



Hebrew Roots of the Christian Faith

by

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Introduction

The New Testament was written in Greek. A type of Greek called Koiné. It was everyday language, spoken in the Roman Empire during the first century of our era. It can be compared to English of the newspapers of today.

Why in Greek? The answer is simple: because it was the universal language of the time. It took this leadership among other languages after Alexander the Great had conquered almost all the then known world. Though his empire collapsed after his premature death, the cultural influence of Greece – language and thought – would still be predominant for centuries. It is, in a certain sense, even to this day.

At the end of the gospel of Matthew 28:19 we read: “*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*”

Later, the apostle Peter would be called personally to first proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles, the non-Jewish people, as we read in the book of Acts, chapter 10. It was only the first step. Mainly through the ministry of Paul, the Christian faith spread outside the borders of Israel, among the heathen nations, throughout the Mediterranean.

With this in mind, the most natural thing we could expect to happen, was that the New Testament would be written in a language understood by the Gentiles of the time. But the Hebrew roots of the Christian faith were not denied and could not be denied. Hebrew was the background of the ministry of Jesus and the apostles. Hebrew was their native language. Hebrew was their culture, their faith, their mind. That all these factors are visible even when the fundamentals of the new faith were spoken and written of in a foreign language, Greek, was inevitable.

Some may tend to ignore or even deny the Jewish background of the New Testament. On the other side, others may utter some extreme comments as if the Christian Faith and the translation in our western tongues of the truths of the Jewish Faith and even of the primitive Church and its Hebrew roots, has somewhat betrayed the original Jewish spirit in it.

Concerning this latter tendency, I believe some problems of translation and of adaptation of one culture when communicated to another, have been overestimated. The true essence of our faith and its Jewish origin are alive and well in our Bibles today! They have influenced us and changed the non-Jewish Christian converts and not vice versa.

We end all our prayers with a Hebrew word, Amen. We shout to God Hallelujah. We call Jesus the Messiah – from the Hebrew word – with the same idea in mind as when we call him Christ – from the Greek – the latter word having entirely taken the meaning of the Hebrew term. More details will be given in the pages to follow.

The study of the Hebrew background, I am sure, will unlock some Scripture truths and will bless the reader with a more reverent attitude concerning the Jewish heritage of our faith.



Chapter One

Was the New Testament written in Hebrew?

Until 1947 such a question could not be asked. It was a common belief that Aramaic was spoken in Israel during the days of Jesus. The Qumran discoveries have proven the case for the Hebrew language. Aramaic was an international language that Israel entered in contact with most during the time of the Babylonian and Persian domination – 605 BC. to 536 BC and on. Some portions of the Old Testament were written in that tongue. Parts of Daniel, Ezra, a verse of the book of the prophet Jeremiah. The intent of such use was to make those portions of Scripture universal, since Aramaic was spoken everywhere in the world. In Daniel, the book introduces the beginning of the Aramaic text openly: “*Then spake the Chaldeans to the king in Syriack, O king, live for ever: tell thy servants the dream, and we will shew the interpretation.*” Daniel 2:4. From that moment on till all of chapter 6, the book was written in that language. It is hard to resist the conviction that the author did so purposely, because he wanted the message of those portions of his book to be universal.

When we hear some speak of an Aramaic original gospel of Matthew, it is an echo of some out of date publications. The fact remains, as witnessed to by the famous church historian Eusebius Pamphilus, bishop of Cesarea, in Palestine, early in the fourth century. He writes in his Ecclesiastical History, “Matthew also having first proclaimed the gospel in Hebrew, when on the point of going also to other nations, committed it to writing in his native tongue, and thus supplied the want of his presence to them, by his writing.” Book I, chapter XXIV.

It is beyond the shadow of a doubt that everything in the gospel of Matthew that we know, through the manuscript evidence, is Hebrew except the language. If there was ever an original Hebrew of Matthew, only a Greek translation was handed down to us and so it is safe to rest with what we have.

Recently the theory of the gospel of Mark being written in Hebrew has been supported by some scholars. But no historical tradition can we recall in favour of such an idea. Again Mark too has been preserved only through Greek manuscripts only. Also, if the identification of the Qumran manuscript 7Q5 as a fragment of the gospel of Mark will prove to be correct, the idea of Mark being originally written in Hebrew and then being translated in the Greek text we know, becomes even less probable.

