

Appendix D

(From *The Holy Bible In Its Original Order*
A New English Translation
A Faithful Version with Commentary)

The New Testament Was Originally Written in Greek

The New Testament was originally written in Greek, the commonly used language in Palestine well before the first century AD. As the universal language of commerce and trade, Koiné Greek was the primary language of Jesus, the apostles and the early New Testament Church.

Some erroneously teach that the New Testament was originally written in the Hebrew language and was later translated into Greek. They fail to realize, however, that in Jewish communities Hebrew had been virtually replaced by Greek many centuries before the New Testament era.

Under the Babylonian and Medo-Persian empires, Aramaic exerted its greatest influence. The Persians ruled Palestine from the time of Ezra until its invasion by Alexander the Great in 333 BC. From that time, the influence of Aramaic was overshadowed by Greek. Biblical scholar Samuel G. Green describes this significant change: “[As] a direct result of the conquests of Alexander the Great and his successors, the Greek tongue had been carried into almost all the countries of the civilized world, and had become the medium of commercial intercourse, the language of the courts, and, in fact, **the universal literary tongue** of the provinces afterwards absorbed in the Roman Empire...” (*Handbook to the Grammar of the Greek Testament*, p. 155; emphasis added).

The Influence of Greek in Jewish Society

Noted German scholar Martin Hengel wrote that by Jesus’ time “Greek had already been established as a language for more than three hundred years ... [and had] long been accepted not only in the former Philistine or Phoenician areas on the coast and (in the third century BCE) in the ‘Graeco-Macedonian’ cities in the interior, but also (though not so intensively) in areas settled by Jews and Samaritans” (*The Hellenization of Judaea in the First Century after Christ*, pp. 7-8).

Greek was the official language of Jerusalem in New Testament times—the language not only of the priestly aristocracy, but also of business and commerce. Its influence was most noticeable in the city of Jerusalem. Hengel adds, “The most important centre of the Greek language in Jewish Palestine was of course the capital, Jerusalem. We again have a good deal of epigraphical evidence [from historical inscriptions] to support this” (*Ibid.*, p. 9).

The importance of Greek in Jewish life is evidenced by the fact that the Temple had a fully staffed Greek secretariat. Such offices were typically vital to the diplomatic, commercial and banking interests of the nation. Hengel believed that “an institution like **the temple must have had a well-staffed Greek secretariat for more than two centuries**” (*Ibid.*, p. 17, emphasis added). It was not difficult to find Greek-speaking Jews to serve as members of the Temple secretariat. Many Levitical and priestly families had contact with Greek-speaking areas outside Palestine, and some families lived in these areas. In fact, the high priests appointed by Herod came from Greek-speaking families.

In New Testament times, Greek was spoken not only by the elite of Jerusalem but also by those who copied manuscripts in the scriptoria, by the middle-class businessmen who ran the bazaars, and by the bankers who served as money changers in the Temple. The monetary exchange that was centered at the Temple and all business transactions in Jerusalem required fluency in Greek. This was the language of business and commerce in every province of the Roman Empire, including Palestine. Hengel adds that “**Greek was no less established among the leading families of Jerusalem than in the scriptoria and the bazaars of the city or at the**

tables of the money changers in the temple forecourt” (Ibid., p. 14, bold emphasis added).

Greek Was Spoken in Galilee in New Testament Times

While Jerusalem was the commercial, cultural and banking center of Palestine, the region of Galilee did not fall far behind. Galilee was perfectly positioned at the crossroads of trade entering and exiting Palestine. The entire region was bustling with commerce, and the language of that trade and commerce was Greek.

Hengel relates that by the time of Christ the prominent cities of Sepphoris and Tiberias in Galilee had Greek schools ranked among the best (*The Hellenization of Judaea in the First Century after Christ*, p. 24). As carpenters, Joseph and Jesus might have worked in Sepphoris, which was only four or five miles from Jesus’ home. The Greek-speaking city of Tiberias—center of a thriving fishing industry—was also near their home. As centers of commerce and trade, those from Galilee needed to be fluent in Greek in order to deal with visiting merchants and tradesmen. Hengel states that in economic terms “Galilee was to a large extent dependent on the completely Hellenized Phoenician cities, especially Acco/Ptolemais and Tyre” (Ibid., p. 15).

