The ‘Jewish Roots’ Movement and Its Mistakes

Andrew Selley 8 December 2025



From time to time, a new wind of doctrine sweeps through the body of Christ, often causing great damage to the church when the new ‘enlightened’ groups break away from those they perceive to be in error. One such wind of doctrine is the ‘Jewish Roots’ beliefs, which seems to be growing in popularity within churches again. Those caught up in this teaching believe that we are in error because we have misunderstood many things, and that only by holding to Jewish Roots (even using the Jewish language and Jewish names) can we properly understand and relate to God.

Faulty Roots

The foundations of this teaching are based upon a number of faulty premises, which have spawned numerous strange practices and language that is often more Jewish than even the ancient Jews were! The fruits of this teaching bear little resemblance to Biblical Christianity. Those caught up in these doctrines are often very passionate and have a deep, sincere desire to serve and worship God properly. Sadly, however, their zeal is misguided, and though they claim to be the real bearers of the truth, they end up misapplying the intent and the letter of the Bible. These doctrines are primarily underpinned by two erroneous core beliefs:

1. The original New Testament was written in Aramaic, not Greek.

2. We must use the Hebrew names for God. (This is addressed in my second article)

Both of these foundational beliefs are incorrect and I wish to show why in this article. The issue of whether the New Testament was written in Greek or Hebrew is an essential argument in the Jewish Roots philosophy, so I will give it special attention in this first article, as it is important to be able to give a good defence of the truth on this point.

Hellenization of the Jews

To answer this, we must visit a bit of history. In the 3rd century BC, Alexander the Great conquered the known world and Israel itself became a part of the great Greek empire. Greek culture and language became the order of the known world, and by the time of Christ's birth it had massively influenced Judaism. While the Jews had managed to hold on to their religion, I will give evidence that the vast majority of people had become very Greek in their language and culture. While many Jews would undoubtedly still have known Hebrew, we find overwhelming evidence that Koine Greek was the primary language.

The Greek language was so widespread in Israel that Pieter W. Van Der Horst writes in his Biblical archaeological review that '…one of the most surprising facts about funerary inscriptions (from ancient Palestine in the period 300 BC to 500 AD) is that most of them are in Greek – approximately 70%, about 12% are in Latin, and only 18% are in Hebrew or Aramaic.'

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This evidence points to the fact that the Jews were massively Hellenized in the time of the writing of the New Testament. This is further evidenced by the rejection of the temple and the priesthood by groups such as the Essene community, who fled into the desert and formed Hebrew communities that spoke the Hebrew language in reaction to the great amount of Greek influence they saw in Israel.

Because Greek was the order of the day, and the area that Jesus grew up in was known as "Galilee of the Gentiles" (Matthew 4:15), we can be sure that Jesus could speak Greek and that Greek was possibly His home language. This is attested to by how easily He conversed with many Gentiles (who could not speak Hebrew or Aramaic) in His ministry (see Mark 7:26). It is also significant that many of Jesus' disciples had pure Greek names, such as Andrew and Philip, which have no Hebrew equivalent. This reveals that while many could still speak Hebrew, Greek had

become the norm. It reveals that even Jewish boys in the area were given pure Greek names at times.

The Septuagint and the New Testament

Greek language had become so widespread amongst the Jews that many could no longer understand the holy texts in the original language. To make the Torah accessible to all Israel, it was translated from Hebrew to Greek in the Septuagint in the 3rd Century BC and the Greek Old Testament was the most commonly used by the time of Jesus' appearing. [1]

Evidence for the popularity of the Greek translation of the Torah is how Paul quotes directly from the Septuagint a number of times in his writings in the New Testament.[2] Paul the Apostle wrote his letters in Greek because it was the language of the ancient world, and most of his letters were written specifically to Gentiles, to whom he had been called as an apostle. In fact, almost all of the quotes taken from the Old Testament and used in the writing of the New Testament are taken from the Septuagint and were therefore in the Greek language, not Hebrew![3]

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In a number of places, the New Testament text specifically states that a phrase is in Aramaic and goes on to explain the Aramaic phrase in Greek. Now if it had been written in Aramaic to Aramaic-speaking people, it would not have needed to explain what the Aramaic quotes meant. Here are a few specific examples of this:

In Mark's Gospel it says, 'He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha koum!"(Aramaic)' Mark goes on to explain the meaning of the Aramaic to his readers – 'which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." (Greek)' We see this again in Mark 15:34, where Jesus speaks Aramaic while dying on the cross and cries out 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachtani?' Again, Mark has to explain the meaning of the Aramaic to his readers in Greek. In his Gospel, John has to explain the meaning of Aramaic name 'Cephas' by adding 'which means "Peter"' (John 1:42).