There is no reason to question the words of Luke at the beginning of his gospel: “*Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Even as they delivered them*

unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus,” Luke 1:1-3. Luke speaks of others writing about the life of Jesus. As a perfect Greek mind at work, he reassures the reader that before writing he did his proper research to be sure of the reliability of the information he was going to provide his reader with. The evidence of the accuracy of his research is proven by the fact that his narrative has more Semitisms and shows more dependence on original Hebrew documents than Matthew and Mark – incredible as it may seem.



Some critics believe the epistle to the Hebrews to have been originally written in Hebrew. Some believe the translation of it into Greek was performed by Luke, though we have no certainty that he knew the Hebrew language at all. Again only the Greek of this epistle survives.

It is impossible to speculate on the possibility of an original Hebrew gospel now lost or survived only in a Greek translation or visible through the skill of Semitic languages specialists under the cover of the Greek text handed down to us. Though I appreciate the work of those who try to learn more about the origin of the New Testament, resting on evidence it is safe to speak of a New Testament all written in Greek. In this language it received universal sanction by the Church throughout the world, being recognized as the inspired Holy Scriptures, to be read and added to the Old Testament, the Hebrew *Tanakh*, it became the Bible as we know it.



Chapter Two

Hebrew background of the New Testament

As I said earlier, the original language of the New Testament may be Greek, but the thoughts behind it, the background, the places, the culture, the whole picture is Hebrew.

Jesus said it openly, “*Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.*” Matthew 5:17.

The least we can expect is a Hebrew background in the Gospels and the entire New Testament.

During his speeches Jesus was addressing Jews in their native tongue. It is evident that the evangelists, translating his sayings in Greek, must have found some difficulties. But the Hebrew atmosphere was so evident and predominant, that the Greek language can be considered only a means of rendering Hebrew thoughts and culture accessible to the Gentile world.

Very often today’s preachers simply explain and translate the words of the Bible in terms of our everyday life. Since most of us live in big western cities, now, at the beginning of the 21st century, we could not be any farther from the background of the land where Jesus and the apostles lived, an agricultural and pastoral world of a small Eastern Roman Province, whose peculiarity was the immovable faith of its inhabitants in their national God.

Let us consider some examples. They are so interesting.

Luke 1:34

“*Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?*”

The word here usually translated “*know*”, literally translates the Greek original. But both in that and our western languages, the words of Mary taken for what they are, literally, do not mean much. This is a clear example of a Hebrew thought expressed by Greek words. If we translate the thought, the word “*know*” implies in the Semitic world, we should translate Mary’s words like: “*seeing I have not had any sexual intercourse with any man.*”

This expression is so familiar with the Christian readers of the Bible, that we can easily say – something that we will repeat and prove later – that the influence of the Semitic mind was so strong on our culture that it has enriched the meaning of our words, amplifying them according to the religious terminology of the Bible.

✚ John 2:1

“And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee.”

The apostle John gives us here a clear indication of when the marriage took place. It was a Tuesday! Marriage in Israel were common to take place on Tuesdays. This tradition is related to the two times God called his creation good in Genesis 1:10-12, where the two good things would be the woman for the man and the man for the woman.

Sunday is the first day of the week. We owe this to the Hebrew calendar. In Mark 16:9 we read, *“Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week.”* It was Easter Sunday! Monday was the second, Tuesday the third.

✚ Luke 9:51

“And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.”

We understand the meaning of the words by the context, but it is obvious that the expression is idiomatic and belonging to the Semitic frame of mind.

As we said earlier, Luke promised his readers to search historically accurate documents. He kept his promise and he did so being so reverent towards the original documents he found or the reports he heard, that he translated in Greek following the Hebrew as much as possible.

✚ Luke 11:50-51

“That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; from the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, it shall be required of this generation.”

There is something in such a statement that only the Jewish background can explain. In fact, chronologically speaking, the above statement is not correct. Abel was indeed the first man to be murdered but Zacharias was not.

So why did Jesus say that?