Members of the priestly families were well trained in both Hebrew and Greek. Hebrew continued to be spoken by the priests in the Temple and by the scribes in the synagogues for religious events and discussions only. When at home with their families or conducting business in the market, they spoke Greek. The common people—who had long since lost their knowledge of Hebrew—spoke Aramaic in general, but those who dealt in commerce and trade also spoke Greek. According to Hengel, “Judaea, Samaria and Galilee were bilingual (or better, trilingual) areas. While Aramaic was the vernacular of ordinary people, and Hebrew ... [was still the] language of religious worship and of scribal discussion, Greek had largely become established as the linguistic medium for trade, commerce and administration” (Ibid., p. 8).

Historical inscriptions attest to the fact that Galilee in the early Christian era was a bilingual society. Hengel adds that the “constant discovery of new inscriptions confirms this picture of a fundamentally multilingual society” (Ibid., p. 9).

Evidence That Greek Was Spoken by Jesus and the Apostles

In addition to the above evidence, Samuel Green wrote concerning the language spoken by Jesus and the apostles. “It was in the Greek of the Septuagint thus modified that, in all probability, our Lord and His apostles generally spoke. The dialect of Galilee (Matt. xxvi. 73) was not a corrupt Hebrew, but a provincial Greek” (*Handbook to the Grammar of the Greek Testament*, p. 156).

The Gospel accounts verify that Jesus and His disciples, who were Galileans, spoke the Greek dialect of Galilee and not a corrupted Hebrew; hence Jesus’ words to the scribes and Pharisees at the temple: “Therefore, Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love Me, because I proceeded forth and came from God. For I have not come of Myself, but He sent Me. **Why don’t you understand My speech?** Because you cannot *bear* to hear My words’ ” (John 8:42-43).

In recording Jesus’ words, John shows that the scribes and Pharisees had difficulty understanding Jesus’ Galilean dialect. John’s choice of the Greek word translated “speech” is *lalia* (lalia), which means “dialect.” The Pharisees had a problem with the Greek dialect of Jesus and His apostles throughout their ministries. As further evidence of this, Matthew comments that it was Peter’s Galilean Greek that gave him away during Jesus’ trial: “Truly, you also are one of [Jesus’ followers], for even **your speech** [dialect] **shows that you are**” (Matt. 26:73).

As the Greek of Peter’s Epistles testifies, he was speaking and writing a better “quality” of Greek than those at Jerusalem. The Greek Jesus and the apostles spoke would be the Greek that would carry the Gospel to the world and would be recorded for all time in the New Testament.

The very names of Jesus’ apostles are Greek: “Among the twelve disciples of Jesus, two, Andrew and Philip, bear purely Greek names, and in the case of two others the original Greek name has been Aramaized” (*The Hellenization of Judaea in the First Century after Christ*, p. 16). Hengel adds, “At all events, Simon Peter must have been bilingual, since otherwise he could not have engaged so successfully in missionary work outside Judaea.... It is remarkable that Luke does not know of Peter having any problems with language—say in connection with

Cornelius” (Ibid., p. 16).

Early Christians in Jerusalem Spoke Greek

As we find in historical records and in Scripture, those who responded to the preaching of the Gospel were primarily Greek-speaking people. It is logical, therefore, to conclude that Jesus and the apostles spoke *to* them in Greek. Luke records that some of the earliest members of the Church at Jerusalem were Greek-speaking Jews.

In the book of Acts, Luke gives us insight into this early community of Greek-speaking Jews from which the first evangelists were chosen and by which the Gospel spread to all Judea. Luke wrote: “Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, **there arose a complaint by the Greeks against the Hebrews** [Jews whose native tongue was Aramaic], because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations” (Acts 6:1). Note that the term “Greeks” used here (translated “Grecians” in the *KJV*) is from the Greek word that means *Hellenist*—or one who follows the customs of the Greeks, including speaking their language. These Hellenized Jewish disciples clearly spoke Greek as their native language.