In the book of Acts, Luke tells us that Paul addressed a large congregation of Jewish people '...in the Hebrew language, saying: "Brothers and fathers, hear the defence..."' (Acts 21:40-22:1) The fact that Luke writes about 'the Hebrew language' and distinguishes it from the language of his readers shows that Acts was written in Greek.

> Christians then get caught up in silly things like names, Jewish festivals and secret hidden meanings in the interpretation of the plain text.

From these examples, we can ascertain that Jesus and Paul could speak and understand Aramaic or Hebrew, but they also spoke and understood Greek. However, when it comes to the writing of the New Testament, we can be absolutely assured of the fact that the New Testament was written in Greek, not Aramaic or Hebrew (a case could be made that Matthew and Hebrews are exceptions) [4]. This has been the accepted position of Christians for 2,000 years and is hopefully confirmed in light of the evidence given here.

Those teachers who claim that we are deceived and that we can only properly understand things by understanding the Hebrew, have taken hold of a false belief system that perverts the true faith, divides the body of Christ, promotes pride and sectarianism, and does great damage to the work of God. Christians then get caught up in silly things like names, Jewish festivals and secret hidden meanings in the interpretation of the plain text. I write this to warn you about these things and to keep you strong in the faith, free in the wonderful liberty that Christ Jesus has provided us all. Ignore those who teach these doctrines and continue to love and hold to the truth with pure hearts.

Read the 2nd Article in this Series: Jewish Roots (Part Two) – Jesus or Yeshua?

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[1] "Bible Translations – The Septuagint". JewishEncyclopedia.com. Retrieved 29 October 2012.

[2] For example Romans 3:12-18

[3] Nicole, Roger – New Testament Use of the Old Testament Revelation and the Bible, ed. Carl. F.H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958), pp. 137-151

[4] Granting this possibility, even with these books we find that the original authors rewrote (or had them rewritten) the letters in Koine Greek. An argument that Matthew was also written in Hebrew (or possibly Aramaic) is based upon a statement by Irenaeus (Approximately AD 170), the disciple of Polycarp (who had been discipled by the apostle John) that 'Matthew also issued a written gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect…' (Against Heresies, Book III, Chapter 1). This is, in my mind, quite possible, largely because of all the gospels, Matthew's was most

specifically written with a Jewish readership in mind. Matthew's letter was written as an evangelistic tool to Jews, to which his use of examples to illustrate that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah strongly attests.

However, Irenaus also reveals that Matthew translated his own gospel into Greek when he tells us that the four Gospels were the pillars of the church scattered throughout the world. This Greek gospel of Matthew could not have been written in Hebrew, because it was read by Christians everywhere. Irenaus also quotes from the Greek text of Matthew and does not use any Hebrew. (Against Heresies, 3.11.8)

Irenaeus also, by his writings, builds a strong case that Matthew had also written his gospel in Greek, when he tells us how Matthew quoted from the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) when he wrote his Greek gospel. (Against Heresies, 3.16.2 & 4.6.1 "for Peter, and John, and Matthew, and Paul, and the rest successively, as well as their followers, did set forth all prophetical announcements, just as the interpretation of the Elders contain them" (referring to the Septuagint) (Against Heresies, 3.21.3-4). Therefore it is clear that even if a Hebrew (or Aramaic) version of Matthew was written, Matthew had also written a Greek version. We can, however, find no copy or other reference from the early church to any Hebrew version, and the Greek version had become the foundational version upon which the early church was built.

It is also possible that Hebrews was originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic, due to its intended audience. According to Clement of Alexandria, the original was carefully translated from Hebrew to Greek by Luke so that Greek speakers could understand it (Hypotyposes, referred to by Eusebius in Eccl. Hist.6:14:2). If it is factual that these two letters were written in Hebrew or possibly Aramaic, it makes little difference, because both were translated to Greek by Matthew and Luke (one of Paul's apostolic helpers) so that the Greek versions became more popular.

So while we cannot prove that Matthew & Hebrews were written in Aramaic or Hebrew, we have much to show us that the rest of the letters, including these two, were written in Greek and were accepted by the Early Church as authentic Holy Spirit-inspired writings.

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