He was speaking to people who had in mind the Jewish Canon of Scripture. The murder of Zacharias was found in the last book of the Old Testament, which was, according to the Palestinian Canon, the book of Chronicles. So Jesus' words must have sounded in the ears of his listeners like our expression of today: *“from Genesis to the Revelation.”*

Instances like this should warn us against those people who speak of contradictions in the Bible. Very often alleged mistakes in the Bible are only thought to be so because of lack of knowledge of circumstances, languages, culture, history and background.



✚ Mark 4:41

“And they feared exceedingly...”

Here the King James Version of the Bible did not translate the Greek literally. On the contrary, the original Greek passage translated the Hebrew literally. In fact it reads: *“they feared a great fear”*. I understand how strange it may sound in our language.

In **Matthew 2:10** we find a similar construction that the KJV has translated more literally: *“When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy”*. The Semitic influence is unquestionable.

I remember when I was just a kid I was so in love with the Bible – I still am, to be honest. One time during a class work in my native language, Italian, I used a phrase like “they wondered with great wonder.” But my teacher knew nothing of Semitisms and so she marked that with confidence as a mistake. To be honest, I did not know of such a thing at the time too! This to say that, whether we admit that or not, we know it or not, the Hebrew background of our faith is so strong that it easily influences our frame of mind and our language even if between an original Hebrew statement are first a Greek and then an English translation - Italian, in my case.

✚ Matthew 5:13-16

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt becomes tasteless, with what shall it be salted? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and to be trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world.”

Jesus speaks of salt and light.

Salt was so precious in times past. So precious that it was used even as a means of payment – hence the word *salary*. Today we have electric refrigerators, so it is not our fault if we fail to see the importance of salt, used also as a preservative.

The same applies to the analogy of light. In a world so used to electricity, night is not able to stop us from doing things, working, going out, etc. But try to imagine how precious it must have been for the men of the times of Jesus.

✚ Mark 1

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God”

I have always been surprised by the way the way Mark begins his gospel. I always preferred reading Matthew or Luke instead of Mark, because I considered it only a shorter version, even a summary of the other two gospels.

Jean Carmignac is an authority on the Qumran texts, which were contemporary to the Gospels. This scholar speaking of Mark’s prologue says that it perfectly aligns with the literary style of the time when it was written.

Very often people see contradictions, imperfections, defects in the Bible. Most of the time such alleged mistakes are only in the mind of the reader, not entirely informed.

Also, reading and studying Mark in the original Greek, I discovered how peculiar this gospel is, how deep and precious it is for the Christian faith.

Please notice in the following Bible passages how the word “son, child, children” is used in a way that has no parallel in our languages, nor in the Greek language. The meaning is evident.

✚ Matthew 13:38

*“The field is the world; the good seed are **the children of the kingdom**; but the tares are **the children of the wicked one**;”*

✚ Matthew 23:15

*“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more **the child of hell** than yourselves.”*

✚ Luke 20:36

*“Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being **the children of the resurrection**.”*

✚ John 17:12

*“While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but **the son of perdition**; that the scripture might be fulfilled.”*

✚ 2Thessalonians 2:3

*“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, **the son of perdition**;”*

Notice here how Jesus calls Judas “the son of perdition.” The same expression Paul will use for the Anti-Christ. The strange and unexplainable modern tendency to

review the person of Judah in a positive way, has no place whatsoever in the New Testament. The so called gospel of Judah is only a mystification, a false document, whose only value is in the age of the papyrus manuscript witnessing to its existence in times past.

✚ 1Thessalonians 5:5

*“Ye are all **the children of light**, and **the children of the day**: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.”*

I like the King James Version because it is a literal translation. It is the same method sanctioned by the New Testament writers who, translating literally from the Hebrew expressions, let the Jewish background arrive at us, with all the riches and beauty it possesses.

When a translator is working on passages like the above, he finds himself confronting a dilemma. Will he betray the original language and use the so called *dynamic equivalence* method and translate the meaning of the phrase but not the phrase itself? Or shall he forget how meaningful will the phrase be if it is rendered literally?

Literal translations are more to be valued for study purposes. Dynamic equivalence makes it easier to read the text, as you would read a novel or a story. This implies the translator’s ability of exactly understanding the meaning of the passage. It is not always so easy. I prefer literal translations: I want to know what the original text said.

✚ Luke 8:5

“A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.”