The seven who were chosen in the account (verses 3-5) each bear **Greek names**. It is quite evident that Greek was the mother tongue of these original seven evangelists who spread the Gospel far and wide into Greek-speaking communities. Hengel calls them the original “spokesmen of the Hellenist community” (*The Hellenization of Judaea in the First Century after Christ*, p. 18).

Hengel believes that because Greek was spoken almost exclusively among this group of Hellenist Jews in Jerusalem, Jesus and His apostles must have evangelized them in Greek: “[The] message of Jesus also reached Diaspora **Jews in Jerusalem who almost only spoke Greek or spoke it exclusively**.... [The] roots of the ... Greek-speaking Jewish Christian community in which **the message of Jesus was formulated in Greek for the first time clearly extend back to the very earliest community in Jerusalem**, and accordingly the first linguistic development of its kerygma [preaching of the Gospel] and its Christology [the study of Christ] must have already taken place there” (Ibid., p. 18, bold emphasis added).

It is evident that Paul—selected by God to preach to the Gentiles—also spoke Greek. Luke recorded that shortly after Saul’s conversion, he became involved in a dispute with the Greek-speaking Jews of Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-31). In his Epistle to the Philippians, Paul described himself as a “Hebrew of Hebrews” (Phil. 3:5). Paul had been trained at the feet of Gamaliel, the leading rabbi of that period in Jewish history, and Paul was fully capable of speaking Hebrew to the Pharisaic Jews of Jerusalem (Acts 21:40). However, Paul did not customarily speak Hebrew. He was equally knowledgeable in the Greek language, as Acts 21 also shows. Paul could hardly have preached throughout the areas of Asia—or written Epistles to Gentile-area churches—without being fluent in Greek. Thus, the New Testament demonstrates that the Gospel was preached almost exclusively in Greek.

The Gospel Was Recorded in Greek

The books of the New Testament were written between 26 and 96 AD, a period of almost seventy years. As internal evidence reveals, Jesus’ disciples recorded His message and began to circulate these writings throughout Palestine and the Empire at a very early date—later collecting them into the Gospel accounts. Matthew’s account may have appeared as early as 31 AD, and Mark’s account in 42 AD. Luke’s account appears around 59 AD. The Gospel of John was written about 42 AD as well.

In 50 AD Paul wrote the first of his Epistles that would appear in Scripture—the rest being written between 51 and 67 AD. James’ Epistle was written around 40-41 AD, and the Epistles of Peter between 63 and 66 AD. Jude was written sometime around 67 AD. The letters of I, II and III John were written about 63-64 AD. The book of Hebrews was written from Rome about 61 AD. Thus the basic canon of the New Testament was completed by the time the Jewish Wars began in about 66 AD. Finally, the book of Revelation was written by the aged apostle John about 95-96 AD.

These early New Testament texts—copied and preserved by the Church in Asia Minor—were generally adopted by Christians in the 4th century as the official text of the New Testament.

From that time forward the documents became known as the Byzantine text—the most authoritative Greek text of the New Testament, of which the King James Version is a translation. Its role as the leading Greek text dates back to the beginning of the Byzantine period, for which the text is named: “The Byzantine text is found in the vast majority of the Greek New Testament manuscripts. It is called *Byzantine* because it was the Greek New Testament text in general use throughout the greater part of the Byzantine Period (312-1453)... Even today it is the text which most Protestants know best, since the King James Version and other early Protestant translations were made from it” (Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, p. 40).

No Original Hebrew Manuscripts of the New Testament

Some claim the New Testament was originally written in Hebrew, then translated into Greek. However, the records of early church history do not support this assertion. Tatian, Papias, Tertullian and Irenaeus, to name but a few writers of the early church, describe the original writings and quote from them. Yet not a single quote is taken from a Hebrew text—all are taken from Greek texts. Although Papias asserts that Matthew compiled his early reports in Hebrew, no evidence is given.

