

In Consequence of Culture

*The Case in Favor of a
Hebrew-influenced
New Testament Translation
by David Ison*

The History

At the time of Yeshua (Jesus) there existed a different definition of the Scriptures than what we use in our time. In that day it consisted of the Torah (the Law of Moses), the Prophets, and the Writings: Genesis through the book of Malachi from our current Bibles. Collectively it was known as the Tenach, which was a synonym for the Bible. It was without the sections now called the “New Testament”. This was, of course, because these epistles and eyewitness accounts had not yet been written, yet it is a point of immense importance.

Most people know that the original language of the Bible is Hebrew. Readily discovered within this language and the Hebraic culture working in concert with it are all the essential foundations of original jurisdiction and of inherent spiritual authority that give the form and peculiar identity to this institution known as the Bible.

These Hebrew scriptures had sustained and nourished the people of God for all times. The Ethiopian eunuch, as we read in Acts 8:28, recited the writings of the scroll of Isaiah and scrutinized the prophecies that were recorded therein. These writings and those of the other prophets had encouraged kings and comforted military commanders. The elders of Israel found inspiration in its psalms and heavenly understanding in its proverbs. Blessings were conferred upon Israel by means of its instruction, and wisdom was found in its teachings; it became a crown of righteousness for whomever would put its sayings into practice, and a fount of understanding for whomever would examine its divine counsels.

After Messiah’s resurrection and ascension, a new rubric began to form. Messengers, bearing good tidings, went forth into all nations, proclaiming the terms of a renewed Covenant and taught their doctrines with fire fresh from the Spirit. Over time, the Church emerged, consumed with relentless zeal in pursuing its

vision of the Great Commission. It now promulgated on its own authority¹ new ordinances, designed to demarcate, and even to coronate before the world, its nascent solemn epiphanies. So a new generation of teaching quickly ensued, propelled into the mainstream by pastors, leaders, and teachers who had little or no understanding or familiarity with the Hebrew Masoretic texts. An unprecedented notion was heralded by the Church: that a “New” covenant had been introduced and the former had passed away (Heb 8:6).

Then, as if to say these precious Hebrew texts which had so long served the people of God were in exigent need of revision, the Church cast into the annals of history its record of the various councils and committees, which at their end conferred to all the world a kind of *canon nouveaux* of sacred text. Its Greek-inspired selections were now regarded as equal to or of even greater authority than the Masoretic Hebrew heirloom that had been passed down for generations. It was labeled, according to ecclesiastic authority of that time, the “New Testament”, and the Hebrew scriptures, which had been preached by the apostles and ennobled by the doctrines of the Messiah himself, were transformed into what those convocations decreed the “Old Testament”.

The Culture and Language

We understand that the followers of Yeshua were originally known as a sect of the Jews (Act 28:22). The individual authors of the writings which had been compiled by the Church into the “New Testament” were either Jewish or Jewish converts and, being such, were immersed in Hebraic culture. Nothing in the words of Yeshua could be construed to say that this was an incorrect understanding or required revision. For example, Rav Shaul (the apostle Paul) learned the Hebrew scriptures under the tutelage of Gamaliel, who remains to this day one of the most highly respected teachers of the Law, or Torah. Paul did not renounce his Hebraic understanding of the scriptures, but instead he testified before even the tribunal of the Sanhedrin that he was in fact a Pharisee, and that at no point did he ever stop being one. He said, **“I am a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee”** (Act 23:6). In claiming his identity as a Pharisee, was he testifying that he was part of some “new” faith? Or,

was he saying that the ways Yeshua taught were the same foundational, Hebraic paths to righteousness that had always been practiced? (See Luke 1:6 in context.) Although he wrote to a predominantly Greek-speaking audience (and we now have copies of his correspondences that are in Greek), his manner of instructing, his mode of expression, and his model of thought were distinctly Hebraic. They were founded upon the teachings of the Torah and were expressed in exclusively Hebraic terms.