✚ Luke 22:15

*“And he said unto them, **With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer:**”*

Such constructions are Semitic. The translation of the KJV is literal. The KJV has so much influenced the English speaking world that it was no surprise when I heard Bob Dylan sing: “I dreamed a dream.”

The Greeks looked at the New Testament as a cheap literary product. From their point of view such Semitisms must have seemed so barbarian.

Chapter Three

Hebrew Words in the New Testament

It must be clear to the reader by now, the only authentic Greek thing we find in the New Testament is the language. Thoughts, religious terminology, ideas, background, all belongs to the Jewish world.

Some Hebrew words have been only transliterated into Greek and retained in the New Testament as we now read it in the Greek manuscripts and by consequence, in our translations too.

Let's see some examples.

✚ Matthew 1:23

*“Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name **Emmanuel**, which being interpreted is, God with us.”*

As it usually happens in these instances, the Hebrew is retained and the translation given.

Some say that Matthew was quoting the Greek translation of the Old Testament here, the famous Septuagint. But even if he did, he goes further giving the interpretation of that Hebrew name to the Greek reader.

Here is a list of other examples found in the gospels.

✚ Mark 3:17

*“And James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and he surnamed them **Boanerges**, which is, The sons of thunder.”*

✚ Mark 5:41

*“And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, **Talitha cumi**; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise.”*

✚ Mark 7:11

*“But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is **Corban**, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free.”*

✚ Mark 7:34

*“And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and said to him, **Ephphatha**, that is, Be opened.”*

This is also one of the reasons why I personally strongly doubt that the Gospels, as we know them, were originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic. It would

be very difficult, if not impossible, to explain such practice of keeping some original terms and then give the translation. It would make sense if the authors were writing in Greek and wanted to preserve some Hebrew terminology.

✚ John 1:41

*“He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the **Messias**, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.”*

Messiah is a word that entered our vocabulary from the Hebrew language. *Christ* comes from its Greek translation, *Kristos*.

✚ John 1:49

*“Nathanael answered and saith unto him, **Rabbi**, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.”*

Rabbi is not translated here. It is so common a term that it is still alive in our languages today.

✚ John 20:16

*“Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, **Rabboni**; which is to say, Master.”*

✚ John 19:13

*“When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, **Gabbatha**.”*

✚ John 19:17¹

*“And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew **Golgotha**”*

In the last two instances, the translation is given before the Hebrew word.

✚ In John 19:19-20 we find this very instructive information.

*“And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, **JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS**. This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in **Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin**.”*

Latin was the official language of the Roman Empire. Hebrew was the language of Israel. Quite significant is the fact that Greek was present too.

¹ The same detail is found in Matthew 27:33 and Mark 15:22.



When I saw the film by Mel Gibson “The Passion of the Christ”, the movie was not in English but in the native language of Israel. The only words I was able to understand were those pronounced by Pilate when asking Jesus: “What is truth?”, since in the movie they were asked in Greek.

Indeed, Greek was a language widely used. I believe that even Jesus must have spoken it during his ministry.

✚ **Matthew 21:9**

*“And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, **Hosanna** to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; **Hosanna** in the highest.”*

The word Hosanna, is the transliteration of the Hebrew *hoshia’na*. As it happens very often with words, it is very difficult to translate it in our western languages. We can translate it: “Save now!” But it is far more than that, like the quotation of the Messianic passage attached to it reveals. It was the cry of the people to their promised Messiah coming to save them. Of course, the people had no idea what a wonderful and perfect freedom and salvation the Messiah was about to bring into this world.

✚ **Matthew 27:46**

*“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, **Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?** that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”*

And its parallel passage,

✚ **Mark 15:34**

*“And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, **Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?** which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”*

As I said earlier, I discovered Mark when I read it in Greek. There is a difference here between Matthew and Mark that is evident also in the translation. Mathew says of the Hebrew expression “that is to say” and then he explains the meaning of the Hebrew phrase. Mark is more technical and speaks of a translation openly when he writes, “being interpreted.”

In the first chapters of Matthew, some of the Hebrew words of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mountain are retained, but no translation is provided. As if the author gave for granted that the reader was able to understand those expressions. This is another evidence in favour of the Greek composition of Matthew: had it been translated into that tongue from the Hebrew, such practice would hardly be explained.