Early translations of the New Testament are all based on Greek texts. *The Harmony of Tatian*, translated in 170 AD, is based on a Greek original, as is *The Muratorian Canon*. The *Old Latin Version* translated in 180 AD is based on a Greek original. Early Gothic, Egyptian, Ethiopian, Armenian and Palestinian versions are all based on Greek originals. Even the Aramaic versions of the New Testament are translations from the Greek (see *The Books and the Parchments*, by F. F. Bruce, p. 189). **No evidence of a Hebrew original has been found in all the centuries that have followed the writing of the New Testament.**

Internal Evidence in the New Testament

If the New Testament had originally been written in Hebrew or Aramaic, there would have been no need for the apostles to interpret the meaning of certain Hebrew and Aramaic words for their readers. However, the Gospel accounts contain many such necessary interpretations. For example, when two of John the Baptist’s disciples were following Jesus, they asked, “ ‘**Rabbi**’ (which is to say, being interpreted, ‘Teacher’), ‘where do You dwell?’ ” Andrew, one of the two, went and found his brother Simon and said, “ ‘We have found the **Messiah**’ (which is, being interpreted, ‘the Christ’).” Later, Jesus said to Simon, “ ‘You are Simon the son of Jona. You shall be called **Cephas**’ (which is, *being* interpreted, ‘a stone’)” (John 1:39, 42-43).

In this example, “Rabbi” and “Messiah” are Hebrew, and “Cephas” is Aramaic. If John had written his Gospel in Hebrew or Aramaic, these words would not have needed to be translated and interpreted in Greek for Greek-speaking readers.

“Rabbi” is an English transliteration of the Greek Ραββι, which is a transliteration of the Hebrew רַבִּי and literally means “Lord” or “Master.” The Greek *didaskale* (“teacher”) is a paraphrase of the Greek Rabbi. John interprets this term for the sake of his Greek readers who were not familiar with the Hebrew “Rabbi,” and therefore would not have understood the Greek transliteration Ραββι.

“Messiah” is a transliteration of the Greek *Messian* (Μεσσιαν), which is a Hellenized transliteration of the Hebrew *Meshiach* (מָשִׁיחַ). The Hellenized Jews, to whom John was writing, were not acquainted with this Hebrew term. Thus, John translated it into the Greek word *Christos* (“the Christ”) which means “the Anointed One.” If John had written in Hebrew to a Hebrew-speaking people, it would make no sense to translate these words into Greek.

“Cephas” is Aramaic for “little stone” or “pebble.” John felt it necessary to translate this word for the Hellenized Jews, who were no more familiar with Aramaic than with Hebrew.

Numerous other examples can be found in the Gospels, such as “Siloam” being interpreted as “sent” (John 9:7)—and in Matthew, where the name “Emmanuel” is a transliteration of the Greek *Εμμανουηλ*, which is in turn a transliteration of the Hebrew אֱמַנּוּאֵל (Matt. 1:23). The fact that these Hebrew terms had to be interpreted illustrates that John and Matthew were writing in Greek to a Greek-speaking audience.

Further evidence that Matthew wrote in Greek to a people who spoke Greek, and not in Hebrew, is furnished by two grammatical structures unique to the Greek: the articular infinitive

and the genitive absolute. Neither of these grammatical structures has a comparable structure in Hebrew—but represent a higher quality of formal Greek. Numerous examples of Matthew’s use of these two grammatical structures demonstrate his mastery of literary Greek. His usage of the articular infinitive, in particular, illustrates the fact that Matthew not only grew up speaking Greek but that he also had formal training in Greek rhetoric.

It is clear that Hebrew was not the primary language of Palestine during the days of Jesus’ ministry; neither was it the language of the apostles. Therefore, it can be concluded that Jesus and all of the apostles spoke fluent Greek, and that the entire New Testament was originally written and preserved in *Koiné* Greek.