So, the difficulty in interpreting these writings is that, linguistically, Greek (or any other language that we know of) is incapable of expressing the spiritual truths and intangible relationships among heavenly ideas that Hebrew naturally affords. This means, therefore, that a translation of this relatively spiritually-deficient Greek text into any language except Hebrew would, of necessity, be inadequate. Furthermore, unless the translators of the Greek texts were intimately familiar with the Torah or were rabbinically trained (and most, of course, are not), they would not be aware of the allusions to the Torah and the Prophets which occur frequently in these correspondences. Therefore, a rendering of the Greek text directly into any language (such as English) becomes devoid of the original Hebraic nuances intended by the author, and much is completely lost to the modern reader in this process.

Intended to be Scripture?

Jesus taught at all times from the Tenach, the Bible without the section entitled the New Testament. Some have speculated this was an acceptable quirk of history only because the “Old Covenant” had not yet been fulfilled. But ask yourself this question, did Jesus at any time even imply that in the future “new writings will be made concerning me and my doctrines that I am not able to explain to you at this time”? Or did he instruct us that “these new writings shall speak at a higher authority than I do because their words will become ‘New’, and the words I am speaking and teaching will have become part of the ‘Old’ ”? Is it recorded anywhere that he said, “these writings will give you much additional instruction, and will illuminate many of the great mysteries of the faith for you”? The reader should give pause and reflect upon these questions before continuing. We see then it is a point of immeasurable importance that the Bible nowadays

is being filtered through doctrines that were formed after Messiah ascended and which are not mentioned anywhere in the record of his words.

After his resurrection from the dead, Jesus instructed his disciples on the Emmaus road, that the Tenach testified clearly of him. In this passage we see a phrase, “all the scriptures” and it means “the Bible without a section entitled the New Testament”. “*And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.*” (Luke 24:27)

The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy that, “*from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*”. Consider that. The Tenach was completely sufficient to lead Timothy, the son of a Greek father in a Greek household, to personal salvation in Yeshua.

Those who are not Jewish will not understand how completely unthinkable it is to place a letter of correspondence into the same category as the scripture. To the Chasidim (devout Jews), this kind of thing is vastly irreverent. Only persons who are not Jewish would even consider it. Paul instructs in Romans 11:18, “*do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you.*” Do you understand who the root is and who are branches in this passage? Therefore could any group acting apart from the Jew and the Circumcision possess the commission and anointing and calling required to execute this function?

In Romans 3:1-2 we read, “*what benefit is there to someone that they would be Jewish, and what advantage is there of the circumcision? Exceedingly much and in every way, the principal benefit being that the very Words of God have been entrusted to them.*”² (SHMA) The reader may be surprised to learn that there are nearly 300,000 variations (!) among the approximately 5,400 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament known to exist today. Although most of these, scholars explain, do not affect the sense of the passage, we find this great a number of discrepancies to affirm the prophecy of Romans 3:1-2, that the people who copied and maintained these texts did not have the same calling to do so as the transmitters of Tenach. Neither did they possess the proper authority to append these writings to the Word of God. They are good words; they are inspirational words and we find aid and comfort in them; but to occupy the same place of authority and original juris-

diction as the books of Moses and of the Prophets and of the Psalms and writings: they were never meant for this purpose.

So, in essence, the question is, how is it that a letter about a thing (the Tenach) could be higher in authority than the thing itself? It is difficult to express the degree of reverence with which all Chasidim (devout Jews) have held the Hebrew scriptures. They are not loosely defined as “some Old Covenant” or “some epistles”. Yeshua, the twelve disciples, the apostle Paul and all members of this sect of the Jews (Act 28:22) would never have presumed to add personal correspondences to the theological crest of the mountain that so gratuitously was done by non-Jewish speakers of Greek who, according to this prophecy of Romans 3:1, acted without divine authorization because the oracles, or scriptures, were not entrusted to them.