✚ Matthew 5:18

*“For verily (**Amen**) I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one **jot** or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.”*

What the translators here rendered as “verily” corresponds in the original to the Hebrew word *Amen* simply transliterated in the Greek alphabet. No translation was given of the term in the original. The same applies to the next Hebrew term *jot*. It is the name of the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. Of course, Jesus meant to say that not even the smallest part of the Law will pass away.

I will say more about the word *Amen* in the following chapter.

✚ Matthew 5:22

*“But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, **Raca**, shall be in danger of the council (**Sanhedrin**): but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.”*

Raca is a Hebrew word. Again here the Hebrew transliterated word *Sanhedrin* is translated “council” in the KJV. Those two terms were entirely foreign to the Greek language.

I am Italian. Very often when I speak to my American friends I am forced to rely on my Italian vocabulary, since no correspondent word is found in English for some typical Italian things. *Pasta* is *pasta*, both here in Sicily – where I live – as in America. *Pizza* is *pizza*, whether I speak English or Italian, it is still *pizza* and no other equivalent word is found in the English dictionary.

The Christian Faith continued in the road already trodden by the Hebrew Faith. The first could only assimilate the religious terminology of the latter.

✚ Matthew 6:24

*“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and **mammon**.”*

The peculiarity of this Semitic term *mammon* is the fact that it is present in the New Testament but unlike the other words, it is declined according to the rules of the Greek language.

In the following chapter we will discuss of some Hebrew words that have become part of our language because of the influence of the Bible.

Chapter Four

Hebrew words in our languages

There are some words that the New Testament borrowed from the Hebrew and kept into the Greek, which we still find in our translations today. We saw some instances in the previous chapter. Some of these words have become so familiar to us, they are used so frequently and with a unique untranslatable meaning, that we can fairly say that they have become part of our languages. This is true both inside and outside of churches. Though, it is only in churches and in religious language and use that they are most honoured in respect to their original meaning.

I will consider some.

AMEN

This is by far the most common of all the words that the Jewish tradition has handed down to the Christian Faith.

It is found so many times in the New Testament. As we have already seen, the translators of our Bibles retained it in the Greek New Testament, most of the times.

The *e-sword Bible software* tells me that the word is present in 50 verses of the KJV where it was not translated but simply transliterated in our alphabet.

It appears for the first time in Matthew 6:13: *“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”*

Its last occurrence is the very last word written in the New Testament. Revelation 22:21: *“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with all the saints. Amen.”*

The KJV translated *Verily, verily* the expression found in the Greek, *Amen, amen*. E-sword confirms that it occurs in 25 verses of the Gospel of John. It is peculiar of this Gospel and you will not find it anywhere else in the New Testament. As I said earlier, in this case also we speak of “Hebrew thoughts and ideas, even linguistic use, simply adapted to the Greek tongue.”

Repeating a word twice is again peculiar to the Hebrew tongue and has no equivalent in the English language. It is intended to emphasise the word used and the importance of the truth Jesus was about to reveal.

In my native language, we have this same construction. We say “piano piano” when we want to say “very slowly”. “Tanto tanto” when we intend to say “really a lot.” “Vicino vicino” when we want to describe a tender intimacy of someone close to

another person, like “very close.” “Ora ora” or “adesso adesso” tends to stress the idea that something happened seconds or minutes before.

Evidently John did not know how to translate in Greek such an idea, and since *Amen* was already part of the terminology in use in the church, he simply reported the expression of Jesus as he uttered that.

✚ HALLELUJAH

The impact that this word has had in Christian countries is extraordinary. Unfortunately, someone uses that out of context, far from the blessed use of praising God and inviting all the believers to praise Him in the churches.

This word is not left in its original form but translated in the Old Testament of the KJV. Psalm 111:1 reads: “*Praise ye the LORD. (Halleluyah) I will praise the LORD with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright, and in the congregation.*”

The same word is only transliterated in the New Testament. Revelation 19:1, “*And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God.*”

This word is found only 4 times in the KJV and only in Revelation 19.

✚ ABBA

Mark 14:36

“*And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.*”

Romans 8:15

“*For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.*”

Galatians 4:6

“*And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.*”

Abba is an Aramaic familiar word kept in the Greek New Testament. Its meaning is closer to *daddy* than to *father*. *Abba* is one of the most precious words of our faith, since it speaks of the privilege we have to address Him as *father*.

