the world at creation did not immediately abolish physical darkness but resulted in a division between light and darkness, so now the spiritual light introduced by Yahshua would divide the true worshippers from the false.

The most weighty form of evidence in proving that a document is a translation from another language is the existence of difficulties or peculiarities of language which can be shown to be mistranslations from the assumed original language. There are a considerable number of such in the Book of John. One example of this is a statement “out of his belly shall flow rivers of living waters.” This conception cannot be connected with any Old Testament passage. The difficulty here vanishes when you see that the Aramaic word for “fountain” is absolutely identical with “belly.” What Yahshua was saying then is that “Rivers shall flow forth from the fountain of living waters.” Compare Ezekiel 47.

There is much technical evidence set forth in Dr. Burney’s work which would require at least a basic understanding of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek to fully grasp. Therefore, it would not be proper to set such evidence forth in an article of this nature.

Once we understand that there is no such thing as an “inspired Greek New Testament” we can only conclude that in matters pertaining to salvation we should “trust no translator,” but “work out our own salvation with meekness and fear.” That although corruptions have been allowed in the translations, it is possible for the sincere truth seekers to discern the truth and know how to “refuse the evil and choose the good.” Yahweh’s Spirit will guide such worshippers into all truth—for the Father seeks such to worship Him (John 4:23). □

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