We see this alone as sufficient testimony that Paul never intended his letters to become part of the Bible, yet there are other identifiable traits within all the apostolic writings that cast a sobering doubt upon whether the authors actually intended their correspondence be made into a canon of scripture. For instance, in his letters Rav Shaul often addresses questions that have been posed by a community of believers in a previous correspondence or examines issues pertaining only to their particular situation (e.g. 1Co 5:1, 6:7, 7:1, 8:1, 12:1, 16:1; 2Co 2:5-7; Col 2:8, 16; 1 Th 4:9, 5:1, 2Th 2:1-3). While it is clear that he is speaking in reply to a question or situation, he makes it so inexplicably difficult to comprehend his arguments because we are not privy to the specific circumstances of the discussion. Furthermore, he seems to totally disregard the need to frame his answers in a way that would make the context clear to readers that are unfamiliar with the original inquiries. If he indeed expected or purposed his letters to be read and understood by persons besides the original recipients, does it not seem reasonable that he would have taken great care to make his communications unambiguous? How much more so if he expected that it would be read and preached by untold generations of believers to come? Would he not have restated the question or at least given background or supplementary information?

There is also evidence that much of these writings originated more as personal correspondences or teachings rather than being at the express initiation of the Holy Spirit. For example, it seems the apostolic writ-

ers had misconceptions about the times in which they lived. There were statements made which indicated they believed the days they lived in were at the absolute end of all time (1Co 10:11, 1Pe 1:5). Study these with particular focus, and you will see that Peter was so confident that all history had drawn to a close, that he misquoted Joel 2:28, saying, *"And it shall come to pass in the last days"* rather than how it is actually written, *"And it shall come to pass afterward"* in his sermon at Pentecost (Act 2:17). Therefore, arguably, according to the criteria given in Deuteronomy 18:22, (that the thing spoken that does not come true was not spoken by the Lord) these writings cannot qualify as prophetic utterances in the same classification as the Prophets.

We also have the admission by Luke (Luke 1: 3) that the initiative to write his historical account of the good news came from his own volition rather than by an explicit prompting of the Holy Spirit, which was the source of the writings of the prophets of old (2Pe 1:21). All of this discussion is not to diminish the value of these accounts in proclaiming the words and actions of the Messiah, but to call into question the manner in which we place too much authority on these words. Shall these writings be held at precisely the same esteem as that given to Moses and the Prophets? Does the statement *"it seemed fitting for me as well ... to write it out for you in consecutive order"* evoke in you a sense of power and authority comparable to *"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.'" (Exo 34:27) or "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Write all the words which I have spoken to you in a book.'" (Jer 30:2) or yet "Then the LORD responded to me saying, write down the vision, making it clear upon the tablets so that even one who is running past could read it..." (Hab 2:2 SHMA)?*

If a letter lacks clarity of ideas, how can it fulfill this? As we have discussed, the epistles frequently offer no elucidation concerning the question that was posed, nor any qualifications concerning the scope or application of the answer. Furthermore, we have noted certain characteristics evincing either a hasty or expeditious composition of the letter, rather than the systematic formality typically encountered in, for example, the book of Leviticus. How then can a blend of instructive opinions and ideas such as this, which had its basis in Torah, but was intended only for one-time use in a letter, be as high as the Torah itself?

Yeshua made an interesting comment concerning this question and in reference to John (the immerser) as recorded in Matthew 11:13 (and Luke 16:16), “*For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John*”. In the Hebraic sense, this is saying there was a sort of closure of the period in which holy scripture would be given. Thereafter, many wonderful things could still be written, and were written, such as the eyewitness accounts (Gospels) and the prophecies of Revelation, but he is saying that after the appearance of John the Baptist, the time period designated for the issuance of holy scripture had ceased. If we were to say, “we took a break until 3:00 PM”, then what happened to the break time after 3:00? It is no longer. We could re-render the passage as, “*For the Navi'im and the Torah were actively prophesying until John*” (Mat 11:13 SHMA) Now when John became that voice crying out in the wilderness, the fulfillment of the prophecies had come. No more sacred scripture was going to be needed. Yeshua is it.

We find it an idiosyncrasy that most denominations teach that Jesus fulfilled perfectly the Law and the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, yet quizzically accept the New Testament as equal or greater inspiration. In effect, while saying they revere the Old Testament they negate their veneration by adopting as sacred scripture writings whose interpretations have often been in conflict with it and which were never authenticated by Jesus.