✚ MARANATHA

Paul used this word in 1Corinthians 16:22, which reads: “*If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha.*”

This word was part of the Christian vocabulary and it was enough for Paul to simply use it, with no need to add anything else, to be sure the recipient of his writing knew what he meant to say.

It is Aramaic and the meaning is explained by the Bible itself in **Revelation 22:20** “*He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.*”

This word in itself was able to recall the faith about the return of Jesus and is in itself a prayer to him.

I believe the ambivalence of the Aramaic word, the meaning of which could not be entirely translated – it happens often when attempting to translate from one language to another – could be a reason why it was kept in use. In itself the Aramaic term could mean:

- Our Lord has come
- Our Lord is present
- Our Lord, come!

I am excited about the deep meaning of this word, which condenses the blessed hope of our faith, and I encourage everyone to use it.

MESSIAH

John 1:41

*“He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the **Messias**, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.”*

John 4:25

*“The woman saith unto him, I know that **Messias** cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things.”*

This term is not used as often as Christ, but bears in itself very deep implications. In fact, it has created the adjective Messianic that has no other synonymous originating from the word Christ. The latter became more a name to be added to that of Jesus, to better identify him. But Messiah never lost the deep religious meaning attached to it.

Conclusion

Has the Hebrew background of the Bible been lost in the new faith of the New Testament?

By no means.

On the contrary, it is alive and well today. It is there in the Greek language, in every verse of the Bible and is still visible in our modern translations. It has become part of our daily lives in the form of language, teachings, beliefs. Instead of disappearing, it is still predominant in the Christian doctrine and practice.

It is there when we say *Amen* in our Christian services. It is there when we shout *Hallelujah* to God in our congregations. It is there when we call Jesus “King of Kings” and “Lord of Lords.”

The Hebrew religious language and culture have deeply influenced us Christians. It is part of our heritage. Without it there would be no Christianity. This is how much we owe to them. This is why we must look at the Jewish religion with a deep sense of respect. Those who don't, neglect to see that Jesus was a Jew. He was born from the seed of David². He was circumcised. He went to the Synagogues, read the Scriptures and explained them to the people. This was the reason why they called him *Rabbi*. All his life, not only was lived according to the Tanakh³ but as a fulfilment of it.

Denying Judaism means to deny Jesus and ourselves as Christians, followers of Jesus of Nazareth.

I have read books by writers who complain that the Hebrew mind and language has been lost in the New Testament and in Christianity. Though, to a certain extent, when translating from one language to another such a thing is inevitable, the case with the New Testament is quite peculiar. I believe the Jewish background and religious terminology was so strong that it could not disappear when the New Testament was written in Greek. On the contrary it influenced the Greek so much that: the language was Greek but the construction of sentences was distinctly Hebrew; some original terms could not be properly translated so they were simply kept in the text; even when some words were translated, that could not destroy their Semitic value.

² I found myself naturally using this Semitic expression. I decided to keep it in the text, as a little evidence that what I say in my writing is true.

³ TANAKH stands for Torah, Law, Nev'im, Prophets, Ketuvim, Writings, which is the way the Jews call the entire Hebrew Scripture Canon. Jesus himself made a reference to this when he said in Luke 24:44 “*And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.*”

For example, the root of our word *prophet* which speaks of a person foretelling the future is lost because the *prophet* of the New Testament is still the Hebrew *Nabi*.

In Italy, Evangelical Christians salute themselves with the word “Pace”, *Peace*. Though we are Italians and our word derives from the Latin and not the Greek, what we mean when we say *pace* has nothing to do with the *pax romana*. It is the Hebrew *Shalom*, with all the deep meanings it implies.

We need to be aware and proud of the Hebrew roots of our Christian faith.

In closing, I think it would not be off the subject to mention here that, in the light of what has been said, it is impossible for a Christian – a true Christian – to be animated by feelings of anti-Semitism or anti-Judaism. It is like a son hating his own parent. It is like a person hating himself. Such feeling was never advocated in the New Testament, such a feeling cannot be advocated – like any form of hate, anyway – by any Christian, individually or corporally.

SHALOM