So what shall we then say to these things? Are the New Testament writings inspired? Yes, in the sense that good preaching is also inspired, that a prophetic word is inspired, that a word fitly spoken can very well be inspired by the Holy Spirit. But we ask these questions:

- 1. Who gave the order to form this “Canon” of writings and “add” these to the Bible?**
- 2. Who said this collection was now to be called “New”, and the previous “Old”?**
- 3. How, whether done by decree or by convention, did they become elevated to a position equal to or higher than the Tenach?**

We are well aware that the standard answer for #1 and #2 is “The Church Fathers”, and that #3 was a natural consequence of #1 and #2. Yet, did God tell them to do it? Was this order at the guidance of the

Spirit of Elohim? Until this question is sufficiently and satisfactorily answered, we must re-examine the commonly held doctrines concerning the relationship between Old and New Testaments. Any doctrine advancing the sentiment that the epistles, prophecies and eyewitness accounts (called the New Testament) should assume a higher (even equal) status with the Tenach is wrong.

If you remain unmoved in your devotion to the New Testament, then these questions should give you all the more reason to want to read the New Testament through Hebraically corrected lenses. On the other hand, if you agree with us that in fact God gave no such order, then join us in repenting of this entire disordered affair and once again place all your hope, confidence and trust in the treasured inheritance of all people of Elohim, the Tenach. The time has come that his people stop basing their doctrines solely on the words of personal correspondence of an apostle with another disciple, but instead *become* a disciple of Yeshua themselves, and “*study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*” (2Ti 2:15 KJV)

Conclusion

Now having analyzed each of the major points into which we have sensed the Holy Spirit's guidance to inquire, we would like to at this point put to rest any misgivings the reader may have concerning our faith. We are believers in Yeshua (Jesus) and accept the fundamental Christian doctrines concerning atonement and salvation. (Of course, it would be pointless to do this translation if we did not believe these words.)

As such, we do not denigrate the New Testament writings but rather see them as being valuable. We don't deny the lofty inspiration they afford, the utility of their instruction so bountifully bestowed, or the preciousness of their incomparable narratives and reports which help tell the world that Yeshua truly IS the promised Messiah. We know the good they have afforded countless souls on their journey of faith. We don't want to destroy your confidence in it; *au contraire*, we invite you to read it in the shining luster and clarity of its original Hebraic motif.

Nonetheless, in affirming the New Testament, we trust we have shown ample reason to begin to SEE the

scriptures differently than you have before. What we want you to see is that it can be good to read the New Testament writings, but it will be *FAR better to revere even more the portions of your Bibles, Genesis through Malachi* as being the providence of God in your life and stop saying the “New Testament” has replaced the “Old”. Begin to see this not as something old or something replaced. Please understand we are not attacking *the contents* of the New Testament itself; we ARE attacking false ideas and false theology. Until you have seen the eminence of what the Tenach instructs, you will not know what you are missing. You will never fully understand your New Testament writings until you cherish what God ordained by the hand of Moses and spoke through the prophets, and recorded by the many scribes of the people out of whom our Messiah was born, the Hebrew.

A Word Concerning Faith

In this translation we have accorded special attention to the correct Hebraic interpretation of the Hebrew word

אמונה (emunah), corresponding to the Greek word πιστις (pistis) commonly translated as ‘faith’. However, the fuller meaning of emunah, which of course would have been the intended meaning of any inquiry into the Hebraic foundation upon which Christianity rests, would have included not only the conventional idea of faith, as in belief, but also trust; reliance upon God; personal faithfulness, or fidelity; and reliability and consistency in relationship with God. It is said that one’s confidence rests in Him. (Heb 3 & 4)

In one Greek Lexicon³ we see this word defined as “conviction of the truth of anything, belief” and this is precisely how it is commonly understood. Yet, in this we find the Hebraic idea is not fully expressed. A secondary definition is given as, “fidelity, faithfulness, stability, or character of one who can be relied on.” This we see is much closer to the hebraic idea, and thus the utilization of these terms in this translation.

-- David Ison 8 Tevet 5767 / 29 Dec. 2006

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